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UNTRAMMELED THINKING
THE PROMISE AND PERIL OF THE SECOND AMENIA CONFERENCE, 1920-1940

VOLUME I

By

Lauren L. Kientz

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ABSTRACT

UNTRAMMELED THINKING THE PROMISE AND PERIL OF THE SECOND AMENIA CONFERENCE

By

Lauren L. Kientz

Beginning in the 1890s, W.E.B. Du Bois envisioned a cadre of highly educated black leadership called the Talented Tenth. In the 1920s and 1930s, the first generation of the Talented Tenth grew into adults and young professionals. These social scientists, professors, social workers, lawyers, doctors, and librarians followed Du Bois's work through the NAACP and its magazine, the *Crisis*, through personal correspondence with him, and in individual meetings. Du Bois interested them and they interested him. They were in some ways his intellectual children. He showed this when he invited 32 of them to discuss the future of African American activism with other leaders of the NAACP in 1933 in Amenia, New York at the Second Amenia Conference. Among these intellectuals and professionals were Ralph Bunche, Marion Cuthbert, Abram Harris, and Mabel Byrd.

The central narrative of the twentieth century—the Civil Rights Movement—misses this cadre of leaders because their actions fit their time rather than fitting current expectation of civil rights leaders. Their parents and communities focused on education as the primary way to solve racial turmoil—the education of whites about their own country's racism and the education of African Americans to join the professional class, disproving pseudo-scientific theories about the lower intellectual ability of people of African descent and providing a modicum of security in Jim Crow America. The research that these men and women conducted and wrote about established a basis for studying

African Americans that continues today. Scholars still use their data sources for contemporary questions.

The interwar period had several other nodes of black leadership, including black nationalists, religious leaders, business leaders, and members of the underground market. Acknowledging all these nodes of leadership, whether or not they led to the Civil Rights Movement, emphasizes the era's complexity and the difficult choices facing African Americans born in a world where Jim Crow laws and lynching were ever-present threats.

This dissertation considers several specific topics in its attempt to map a piece of the extensive national and international network of the Talented Tenth. They include almost entirely unstudied topics, like black women's organizations in Harlem, black women attending interracial Christian conferences in the United States, Europe, and Asia, black women's role at Fisk University, and participation in the New Deal. Topics covered also include a thorough examination of the community of social scientists at Howard University self-titled the Young Turks. They created a vibrant community of political and economic debate in 1930s Washington DC as important as the cultural renaissance in Harlem the decade before or the literary community in Chicago in the late 1930s and 1940s. The Young Turks also travelled extensively across the United States and internationally. In London, they were part of the community of African expatriates that included several future independence leaders.

Societal change arrives in many forms, sometimes through street protests and sometimes through the persistent efforts of social scientists and social workers. This dissertation proves the necessity of considering all forms of change.

To my parents
For introducing me to travel,
Taking me to every museum and historical site along our path,
And always encouraging me to try something new.

Acknowledgements

Writing this dissertation has been at times thrilling, exhausting, overwhelming, rewarding, and magical. With many of the individuals you will meet in these pages, I began with hardly more than a whisper of information. After visiting many archives across the country, a picture of the period slowly started to coalesce. When I would find a letter in Los Angeles that suddenly explained the significance of a letter I had read in Washington D.C., the excitement kept me going through many hard days of writer's bloc. I say magical, even though it might sound too fanciful, because sometimes that is the only way to describe those last minute glances at boxes you never meant to open that suddenly provide the most wonderful bit of information.

I would like to thank all the archivists that I visited and corresponded with that made those kinds of moments possible. As anyone who has gone to the Moorland Spingarn Research Center at Howard University knows, Ida Jones was a welcome, knowledgeable presence who greeted me each morning. Though the MSRC is small, they are efficient and helpful. I would never have gotten as much done there as I did without Richard's careful copying. Ruth Hill at the Schlesinger opened her personal files about the Black Women's Oral History Project to me. I spent an evening with her and her husband in Cambridge that I will not forget. Though I have yet to use the materials she gave me access to, I plan to in my future projects.

Each archive presented a new challenge and I would like to thank all the archivists and librarians who helped me navigate, including those at the Spingarn Center for Research

in Black Culture, the New York Public Library Manuscripts and Archives Division, the Schlesinger Library, and the special collection staffs at UCLA, the University of Chicago, Western Michigan University, Michigan State University, Yale University, Columbia University, University of Pennsylvania, Northwestern University, the Library of Congress, and the National Archives at College Park. Archivists at the University at Albany, Fisk University, and Mount Holyoke generously provided me with advice about and copies of their materials.

All the travel that visiting these archives entailed would not have been possible without the generous support of my department, my college, and my family. I also thank the Western Association of Women Historians for bestowing upon me their Founder's Dissertation Award. The Milton Muedler Graduate Student Fellowship and the Michigan State University Dissertation Completion Fellowship helped me complete the dissertation.

Several individuals read parts of the dissertation. Brenna Greer, Olivia Bustion, Bethany Hicks, Lashawn Harris, Amanda Izzo, and the University of Michigan American History Workshop all helped me process and analyze Mabel Byrd's life and community. Nancy Robertson read a draft of the Juliette Derricotte sections I prepared as a separate article, providing meticulous, thoughtful comments throughout. David Levering Lewis read my chapter about the Second Amenia Conference and gave me warm encouragement to keep going. In my very last days of writing, Daniel Lin read almost my entire dissertation with a keen eye for grammar and meaning meltdowns with swiftness and accuracy.

Jeffrey Perry approached me at the Black Women's Radicalism Conference at the CUNY Graduate Center to tell me that Mabel Byrd had worked with Hubert Harrison. He then found the location of that information and emailed it to me, along with a portion of his

upcoming second volume of the Hubert Harrison papers. Janice Dilg kindly provided me with further information about the Portland YWCA and Kimberly Mangun shared with me her work on Portland's African American community. William Darity sent me useful bibliographic resources on Abram Harris. Wilson Moses, Evelyn Higginbotham, Darlene Clark Hine, Gerald Horne and John Bracey gave me words of encouragement when I particularly needed them.

I have had several long and fruitful conversations during my travels. Prudence Cumberbatch took me to lunch and shared with me her knowledge about the civil rights leaders of Baltimore, particularly Juanita Jackson and her mother. She has helped me to understand the kinds of communities that the Second Amenians created. Ula Taylor read my chapters on the Second Amenia Conference and then discussed them with me during the five hour drive from Cleveland to the Wayne County Airport. She was more than kind and insightful. Robert Vitalis invited me to his home in Philadelphia and helped me piece apart the political philosophies of many of the Second Amenians. We also discussed our mutual interest in Dr. Merze Tate. Touré Reed encouraged my criticism of the Long Civil Rights Movement and pushed me to find greater clarity. Natanya Duncan welcomed me at the Association for Study of African American Life and History, introduced me to the way everything worked at the conference, and then supervised my social life in Birmingham. Matthew Cotter invited me to a book launch in New York City and urged me to find a way to finish. Timothy Lacy and Paul Murphy invited me to participate in the US Intellectual History blog, which has provided many hours of thoughtful stimulation during the isolating days of writing. Between these two organizations, I feel like I have two academic families willing to push me, critique me, and support me.

I am indebted to teachers and professors throughout my education. Matthew Whitaker took me under his wing at Arizona State University, alternatively advising me and pushing me to find my own voice. Stephen Bataldan brought fantastic enthusiasm to every class and introduced his students to visitors from all over the world. Michael Stanford helped me transition from a rural Arizona teenager to a college-educated adult. Leslie Moch showed me unending kindness. Mark Kornbluh introduced me to interdisciplinarity and committee work, and gave me a model of good administration. Pero Dagbovie kept me to his exacting standards. David Bailey walked with me throughout this journey, sometimes saying just what I needed to hear and other times letting me fight my way through to my own conclusions. He never let me give in to my exhaustion, but gently guided me to write the dissertation he knew I could. This manuscript is certainly better because of his advice.

Friends and family helped me navigate the emotional shoals of writing and researching. Creative work—and writing a history is an act of creation bound by concrete sources—takes immense emotional stability and a little bit of hubris. Without friends like Olivia Bustion, Kristina Eden, Anna Gustitus, Raegan Barnes, Adam Goforth, Bethany Hicks, Deborah Forger, David Constantine, Ken White, and Richard Bentley to encourage me, press me for understanding, distract me, and shore up my ego I would not have made it through. Brenna Greer became a friend just when I needed her. She listened to me, shared her research with me, comforted me, and helped me find the courage to finish. Thank you.

My family is born of immigrants and we tend to live far from each other. The internet and cell phone age has allowed us to be connected like never before. Thank you for every hug, hand held, sob listened to, and worry soothed away. Jan, Rosalie, and Eric reminded me. Owen and Sherry challenged me. Grandma, Ed and Charilyn, and Heidi and Eric welcomed

me. Dianna and Larry, and Don and Robin remembered me. Jenny read my work. Alyssa visited me. Grandpa sent me his artistic creations. Erik supported me throughout. Thank you.

What does it mean to be untrammeled?

“To yield on the question of untrammeled education for Negroes is to invite unworthy comments, non-recognition from intelligent thinkers, and to accept the castigation that the petition of the black man is but one of submission and acquiescence.”

--Impavidi Progridiamur to the editor of the *New York Amsterdam News*, 1925

“In this group might be found the names of some persons who might be able to give some untrammeled thinking on our problems.”

--Ira Reid to W.E.B. Du Bois, 1933

“I am greatly interested in the proposed conference at Amenia this summer. Most of my recent associations, however, have been with undergraduates, and I shouldn't wonder if to get really 'untrammeled thought' you would not have to reach back eventually to this very young group.”

--Caroline Bond Day to W.E.B. Du Bois, 1933

“I don't see how the Committee can function while it is the guest of the Chairman of the Board [J.E. Spingarn]. Discussion ought to be free and untrammeled. And I fear...there are certain proprieties that some people can't ignore.”

--Abram Harris to Walter White, 1934

“I know, I have seen, the desperation and disorder of the powerless: how it twists the lives of children on the streets of Jakarta or Nairobi in much the same way as it does the lives of children on Chicago’s South Side, how narrow the path is for them between humiliation and untrammelled fury, how easily they slip into violence and despair.”

--Barack Obama, *Dreams from My Father*, 2004

“I came across this quote some months ago from a black [Civil War] soldier which sent shivers down my spine: ‘I was very eager to become a soldier, in order to prove by my feeble efforts the black man’s rights to untrammelled manhood.’ *Untrammelled Manhood*. That’s what I believed in, and confronted with the essentially conservative/reformist history of black leadership (as opposed to radical/revolutionary), confronted with lawsuits, marches and pickets, instead of gun clubs, vigilantism and hand grenades, I was left seething. As I got older, I came to get the political critique of black radicalism—the unfeasible, and in fact undesirable, aspects of militancy.”

--Ta-Nehisi Coates, *The Atlantic Monthly*, 2009

“Our children need training and encouragement and support—they need rehearsal space and tempera paint and bass violins, teachers and tap-shoes; they need constant, passionate exposure to the great artistic heritage of their people, so that even if they don’t grow up to be artists themselves, they will still have been blessed, as Americans have always been blessed, with the artist’s gift for seeing the possible in the impossible, the fellow soul on the other side of the fence. Our artists need freedom to pursue the solitary investigations into which their art

inevitably leads them. America needs that untrammeled flow of creativity, of the willingness
and ability to innovate, to skylark, to tinker,
to daydream out loud.”

--Michael Chabon, *Studio 360 Blog*, 2009

Table of Contents

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....	xv
Part 1 Introductory Materials.....	1
Introduction and Historiography.....	1
<i>Chapter 1</i> The Critical Time: W.E.B. Du Bois, Mary White Ovington, and J.E. Spingarn Discuss the Role of the Intellectual and the Leader	32
Part 2 "Honest Agony" The Education of Black YWCA Secretaries.....	118
<i>Chapter 2</i> Combining the "Nest and the Adventure" Black Women Organizing and Socializing in Harlem.....	118
<i>Chapter 3</i> A Spirit of Cooperation or Confrontation? Black Women's Internationalism	194
<i>Chapter 4</i> Social Science Center or Interracial Laboratory? Mabel Byrd and Juliette Derricotte at Fisk University	277
Part 3 "Objective or Intellectual or 'Detached' Type" The Education of the Young Turks	346
<i>Chapter 5</i> High School and College	354
<i>Chapter 6</i> Growing Into Themselves: Abram Harris and Sterling Brown as Young Scholars.....	399
<i>Chapter 7</i> Howard University, 1927-1930	463
<i>Chapter 8</i> Howard University, 1931-1933	535
Part 4 "A Journey "Not too Lonely or Impossible" The Second Amenian Conference, August 1933	595
<i>Chapter 9</i> The Summer Before.....	600
<i>Chapter 10</i> The Setup and Arrival.....	635
<i>Chapter 11</i> The Conference Itself.....	676
Part 5 "Trends of Thought Revealed" Organizing in the Aftermath of the Amenian Conference	720
<i>Chapter 12</i> The NAACP Transforms while Standing Still	721
<i>Chapter 13</i> The Byrd Affair	753
<i>Chapter 14</i> Du Bois Leaves and the Harris Report	786
<i>Chapter 15</i> The National Negro Congress.....	799
Part 6 Towards a Conclusion	823
<i>Chapter 16</i> The Second Amenians: Global Network of Professors	823
<i>Conclusion</i>	861
Appendices	
<i>One</i> Cast of Characters	880

<i>Two</i> Nominations for the Second Amenian Conference.....	890
<i>Three</i> Enrollment in Black Colleges in the 1920s	907
Bibliography	908

List of Abbreviations

ESR/ISS	European Student Relief (became International Student Services in 1926)
FPA	Foreign Policy Association
JCNR	Joint Committee on National Recovery
LCRM	Long Civil Rights Movement
NAACP	National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
NACW/NAUW	National Association of College Women (not to be confused with National Association of Colored Women), became National Association of University Women in 1974
NNC	National Negro Congress
NRA	National Recovery Administration
NUL	National Urban League
WSCF	World's Student Christian Federation
YMCA	Young Men's Christian Association
YWCA	Young Women's Christian Association

Introduction and Historiography

W.E.B. Du Bois devoted part of his long life to a grand social experiment—testing what group of leaders could most help African Americans to struggle, fight, and overcome. In the 1890s, he first started to conceptualize a name for this group—the “Talented Tenth,” and envisioned them as the “exceptional men” who would save “the Negro race.”¹ At Atlanta University in the next decade, he turned to female research assistants to create objective social science. In the teens and twenties, Du Bois and others stimulated young black writers and artists to create objects and texts that would change international perceptions of African Americans. In the 1930s, he invited a cadre of black social scientists, lawyers, and social workers, who were committed to change, to take up the questions of black leadership in an economically depressed world, torn apart by colonialism, fascism, and racism. They gathered in Amenia, NY, staying in tents on the lawn of the NAACP president’s house, in the second such gathering in the Association’s twenty year history.

By the 1950s, Du Bois had turned to yet another group of black leaders—those rising out of the working class, rather than those trained for leadership through a liberal education. He wrote with frustration that his “Talented Tenth”

naturally tended to become, as [Booker T.] Washington hoped, themselves exploiters of the Negro and white workers, as acquisitive and as hard-fisted as the white employers. But, on the other hand, some of them did not. The miracle which I had regarded as probable did come true, but only after long years: this leadership for the workers came mainly from intelligent and better paid workers, trained as workers and not as exploiting aristocrats. ... I now realize that the ability within a people does

¹ W.E.B. Du Bois, “The Talented Tenth,” *TeachingAmericanHistory.org*, 1903, <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=174>.

not automatically work for its highest salvation. On the contrary, in an era like this, and in the United States, many of the educated and gifted young black folk will be as selfish and immoral as the whites who surround them and to whom Negroes have been taught to look as ideals. Naturally, out of the mass of the working classes, who know life and its bitter struggle, will continually rise the real, unselfish and clear-sighted leadership. This will not be automatic or continuous, but the hope of the future of the Negro race in America and the world lies far more among its workers than among its college graduates, until the time that our higher training is rescued from its sycophantic and cowardly leadership of today, almost wholly dependent as it is on Big Business either in politics or philanthropy.”²

What had happened to Du Bois’ experiment in developing the Talented Tenth? Why did he cry out in despair at the end of his life, bemoaning the outcome of his repeated attempts to develop black leaders? One of the primary points of this dissertation is to examine in detail one of the cohorts of leadership that Du Bois sponsored—those thirty-two that gathered for the Second Amenia Conference in August 1933.

By examining “texts as historical artifacts of specific discursive communities,” as encouraged by Adolph Reed, the dissertation assembles layers of interconnected black leadership in the 1920s and 1930s—what motivated them, how they interacted, how they interpreted the expectations they received from black and white worlds, how they related to foreign environments, and how they developed as scholars and professionals—in short, how they educated themselves and became educated. These interconnections are steeped in primary documents—letters, essays, diaries, newspaper articles and others—because of the danger Reed warns about when careful contextualization and devotion to the particular historical frame of mind does not occur: “Not having access to the conventional groundings of black discourse, furthermore, undermines the project of

² W.E.B. Du Bois as quoted in Dan S. Green, “W. E. B. Du Bois’ Talented Tenth: A Strategy for Racial Advancement,” *The Journal of Negro Education* 46, no. 3 (Summer 1977): 363-4.

commenting other than trivially on the durable features and self-driving characteristics of Afro-American thought. Instead, such commentary has tended to depict either a perennial chase after platitudinous symbols--'freedom,' 'equality,' even 'struggle'--or a Whiggish saga of the linear unfolding of a grand idea."³ Part of the contribution of this work is to look at the spaces of black discourse, not just its content. Those present at Amenias moved through many different spaces—Harlem, Chicago, Washington DC, Geneva, Mysore India, rural Alabama and Louisiana, Paris, London, and many others. They sought what one participant argued they had found in Amenias—"Amenias seemed to me to furnish some of the basic things ["the young Negro"] needs and has little chance to provide for himself, namely, leisure in which to think and talk with others of his day and generation, a sense of a past from which he has come and a future into which he is going, a sense of fellowship with others so the journey seems not too lonely or impossible."⁴

If one considers black leadership in the interwar period as a Venn diagram, there was frequent overlap between different cohorts. Part of the way this dissertation adds to existing literature is by highlighting the overlaps and connections that were forged as young black intellectuals moved between different geographies and different social groups. The Venn diagram of those who participated in the Amenias conference includes professors at traditionally black schools (particularly Fisk and Howard Universities), Young Women's Christian Association secretaries, black graduate students at northern primarily white institutions, the first black employees of the New Deal, and members of the national NAACP office. Those who touched these circles were newspaper journalists,

³ Adolph L. Reed, *W.E.B. Du Bois and American Political Thought* (Oxford University Press US, 1997), 10-11.

⁴ Frances Williams to J.E. Spingarn, 23 Aug 1933, Box 95-12 Folder 494, Spingarn Papers MSRC.

members of the Urban League, the lawyers building the precedent for the Brown decision, community businessmen, teachers, Harlem Renaissance authors and painters, African students and colleagues, the historians who gathered around Carter G. Woodson, and Euro-American professors, intellectuals, and philanthropists. In many ways, those who attended America had to search long and hard for an identity. Something displaced them—sometimes it was that they were black in a predominantly white world, sometimes that they were female in a male profession, sometimes that they were highly educated among people without degrees. This dissertation is about their search for identity and the moments of connection that gave them the strength and purpose to continue to struggle. On the same plane of the Venn diagram, but barely touching, were the Communists that Robin Kelley and Mark Naison studied, Garveyites and other Black Nationalists, new religious leaders like Father Divine and Wallace Fard Muhammad, established black Christian ministers, and the heirs of Booker T. Washington's industrial education movement.

It is worthwhile to study these different cadres of black leadership for many reasons. One in particular is how frequently educated African Americans have been lauded and chided for their leadership. One of the initial driving questions in this work was how African Americans lived with the enormous expectations placed upon their shoulders by their communities and by people outside their communities. They were expected to be Moses and lead their less fortunate co-racialists out of their difficulties. They were seen as representatives of the race wherever they went and had to pay careful attention at all times to their behavior. This was both a tremendously meaningful gift of purpose to their life and a constant presence they daily had to deal with. How did Du Bois

beckon young people to join his cadre? How did they react to him—when did they accept his leadership and when did they rebel against it? How did an intellectual who could sometimes be quite crotchety and a little too friendly with the ladies become such an important influence on the younger generation?

No matter the profession, their own internal sensitivities and their communities required them to act as leaders because they had been given the educational opportunities denied to so many black people. Horace Mann Bond explained the pressure to become race leaders in his study of black scholars: “An added and ever-present factor [in the small number of black scholars] has been that the few persons who had the capacity and skills to engage in scholarly pursuits in the Negro race--yesterday and today--have felt the pressure of other demands so urgent as to preclude devotion to the scholarly life: they were frequently called upon to be 'race leaders,' or, in educational circles, were such a rarity as to be drawn from research and study to administrative responsibilities.”⁵

Du Bois was certainly not the only one to criticize the actions of educated African Americans and beckon them to work harder and be more responsible. Among many, perhaps the most famous was historian and iconoclast Carter G. Woodson’s 1933 jeremiad *The Mis-Education of the Negro*, a collection of two years of newspaper columns attacking black intellectuals.⁶ The book, published the same year as the Second Amenia Conference, was intended to spur the educated to action on behalf of the great

⁵ Horace Mann Bond, *Black American Scholars: a Study of Their Beginnings* (Detroit, Mich: Balamp Pub, 1972), 14.

⁶ Pero Dagbovie proposed the adjective “iconoclast” for Woodson. See his *The Early Black History Movement, Carter G. Woodson, and Lorenzo Johnston Greene* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007).

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“mass” of black Americans.⁷ Schoolteachers and schoolbooks had shoved “the thought of the inferiority of the Negro” into blacks from childhood. The number of blacks educated in elementary school, high school, college, and graduate school had grown exponentially in the early 1920s. More and more black leaders had advanced degrees. But Woodson believed that the new group of intellectuals failed to change blacks’ persistent sense of inferiority because their Eurocentric education at institutions like Harvard, Columbia, and Chicago turned them into proto-Europeans, more interested in their own personal welfare than in the welfare of the members of their race. He castigated politicians for their corruption, lawyers for their ineptitude, doctors for their greed, and teachers for their ignorance of black history.⁸ He called for every black person whose mind was shackled by slavery to loose their chains.⁹ The book fits into a long tradition of black leaders

⁷ The work was first published by Woodson’s The Associated Publishers in 1933. According to WorldCat, they waited till the Black Power Era to bring out other editions in the years 1969, 1972 1977, 1985. When the text became public domain, many other publishers began to offer copies, including Africa World Press, Inc. of Trenton New Jersey, who ran ten printings between 1990 and 1998. Other publishers include San Diego: The Book Tree, 2006, 2007; Radford, VA: Wilder Publications, 2008; Dover Publications, 2005. Chicago: African American Images, 2000; Philadelphia: Hakims Bookstore, 1995; New York : AMS Press, 1977; Washington, Associated Publishers: Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Publications, 2005; Nashville, TN : Winston-Derek, 1990; Drewryville, Va.: Khalifah’s Booksellers, 2006; New York : Classic House Books, 2008.

⁸ In his review of the book in 1933, Horace Mann Bond noted with frustration the persistent pessimism in Woodson’s work. He wrote, for example, “Dr. Woodson chides the Negro school teacher for not including the curriculum a study of literary classics from the pens of Negroes, and a few pages further on states that ‘Comparatively few American Negroes have produced creditable literature, and still fewer have made any large contribution to philosophy or science.’” He then explained how Woodson criticizes African Americans for not supporting black professionals and then criticizes black professionals for being completely inadequate. Horace Mann Bond, “Review: Dr. Woodson Goes Wool-Gathering,” *The Journal of Negro Education* 2, no. 2 (April 1933): 210-213.

⁹ “Large numbers of Negroes live in such a community [where a black person would choose a white hospital and poor treatment over a black hospital and dignified treatment]. You say that such an atmosphere is not congenial and you will not lose time with these people who are thus satisfied, but the exploiting preacher, the unprincipled politician, the notorious gambler, and the agent of vice are all there purposely misleading these people who have not as yet shaken from their mind the shackles of slavery. What is going to become of them? What is going to become of you?” Carter G. Woodson, *The Mis-Education of the Negro* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1998), 164. He extended his analysis of black professionals the

calling for blacks to raise themselves up, epitomized by Booker T. Washington, suggesting that many societal ills could be overcome by developing “the Negro” “into a worthy citizen.”¹⁰ In this book, he wrote to a black audience. In many other venues, he analyzed the systemic problems and racism African Americans have faced in this country “in the light of science.”¹¹

next year in *The Negro Professional Man and the Community with Special Emphasis on the Physician and the Lawyer* (Washington DC: Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, 1934).

¹⁰

Woodson, *The Mis-Education of the Negro*, 181. Leaders differed on the ultimate purpose of self-help—whether it was to change the political and legal situation of African Americans by changing the opinions of white lawmakers, or whether it was to improve the socioeconomic situations of African Americans by changing physical circumstances. Many combined these two ideas, while others emphasized one or the other more. W.E.B. Du Bois, Washington’s famous opponent, emphasized the necessity of self-help many times during his career, even while arguing that it was necessary to always directly confront legal and political segregation. For instance, in the 1920s, he argued that a hospital was so necessary in Harlem, that it was ok to accept segregation. During WWI, J.E. Spingarn and Du Bois argued that a training facility was so necessary for black officers that it was necessary to accept segregation. Many others in Harlem and other black communities rejected both of these positions. See, for example, Mark Ellis, ““Closing Ranks” and “Seeking Honors”: W. E. B. Du Bois in World War I,” *The Journal of American History* 79, no. 1 (June 1992): 96-124. The literature on black self-help is voluminous. A few works are V. P. Franklin, “Hidden in Plain View: African American Women, Radical Feminism, and the Origins of Women’s Studies Programs, 1967-1974,” *The Journal of African American History* 87 (Autumn 2002): 433-445; Traci L. Taylor, ““Womanhood Glorified”: Nannie Helen Burroughs and the National Training School for Women and Girls, Inc., 1909-1961,” *The Journal of African American History* 87 (Autumn 2002): 390-402; V. P. Franklin, “Patterns of Student Activism at Historically Black Universities in the United States and South Africa, 1960-1977,” *The Journal of African American History* 88, no. 2 (Spring 2003): 204-217; Jacqueline M Moore, *Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. Du Bois, and the Struggle For racial Uplift* (Wilmington, Del: SR Books, 2003); Barbara P. Josiah, “Providing for the Future: The World of the African American Depositors of Washington, DC’s Freedmen’s Savings Bank, 1865-1874,” *The Journal of African American History* 89, no. 1 (Winter 2004): 1-16; Stacy Kinlock Sewell, “The “Not-Buying Power” of the Black Community: Urban Boycotts and Equal Employment Opportunity, 1960-1964,” *The Journal of African American History* 89, no. 2 (Spring 2004): 135-151; Derrick P. Alridge, “From Civil Rights to Hip Hop: Toward a Nexus of Ideas,” *The Journal of African American History* 90, no. 3 (Summer 2005): 226-252; Marci Bounds Littlefield, “The Black Church and Community Development and Self-help: The Next Phase of Social Equality,” *Western Journal of Black Studies* (Winter 2005); Karen A. Johnson, “Undaunted Courage and Faith: The Lives of Three Black Women in the West and Hawaii in the Early 19th Century,” *The Journal of African American History* 91, no. 1 (Winter 2006): 4-22; John S. Butler, *Entrepreneurship and self-help among Black Americans* (SUNY Press, 2005).

¹¹

Carter G. Woodson, “Ten Years of Collecting and Publishing the Records of the Negro,” *The Journal of Negro History* 10, no. 4 (October 1925): 598.

Woodson suggested that in the struggle so far, the Talented Tenth had had “nothing to offer.”¹² Yet even in this critique, Woodson recognized that a group of educated blacks had arisen, numerous enough to have real influence, if still not close to a tenth of the black population. This book experienced a second surge in popularity during the Black Power Era and continues to command attention among college-educated black youth, who recognize themselves in its pages more than seventy five years after its publication.¹³ Was Washington right? How were black Americans educated? What did they believe about themselves and their race? What did they teach others? How did they act out their personal ambitions and their desires for social change? How did they conceptualize that change? What comfort did they take from each other and when did they enter into conflict?

¹² Green, “W. E. B. Du Bois’ Talented Tenth,” 358-9. Green argues that Du Bois’s theory of the Talented Tenth was one of his greatest ideological contributions and one that remained remarkably consistent throughout his life. Woodson, *The Mis-Education of the Negro*, 107. Pero Dagbovie elaborates on this point in his study of Woodson and Woodson’s student/colleague Lorenzo Greene; “Woodson also continued his attack on black intellectuals and the black middle-class in the *Negro History Bulletin*. More than five years after *The Mis-Education of the Negro* was first published, Woodson described the typical black graduate from Yale, Harvard, Columbia, and Princeton as being useless. A graduate of Harvard himself, Woodson used such generalizations in order, he hoped, to spark debates and critical conversations. The black college graduate, in Woodson’s estimation, was one ‘equipped to begin the life of an Americanized or Europeanized white man,’ one without the proper training to help the masses of his people. These ‘intellectuals,’ Woodson added, despised Africa and its descendants. He instructed blacks to ‘learn to (59) do what whites cannot do’ and then make the world ‘much better off’ with these gifts. Woodson advocated a ‘revolution’ in the American educational system, calling for institutions that would be molded to the conditions of black Americans.” Dagbovie, *The Early Black History Movement, Carter G. Woodson, and Lorenzo Johnston Greene*, 58.

¹³ Some of the book’s continuing influence is suggested by the following anecdotes: The title of Lauryn Hill’s 1998 best-selling album “The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill” is a reference to the book’s title. Most introductions to various editions begin by emphasizing how relevant the book remains. Historian Charles Wesley wrote in 1969 that “Considerable time has passed since the first printing of this volume, but it is significant that it has meaning and direct implications for today’s consideration.” A student at Morgan State University, a historically black college, wrote in 2004 that “Although published more than six decades ago, the impact of these poignant words by Dr. Carter G. Woodson in *The Miseducation of the Negro* has continued to resonate throughout the minds and hearts of Black people around the globe.” Leah Taylor, “The Miseducation of the Negro - Perspectives,” *Morgan State University Spokesman*, October 8, 2004, <http://media.www.msuspokesman.com/media/storage/paper270/news/2004/10/08/Perspectives/The-Miseducation.Of.The.Negro-750673.shtml>.

By examining the cohort that attended the Second Amenia Conference, this dissertation illuminates a world of black intellectuals, thinkers, and activists in the 1920s and 1930s as they grew, went to college, and established themselves as professionals. These terms are useful but difficult to pinpoint exactly. For most of the male professors in the dissertation, intellectual fits as a professional label and a label they recognized as their own (Abram Harris proudly and Sterling Brown reluctantly). The women had curvaceous paths through aid organizations and higher education. Few of their letters were preserved that might document their intellectual journey in the same detailed way as, for example, Abram Harris'. They did not have the same social and cultural space to grasp on to an "intellectual" identity. Yet, they inhabited roles as crafters and disbursers of ideas. They acknowledged and criticized the emphasis on scientific objectivity that dominated a lot of contemporary thought. Whether or not they fit the label of intellectuals does not consume much time in these pages. Rather, their individual journeys through ideas and struggles for rights are presented and analyzed. Those journeys are bigger than the label intellectual, and also capture when they and the men that share these pages do and do not inhabit that label.

For the first time, enough African Americans sought higher education that they made up a significant presence throughout the country. Black men had received doctorates and masters in small numbers since Edward Bouchet graduated with a PhD in physics from Yale in 1876 (in the period in which the PhD model of education began to arrive in the United States from Germany). This was the era that Stephanie Evans calls "The Third Step" in black education, when African American women earned the

doctorate.¹⁴ The larger (though still relatively small) number of African Americans in higher education changed the nature of the national leadership in various ways.

Throughout the country, the interwar period represented one of the last eras in which most intellectuals made their living outside the academy. Many African Americans had pursued a life of ideas from the earliest days of the country, as charted in many excellent works about black historians, the convention movement, reading groups, black ministers and theologians, and prominent black intellectuals like Alexander Crummell, Henry Highland Garnett, and Frederick Douglass.¹⁵ Many of the nineteenth century intellectuals wrote and meditated upon multiple meanings of freedom, race, and Christianity.

At the turn of the century, Alexander Crummell founded the American Negro Academy to bring together professional and lay scholars to discuss African Americans within the context of new and old scientific methods. He wrote that the ANA's purpose was the "'civilization of the Negro race in the United States, by the scientific processes of literature, art, and philosophy.' Its members were the scholars and the thinkers 'who have secured the vision with penetrates the center of nature, and sweeps the circle of historic

¹⁴ Stephanie Y Evans, *Black Women in the Ivory Tower, 1850-1954: An Intellectual History* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2007).

¹⁵ William M Banks, *Black Intellectuals: Race and Responsibility in American Life* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996); John Ernest, *Liberation Historiography: African American Writers and the Challenge of History, 1794-1861* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Stephen G Hall, *A Faithful Account of the Race: African American Historical Writing in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009); Earl Ofari, *Let Your Motto Be Resistance: the Life and Thought of Henry Highland Garnet* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1972); Alfred A Moss, *The American Negro Academy: Voice of the Talented Tenth* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981); Wilson Jeremiah Moses, *Alexander Crummell: A Study of Civilization and Discontent* (Oxford [Oxfordshire]: Oxford University Press, 1989); Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1993); Martin B Pasternak, *Rise Now and Fly to Arms: The Life of Henry Highland Garnet*, Studies in African American history and culture (New York: Garland Pub, 1995); Wilson Jeremiah Moses, *Creative Conflict in African American Thought: Frederick Douglass, Alexander Crummell, Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Marcus Garvey* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

enlightenment.' He added that true scholars were also 'reformers' and 'philanthropists' who would challenge the country to live up to its promises."¹⁶ Crummell's focus on "civilization" and the focus of others in the Progressive Era on "uplift" have come under careful scrutiny by historians like Michelle Mitchell and Kevin Gaines.¹⁷

The interwar leadership in this dissertation inherited many ideas from earlier generations. Prior intellectuals had also explored what it meant to be responsible to black communities, to their own ambitions, and to the struggle against personal and institutional racism. They questioned the nature of civilization, their place within the United States, and their relationship to Africa. They explored their spirituality and their Christianity. Some things also marked the Amenian participants as a new group. This was a large enough group that it included more than the first people to enter a profession, lived in urban centers besides Washington DC or New Orleans, and had even begun to attract the fundamental critiques of someone like Woodson. Professors usually got their start in civil rights or uplift organizations before teaching at black Southern colleges. They frequently gave talks to groups of interested community members about their scholarly activities and about their plans for world change. Black women professionals built community through private parties, literary salons, and organizations in metropolitan centers like Harlem and DC as well as in small towns throughout the nation. Throughout their activities within black communities, educated blacks also moved within white and interracial worlds. Many leaders attended "whitestream" educational

¹⁶ As quoted by John Hope Franklin, Foreword, in Banks, *Black Intellectuals*, x.

¹⁷ Kevin Kelly Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Michele Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation: African Americans and the Politics of Racial Destiny After Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

institutions, particularly Harvard, Columbia, and Chicago, while others arose from historically black colleges whose attendance grew by a hundredfold in these years.¹⁸ YWCA secretaries worked in segregated local associations, but had to go to the “main” branch to discuss budget and planning issues. In the 1920s, due to the work of black secretaries, the executive committee of the YWCA desegregated their conferences and started to attend closely to the housing situation for black conferees. Black lawyers usually studied under white lawyers, took the board exams before a panel of white men, and appeared before white judges. Almost all remembered the first time they picked up Du Bois’ *Souls of Black Folk* and recognized themselves in its description of a “double consciousness” and life “behind the veil.”¹⁹

The term “Amenians” often appears in these pages as a short hand to identify the kind of Depression-era leadership that was focused on objective social science and felt pulled between their personal ambitions and their desire to change the place of African Americans in the world. It also captures the fact that these individuals continually encountered each other around the country and around the globe and depended upon each other for connections and support. Each individual had their own circle of close friends,

¹⁸ I follow Dagbovie’s use of “whitestream” as a more accurate alternative to “mainstream.”

¹⁹ W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg & Co., 1907). There is a large and growing literature on black double consciousness. Just a few of the works include Sandra Adell, *Double-consciousness/double bind* (University of Illinois Press, 1994); Richard. Hardack, ““A Music Seeking Its Words”: Double-Timing and Double Consciousness in Toni Morrison’s *Jazz*,” *Callaloo* 18, no. 2 (1995): 451-471; Cynthia D. Schrager, “Both Sides of the Veil: Race, Science, and Mysticism in W.E.B. Du Bois,” *American Quarterly* 48, no. 4 (1996): 551-586; David Krasner, *Resistance, Parody and Double Consciousness in African American Theatre, 1895-19* (Palgrave Macmillan, 1998); Susan. Wells, “Discursive Mobility and Double Consciousness in S. Weir Mitchell and W. E. B. Du Bois,” *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 35, no. 2 (2002): 120-137; Nahum Dimitri. Chandler, “The Souls of an Ex-White Man: W. E. B. Du Bois and the Biography of John Brown,” *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3, no. 1 (2003): 179-195; Danny Sexton, “Lifting the Veil: Revision and Double-Consciousness in Rita Dove’s *The Darker Face of the Earth*,” *Callaloo* 31, no. 3 (2008): 777-787; Nahum D. Chandler, “Of Exorbitance: The Problem of the Negro as a Problem for Thought,” *Criticism* 50, no. 3 (2008): 345-410.

but participation in race-based organizations, in professional organizations, and in becoming friends of friends brought them into frequent interaction. The interactions gave rise to a similar concentration on the needs of the working class or “masses” but it also led to frequent conflict of ideas and purpose. Both conflict and cooperation pepper these pages.

This work critiques the growing emphasis in American History on the Long Civil Rights Movement. In her 2005 Organization of American Historians presidential address, Jacqueline Dowd Hall advanced a major attempt to deal with the American public’s inadequate understanding of the Civil Rights Movement (bracketed roughly by the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision and the 1965 Voting Rights Act).²⁰ She suggested that the politically expedient narrative over-emphasized the role of black and white male leaders, without recognizing the work of African American women or that of black people working on a smaller scale.

By confining the civil rights struggle to the South, to bowdlerized heroes, to a single halcyon decade, and to limited, noneconomic objectives, the master narrative simultaneously elevates and diminishes the movement. It ensures the status of the classical phase as a triumphal moment in a larger American progress narrative, yet it undermines its *gravitas*. It prevents one of the most remarkable mass movements in American history from speaking effectively to the challenges of our time.²¹

²⁰ Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, “The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past,” *The Journal of American History* 91, no. 4 (March 2005). Dowd explains the national narrative: “Centering on what Bayard Rustin in 1965 called the “classical” phase of the struggle, the dominant narrative chronicles a short civil rights movement that begins with the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, proceeds through public protests, and culminates with the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Then comes the decline. After a season of moral clarity, the country is beset by the Vietnam War, urban riots, and reaction against the excesses of the late 1960s and the 1970s, understood variously as student rebellion, black militancy, feminism, busing, affirmative action, or an overweening welfare state.”

²¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

This last clause encapsulates one of Dowd Hall's fundamental concerns—that history should instruct the present.²² Herein lies a potential problem: too strong of a desire for instruction can lead to the avoidance of the moral complexities of the past. She suggests that one way to overcome this political narrative is by pushing back the official start date of the CRM to the late 30s, recognizing its close connection to the New Deal, and moving the end date further into the Black Power and desegregation eras. She also encouraged scholars to stretch the geographic boundaries of the CRM beyond the South. This shift in periodization and geography represents “a more robust, more progressive, and *truer* story—the story of a “long civil rights movement.”²³

Many civil rights scholars have enthusiastically embraced Dowd Hall's Long Civil Rights Movement (LCRM). Since she first introduced it, dozens of books and articles have used it as a major organizing principle for their work.²⁴ Some simply use it as a way to focus the CRM scholarship on the resistance of African Americans, rather

²² One of her primary purposes in developing the LCRM is to critique the political uses of the past made by the “New Right.” She explains, “This essay emphasizes how the movement's meaning has been distorted and reified by a New Right bent on reversing its gains.” *Ibid.*, 5.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ For a selection of those works written with the LCRM as an organizing idea, see Kevin Boyle, “Labour, the Left and the Long Civil Rights Movement,” *Social History* 30, no. 3 (2005): 366; Joe William Trotter, “Rethinking the Boundaries of the Modern Freedom Struggle,” *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 130, no. 4 (October 2006); Karen Kruse Thomas, “The Hill-Burton Act and Civil Rights: Expanding Hospital Care for Black Southerners, 1939-1960,” *The Journal of Southern History* 72, no. 4 (November 2006): 823; E. Battat, “‘Ain't got no home': Race and American migration narratives in the Depression era” (Harvard University, 2008); Andrew W. Kahrl, “On the Beach: Race and Leisure in the Jim Crow South” (Ph.D., Indiana University, 2008); Shana Redmond, “Anthem: Music and Politics in Diaspora, 1920--1970s” (Ph.D., Yale University, 2008); Wendy Wall, *Inventing the “American Way”: The Politics of Consensus from the New Deal to the Civil Rights Movement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); L. Isaac, “Movement of Movements: Culture Moves in the Long Civil Rights Struggle,” *Social Forces* 87, no. 1 (September 2008): 33; Catherine Fosl and Tracy Elaine K'Meyer, eds., *Freedom on the Border: An Oral History of the Civil Rights Movement in Kentucky* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2009); Hasan Kwame Jeffries, *Bloody Lowndes: Civil Rights and Black Power in Alabama's Black Belt* (New York: New York University Press, 2009); T. Stewart-Winter, “Raids, rights, and rainbow coalitions: Sexuality and race in Chicago politics, 1950--2000” (The University of Chicago, 2009).

than on national political changes, a handful of prominent leaders, or when the movement “burst into white people’s living rooms, brought to them by white media.”²⁵ While this correction is obvious and necessary, if it is overemphasized it becomes dangerously akin to homogenizing black history.

In other words, simply recognizing that black people have resisted injustice in different ways throughout their time on American soil should be a starting point instead of a conclusion. It should not obscure the myriad ways that black Americans dealt with racism or the various ways they lived their lives regardless of racism. At the same time, making all of African American history akin to “The Civil Rights Movement” places too great an emphasis on “civil rights” as the sum total of black people’s resistance, while neglecting the ways the definition of human rights has changed over the years, particularly in the wake of Nazism and World War II. Some, like Robin D.G. Kelley, have attempted to avoid this problem by calling black resistance “The Black Liberation Movement.”²⁶ Even that has some of the same problems as the LCRM, as Eric Arnesen points out in a recent *Historically Speaking* article; “Yet despite its popularity and classroom utility, the notion [of the LCRM] tends to reduce very different approaches and agendas to a too simple common denominator, minimizing the importance of chronology, precise periodization, and even conflicting agendas and demands.”²⁷ Arnesen does not suggest ignoring black resistance; rather “[o]ne can appreciate the deep traditions of

²⁵ Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Defying Dixie: The Radical Roots of Civil Rights, 1919-1950*, 1st ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 2008), 2.

²⁶ Robin D. G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002).

²⁷ Eric Arnesen, “Reconsidering the “Long Civil Rights Movement”,” *Historically Speaking* 10, no. 2 (2009): 31-34.

black protest politics while simultaneously rejecting the adjective “freedom” as too expansive to have much concrete descriptive meaning.”²⁸

While some use the LCRM as a tool of political protest or as a way to open the umbrella of the grand narrative to embrace more activities as part of the Civil Rights Movement, others use it to establish that the actions of black and white communists in the 1930s built the foundation of the CRM. The most prominent scholar in the latter trend is Glenda Gilmore. In her book, the *Defying Dixie: The Radical Roots of Civil Rights*, Gilmore claims that the Civil Rights Movement began at the end of WWI, though she spends only a few pages on the socialists and communists of the 1920s (specifically the Harlem-based African Blood Brotherhood), before turning to the 1930s. She argues that “the presence of a radical Left [in the South], in this case a Communist Left, redefines the debate over white supremacy and hastened its end. By brooking no compromise with full social equality for a decade after they entered the South in 1929, the Communists gave Southerners a vision and a threat. Their small numbers matter less than their very existence.” She then suggests that “it was Communists who stood up to say that black and white people should organize together, eat together, go to school together, and marry each other if they chose.” There are two problems imbedded in this statement. First of all, as Arnesen points out, “the communists Gilmore celebrates did not really create a civil rights movement at all, much less one that compared in size or influence to the movement of the ‘classical’ phase.”²⁹

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

Moreover, Gilmore again foregrounds the efforts of a small mass of whites rather than the daily perseverance of African Americans.³⁰ The classic Civil Rights Movement would never have succeeded without several local, national, and international planets aligning. The national legislation required the international pressure that arose during the Cold War.³¹ But the legislation would not have arisen without constant pressure from African American protestors who felt liberated and motivated by the experience of fighting for Double Victory in World War II, Supreme Court decisions like *Brown*, the powerful rhetoric of national leaders, and the power of daily decisions to resist made by their peers.

This dissertation is not an attempt to sketch the foundations or antecedents of the Civil Rights Movement in the interwar period or to refute the Long Civil Rights Movement, because the importance of the interwar period can stand on its own. It does not need to be attached to the Civil Rights Movement in order to have importance.³² The dynamic confrontations and allegiances those years witnessed provide important insight into race relations, internationalism, intellectual development, and national black culture. African Americans made nuanced choices in a complicated world, sometimes toward resistance and sometimes not. The relationships between African American leaders—

³⁰ A useful insight Gilmore posits, that does not get enough play in her book because of her focus on white Communists, is that African Americans developing organizations in the north “were similar to governments in exile. Jim Crow’s black daughters and sons established beachheads in the North and around the world to gain safe ground from which to fire back at those occupying their country.” Gilmore, *Defying Dixie*, 5.

³¹ Brenda Gayle Plummer, *Rising Wind: Black Americans and U.S. Foreign Affairs, 1935-1960* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Penny M Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997).

³² I initially linked my study to the Civil Rights Movement in order to justify it, before realizing that this was an uncomplicated view of these events.

scholars, activists, intellectuals, and thinkers—help illuminate those nuances and complications.

Other historians are turning away from the LCRM as an organizing tool. Darlene Clark Hine suggests a “proto-Civil Rights Movement” to describe the foundational efforts that led up to the major social change of the 1960s, rather than the LCRM. She argues that the black professional class was central to establishing the foundations of the CRM: “Without the parallel institutions that the black professional class created, successful challenges to white supremacy would not have been possible. The formation of parallel organizations (such as the National Medical Association in 1895, the National Association of Colored Graduate Nurses in 1908, and the National Bar Association in 1925) proved to be far more radical, far more capable of nurturing resistance, than anyone could have anticipated in the closing decade of the nineteenth century and opening decades of the twentieth.”³³

Before Hunt suggested the LCRM, Paul Moreno pointed out an ideological continuity between the New Deal era and the CRM. He explained that the New Deal represented a change in the way that American politicians thought about racial justice; in other words, the depression era introduced for the first time the idea that there should be proportional representation of minorities. He points particularly to “Don’t Buy Where You Can’t Work” campaigns which demanded representation in business that served black communities (without encouraging new jobs—Ralph Bunche and Abram Harris worried that campaigns like this would encourage greater fighting between black and

³³ Darlene Clark Hine, “Black Professionals and Race Consciousness: Origins of the Civil Rights Movement, 1890–1950,” *The Journal of American History* 89, no. 4 (March 2003), <http://www.historycooperative.org.proxy2.cl.msu.edu/journals/jah/89.4/hine.html>.

white workers, as Moreno points out).³⁴ One of the weaknesses of Hall's thesis, as Touré Reed suggests in his forthcoming work, is that it misses the different ways that civil rights were defined and the different ways that they were fought for.³⁵ African Americans have defined freedom and the goals of their struggle very differently over the past two hundred years. Moreno's work (as well as Risa Goluboff's) shows the necessity of paying careful attention to these shifts.³⁶ One of the things that this dissertation does is suggest the different ways that young black leaders in the 1920s and 1930s conceptualized equality and freedom. Some reached for a class analysis that tended at times toward reductionism, others found equality in interracial Christian relationships, and still others sought social science "objectivity" for definitions of equality. Almost everyone in this dissertation believed in the validity of different kinds of integration (religious, cultural, political, and/or professional), which differentiated them from many other cadres of black leadership in the period.

The dissertation primarily follows three of the cadres of the Second Amenia Group, as they developed prior to Amenia—NAACP officials (in Chapter 1), YWCA secretaries (Chapters 2 through 4), and black college professors (Chapters 5 through 8)—moved through the space at Amenia (Chapters 9 through 11), and changed their

³⁴ Paul D. Moreno, *From Direct Action to Affirmative Action: Fair Employment Law and Policy in America, 1933-1972* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997).

³⁵ Reed to Lauren Kientz, email, March 18, 2010, in author's possession.

³⁶ Risa L. Goluboff, *The Lost Promise of Civil Rights* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007).

organizations in the aftermath of America (Chapters 12 through 16). While the literature dealing directly with the interwar period is far less voluminous than that for the CRM or LCRM, it certainly does exist. It focuses particularly on the Harlem Renaissance and the founding of civil rights and uplift organizations, as well as the development of black societies like the sororities and fraternities, religious groups like the Nation of Islam or Father Divine, and the Universal Negro Improvement Association. Scholars have also analyzed the foundational work of black academics in the different disciplines later associated with Black Studies, like psychology, anthropology, history, sociology, political science and economics.

Previous work carefully tracks the radical opinions of the Young Turks at Howard University, including political scientist Ralph Bunche, poet and literary critic Sterling Brown, economist Abram Harris, school accountant Gus Auzenne, and sociologist E. Franklin Frazier. They founded and developed the Social Science College at Howard, in constant conflict with president Mordecai Johnson, who was in turn pressed by a Congress fearful of communist influence on the campus. At the same time, they engaged critically and frequently with a group of white scholars. They brought sympathetic white professors to campus several times a year to speak to their undergraduates. They published in established scholarly journals, like the *Journal of Political Economy* or the *Journal of Social Forces*, while also publishing in and developing black journals like the Howard-based *Journal of Negro Education* and Woodson's *Journal of Negro History*, as well as magazines like the *Crisis*, the *Opportunity*, and the *Messenger*.³⁷ End of the year

³⁷ For example, see Abram L. Harris, "Types of Institutionalism," *The Journal of Political Economy* 40, no. 6 (December 1932): 721-749; Abram L. Harris, "Economic Evolution: Dialectical and Darwinian," *The Journal of Political Economy* 42, no. 1 (February 1934): 34-79; Abram L. Harris, "Pure Capitalism and the

reports indicate that they attended the yearly “whitestream” conferences of their disciplines, despite the discomfort they experienced there. When applying for grants and developing new projects, they maintained dialogue with their academic mentors from their graduate universities, keeping a careful watch on their access to granting sources and their critique of mainstream narratives.

In the dissertation chapters dealing with the Young Turks, I add to the growing literature on them by examining their lives and ideas in concert with each other. They are attracting greater interest recently due to the differences between their ideas in the 1950s and 1960s and those in the 1930s. In the earlier era, they seemed like radicals, whereas in the later era they seemed to advocate a passive, “Uncle Tom” like response to racial inequality.³⁸ I argue that their desire to be taken seriously as academics and

Disappearance of the Middle Class,” *The Journal of Political Economy* 47, no. 3 (June 1939): 328-356; Abram L. Harris, “Sombart and German (National) Socialism,” *The Journal of Political Economy* 50, no. 6 (December 1942): 805-835; Abram Harris, “A Review of Four Books,” *Crisis*, September 1920; Abram Harris, “Black Communists in Dixie,” *Opportunity*, July 1925; Abram L. Harris, “The Plight of the Negro Miners,” *Opportunity*, October 1925; Abram L. Harris, “Economic Foundations of American Race Division,” *Social Forces* 5, no. 3 (March 1927): 468-478; E. Franklin Frazier, “The Negro and Non-Resistance,” *Crisis*, March 1924; E. Franklin Frazier, “Social Work in Race Relations,” *Crisis*, April 1924; E. Franklin Frazier, “Psychological Factors in Negro Health,” *Journal of Social Forces* 3, no. 3 (March 1925): 488-490; E. Franklin Frazier, “The Negro Family,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 140 (November 1928): 44-51; E. Franklin Frazier, “The Negro Community, A Cultural Phenomenon,” *Social Forces* 7, no. 3 (March 1929): 415-420; E. Franklin Frazier, “The Negro Slave Family,” *The Journal of Negro History* 15, no. 2 (April 1930): 198-259; E. Franklin Frazier, “Graduate Education in Negro Colleges and Universities,” *The Journal of Negro Education* 2, no. 3 (July 1933): 329-341; Sterling Brown, “Arcadia, South Carolina,” *Opportunity*, February 1934; Allison Davis, “Our Negro ‘Intellectuals,’” *Crisis*, August 1928; E. Franklin Frazier, “The Mind of the American Negro,” *Opportunity*, September 1928; Emmett E. Dorsey, “The Negro and Social Planning,” *Journal of Negro Education* (January 1936): 105; Ralph J. Bunche, “French and British Imperialism in West Africa,” *Journal of Negro History* 21, no. 1 (January 1936): 31-46; Ralph J. Bunche, “The Role of the University in the Political Orientation of Negro Youth,” *Journal of Negro Education* 9, no. 4 (October 1940): 571-579.

³⁸ William Jr. Darity, “Introduction,” in *Race, Radicalism and Reform* (New Brunswick, NY: Transaction Publishers, 1989); William Jr. Darity and Ellison, “Abram Harris Jr.: The Economics of Race and Social Reform,” *History of Political Economy* 22, no. 4 (1990): 611-627; William Jr. Darity, “Soundings and Silences on Race and Social Change: Abram Harris Jr. in the Great Depression,” in *A Different Vision: African American Economic Thought*, ed. Thomas D. Boston, vol. 1, 1997; John B. Kirby, “Ralph J. Bunche and Black Radical Thought in the 1930s,” *Phylon* (1960-) 35, no. 2 (Qtr 2, 1974): 129-141; Brian Urquhart, *Ralph Bunche: An American Life*, 1st ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1993); Brian Urquhart, “The Higher Education of Ralph Bunche,” *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, no. 4 (Summer

professionals, which led to Ralph Bunche's success in the United Nations and Abram Harris' success at the University of Chicago as well as to their absence during the public debates of the Civil Rights Movement, was present in those earlier years. Ralph Bunche, in particular, was transformed by a world-wide research expedition from 1936-1938 to become a peace-maker as well as a scientist. His desire to escape segregation in DC led to his acceptance of a permanent position with the UN following WWII. The Young Turks, with the exception of Sterling Brown, often did not fit easily within black communities because of their interests and level of education. By the time they were middle-aged, they seemed entirely conventional to a younger generation interested in radical change. Contemporary scholars have tried to rescue them by arguing that they too were interested in radical change in their youth. While it is true that their ideas were linked to "radical" economic ideas, influenced by Marx, and they discussed these ideas before myriad audiences, personally they were determined to grow into the role of the dignified professor. Patrick Rael describes similar individuals in the nineteenth century; "The black elites who crafted the protest tradition often came out poorly in this view.

1994): 78-84; Ben Keppel, *The Work of Democracy: Ralph Bunche, Kenneth B. Clark, Lorraine Hansberry, and the Cultural Politics of Race* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995); George P. Potamianos, "Visions of a dying Africa: Ralph J. Bunche and his second African journey, 1936-1938," *Journal of Black Studies* 26, no. 4 (March 1996): 447(20); Charles P Henry, *Ralph Bunche: Model Negro or American Other?* (New York: New York University Press, 1999); Clare L. Spark, "Race, Caste, or Class? The Bunche-Myrdal Dispute over 'An American Dilemma'," *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 14, no. 3 (Spring 2001): 465-511; Jonathan Scott Holloway, "Ralph Bunche and the Responsibilities of the Public Intellectual," *The Journal of Negro Education* 73, no. 2 (Spring 2004): 125-136; Ben Keppel, "Thinking through a Life: Reconsidering the Origins of Ralph J. Bunche," *The Journal of Negro Education* 73, no. 2 (Spring 2004): 116-124; Hanes Walton, "The Political Science Educational Philosophy of Ralph Bunche: Theory and Practice," *The Journal of Negro Education* 73, no. 2 (Spring 2004): 147-158; Pearl T. Robinson, "Ralph Bunche and African Studies: Reflections on the Politics of Knowledge," *African Studies Review* 51, no. 1 (April 2008): 1-16; Anthony M. Platt, "The Rebellious Teaching Career of E. Franklin Frazier," *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, no. 13 (Autumn 1996): 86-90; J.H. Schiele, "E. Franklin Frazier and the Interfacing of Black Sociology and Black Social Work," *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare* 26, no. 2 (1999): 105-125; John Hope Franklin, "E. Franklin Frazier: A Memoir," in *E. Franklin Frazier and Black Bourgeoisie*, ed. James E Teele (Columbia, Mo: University of Missouri Press, 2002), 17-20; James E Teele, ed., *E. Franklin Frazier and Black Bourgeoisie* (Columbia, Mo: University of Missouri Press, 2002); Charles Jarmon, "Sociology at Howard University: From E. Franklin Frazier and Beyond," *Teaching Sociology* 31, no. 4 (October 2003): 366-374.

Almost by definition these national spokespersons trolled the language of the bourgeois urban public, enthusiastically scavenging values, ideas, and rhetorical tropes to sway public opinion in their favor. If effective resistance could come from nowhere but isolated slave culture, how could they not look like assimilated sell-outs?"³⁹ By examining their choices and motivations, this dissertation attempts to illuminate the complicated lives of the Young Turks, which were neither wholly radical nor wholly conventional.

Because black scholars from this period founded many of the disciplines and explored many of the topics that later became central to Black Studies, there are several recent books discussing either individual scholars or a group of discipline-specific scholars. One of the first works was Earl Thorpe's critique of black historians.⁴⁰ A more recent text is Francille Wilson's discussion of the development and education of black sociologists in the volume mentioned above.⁴¹ Other disciplines considered include

³⁹ Patrick Rael, "Review of Mia Bay, *The White Image in the Black Mind*," *Reviews in American History* 29, no. 3 (2001): 357-367.

⁴⁰ Earl E. Thorpe, *Black historians; A Critique* (New York: Morrow, 1971). Other discussions of black historians include August Meier, *Black History and the Historical Profession, 1915-80* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986); Jacqueline Anne Goggin, *Carter G. Woodson: A Life in Black History*, Louisiana paperback ed., Southern biography series (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997); *African American History and Radical Historiography: Essays in Honor of Herbert Aptheker* (Minneapolis, MN: MEP Publications, 1998); Ralph L. Crowder, *John Edward Bruce: Politician, Journalist, and Self-Trained Historian of the African Diaspora* (New York: New York University Press, 2004); Ernest, *Liberation Historiography*; Pero Gaglo Dagbovie, *Black History: "Old School" Black Historians and the Hip Hop Generation*, 1st ed. (Troy, Mich: Bedford Publishers, 2006); Hall, *A Faithful Account of the Race*; Adolph L. Reed, *Renewing Black Intellectual History: The Ideological and Material Foundations of African American Thought* (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2010).

⁴¹ Francille Rusan Wilson, *The Segregated Scholars: Black Social Scientists and the Creation of Black Labor Studies, 1890-1950* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006). Other retrospectives on sociologists include John H. Jr. Bracey, August Meier, and Elliott Rudwick, eds., *Black Sociologists: The First Half Century* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Pub. Co, 1971); James E. Blackwell and Morris Janowitz, eds., *Black Sociologists: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974); Teele, *E. Franklin Frazier and Black Bourgeoisie*.

anthropology, political scientists, theologians, and others.⁴² Scholars who have attracted individual biographers include W.E.B. Du Bois, Carter G. Woodson, Rayford Logan, E. Franklin Frazier, Sterling Brown, and Ralph Bunche.⁴³

Two of the books to study the connections of black scholars across disciplines in the interwar period are Jonathan Scott Holloway's *Confronting the Veil* and Stephanie Evans' *Black Women in the Ivory Tower*.⁴⁴ Holloway also uses the Second Amenia Conference as an organizing focus in his introduction, and his work provides an excellent foundation of the study of on Washington DC, Howard University, and three social scientists (Harris, Frazier, and Bunche). In personal correspondence with the author, he has encouraged further study of the subject.⁴⁵ With his focus, he discusses thoroughly the intellectual concerns of each man, but neglects the friendships and tensions between these men and the rest of the Young Turks at Howard. For instance, Sterling Brown's house

⁴² Some of these texts include Ira E. Harrison and Faye V. Harrison, eds., *African-American Pioneers in Anthropology* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999); Wilbur C. Rich, ed., *African American Perspectives on Political Science* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2007); Edward E. Curtis IV and Danielle Brune Sigler Sigler, eds., *The New Black Gods: Arthur Huff Fauset and the Study of African American Religions* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009).

⁴³ Dagbovie, *The Early Black History Movement, Carter G. Woodson, and Lorenzo Johnston Greene*; David L. Lewis, *W.E.B. DuBois--Biography of a Race, 1868-1919*, 1st ed. (New York: H. Holt, 1993); David L. Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: The Fight for Equality and the American Century, 1919-1963* (New York: Henry Holt, 2000); Kenneth Robert Janken, *Rayford W. Logan and the Dilemma of the African-American Intellectual* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993); Henry, *Ralph Bunche*; Urquhart, *Ralph Bunche*; Teele, *E. Franklin Frazier and Black Bourgeoisie*; Joanne V. Gabbin, *Sterling A. Brown: Building the Black Aesthetic Tradition* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1985).

⁴⁴ Jonathan Scott Holloway, *Confronting the Veil: Abram Harris, Jr., E. Franklin Frazier, and Ralph Bunche, 1919-1941* (Chapel Hill [N.C.]: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Evans, *Black Women in the Ivory Tower, 1850-1954*. Eben Miller's dissertation also uses the Second Amenia Conference as a coordinating concept. He provides several case studies of individuals at the conference as well as a chapter on the conference itself. His work is well researched and individual chapters are well written, but the work lacks overall cohesion and struggles to back up its thesis. His thesis emphasizes the importance of this generation of leaders, yet concentrating on individuals reduces the sense of generation and interaction. Eben Miller, "Born Along the Color Line: The Second Generation of the Talented Tenth and 'The Problem of the Twentieth Century'" (Ph.D., Brandeis University, 2004).

⁴⁵ Jonathan Scott Holloway to Lauren Kientz, email, August 24, 2009, February 13, 2010.

[illegible]

was a central location for parties and “gab fests” for these men, but Holloway hardly mentions him. By focusing on Howard, Holloway also misses these scholars’ engagement with other black communities and with white scholars, as well as their extensive international journeys. His excellent charting of Harris, Frazier, and Bunche’s resistance to race-based strategies for social change and their preference for working-class solutions freed this dissertation to examine the relationships between these men that led to their intellectual agreements and disagreements.

Stephanie Evans charts the particular concerns of black women scholars as they pursued teaching, research and service. She describes four central themes in the educational philosophies of women academics in a diversity of disciplines: “(1) demand for applied learning; (2) recognition of the importance of cultural identity; (3) epistemology that critically engaged dominant ideas; and (4) moral existentialism grounded in a sense of communal responsibility.”⁴⁶ Francille Wilson documents the many African American women engaged in various kinds of social study during the early years of sociological research.⁴⁷

Two other types of literature cover this period—organizational histories and the works surrounding the New Negro Renaissance. The NAACP has attracted surprisingly little scholarly work, though there is a brand new comprehensive history, Patricia Sullivan’s *Lift Every Voice and Sing: The NAACP and the Making of the Civil Rights*

⁴⁶ Stephanie Evans, “‘This Right to Grow’ African American Womens Intellectual Legacy,” *International Journal of the Humanities* 3 (2005).

⁴⁷ Wilson, *The Segregated Scholars*.

Movement.⁴⁸ It is a strange in-between book in that it was published by The New Press, a small not-for-profit press designed to bring scholarly ideas to the public and “provide ideas and viewpoints under-represented in the mass media.”⁴⁹ As such, *Lift Every Voice* was written by a professional historian for a public audience. Its tone is too scholarly and so fails to capture the intense excitement of those early years of the NAACP, but at the same time, it does not advance significant arguments about the organization or its historical context because it is aimed at a wider audience. Nonetheless, Sullivan’s extensive research is invaluable for future scholars. Another important work is Beth Thompkins Bates’ 1997 article on the tensions between the “New Crowd” and the “Old Guard.” With Holloway’s work, this is one of the few texts to deal extensively with the Second Amenia Conference. This work provided asserts that the Amenia Conference represented a generational conflict, an obscuring generality. It also neglects most of the women at the conference. Otherwise, it is a useful introduction to the topic, which deserved to be expanded upon.

Another significant organization in this era is the Young Women’s Christian Association. Nancy Robertson’s analysis of race relations within the YWCA, *Christian Sisterhood, Race Relations, and the YWCA, 1906-1946*, offers one of the few secondary sources that discuss some of the women in this dissertation.⁵⁰ There are also a few

⁴⁸ Patricia Sullivan, *Lift Every Voice: The NAACP and the Making of the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: New Press, 2009).

⁴⁹ “About The New Press,” *The New Press*, 2009, http://www.thenewpress.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1&Itemid=6.

⁵⁰ Nancy Marie Robertson, *Christian Sisterhood, Race Relations, and the YWCA, 1906-1946* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007).. She read one of my early drafts of the sections of the work related to Juliette Derricotte, which I turned into an article for the *Journal of African American History*. It is currently under review.

studies of the early years of black sororities.⁵¹ While the women at the Second Amenia Conference are largely unstudied, there are at least two dissertators, a few years behind me, who are also focusing on them. Perzavia Praylow of the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign studies women in the early days of Fisk University, particularly Juliette Derricotte, and Treva Lindsey focuses on women at Howard University, particularly Lucy Slowe.⁵² These case studies will be valuable contributions.

This dissertation includes several chapters focused around a geographic node (Chapter 2 in Harlem, Chapter 4 at Fisk University in Nashville, and Chapters 7, 8, 13 at Howard University in Washington DC). This illuminates the ways that the Amenians connected in many geographic arenas. Focusing too narrowly on one school or one organization threatens to miss the vibrant movement of black women between locations, schools, professions, and organizations. As Paula Giddings points out, black women found safety, identity, and happiness in their autonomous organizations and small associations proliferated wherever black women gathered.⁵³ At the same time, they found employment within interracial organizations like the YWCA. Focusing on relationships, rather than on a strict organizational history, allows me to explore all these different influences on the individuals who devoted themselves to these groups and to

⁵¹ Paula Giddings, *In Search of Sisterhood: Delta Sigma Theta and the Challenge of the Black Sorority Movement*, 1st ed. (New York: Morrow, 1988).

⁵² Perzavia Praylow, "Behaviors Unbecoming A Fisk Woman' Unruly Black Women, Disrespect and the Threat to Respectable Leadership, 1924-1940" (presented at the Association for the Study of African American Life and History, Cincinnati, Ohio, October 2, 2009); Treva Lindsey, "Climbing the Hilltop: New Negro Womanhood at Howard University, 1900-1935" (presented at the Association for the Study of African American Life and History, Cincinnati, Ohio, October 2, 2009).

⁵³ Giddings, *In Search of Sisterhood*, 9.

each other, even when geographical movements required reassessing the associations perennially.

The Second Amenians are mostly left out of the “New Negro” or Harlem Renaissance literature for two major reasons. The Amenian men who published in the main magazines of the Renaissance, the *Crisis*, the *Opportunity*, and the *Messenger*, wrote non-fiction essays, usually not fiction or poetry, genres more commonly anthologized and analyzed.⁵⁴ Women working for the YWCA in Harlem and Brooklyn participated in and often hosted the intellectual life of those areas, yet their activities did not interest Harlem’s chroniclers (like Langston Hughes) in the same way as the jazz clubs or A’lelia Walker’s and Carl Van Vechten’s literary salons did. For example, Lillian Alexander was perhaps the premier club woman in Harlem and the first black woman on the board of the NAACP, yet Langston Hughes dismissed her salon in one sentence as the boring, pretentious, and sober haven of intellectuals like Du Bois.⁵⁵ Early books on the Renaissance focused on the writings, biographies, and communities of a few major figures—Hughes, Claude McKay, Countee Cullen, Jean Toomer, and later Zora Neale Hurston.⁵⁶ The literature has exploded in number since 1990 and begun to

⁵⁴ Allison Davis wrote poetry, but he is much better known for his anthropological work at the University of Chicago after World War II than for these early years when he tried to be an author and a poet. His poems are not often anthologized.

⁵⁵ “Literary soirees with much poetry but little to drink were the order of the day. The same was true of Lillian Alexander’s, where the older intellectuals gathered. A’lelia Walker, however, big-hearted, night-dark, nhair-straightening heiress, made no pretense at being intellectual or exclusive.” Langston Hughes, *Autobiography: The Big Sea* (St. Louis: University of Missouri Press, 2002), 189.

⁵⁶ Tyrone Tillery, *Claude McKay: A Black Poet's Struggle for Identity* (1992: Amherst); Alan R. Shucard, *Countee Cullen* (Boston: Twayne, 1984); Wayne Cooper, *Claude McKay: Rebel Sojourner in the Harlem Renaissance A Biography* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987); Paul Witcover, *Zora Neale Hurston* (New York: Chelsea House, 1991); Harold Bloom, ed., *Black American Prose Writers of the Harlem Renaissance* (New York: Chelsea House, 1994); Charles Scruggs and Lee VanDemarr, *Jean Toomer and the Terrors of American History* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998);

consider New Negro communities other than Harlem.⁵⁷ More recent books explore a particular aspect of the community, like nightclubs or theater.⁵⁸ The work of middle-class women in building a strong Harlem community is beginning to come to light in works on the influence of the library on 135th Street, now the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Life, and particularly of librarian Regina Anderson Andrews.⁵⁹ The YWCA, two blocks north of the library, sponsored a number of lectures and book discussions and hosted the Fourth Pan African Congress in 1927. It needs similar attention as other centers of the New Negro Renaissance and begins to get it here, in Chapter Two. Several women detailed in this study, particularly Mabel Byrd, Juliette Derricotte, and Marion Cuthbert, have never before been discussed in an extended way.⁶⁰

Arnold Rampersad, *The Life of Langston Hughes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Laurie F. Leach, *Langston Hughes: A Biography* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 2004).

⁵⁷ Theresa A. Leininger-Miller, *New Negro Artists in Paris: African American Painters and Sculptors in the City of Light, 1922-1934* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001); Jacob Dorman, "Chicago's New Negroes: Modernity, the Great Migration, and Black Urban Life," *Journal of African American History* 93, no. 3 (Summer 2008): 452 (3); Davarian Baldwin, *Chicago's New Negroes: Modernity, the Great Migration, and Black Urban Life*.

⁵⁸ David Krasner, *A Beautiful Pageant: African American Theatre, Drama, and Performance in the Harlem Renaissance, 1910-1927* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); Shane Vogel, *The Scene of Harlem Cabaret: Race, Sexuality, Performance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

⁵⁹ Sarah A. Anderson, "'The Place to Go': The 135th Street Branch Library and the Harlem Renaissance," *Library Quarterly* 73, no. 4 (October 2003): 383-421. I have met two women working on Andrews; E. Whitmire on the library faculty of University of Wisconsin, Madison, and Lisa Kohlmeier, a recent PhD from Claremont Graduate Center. E. Whitmire, "'We must be more than librarians' Regina Andrews and the Little Theatre Movement," under review; E. Whitmire, "Breaking the Color Barrier: Regina Andrews and the New York Public Library," *Libraries and the Cultural Record* 42, no. 4 (2007): 409-421. Another prominent black librarian in the branch was Roberta Bosley.

⁶⁰ Juliette Derricotte gets mentioned in the context of her tragic death in a car accident in 1931. She was one of several African Americans who did not receive adequate medical care after such accidents. See, for example, Mary Beth Culp, "Religion in the Poetry of Langston Hughes," *Phylon* (1960-) 48, no. 3 (Qtr 3, 1987): 240-245; John Hope Franklin, "John Hope Franklin: The Fisk Years," *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, no. 49 (Autumn 2005): 74-83; Kenneth Robert Janken, *White: The Biography of Walter White, Mr. NAACP* (New York: New Press, 2003). Robertson and Max Yergan's biographer also mention her in the context of her YWCA work and her friendship with Yergan. Robertson, *Christian Sisterhood*; David Henry Anthony, *Max Yergan: Race Man, Internationalist, Cold Warrior* (New York: New York University Press, 2006). Mary Jenness wrote a biographical study of Derricotte in the context of her

This dissertation reclaims the interwar period as a significant timeframe within African American History. Jim Crow legislation had been established for two decades; children born in 1900 grew up in a world where it was a persistent reality. Lynching was an ever present concern. World War I had introduced the bravery of the black soldier and the violent extent to which some whites would go to keep that soldier from enjoying his full rights at home or abroad. The KKK surged in membership in the wake of the movie “Birth of a Nation” and began to terrorize Black, Jewish, and Catholic communities north and south. Black professionals and artists began to test the boundaries of community and identity. Hundreds of thousands of black farmers began to wend their way to urban centers in the South and North, discovering the freedom and fear of the urban landscape. Du Bois and Garvey and others attempted to draw the attention of working class black people to their connections to other people of African descent abroad and to the African continent as a homeland. After a spike in the 1920s, the number of lynchings began to decrease from a combination of African American political influence and the stronger rule of law. Often innocent African Americans accused of a crime who had been lynched by a mob were instead tried and killed by a legal system stacked against them. Some African Americans began to gain significant political influence; others chose alternative, radical groups for community support, meaning in their lives, and the opportunity to create change. And some chose the halls of academia, the corridors of Young Women’s

Christianity, while Marion Cuthbert collected Derricotte’s letters and stories after her death into a short book. Marion Cuthbert, *Juliette Derricotte* (New York: Womans Press, 1934); Mary Jenness, *Twelve Negro Americans* (Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1936). Marion Cuthbert’s 1941 dissertation about the way that educated black women did and did not reintegrate into their communities after their education is discussed in Stephanie Evans work. Evans, *Black Women in the Ivory Tower, 1850-1954*. Linda Perkins wrote an article about Marion Cuthbert and the National Association of College Women and provided me with direction for further research into her life. Linda M. Perkins, “The National Association of College Women: Vanguard of Black Women’s Leadership in Education, 1923-1954,” *Journal of Education* 172, no. 3 (1990): 67.

Christian Association buildings, the streets of Harlem, DC, and Chicago, or the stone paths of Europe to make their mark on the world.

Chapter 1

“The Critical Time”

W.E.B. Du Bois, Mary White Ovington, and J.E. Spingarn

Discuss the Role of the Intellectual and the Leader

“This is the critical time, Black men of America;
the staggering days of Emancipation,
of childhood,
are gone.”

--W.E.B. Du Bois, “Niagara Movement”

“I believe in God, who made of one blood all nations that on earth do dwell. I believe that all men, black and brown and white, are brothers, varying through time and opportunity, in form and gift and feature, but differing in no essential particular, and alike in soul and the possibility of infinite development.

“Especially do I believe in the Negro Race: in the beauty of its genius, the sweetness of its soul, and its strength in that meekness which shall yet inherit this turbulent earth.”

--W.E.B. Du Bois, “Credo”

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) began with the *Crisis* magazine at the center of its efforts. For the first five years from 1909 to 1914 the association office had only a couple of paid workers while across the hall the *Crisis* offices buzzed with staff. W.E.B. Du Bois insisted that it remain a priority for the organization and that the NAACP contribute to its coffers, but that financial contribution did not give the other NAACP officers the right to interfere with his editorial control of the *Crisis*. As the association grew and branches developed, NAACP executives began to criticize Du Bois' dominant position. They wanted the *Crisis* to reflect the positions of the association, not merely Du Bois' own opinions. They feared his radicalism. Du Bois advocate Mary White Ovington, a founder and daily presence in the administrative office initially wanted to found the association in part as a national platform for Du Bois. She captured the problem succinctly in a letter to NAACP newly elected Chairman of the Board Joel E. Spingarn:

In building up a successful colored magazine, Dr. DuBois has seemed to me eminently successful, but such magazine cannot be the organ of an association. We need to put in things that would hurt its popularity, and it needs to put in things that seem to sometimes to compromise us. I would like to see the association use the *Crisis* as an independent magazine, but I have not yet been convinced that what is good for us in the *Crisis* is necessarily of advantage to the magazine itself. However, I think I am alone in this opinion, and of course, I have no right to force it upon others.¹

Even as the executives (other than Ovington and to an extent Spingarn) worried they could not trust him, Du Bois was fairly certain he could not trust them. Surveying the men and women across the hall, Du Bois found those in the association office,

¹ Ovington to Spingarn, 20 Dec 1915, Box 9 Folder 2, Spingarn Papers NYPL.

particularly executive secretary May Child Nerney, to be in general less aware of the color line than himself and with less ability to confront it. The color line was the way Du Bois succinctly described the stereotypes and discriminations people of color suffered at the hands of whites and the internalized expectations whites had of blacks and vice versa; he famously said the “problem of the twentieth century was the problem of the color line.”² How then could he cede control to their concerns?

Again and again, the office, the board, and Du Bois called on Spingarn and Ovington to mediate conflicts. These administrative disagreements threatened to undermine the burgeoning work of the association. They also illustrate the different ways these three founders³ viewed the organization. Each one believed the central goal of the association was education, but education for different people and education spurring different things. Du Bois wrote to other African Americans, stirring the race pride he had spent years cultivating in himself, teaching about national and international politics, and turning a glaring light on discrimination. Ovington wanted blacks and whites to work together to fight racial discrimination; she attempted to turn herself into an ambassador that understood both sides and could function as a go-between. She wanted blacks to have all the rights and opportunities of whites, and in particular she wanted other liberal white women to recognize their own role in racial discrimination and transform their behavior in light of the knowledge she brought them. Spingarn wanted the United States to live up to its fundamental creeds and believed his social set—New York

² W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg & Co., 1907). Brent Hayes Edwards starts his book with an excellent discussion of this phrase and the original international context it was uttered in (the Pan African Conference of 1900). See *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2003).

³ Spingarn is not technically a founder because he joined the group in 1911 rather than 1909. However, his loyalty to and leadership in the organization from 1911 till his death in 1939 meant that he was soon being classed among founders in various NAACP histories published in the *Crisis* and newspapers.

intellectuals—were responsible to make that happen. The Amenia experiment occurred in the tense atmosphere fostered by these efforts at self-education and propagation of ideas, between Ovington's deracialization and Du Bois racialization projects, and by the space the NAACP gave women and the assumptions about their lower status.

In a telling exchange in 1914, the discord over Du Bois' temperament and Spingarn's and Ovington's roles as peacekeepers came to a head.⁴ Spingarn, newly elected executive of the board, asked Du Bois to reduce the *Crisis*' dependence on the NAACP's strained coffers. In particular, he urged Du Bois to reconsider the amount of rent.⁵ The Association and *Crisis* offices had recently moved from a small office with no modern conveniences at 26 Vesey Street to a larger set of rooms with electricity, lights, janitor service, and elevators at 70 Fifth Avenue, in midtown Manhattan. To explain his concern with the size of rent the *Crisis* paid at the new offices, Spingarn wrote, "Possibly I have carried over from a dead past the old idea that any attic or garret was good enough for a newspaper office; possibly I have derived my ideas on this score from the realm of fiction, which certainly has consecrated a tradition of ascetic, not to say shabby, environment for editors and reporters."⁶ Du Bois answered every one of Spingarn's protestations with reasoned counter-points, explaining that the growth of the *Crisis* required larger rooms, and the new machines that made this growth possible needed electricity and light. Would Spingarn cut off the growth of the *Crisis*, only because it was

⁴ Herbert Aptheker recognized the significance of the letters between Du Bois and Ovington in the midst of this conflict: "With the growth in the membership of the NAACP and in the circulation of the *Crisis*, problems multiplied which were reflected in the organization's leadership. an exchange between Du Bois and Miss Ovington in April 1914 is among the most remarkable extant between a Black man and a white woman in the United States; at the same time it illuminates many facets, not only of history, but also of the realities and nuances of collective work seeking significant social change." William Edward Burghardt Du Bois and Herbert Aptheker, *The Correspondence of W.E.B. Du Bois* (Univ of Massachusetts Press, 1997), 188.

⁵ Spingarn to Du Bois, 28 Sep 1914, Reel 4, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

⁶ Ibid.

not yet self-sufficient?⁷ Several letters passed back and forth comparing financial data and understanding of the issue.

Finally, in frustration that he had not been heard, and reacting to much more than this dispute over rent (particularly over his being used as an intermediary between Du Bois and the rest of the office for months), Spingarn fired off a dense three pages detailing all the faults of Du Bois' character—those he had heard about repeatedly from others and those that he had personally witnessed. His most strident concern was Du Bois' inability to "play the game"—his seeming inability to concede minor points in order to further the larger cause. "Surrounding you always," Spingarn contested, "I have found an atmosphere of antagonism." It was not just Du Bois' interaction with "Mr. [Oswald] Villard [president] and Miss Nerney and the board generally; it is in the whole colored world, and even some of your most intimate friends feel toward you a mingled affection and resentment." He continued,

I realized from the outset that this was in part due to a devotion to principle, and the sacrifice that such devotion must always entail. I at least, I think you will understand, could not doubt that such a sacrifice might be called for, indeed wooed, by devotion to truth. I realized too (it was your boast) that you could never accept even the appearance of 'inferiority' or 'subserviency' without treason to the race ideals for which you fight, although in this matter it may be weakness rather than manliness to protest too much.

Inhabiting a true masculinity was very important to both Spingarn and Du Bois, so it was a painful jab to suggest Du Bois was being weak rather than manly in his insistence on proper treatment. Spingarn said that others sympathized with Du Bois' ideals, but disagreed with

your actions and your methods. These men have come to feel that you mistake obstinacy for strength of character or at least strength of

⁷ Du Bois to Spingarn, 30 Sep 1914, Reel 4, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

conviction, although it is indeed a very poor substitute for the art of managing men. They have come to feel that you prefer to have your own way rather than accept another way, even when no sacrifice of principle is involved. [...] They have come to feel that you refused the alternative of co-operation or subordination, the only alternatives when men are working together, and preferred the wreck of a cause to the losing of some preferred point; in a word, that you would not 'play the game', at least with others. Perhaps you may have imagined that your victory in many cases of dispute was due to successful argument or strength of character, but these men yielded to you for the reason that parents yield to spoilt children in company, for fear of creating a scene: they were less willing than you to wreck our case before the colored world.⁸

In Spingarn's eyes, Du Bois' actions and temperament threatened the very core of their organization. Behind his words, Spingarn feared that Du Bois would alienate the friends of their cause that he kept trying to bring to the organization. Unlike some organizations in which whites tried to "help" African Americans, the NAACP found it difficult to raise funds. Spingarn knew that Du Bois' insistence upon proper treatment could threaten the tenuous nature of their funding.

After repeating all these things that unnamed others thought about Du Bois, Spingarn assured him that "I do not assume that all this is true," however, "my own experience at least in part confirms it. Because of the friendliness of our relations, and my constant championship of you, I have been thrust forward by your friends and enemies as intermediary and arbiter in their disputes with you." Every time Spingarn went to Du Bois to settle a dispute, he could not treat him as he would "other cooperators in a great cause." Rather, Du Bois "had to be approached with care and diplomacy, and made to do things by wheedling and questioning, as children are induced to do them." Throughout the letter, Spingarn held back his anger inside a paternalistic tone. He was above the fray,

⁸ Spingarn to Du Bois, 24 Oct 1914, Reel 4, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

commenting, and offering fatherly advice (even though they were the same age). His letter attempted to be friendly while skewering Du Bois' entire personality.⁹

Du Bois spent four days trying to decide how to answer this harsh and paternalistic letter. He could not believe such vitriol had poured forth from the pen of his friend. In an attempt to show that he could "play the game," he conceded to Spingarn that "the spirit of the letter is right and that, after all, is the chief thing." But did Spingarn not realize the extremely tenuous nature of this project they were taking on? Never before had an interracial group held together this long—either the whites led, and the blacks chaffed at being marginalized, or blacks led and froze "out their white co-workers by insolence and distrust." In the office, only Mary White Ovington fully understood the extent of the color line.¹⁰ Others, like Nerney and Villard had the color line running right through their minds, even though they were well intentioned and not consciously prejudiced. From Du Bois' perspective, their every action and attitude arose from that line. If Nerney asked Spingarn a question on a matter in which he was educated, she listened. If she asked Du Bois about a matter in which he was an expert, she equivocated and confronted. So yes, he answered Spingarn's accusation that he prized his dignity above all else; he must strictly maintain his appearance of authority because everyone was trying to undermine it.¹¹ Nerney also pushed Du Bois out of the general work of the organization, never asking his opinion or discussing concerns except for small matters of names and addresses. It may have been true that his personality was difficult to deal with,

⁹ Spingarn to Du Bois, 24 Oct 1914, Reel 4, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

¹⁰ "Everything tends to this break along the color line. You do not realize this because there is no shadow of the thing in your soul. But you are not 'American.' The same is true of Miss Ovington because she has lived the life of colored people intimately. She knows 'the line' when she sees it." Du Bois to Spingarn, 28 Oct 1914, Reel 4, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

¹¹ Du Bois to Spingarn, 28 Oct 1914, Reel 4, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

Du Bois agreed, but that was hardly surprising given the force of racism on his life; “In my peculiar education and experiences it would be miraculous if I came through normal and unwarped.”¹²

He also felt justified in demanding that others conform to his expectations for the magazine because, from past experience, he trusted his own ability to accomplish great things more than anyone else’s. If he was constantly picked at and forced to think about minor things (such as income or an appropriate level of NAACP publicity in each issue) he could not achieve his grand vision for the magazine. Only when he had had free reign, like in the sociological papers he wrote while at Atlanta, had he been able to achieve “a big piece of work.” The problem lay in other people’s lack of vision, not his own obstinate pursuit of it. “I hate to see my plans spoiled in detail when I know that those who are spoiling them would be enthusiastic if they understood thoroughly my aim. Always in the past I have been hampered and stopped so many times because good friends not seeing the big ideal thought me petty and opinionated.”¹³

Du Bois’ greatest frustration with Spingarn’s critiques was its presumption that the *Crisis*’ work was not central to the NAACP’s, and did not deserve the resources directed toward it. “I sometimes listen to you quite speechless, when you urge easily co-operation and understanding. You do not begin to realize where the real rift in the lute comes.” Du Bois explained,

What I am working for with The CRISIS is to make the NAACP possible. To-day it is not possible. We can piddle on, we can beat time, we can do a few small obvious things: but the great blow—the freeing of ten million—and of other millions whom they pull down—that means power and organization on a tremendous scale. The men who will fight in these ranks must be educated and The CRISIS can train them: not simply in its words,

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

but in its manner, its pictures, its conception of life, its subsidiary enterprises.¹⁴

Du Bois used the *Crisis* to train the next generation of the Talented Tenth, who would directly attack segregation and discrimination. Spingarn could relate to the military language; as world war threatened Europe, Spingarn was already preparing to become an officer in the American army, knowing that the European war would eventually involve the Americans. Could Spingarn not see that Du Bois' grand plan was as great or greater than the military training camp Spingarn was planning to enter? Could he truly say that Du Bois was not cooperating with the NAACP's plans?

In his work on the *Crisis*, Du Bois could finally influence the expansion of a leadership cadre devoted to racial justice, a Talented Tenth, which he had been encouraging since his publication of *The Souls of Black Folk* eleven years previously. How could Spingarn and the other executives question the primacy of the *Crisis* in the mission of the NAACP and threaten to dull its power through their "trifling" worries? They dared to call his own acerbic personality "Tragic trifling" when it was their own worries that were consumed with the trivial and their own acts that delved into "double-dealing." Even with all their worrying over the conflicts they believed Du Bois had started, "[t]here never has been an association with our objects or similar objects that has gone on with less friction than ours. Compared with the Anti-Slavery Society ours is a heaven of peace and concord." Spingarn had claimed that Du Bois transformed personal problems into questions of ideology. Du Bois asked, "Have we not magnified little

¹⁴ Ibid.

differences and chafed at a peculiar organization because few beside myself and Miss Ovington recognize the real underlying difficulty?"¹⁵

In response to this passionate diatribe, Spingarn sent conciliatory words. "I have been thinking over our talk of yesterday," he wrote Du Bois, "and I want to make clearer than I did then, that our criticism was not offered in the spirit of fault-finding, but (as friends' criticism should always be) was given for no other purpose than that of *helping*. More than ever now, I feel that we must present a united front, with courage and common sense, against defection and opposition."¹⁶ Du Bois was not going to be soothed like an angry child. That kind of treatment was a major part of what distressed him. He turned to Ovington, the only one he felt was on his side.

Du Bois posed a question to Ovington that was sure to engage her attention; was the association "to stand on its original radical platform or is to go that way of conservative compromise which turned the Ogden movement, the Southern Education Board and the General Education Board so completely from their original purpose." Ovington originally strove so fiercely to bring Du Bois into the organization precisely because she believed in the positions he took. He had spent the first three and a half years of editing the *Crisis* describing those positions and his principles and believed that "on the whole CRISIS principles have been those which I conceive should be the principles of the [NAACP]." Did the rest of the organization recognize this? Then they should not so humiliate the editor of the *Crisis* by changing the administrative structure and placing him under the direct control of the executive committee, unlike all other executive officers. If that proposal was adopted, Du Bois would resign. "I am sorry that the

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ J.E. Spingarn to W.E.B. Du Bois, March 11, 1914, Reel 4, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

impression is so wide-spread that I do not receive or desire advice. It is not true. I have not, of course, haunted Mr. Villard's office, or kept Mr. Spingarn on the 'phone or poured out my heart to Mr. Studin, and I shall not do this. But whenever at properly appointed times and places, I can arrange to consult with anyone interested in my work I do so gladly. I think you can all understand that the insults which I receive in life may have made me reticent but it is unfair to assume that therefore I deem my thought or way self sufficient." For example, he usually agreed intellectually with Villard, but objected to the way the white man treated him, because "he is used to advising colored men and giving them orders and he simply cannot bring himself to work with one as an equal." And equal Du Bois was determined to be, despite other officers' attempts to make him subordinate to someone. "If in this Association white and black folk cannot work together as equals; if this Association is unable to treat its black officials with the same lease of power as white, can we fight a successful battle against race prejudice in the world?"¹⁷

In chasing funds, some members of the board were eager for a smoother, less antagonistic path. Du Bois would never allow such a path to appear in the *Crisis*, so he believed "they want it changed into a periodical which will say nothing that any person, or at least many persons can disagree with. They propose, therefore, to stifle all initiative of thought or action on my part and yet to use my name as editor. This, of course, cannot be." Du Bois sent this letter to Ovington for her to read in front of a caucus called at Nerney's house. He did not want to attend personally because he wanted those gathered to be free to discuss him frankly. He trusted Ovington to faithfully recount his position, "because you are one of the few persons whom I call Friend."¹⁸

¹⁷ W.E.B. Du Bois to Mary White Ovington, draft, April 9, 1914, Reel 4, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

¹⁸ Ibid.

In response, Ovington pleaded with Du Bois to attend the meeting “as you are the one person needed there above all persons.” She reminded him that she too was aware of the immense challenge of building an interracial organization and suggested that he keep his white readers in mind as well as his black. After reflecting upon the matter during her recent trip abroad, she came to the conclusion:

The Magazine is [?] of two races, but its psychology is the psychology of the colored race. Now perhaps you will get at my point more clearly if you think of the magazine as edited solely by a white man, and [?] who has stood always for the things for which our Association has stood since it printed its first platform. Don't you think that such a man might sometimes offend his colored readers, and be wholly unconscious of it? He might, for instance, patronise a little, he might dictate too much, he might rub his readers the wrong way, and yet he would feel that he was only speaking the truth, and that if he said anything else he would be compromising with his conscience. He would be absolutely honorable and yet he would offend.

She hoped he could realize that “just as Mr. Villard, let us say, without knowing, sometimes offends the colored people by giving them orders; so sometimes you offend the white people by calling them hogs, by saying that they are reactionary heathen, by giving them the feeling that they are insulting you, when they gave no insult in their heart.” Ovington assured the editor that she considered him a genius and that everyone truly wanted him in the organization. She thanked him, too, “for your word of friendship. No finer gift could come to me to-day. And it is just because we are friends that we can disagree sometimes and enjoy one another all the more for it.”¹⁹ Ovington tried to explain the mentalities of the whites in the office to Du Bois, even while she took on the task of explaining Du Bois to the rest of the board. It would indeed be difficult to work through so many potential mine fields just within the office itself, without even stepping through the front door to confront the national difficulties the association was designed to attack.

¹⁹ Mary White Ovington to W.E.B. Du Bois, April 11, 1914, Reel 4, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

At the conclusion of the conflict, the Board of Directors made the Executive Secretary (Nerney) and the Director of Publicity and Research (Du Bois) co-equal powers. Two years later, Secretary Nerney resigned, suggesting as she left that it would be better to give the salaried position of executive secretary to a black person.²⁰ The board did not follow this advice then, though they would soon. Ovington became acting secretary.²¹ When Nerney joined the organization in 1912 there were only 4 branches and less than 1000 members. At the end of her tenure in January 1916, there were 63 branches and 10,000 members.²²

For most of the fifteen years following the 1914 torrent of letters, Du Bois made the *Crisis* self-sufficient. Without depending on the NAACP for funds, Du Bois achieved much of his valued independence. When the Depression dawned and African American unemployment spiked, Du Bois lost the bulk of his funding and had to again seek funding from the NAACP. The ensuing conflict over control of the *Crisis*'s content was bubbling under the surface at the Second Amenia Conference. It, combined with the animosity between Walter White and Du Bois, had already broken the surface once, leading to Mary White Ovington's resignation as chairman of the board in 1932 and Spingarn assuming that role.

²⁰ Mary Childs Nerney to Board of Directors, January 6, 1916, Reel 5, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

²¹ Ovington had raised the idea of her leadership when Spingarn began himself as a white man at the head of the association. Du Bois was the only black man to hold a place on the executive board in these early days. In 1915, he felt that he had to "make a fight at this particular moment for colored leadership." In response Mary White Ovington wrote to Spingarn that "If we had a colored man in New York who had attended the board regularly, had shown such an interest in the work as you or I have shown, I would hail him as chairman, but we have no such person, and I do not see why we should hand over the organization to any one because he or she is colored. When the colored man appears to whom the chairmanship would go as naturally as it went to you or Mr. Villard, then surely he should have it." She wished she could be chairman that she might put into place all the plans she had developed while visiting the branches on her own tours, like turning their resources more "into legal work and political work." She suggested that she might be the right kind of chairman to solve the question of black or white leadership—"Perhaps by putting a woman between a white chairman and a colored chairman you may be making the needed link!" Ovington to Spingarn, 20 Dec 1915, Box 9 Folder 2, Spingarn Papers NYPL.

²² "Minutes of board of directors meeting," January 10, 1916, Reel 5, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

While those later moments of fighting concerned many ideological conflicts, this 1914 moment of frustration highlights the incipient NAACP's struggle to achieve a workable interracialism. When white people thought black people saw racism under every rock, and blacks felt they indeed experienced it under each rock, how could the two groups get along? In Du Bois' words to Spingarn, "At any rate we must, first, recognize the inevitable American rift of the color line. You do not realize this. Perhaps I realize it overmuch."²³ And who had to take the first steps? Whites usually expected blacks to come to them; it was the rare white person who realized the responsibility really was theirs. Ovington recognized this when she went to live with African Americans in the settlement house she founded; when she realized that this work could be done more effectively by African Americans, she threw herself into the cause of civil rights first and foremost (beyond all other causes she celebrated and worked for, like women's suffrage and socialism). Spingarn took the first steps by seeking out Du Bois and the NAACP, and by somehow, miraculously, being free of the color line, according to Du Bois ("because there is no shadow of the thing in your soul"). He was able to support and appreciate a black man in leadership. But the rest of the white workers in the office did not recognize the color line in themselves or their world so readily. They thought themselves personally free of racism and could not understand Du Bois' criticism of their attitudes.

Blacks were used to treating every white person with an extra degree of diplomacy simply to get along. Spingarn criticized Du Bois for requiring that extra level of diplomacy himself. Spingarn felt he could not relate to Du Bois simply as two comrades in arms, but rather had to treat him always with special precaution. Was that not how African Americans had to treat all white people? Could blacks express their true

²³ Spingarn to Du Bois, March 11, 1914.

opinions within the NAACP without being criticized for failing to moderate their tone? Du Bois refused to modulate his voice; his brilliance, the success of the *Crisis*, and the consistent support of Spingarn and Ovington allowed him this space. But could other blacks afford it as well?

By the time of the Second Amenia Conference, this became a major question. How much truth could black intellectuals afford to have publicly attached to their names if they wished to be employed by a society tied to white purse strings (either white philanthropists behind organizations like the NAACP or the YWCA, government funding behind Howard University, missionary societies behind many black colleges, or white philanthropists and scholars supporting scholarships like the Rosenwald, General Education Board, and Social Science Research Council). In these early days of the NAACP, Du Bois felt like he was speaking alone, burdened with the education of all those who would fight for “the freeing of ten million.” When he was no longer alone among black intellectuals, no longer striving alone, would he be able to moderate his tone and cooperate with other black leaders? His failure to do so was one of the primary reasons for his break with the NAACP; his disappointment with the Second Amenia Conference was in part because the younger generation refused to look solely to him as their stalwart leader into the future.

James Weldon Johnson, the first black executive secretary of the NAACP, described exactly the dilemma Du Bois created for himself; the fierceness of his ideas drowned out his potential as a charismatic leader, yet it was exactly the scope and force of his ideas that attracted a national audience.

I have since learned well, and what the world knows not at all: that Du Bois in battle is a stern, bitter, relentless fighter, who, when he has put

aside his sword, is among his particular friends the most jovial and fun-loving of men. This quality has been a saving grace for him, but his lack of the ability to unbend in his relations with people outside the small circle has gained him the reputation of being cold, stiff, supercilious, and has been a cause of criticism amongst even his adherents. This disposition due perhaps to an inhibition of spontaneous impulse, has limited his scope of leadership to less than what it might have been, in that it has hindered his attracting and binding to himself a body of zealous liegemen—one of the essentials to the headship of a popular or an unpopular cause. The great influence Du Bois has exercised has been due to the concentrated force of his ideas, with next to no reinforcement from that wide appeal of personal magnetism which is generally a valuable asset of leaders of men.²⁴

Dissecting the attitudes of these three NAACP founders is important for the rest of the dissertation, which focuses on a handful of people in the next generation, whom I call the Second Amenians, on several levels. The NAACP, as set up by these three, became the premier civil rights organization in the communities that the Second Amenians grew up with. They grew up in a world where Jim Crow was an established reality (to a greater or lesser extent, depending on how far west or north they lived), but also where it was being fought on a national scale. *The Crisis* was required reading in most of their households.

Scholars created the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. The initial idea was sewn and propagated through Mary White Ovington's circle of influential blacks and whites. It was publicized through W.E.B. Du Bois' powerful monthly magazine, the *Crisis*. It was sustained through J.E. Spingarn's careful diplomacy and willing financial contributions. Du Bois and Spingarn began their professional lives in the academy, while Ovington took time out of her settlement house work for

²⁴ Johnson, *Along This Way*, 203-04.

scholarship when she realized the depth of her own ignorance about African Americans and how few resources there were for study. Each then choose to devote her or his life to activism, rather than continue fulltime as professors or researchers.

The next generation of black leaders and intellectuals criticized the founding figures of the NAACP for a lack of scholarly rigor and for their failure to address the needs of starving and out of work African Americans. Why did the younger generation have this perception? How was the world that the first generation of NAACP leaders fought different from that which the second did? Why was the socialism of Ovington and Du Bois inadequate to the 1930s intellectuals seeking an economic solution to poverty and oppression? How were the Du Bois, Ovington, and Spingarn that the Second Amenians interacted with in 1933 different from their earlier selves in 1909 and 1910? One of the first places to explore the younger Du Bois' and Ovington's ideologies, personalities, and interactions was at the scene of the second Niagara Movement meeting.

The Niagara Movement

The spirit of John Brown greeted the rebellious travelers arriving by carriage and train on Camp Hill above Harpers Ferry, West Virginia in 1906. On warm, blustery evenings the fifteenth to the nineteenth of August black women, with upswept hair and elegant dresses, gathered in Storer College's Anthony Memorial Hall on the arms of black men in straw boaters and suit coats.²⁵ Outside and inside the three story brick edifice, dark brown hands clasped light tan ones in greeting. Arriving from all over the

²⁵ "Weather," *New York Times*, August 17, 1906, 7.. For an image of this hall, see Beth Jane Toren and Alisha Myers, "Storer College: A Photographic Exhibit of the First African American College in West Virginia," *West Virginia University Libraries*, 2002, <http://www.libraries.wvu.edu/exhibits/storer/scenes/pages/gg7.htm>.. The campus is now a national historic park and training center for the National Park Service; <http://www.nps.gov/archive/hafe/storer.htm>

country, they began immediately to discuss overturning the world as they knew it, by creating the space for black political participation, the desire for an educated black leadership, and the true equality captured over a hundred years before in the Declaration of Independence and over fifty years before promised in the fourteenth and fifteenth amendments.

An air of “solemnity [as] of a holy crusade” transfixed the gatherers, remembered Du Bois, one of the organizers. He was forty years old, back stiff, silver tipped cane held tightly, and goatee newly trimmed into its distinctive point. Du Bois had had a long list of demands brewing in his heart and mind for many years. Perhaps this was finally the dawn of a new age, but he was unsure how to communicate his passions to the audience. While William Monroe Trotter, the other organizer of the event, cheerfully milled among the assembled, Du Bois stayed in the shadows, planning out his speech for the final evening. In previous contests of wills and oratory with Booker T. Washington, he had come across as too distant, too intellectual. He had devoted his life to scholarship but knew the power of emotion and spirituality. So for this meeting, he had tapped into a great American symbol of protest and fight—John Brown. The rest of the speakers and members eagerly took up the theme.

Two days into the conference, early on Friday morning, the men and women assembled for a pilgrimage to John Brown’s fort. Dr. Owen M. Waller gazed at the fort in the near distance, slowly bent over, slipped off first his right and then his left shoe, and placed them on the steps of the auditorium. He then walked “barefooted through the rough grass and stones to the shrine of this old warrior, who with a handful of supporters

stood against the millions of the slaveholding South.”²⁶ Inspired, others slipped off their shoes and followed. They all cupped candles in their hands and created a long trail down to the fort and memorial sign. That afternoon, they listened to the inspiration Du Bois drew from Brown’s example, “We do not believe in violence, but we do believe in John Brown and here on the scene of John Brown's martyrdom we reconsecrate ourselves, our honor, and our property to the final emancipation of the race which John Brown died to make free.”²⁷

Then, in a fine tenor voice, Du Bois led the gathering into the song they had filled the hall with each day.

John Brown’s body lies a-mouldering in the grave
John Brown’s body lies a-mouldering in the grave
John Brown’s body lies a-mouldering in the grave
His soul’s marching on!

Glory, glory hallelulah!
Glory, glory, hallelujah!
Glory, glory hallelujah!
His soul’s marching on!

He’s gone to be a soldier in the Army of the Lord!
He’s gone to be a soldier in the Army of the Lord!
He’s gone to be a soldier in the Army of the Lord!
His soul’s marching on!

That evening, the rising star of the African Methodist Episcopal church, Reverend Reverdy Ransom, cemented the link between the hero of emancipation and those

²⁶ Mary White Ovington, *Black and White Sat down Together: The Reminiscences of an NAACP Founder* (New York: Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 1995), 23-24.

²⁷ “Negroes Want Equal Rights,” *New York Times*, August 20, 1906. The Niagara Movement was almost entirely black. Why then did it choose to venerate Brown and not, say, Frederick Douglass? This was the height of the Progressive Era, when ideas about pacifism were in vogue. Indeed, Du Bois himself had captured that spirit in his *Credo*, “I believe in the Prince of Peace. I believe that War is Murder. I believe that armies and navies are at bottom the tinsel and braggadocio of oppression and wrong, and I believe that the wicked conquest of weaker and darker nations by nations whiter and stronger but foreshadows the death of that strength.” John Brown was a violent crusader, but he was also a spark that started the fire that overturned slavery. Du Bois did not want the Niagara Movement to come across as just another Progressive group of good hearted, still calcified, reformers. He wanted rebellion.

gathered together in 1906—God was on their side. “‘God sent John Brown to Harper’s Ferry,’ the tall, long-maned preacher told them, ‘to become a traitor to the government in order that he might be true to the slave.’” Neither John Brown nor this group of rebels, the nascent Niagara Movement, believed in “bartering [their] manhood for the sake of gain,”²⁸ he concluded to thunderous applause. Reverdy’s speech overpowered any that Du Bois had made in the minds of the journalists who typed up their stories of the event. The next day, the gathered group traveled to Charleston by train to visit John Brown’s last sites, “the courthouse, the jail, and the place of execution, and were shown every possible courtesy by the citizens of Charlestown” the *Washington Post* noted.²⁹

On another afternoon, all the attendees amassed for a group photograph. The many women present were asked to remain outside of the photo, as they had also been asked to remain outside of the business meetings during the day. Unlike the first Niagara Meeting the year before, Du Bois had convinced Trotter to allow women to attend, but had been unable to convince him to let them participate fully. Nevertheless, one of the lasting descriptions of the meeting came from the one white woman present. Mary White Ovington, a woman with a soft round face, tall frame, and simple bun, observed everything she could with intense concentration and growing excitement. A white settlement worker who came to the meeting as a journalist for Oswald Garrison Villard’s *New York Evening Post*, she soaked in the language because she was “wholeheartedly in accord with the platform of these insurgents.”³⁰ She sang “John Brown’s Body” as loud

²⁸ The implication being that the other “class” of African Americans, led by Washington, did. As quoted in David L. Lewis, *W.E.B. DuBois--Biography of a Race, 1868-1919*, 1st ed. (New York: H. Holt, 1993), 318, 328-9; “Score President’s Silence,” *Washington Post*, August 18, 1906.

²⁹ By their pilgrimage, the Niagarites linked one Civil Rights Movement to another. In David Bailey’s typology, there have been four civil rights movements—abolitionism, reconstruction, the Progressive Era/Niagara Movement, and the “classic” era of the 1945-1970 era.

³⁰ Ovington, *Black and White Sat down Together*, 23.

as anyone there. When she was prevented from sitting in the meetings, she settled down for long chats with the other delegates outside. The fiery rhetoric invoked during each speech evoked beloved memories from her youth. As a child, she had sat at her grandmother's knee while the elderly abolitionist regaled her with stories of heroic African Americans. Her childhood heroes included runaway slaves on the Underground Railroad, Harriet Tubman, and Frederick Douglass.

Ovington longed for the kind of rebellion Du Bois promised, not the kind of silent, patient attack promised by the man the Niagara Movement gathered to counteract.³¹ Booker T. Washington's strong presence hovered at the edge of the Harper's Ferry meeting. Everyone at the meeting had had to decide that they were willing to suffer his disapproval by attending. They risked being blackballed for the many professional jobs that Washington had influenced over and also ignored by the news agencies Washington controlled. Du Bois had started his professional life in the late nineteenth century with high regard for Tuskegee's founder, but became increasingly frustrated as he found several job avenues blocked by Washington's maneuverings and then his pursuit of liberal arts denigrated and mocked by Tuskegee's founder. Two years before founding the Niagara Movement, Du Bois had drawn the lines of conflict with his essay "Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others" in his collection *The Souls of Black Folk*. Though the two men agreed on many issues, Du Bois desired to fight and he desired to lead. There was no room in Washington's shadow for another leader,

³¹ "She could not accept the pragmatic rhetoric of Booker T. Washington, whose Negro Business League conference she would visit a few weeks later on the same journalism tour. (The fierce work ethic of the meeting did not help. She wrote later, in an attempt at humor that comes across today as rather painful, that "In Atlanta I had taken notes until four in the afternoon, and then found the second meeting coming at once upon the end of the first. The Negro stores up food as the camel stores up water. We anemic whites are not so stoic. We like a luncheon." Ibid.

especially not one with Du Bois' own imposing personality and talents. Reminiscing years later, Ovington could see the validity in both men's approach, but was glad that the younger leaders did not accept them equally.³² "Fortunately for the race, they were able to choose where they should stand. Solidarity is good, but independence of thought is better."³³ She wanted to fight for a world in which "the Negro was free to express his aspirations. Following Washington's advice, he paints his house and then is thrown out of it because it looks better than the house of his white neighbor. How shall he ever have the right to live in it, save as his aspirations seem to his race to be worth battle and sacrifice?"³⁴

This second meeting of the Niagara Movement was as public as the first one was secret. In August 1905, a handful of carefully selected black men had met on the Canadian side of the Niagara Falls to inaugurate a protest movement, because they could not find welcoming accommodations on the American side. A year later, black leaders congregated from all over the country to celebrate the hundredth anniversary of John Brown's birth.³⁵

³² She witnessed directly how others dealt with the conflict between the two men. Richard T. Greener, the first black graduate of Harvard University and consul to Vladivostok, attended both the Niagara Movement and the Negro Business League meetings. At the former, "he spoke of the battle for freedom. He eulogized John Brown and consecrated his race anew to the struggle for human rights. His speech ended with the words, 'Who would be free himself must strike the blow.'" At the latter, though, "he talked of compromise, of the necessity of adjusting one's self to circumstance, ending with the quotation, 'It is better to bend than to break.'" As he left the platform, he spotted Ovington scribbling on her pad, taking careful notes. She remembered their meeting at Harpers Ferry and sensed "embarrassment in his manner as he nodded and hurried past." *Ibid.*, 25-26.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Though the Niagara Movement started as an all male organization, they did have women members, such as Ovington, and an auxiliary organization. Du Bois praised one of the joint secretaries "of the women of the Niagara Movement, her ability to be 'companion and co-worker of men...[and] leader and confidante of women.' Du Bois offered Ida Bailey as a model: "She was born to play a part on a world stage—no narrow pent-up niche of life for her, but great sweeping vistas and glorious vision of eternal success." Lewis, *W.E.B. DuBois--Biography of a Race, 1868-1919*, 381.

Du Bois captured the spirit of resistance that Ovington so admired in his “clear and unequivocal” list of demands read by Reverend Reverdy C. Ransom on the last day of the meeting and published in the *New York Times*, the *Detroit Free Press*, the *Washington Post*, and many other major newspapers.³⁶ From the first, Du Bois infused the list with his own sense of restricted manhood—he knew inside himself and within his community that he was fully a man, but legally, politically, and economically he possessed “no rights that a white man had to respect,” even though slavery had been outlawed when he was just a toddler.³⁷ He demanded the vote, “With the right to vote goes everything—freedom, manhood, the honor of your wives, the chastity of your daughters, the right to work, and the chance to rise.” Washington suggested that African Americans would benefit more from rising economically than possessing the vote. Du Bois retaliated; “And let no man listen to the liars who deny this. We want full manhood suffrage and we want it now, and henceforth, and forever.”³⁸ He evoked the fifteenth amendment to emphasize that his demands were protected by the U.S. Constitution, if not the by the state legislatures or courts.

Du Bois has been described by Joy James as a “social architect” and by Manny Marable as a “radical democrat” but single labels like these miss Du Bois’ nuances and

³⁶ “Score President’s Silence”; “Sits in Secret Session,” *Washington Post*, August 19, 1906; “Blacks Demand Equality,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, August 20, 1906; “Negro ‘Wants’ ‘Niagara Movement’ Sets Forth Many in an ‘Appeal to the Country’,” *Detroit Free Press*, August 20, 1906; “Negroes Want Equal Rights”; “Party Ignored Its Pledge,” *Washington Post*, August 20, 1906.

³⁷ Du Bois referenced the Dred Scott decision in *Darkwater*; “This theory of human culture and its aims has worked itself through warp and woof of our daily thought with a thoroughness that few realize. Everything great, good, efficient, fair, and honorable is ‘white’; everything mean, bad blundering, cheating, and dishonorable is ‘yellow’; a bad taste is ‘brown’; and the devil is ‘black.’ The changes of this theme are continually run in picture and story, in newspaper heading and moving-picture, in sermon and school book, until, of course, the King can do no wrong,—a White Man is always right and a Black Man has no rights which a white man is bound to respect.” W.E.B. Du Bois, *Darkwater* (Courier Dover Publications, 2002), 25.

³⁸ “Blacks Demand Equality”; “Negro ‘Wants’ ‘Niagara Movement’ Sets Forth Many in an ‘Appeal to the Country’”; “Negroes Want Equal Rights”; “Party Ignored Its Pledge.”

changes.³⁹ He was a complicated intellectual, and like all such, held varied, nuanced views that grew and changed throughout his lifetime. Unlike some intellectuals, he never really stopped growing, even though he lived almost a century. In the late 1890s, Du Bois had suggested accepting limited manhood suffrage applied equally, after having advocated women's suffrage in an undergraduate essay at Harvard. He also wrote the Talented Tenth essay, which seemed to discount the abilities of the uneducated, and then penned the demands of the Niagara Movement, which begin with an unequivocal desire for total male democracy. "We want full manhood suffrage, and we want it now, henceforth and forever." In 1890, he accepted that certain voting tests might be necessary as long as they were applied fairly to black and white men. This Niagara Address represents a change in his thinking towards a greater openness to the political power of all men, even those with little training and less culture than Du Bois' Talented Tenth. He emphasized the demands of black men as fulfilling their full manhood in an era when Theodore Roosevelt brought national attention to rugged masculinity. Within a few years, Du Bois returned to the subject of women's suffrage and women's rights, becoming in David Levering Lewis' estimation "one of the most militant male feminists of the early twentieth century."⁴⁰ This feminism did not prevent Du Bois from directly and frequently discussing the masculine traits he sought and supported.

He called for men to lead the charge—the whole language of the movement was heavily gendered by Du Bois' descriptions of his ideal leaders. He concluded an essay on "The Niagara Movement" in *The Voice of the Negro* with this poem by J. G. Holland,

³⁹ See Joy James, *Transcending the Talented Tenth* (Routledge, 1997); Manning Marable, *W.E.B. DuBois, Black Radical Democrat* (Boston: Twayne, 1986).

⁴⁰ William Edward Burghardt Du Bois and David L. Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: A Reader* (New York: Macmillan, 1995), 289.

editor of *Scribner's Monthly* that encapsulated the kind of masculinity that Du Bois sought:

'God give us men! A time like this demands
Strong minds, great hearts, true faith, and ready hands;
Men whom lust of office does not kill;
Men whom the spoils of office cannot buy;
Men who possess opinions and a will;
Men who have honor; men who will not lie;
Men who can stand before a demagogue,
And damn his treacherous flatteries without winking.
Tall men, sun-crowned, who live above the fog
In public duty and private thinking.
For when the rabble, with their thumb worn creeds,
Their large profession and their little deeds,
Mingle in selfish strife--lo, Freedom weeps,
Wrong rules the land, and waiting Justice sleeps.

Twenty five years later, a young economist named Abram Harris praised Du Bois for always maintaining an independence of thought which could not be bought or swayed by public opinion. It was Du Bois' and the NAACP's distance from the African American "rabble," or rather the vast majority of blacks in the US who labored for their living, that so plagued their efforts during the 1930s. That distance necessitated calling for the Second Amenia Conference. It also reached toward a fundamental difficulty that intellectuals struggle with in a democracy. Who is qualified to lead, representatives of the "people" who reflect the "people's" level of education and inhabit their values, or highly educated statesmen ready to lead by example?

The second demand of the Niagara Movement Address also involved questions of democracy. He condemned racial segregation on the railroad and streetcars as "un-American, undemocratic, and silly."⁴¹ Plessey versus Ferguson was only a decade old, though states and local areas had been setting up segregation laws since Emancipation

⁴¹ "Blacks Demand Equality"; "Negro 'Wants' 'Niagara Movement' Sets Forth Many in an 'Appeal to the Country'"; "Negroes Want Equal Rights"; "Party Ignored Its Pledge."

and with greater speed since the end of Reconstruction.⁴² African Americans could never be sure of what they would face when taking public transportation; the best they could hope for was being ignored, otherwise they faced rudeness, delay, scorn, bodily harm, and worse. The automobile was in its infancy and did not offer the freedom of travel for those who could afford it that it would within only a few years.

For the third and fourth demands, Du Bois evoked another quality of free men. He invoked the Bill of Rights: the freedom of assembly and equal protection under the law. “We claim the right of free men to walk, talk, and be with them that wish to be with us. No man has a right to choose another man's friends. To attempt to do so is an impudent interference with the most fundamental human privilege.”⁴³ This point got at the heart of something that bedeviled all interracial work—blacks and whites could not congregate safely in public anywhere, North or South. Ovington would discover the truth of this in a deeply personal way two years later. From its beginnings, the Niagara Movement accepted the need for someone to protect African Americans in court. Its predecessor, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) took up that role with its greater access to funds, lawyers, and judges. “Fourth, we want the laws enforced against rich as well as poor, against capitalist as well as laborer, against white as well as black. We are not more lawless than the white race, but we are more often arrested, convicted and mobbed. We want justice even for criminals and outlaws.”⁴⁴ Du Bois lambasted the federal government for betraying its constitution and its promises. The fourteenth and fifteenth amendments had become dead letters in terms of protecting

⁴² See Eric Foner, *America's Reconstruction: People and Politics After the Civil War*, 1st ed. (New York: HarperPerennial, 1995).

⁴³ “Blacks Demand Equality”; “Negro 'Wants' 'Niagara Movement' Sets Forth Many in an 'Appeal to the Country'”; “Negroes Want Equal Rights”; “Party Ignored Its Pledge.”

⁴⁴ Ibid.

African Americans' rights. The Republican Party depended upon black votes, particularly in close elections, and then refused to fulfill its promises to help African Americans.⁴⁵

In his fifth demand, Du Bois again referenced his conflict with Booker T. Washington: "We want the national government to wipe out illiteracy in the south. We want our children trained as intelligent human beings should be. We will fight for all time against any proposal to educate black boys and girls simply as servants and underlings, or simply for the use of other people."⁴⁶ Du Bois did not suggest that every person has the right to a liberal arts education or even that college education is preferable to all, or that black leadership needs it to lead effectively. Rather, he suggests that Washington's industrial training reified notions of black inferiority by inculcating subservience in the students.

Du Bois pointed out the frustrations that African Americans, who had been in the country for many generations, felt when they witnessed brand new immigrants receive greater citizen benefits than they did. Could not "the nation that has absorbed 10,000,000 foreigners into its political life without catastrophe absorb 10,000,000 negro Americans into that same political life at less cost than their unjust and illegal exclusion will involve?" The *Detroit Free Press* picked up on the verb "absorb" in its sub-headline, "Also Want to be 'Absorbed' Like Foreign Whites Are," stripping away the context of "political life," and making it sound as though Du Bois desired to assimilate so completely that anything distinctly African American would be eradicated.⁴⁷ This had

⁴⁵ Almost thirty years later, at the Second Amenia Conference, the next generation of black leaders would evoke many of these same complaints, some without any recognition that the prior generation had desired the same things, and some with respect for all that the older generation had been through. At the same time, the older generation, while still desiring to fight, had difficulty accepting the earnest proclamations of the young.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ "Negro 'Wants' 'Niagara Movement' Sets Forth Many in an 'Appeal to the Country'."

never been Du Bois' goal, though it was a question raised frequently by black nationalists like Marcus Garvey about integrationist movements like the Niagara and the NAACP.

Mary White Ovington

Du Bois shared his vision of the Talented Tenth, full manhood, and democracy with Mary White Ovington during these years, while she shared her socialism with him, through a voluminous correspondence and several face-to-face interactions.⁴⁸ They had met in a flash of mutual interest. Ovington wanted to cultivate a relationship with an African American with whom she could share her passions and intellectual interests. When she first read Du Bois' essays in the *Atlantic*, the essays that would become *The Souls of Black Folk*, she knew she had found a kindred spirit. She followed him at a distance before finally breaking the barrier of silence when she needed advice about the settlement house she was trying to build.⁴⁹

Du Bois responded in kind because he too was searching for someone like Ovington. He was in the midst of writing to white intellectuals and government officials detailing the concerns faced by African Americans.⁵⁰ Ovington, as a sympathetic white, started to become overwhelmed by the amount of discrimination that African Americans face: "I have read your Credo," she wrote to Du Bois. "It makes me ache with anger at

⁴⁸ Du Bois and Ovington were at Harvard and Radcliffe at the same time, though did not meet as students. Ovington became interested in African Americans when a socialist club she was a member of asked her to host an evening devoted to black issues, keynoted by Booker T. Washington. She did not particularly care for his speech, but was flabbergasted to learn from another speaker that black New Yorkers had the hardest time out of any group in the city. That information led her to start thinking about starting a settlement house among African Americans. She had been in settlement work since her graduation from Radcliffe, but had begun to tire of the high spirits of the Italian and Irish teenagers she worked with.

⁴⁹ In her first letter to Du Bois was in February 1904, Ovington wrote "I want very much to talk with you. You see, you have talked to me through your writings for many years and have lately made me want to work as I never wanted to work before, but I need now to ask directly for advice." Bois and Aptheker, *The Correspondence of W.E.B. Du Bois*, 76.

⁵⁰ Marable, *W.E.B. DuBois, Black Radical Democrat*, 33.

one's own impotence” and also to be part a race that does such despicable deeds.⁵¹ Du Bois urged her past the ache to see all the positive aspects in the *Credo* and by extension in black life; “I am glad you read my *Credo*—I am sorry you ached over it, for after all there are wonderful compensations in all this thing.”⁵² Surely such a kind response was one of the things, in addition to Du Bois’ impressive intellectuality, that endeared Du Bois to Ovington right from the beginning.

Du Bois suggested that Ovington do what he had told interested white Americans to do in the *Philadelphia Negro*; she began to seek out “the existence of the better class of Negroes” to cooperate with them and ask for their aid in understanding the race lines in America.⁵³ He sent several names as suggestions and sent introductory letters. Her movement into black communities in New York, including one near her family home in Brooklyn, facilitated her development of a settlement house and her research for *Half-A-Man*. She also began to build friendships that would help her gain a more nuanced appreciation for black individuals. She had an unusual mixture of humility and self-confidence that helped her move into a world normally sealed against untoward white invasion.

Ovington wrote her observations of black communities in a sociological study, *Half a Man: The Status of the Negro in New York*, which was published the same year that the NAACP was founded. The book included short chapters on black history in New York, housing and neighborhoods, children, manual labor and professional work, women.

⁵¹ Ovington to Du Bois, Nov 4, 1904, Bois and Aptheker, *The Correspondence of W.E.B. Du Bois*, 78.

⁵² Du Bois to Ovington, Nov 8, 1904, *Ibid*.

⁵³ As quoted in Marable, *W.E.B. DuBois, Black Radical Democrat*, 26.

the upper class, and the relationship between city government and African Americans.⁵⁴ This was just a few years before the major migration of African Americans into the North and Jamaicans into New York; people of African descent made up only 2% of Manhattan's population and 1.8% of New York's. Despite the tiny population, many of the trends she noted would become familiar to residents in the height of the Harlem Renaissance a decade later, like the difficulty to obtain housing, the high rents, the police brutality, the vibrant life of the local churches, and powerful musical traditions.

Half a Man illustrated some of the ideas that Ovington had learned from Du Bois. Ovington embraced Du Bois' definition of full equality as being a question of manhood—could African Americans become fully men, or were they so stunted by conditions in the United States that they were prevented? She began the book with a story about a black man born in the South.

Six years ago I met a young colored man, a college student recently returned from Germany where he had been engaged in graduate work. He was born, he told me, in one of the Gulf States, and I questioned him as to whether he intended going back to the South to teach. His answer was in the negative. 'My father has attained success in his native state,' he said, 'but when I ceased to be a boy, he advised me to live in the North where my manhood would be respected. He himself cannot continually endure the position in which he is placed, and in the summer he comes North to be a man. No,' correcting himself, 'to be half a man. A Negro is wholly a man only in Europe.'⁵⁵

Except for the man's southern father, this young man's experiences parallel Du Bois' own (as well as many other black European travelers Ovington would later meet). In

⁵⁴ Ovington's musings on black families in New York City had appeared first alongside Jane Addams' discussion of "ethnic family life in the urban North" in Du Bois' Atlantic Studies series. This discussion was cut out of the final book perhaps because Ovington and Du Bois realized their language was "jarringly regressive" and "erroneous in its conclusions that sexual mores were the Negroes' overriding problem, making their family life 'less efficient for its onerous social duties,'" as David Levering Lewis' assessed the *Negro American Family* many years later. Lewis, *W.E.B. DuBois--Biography of a Race, 1868-1919*, 378.

⁵⁵ Mary White Ovington, *Half a Man: The Status of the Negro in New York* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1969), 1.

Autobiography, Du Bois remembers that in Germany he was finally able to emerge “from the extremes of racial provincialism. I became more human; learned the place in life of ‘Wine, Women, and Song’; I ceased to hate or suspect people simply because they belonged to one race or color; and above all I began to understand the real meaning of scientific research...for the settlement of the Negro problem in America.”⁵⁶ Ovington took her idea of African Americans’ desire for full manhood from Du Bois. Her definition of a true man paralleled his in many ways, but was also influenced her own upper-middle class Unitarian family and participation in Socialist groups. Ovington had grown up in Brooklyn, the child of a successful merchant. Their family faithfully attended Unitarian services every week and embraced ideas of public service. After spending a year in “society,” she decided that that life was not for her. She wanted her life to matter in a world outside of marriage and family. She also knew that her parents would require a lot of care as they aged, so she decided to pursue her own education and keep space in her life to care for them. She went to Radcliffe (learning later that Du Bois was there at the same time) and entered settlement work soon after.

Her definition of a true man was influenced by cultural and political factors. She wanted individuals to have the ability to reach their full potential in a trade or in a profession. She expected them to be clean, diligent, mannerly, nonviolent, and respectful to women. She addressed why black women might be parenting on their own in an open-minded way and why black children tended to keep their wages rather than funnel them

⁵⁶ W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Autobiography of W. E. B. Du Bois: A Soliloquy on Viewing My Life from the Last Decade of Its First Century* (International Publishers Co, 1968), 160.

[illegible]

back into the family like Irish and Italian families she knew.⁵⁷ She described the relationship between African Americans and New York City government. She supported equality in voting rights and the ability to be part of unions, while recognizing why some African Americans preferred the immediate results of machine patronage over the high rhetoric of patronizing reformers.⁵⁸

She was very straightforward and described things the way she saw them.⁵⁹

Sometimes this meant that she laid bare the facts of racial discrimination. At other times, it meant she did not fear offending African Americans with her words. Perhaps this is

⁵⁷ They were much more likely to live away from home, especially young women domestics, and so were responsible for their room, board, and entertainment where Irish and Immigrant teenagers lived with their families.

⁵⁸ "How much of this unequal treatment comes from color prejudice or caprice or temperament, the Negro is unable to decide, but he soon learns one curious fact: while his black skin marks him as inheriting Republican politics, it is the Democratic magistrate, the Tammany henchman whose name is a byword to the righteous, who is the more lenient when he has committed a trifling offense. 'Didn't I play craps with the nigger boys when I was a kid?' one of these well-known politicians says, 'and am I going back on the poor fellows now?' Of course, the Negro is assured such men only want his vote, but he believes real sympathy actuates the Tammany leader, who is too busy to bother whether the man before him is black or white. The reformer, on the other hand, big with dignity, at times make him vastly uncomfortable as he lectures upon the Negro problem from the eminence of the superior race." Ovington, *Half a Man*, 111..

⁵⁹ For example, throughout her discussions of her travels to different places where blacks living, from neighborhoods in New York to the urban and rural south, she was sensitive to what the places sounded, looked, and smelled like. Her desire to deracialize herself did not curb her honesty about her disgust, at times, with the places that blacks lived. It strikes me that this is an important element in the ways that many whites approach blacks, in my own experience, but not something discussed directly. It is coded in a language of gentrification, inner cities, ghettos, and graffiti. In a country rich in natural resources, begun as a rural society, beauty was usually coded by nature—lush landscapes, colorful meadows, the rich blue of sea and sky. What, then, is beautiful as the country began to urbanize? When Ovington traveled to Atlanta for the 1905 Atlanta University "Studies on the Negro Problem" conference, she loved every minute mingling with the black and white attendees and the ability to stop by the rooms of Du Bois and President John Hope for extended chats. She noted that "despite the ugly buildings and the seedy-looking campus [...] white and colored met on a complete equality and one became unconscious of race." The latter was what she wanted, but she could not help but note the former. Aesthetic conditions that did not please Ovington never prevented her from going into communities, but at the same time she felt no compunction to describe the places other than how she saw them.

In contrast, most descriptions of Atlanta University from black students or in black journals emphasized the ideas and education flowing around the campus, not the look of the buildings. James Weldon Johnson, who as a poet was intensely in tune with aesthetics, described his alma mater as a beautiful have from the ugliness of Atlanta, a sea of green in that wasteland of muddy red. Du Bois embraced the fact that the university was then "the only institution in the world carrying on a systematic study of the Negro and his development, and putting the result in a form available for the scholars of the world." James Weldon Johnson, *Along This Way: The Autobiography of James Weldon Johnson*, 1st ed. (New York: Da Capo Press, 2000); Lewis, *W.E.B. DuBois--Biography of a Race, 1868-1919*.

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more startling today because she was at once one of the few whites of her era who thoroughly opened herself to the plight of African Americans and to friendship with myriad different blacks. She responded to blacks thoroughly as individuals and recognized racism, intended and unintended, as Du Bois attested in a 1914 in a letter to Spingarn; “she has lived the life of colored people intimately. She knows ‘the [color] line’ when she sees it.”⁶⁰

Ovington still said things that echoed the white culture she was born in. Take, for example, her conclusion about black actors, then one of the most thriving professions for blacks in New York City. “But with the ambition to rise in his profession comes the difficult struggle to induce the audience to see a new Negro in the black man of today. ... However lighthearted a people, and however worthy of praise the entertainment that brings a jolly, wholesome laugh, let us hope that in the near future the Negro will find a more complete expression for his musical and histrionic gifts. ... perhaps from the theater’s seat the American will first understand the despised black race.”⁶¹ In this passage there that mixture of Ovington’s recognition of the desire of black actors to play more complex parts, the use (most likely ironic) of the term “despised black race” and the acceptance of a broad characterization of black people that we would consider today a stereotype. In the latter category, though, she had some accord with Du Bois, who also praised general characteristics of African Americans like musical abilities.⁶² Her struggle

⁶⁰ Du Bois to Spingarn, 28 Oct 1914, Reel 4, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

⁶¹ Ovington, *Half a Man*, 74.

⁶² He sometimes used generalization in a more negative way, like in this description of the difference between northern and southern blacks in the *Souls of Black Folk*: “To-day the two groups of Negroes, the one in the North, the other in the South, represent these divergent ethical tendencies, the first tending toward radicalism, the other toward hypocritical compromise. It is no idle regret with which the white South mourns the loss of the old-time Negro, -- the frank, honest, simple old servant who stood for the earlier religious age of submission and humility. With all his laziness and lack of many elements of true manhood, he was at least open-hearted, faithful, and sincere. To-day he is gone, but who is to blame for his

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to deracialize her views was only partly successful; Du Bois succeeded more thoroughly in racializing himself by starting with generalizations in the 1890s and early 1900s and then moving beyond them.

Ovington's use of the manhood idea, which she returns to throughout the book as she discusses what she believed a full man was, is more troubling to modern readers (and to some extent Ovington's contemporary readers) coming from a white woman than a black man. When Du Bois describes his own experiences of feeling less than fully human, he was criticizing the nature of the United States that would create such circumstances. But when Ovington titles her book that a black man was "half a man," she evokes all the times that whites have counted blacks as less than human, without being clear at first that she criticizes that system. "Half a Man" could as easily be the title to a book by a white person arguing that a black person was indeed less than human. In the very first pages she makes her position clear (that she longs for blacks to be able to become fully men and fully women in this country) but the title haunts her pages. In her introduction, she explained that "I have endeavored to know the life of the Negro as I know the life of the white American, and I have learned that while New York at times gives full recognition to his manhood, again, its race prejudice arrests his development as certainly as severe poverty arrests the development of the tenement child." How did her "arrested development" relate to other scientists' proof that that African Americans were somehow less than human? She dealt with this question throughout the text by urging the

going? Is it not those very persons who mourn for him?" A more lyrical generalization lies in this description of black religion: "The Music of Negro religion is that plaintive rhythmic melody, with its touching minor cadences, which, despite caricature and defilement, still remains the most original and beautiful expression of human life and longing yet born on American soil. Sprung from the African forests, where its counterpart can still be heard, it was adapted, changed, and intensified by the tragic soul-life of the slave, until, under the stress of law and whip, it became the one true expression of a people's sorrow, despair, and hope." W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: A. C. McClurg, 1909), 191.

reader to see all the discrimination that prevented the full development of black children and young adults. For example, she explains that young black men might get into mischief because they had almost no avenues for employment. This did not mean, however, that it was impossible for African Americans to be educated and learn anything that whites could. She described how stultifying a job as an elevator operator or domestic servant was to a person with a rich intellectual life.

Ovington began to realize that the root of the “Negro Problem” was in fact based in white culture and society’s structures during a trip through the South the winter following the Second Meeting of the Niagara Movement. In *Half A Man*, she wrote, “Careful readers of economic Negro studies by white writers will notice this tendency to look upon the Negro as belonging to a servile class. Emphasis is laid upon his responsibilities to the white man, not upon the white man’s responsibilities to him. ... Negro laborers are still studied from the viewpoint of the capitalist.”⁶³

When Oswald Garrison Villard asked her for more stories for the New York *Evening Post* after she reported about the Niagara Movement and the Negro Business League, she leapt at the chance to see for herself conditions for African Americans in the South. She took quite a few risks going through the Deep South as a northern white woman who believed in black rights. Throughout the trip, the poverty shocked her.⁶⁴ A child asked her if she was a millionaire when she brought out her own personal comb. She spent much of the time at the Calhoun Colored School, founded in Alabama by two white Northern women inspired by Booker T. Washington. When Leslie Pinckney Hill, black poet and Harvard MA, came to visit near Christmas, she remembered “how we two

⁶³ Ovington, *Half a Man*, 124.

⁶⁴ Ovington, *Black and White Sat down Together*, 40.

walked briskly round and round the little campus and longed for a good run over the hills. We were like refugees sheltered in a consulate during a war, in danger of lynching if we went outside together.”⁶⁵ The students at the school impressed Ovington for their honesty, “earnestness and latent power.”⁶⁶

The tour gave her insight into racial conflict that many of the other NAACP white founders did not share. While most of the country called that conflict the “Negro Problem,” she realized that it was “a white problem,” rooted in racial prejudice, an undeveloped economy, a poor educational system, and a lack of health care. The problem was not an innate inferiority on the side of African Americans, the theory most commonly propounded by social scientists and in media outlets, but the way society was structured. She could see the underlying structural problems more readily than some whites because she had been a dedicated socialist for many years.

While her new interest in African American rights was deepened by her socialism, it also led her to challenge her socialist friends. In as many ways as she agreed with Du Bois, on at least one she occasion offered a major critique of his Talented Tenth Thesis. Coming back to New York from her trip around the South, she brought all of her new information and bubbling excitement to the meetings of the Socialist Party. She urged the other members to realize that they could not rely upon reading about African Americans in the white press; they actually needed to go to black people for the facts.⁶⁷ She suggested pamphlets mostly authored or supported by Du Bois, including his Atlanta

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ If they argued that they went to Booker T. Washington, she explained how there were diverse views among African Americans and they needed to ask more than the most prominent black man.

University bulletins, American Negro Academy essays, Niagara Movement publications, and *The Souls of Black Folk*. She also recommended Charles Chesnutt novels.⁶⁸

She then asked what the socialists would do with this information, urging them to recognize their responsibility while also admitting their own limited sphere of influence. Ovington asked them a question in direct contrast to Du Bois' Talented Tenth thesis; "What aristocracy ever saved an impoverished class?" She was not concerned that whites were out of place helping blacks, but rather that the wealthy did not understand workers. Not an aristocracy, but "one strong trade union, with colored and white working together, is worth more than ... all the ... rich men's schemes for making 'independent' workmen that you can find."⁶⁹ One major hindrance to this plan was unions' violent opposition toward black membership. Socialists could stimulate the "'poorly-fed, weary-hearted white folk' to rebel not as the demagogue directed, against black people, but against 'the real enemy—the system that deprives the workman of the best fruits of his labor.'"⁷⁰

In her rhetorical question, "What aristocracy ever saved an impoverished class?" Ovington may have been echoing rhetoric heard from workers within the Party itself that intellectuals or interested wealthy folks were not as useful or acceptable as true workers. This rhetoric struck Ovington especially hard at an Intercollegiate Socialist Society dinner in 1908, when she became convinced that her support for African Americans and the NAACP should eclipse her work for the Socialist Party. The speaker, a veteran of the Paris Commune of 1871, told all those seated that their efforts were useless unless they

⁶⁸ Carolyn Wedin, *Inheritors of the Spirit: Mary White Ovington and the Founding of the NAACP* (New York: Wiley, 1998), 90.

⁶⁹ As quoted in *Ibid.*, 89.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 83-84.

repudiated their class, and “even then, most of you would be worthless.” Ovington remembered,

I went home profoundly disturbed. I believed then as I do now [1947] that the economic problem is civilization’s first problem, and that the workers’ continued rebellion against their lot is the most profound fact of history, but I knew that I was not one of them. I was only cheering and throwing a few pennies. Very well then, I would cease to work for socialism and give what strength and ability I had to the problem of securing for the Negro American those rights and privileges into which every white American was born. Thus the Negro, if he willed it, should be able to march with the working class.⁷¹

She remained convinced, long before the Second Amensians thought they said it for the first time, that “many problems attributed to race are really labor problems.”⁷²

It is interesting that Ovington stopped working for socialism because she was not a worker, and yet turned her efforts towards race relations even though she was white. Partly this worked because she saw the problem as a “white problem,” so she could fight white prejudice among her own “kind” (though she never quite spoke that way) and work to overturn discriminatory laws. At the same time, she emphasized over and again how similar upper class blacks were to the upper class whites she grew up with.⁷³ She wanted to convince her friends among the white socialists and settlement workers to care as much about black rights as she did.

⁷¹ Mary White Ovington, *The Walls Came Tumbling Down*, 1st ed. (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1947), 47-49.

⁷² Ovington, *Black and White Sat down Together*, 9.

⁷³ “Few of New York’s citizens are so American as the colored, few show so little that is unusual or picturesque. The educated Italian might have in his home some relic of his former country, the Jew might show some symbol of his religion; but the Negro, to the seeker of the unusual, would seem commonplace. The colored man in New York has no associations with his ancient African home, no African traditions, no folklore. The days of slavery he wishes completely to forget, even to the loss of his exquisite plantation music. He is ambitious to be convention in his manners, his customs, striving as far as possible to be like his neighbor—a distinctly American ambition.” (93-94) ... “From my own observations I find that the well-to-do Negroes bear and rear children, refrain from committing crimes that put them into jail, and live to an old age with the same success as their white neighbors. But they get little credit for it. Willy-nilly, the strong, intellectual Negro is linked to his unfortunate fellow. Whether an increase in material prosperity will break this bond, or whether it will continue until it ceases to be a bond as humanity comes into its own, is a secret of the future.” 106

When Ovington brought together blacks and whites to discuss the organization that became the NAACP, one of her goals was to create a platform for Du Bois' ideas to be disseminated more widely. Between Booker T. Washington's control of the press and the myriad difficulties that blacks faced in creating self-sustaining periodicals, none of Du Bois' plans for a magazine had blossomed into a permanent institution. Ovington believed so thoroughly in the rightness of Du Bois' ideas that she wanted to find a way to create a major organization around Du Bois. While more public names went into the founding of the NAACP, it was Ovington who knew enough people, white and black, to get the organization off the ground. It was Du Bois' voice in the *Crisis* (coupled with ambitious tour schedules by many of the administrators and executives) that moved the NAACP from a fledgling organization into full flight.

Ovington aimed her educational efforts at her social set in New York City. She knew that she had needed a thorough education in the stereotypes and structures that African Americans worked against, and so she tried to teach other progressive whites how to pay attention to their own racial stereotyping. She wrote *Half A Man* as if there were a crowd of whites around her that she was trying to convince that African Americans were fully human, should not be discriminated against, and did not fulfill the stereotypes whites had of them. She highlighted any time African Americans were clean, well-behaved, and thoughtful, while explaining the complexity behind any stories that went against the image of African Americans as upright citizens. For example, she shows that African Americans were not any more criminal than other racial or ethnic groups similarly poverty-stricken, given the propensity of police to arrest blacks for small offenses. She admired the culture of upper class African Americans she met in New

York. She recounted her experiences in black churches: “Strangers who visit colored churches to be amused by the vociferations of the preacher and the responses of the congregation will be disappointed in New York. Others, however, who attend, desiring to understand the religious teaching of the thoughtful Negro, find much of interest. They hear sermons marked by great eloquence. In the Evangelical church the preacher is not afraid to give his imagination play, and in finely chosen, vivid language, pictures his thoughts to his people. Especially does he love to tell the story of a future life, of paradise with its rapturous beauty of color and sound, its golden streets, its gates of precious stones, effulgent, radiant. He dwells not upon the harshness, but rather upon the mercy of God.” This emphasis on mercy attracted Ovington the lifelong Unitarian much more so than the hell-fire and brimstone she heard from Calvinists.

Ovington and Du Bois also agreed that black civilization needed to be “raised” (indeed, uplift was a common theme among black and white charities, clubs, and organizations in the Progressive Era), though they had different views and approaches to the issue.⁷⁴ Ovington was interested in raising a race from the outside, while Du Bois preferred the approach of the Talented Tenth raising the poverty-stricken of their own race.⁷⁵ Ovington wrote in *Half a Man* about the responsibilities of whites:

⁷⁴ Uplift texts include Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1993); Kevin Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Defying Dixie: The Radical Roots of Civil Rights, 1919-1950* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2008); Paula Giddings, *In Search of Sisterhood: Delta Sigma Theta and the Challenge of the Black Sorority Movement*, 1st ed. (New York: Morrow, 1988).. In his new work on the Urban League, Toure Reed argues that “Presuming a necessary consonance between the asserted goals and deeds of middle-class Afro-American reformers, uplift historiography frequently takes for granted that racial uplift was comparatively free of the biases pervading contemporaneous reform movements.” One of the reasons I think uplift comes under criticism today was the proscriptive progress reformers advocated.

⁷⁵ Perhaps it strikes us today as paternalistic, yet what else is charity work, including that seen today, but attempting to improve the material status of the poor? Charities today have more or less emphasis on the attending morality they require for those they help.

If the Negro civilization of New York is to be lifted to a higher level, the white race must consistently play a finer and more generous part toward the colored woman. There are many inherent difficulties against which she must contend. Slavery deprived her of family life, set her to daily toil in the field, or appropriated her mother's instincts for the white child. She has today the difficult task of maintaining the integrity and purity of the home. Many times she has succeeded, often she has failed, sometimes she has not even tried. A vicious environment has strengthened her passions and degraded her from earliest girlhood. Beyond any people in the city she needs all the encouragement that philanthropy, that human courtesy and respect, that the fellowship of the workers can give—she needs her full status as a woman.⁷⁶

Ovington here recognized that black women had unique needs; that her description of the “half a man” could cover not all African Americans equally across genders. For the complete woman, she emphasized dignity as she had with men, but added the “purity of the home.” It is one thing for a black man to say that slavery had a detrimental affect on black families almost fifty years later, and E. Franklin Frazier certainly encountered opposition when he wrote *The Black Family* but it is another thing entirely when a white woman says it. It is one thing for black club women to emphasize respectability over and over, especially because they framed it as a group activity—they were “lifting as we rise.” Ovington always balanced on the edge of paternalism. She narrowly avoided tipping over because she recognized that she was balancing precariously—she knew what paternalism looked like and attempted to avoid it, even when her instincts took her there. Most white philanthropists were blind to the problem of paternalism.

One of the ways that Ovington purposely worked on reducing her paternalism, or reducing her racial assumptions, was by frequently socializing with upper class African Americans. Before starting the NAACP, Ovington set up the Cosmopolitan Club, an interracial social club she hoped would foster interracial dialogue and encourage African

⁷⁶ Ovington, *Half a Man*.

Americans and socialists to find common ground. As Ovington got to know black professionals, she became increasingly frustrated to realize that many of them espoused conservative values in all but race issues. She wanted to bring together African Americans and white socialists to discuss the state of their world, imagine solutions, and hopefully help their racial and economic radicalism rub off on each other, but she was stymied by the almost complete segregation of whites and blacks in New York City. In 1906, she found a group of black and white people “with a wide outlook on conditions” and with them formed the Cosmopolitan Club. It was the only club in New York that had black, white, men, and women, in fairly equal numbers. They could only meet in private homes, but Ovington longed for a large hall in which to host these gatherings. She feared that if the intelligent black men and women continued to be segregated, “taking no part in matters of public moment, they will grow to think that they have no part in the affairs of the state in the North as they know they have none in the South,” she wrote Oswald Garrison Villard.⁷⁷

In the interim, she suggested that the club meet in a favorite restaurant of the socialists, Peck’s Restaurant on Fulton Street in lower Manhattan. She arranged for a prominent list of speakers, including white newspaper men Villard and Hamilton Holt (of the *Independent*), black reverend George Frazier Miller, white socialist John Spargo, and black physician Owen Waller (he who had started the barefoot pilgrimage to John Brown’s fort). Tickets sold quickly.

Thirty members and as many guests arrived at the restaurant Monday evening, April 27, 1908, in the midst of cool spring showers.⁷⁸ Assigned seats mixed the races so

⁷⁷ As quoted in Wedin, *Inheritors of the Spirit*, 96.

⁷⁸ “The Weather,” *New York Times*, April 27, 1908, 15.

that blacks and whites sat next to each other at each table.⁷⁹ Waller, secretary of the club, welcomed the well dressed middle-aged crowd and introduced the speakers.⁸⁰ According to Ovington, most of the blacks in the room were not socialists (though there were a few), but rather Jeffersonian individualists wishing that the United States would offer them the same kind of chances that it offered whites. The whites represented a selection of the typical types of whites interested in African Americans, old abolitionist stock, socialists, radicals, and settlement workers.⁸¹ For all their attention to reforms, most progressive whites did not often think about the status of African Americans, but rather discussed immigration, urban reforms, zoning, child labor, work conditions, and prohibition.⁸²

During the “sober gathering,” many speakers focused on the spiritual aspect of their evening. Speaker after speaker named Christ the servant of society and the driving moral force behind their efforts (in a Social Gospel vein). Ovington remembered that “the beauty of human brotherhood, the thought that all men can work together for good, was the dominant word. I have never heard Oswald Garrison Villard make a more moving spiritual appeal.”⁸³ In the middle of the speeches, journalists slipped into the room. Frenchman and club president Andre Tridon, a “delightful pagan,” had invited them.⁸⁴ They tried to take pictures of the attendees, but Ovington refused to allow any photographs.

⁷⁹ This image gave Ovington the name for her collection of essays on the history of the NAACP, *Black and White Sat Down Together*.

⁸⁰ Wedin, *Inheritors of the Spirit*, 97.

⁸¹ Ovington, *Black and White Sat down Together*, 32.

⁸² Louis Menand suggests that this was in part because the Civil War and then the Reconstruction era had worn out liberals and pushed whites to form a new union between North and South that emphasized the South’s view of history, with slavery a benign institution, the Reconstruction as a fatal mistake, and African Americans as not-quite-humans who still needed education before being brought into full citizenship. See Louis Menand, *The Metaphysical Club*, 1st ed. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001). Frequently, historians forget he

⁸³ Ovington, *Black and White Sat down Together*, 33.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

With the journalists listening in the shadows Hamilton Holt, white editor of the *Independent*, talked about four possible solutions to “the Negro question”: extermination, removal, assimilation, or education.⁸⁵ The first two he dismissed as impossible (though the fact that he brought them up indicates they were a live possibility in the era. In the *Philadelphia Negro* a decade before, Du Bois directly confronted these ideas in a section entitled “The Negro is Here to Stay.” With frustration, he wrote about the many Americans greeted the news of a “slight indication of the utter disappearance” of the African American population with “ill-concealed delight.” But African Americans would not disappear “first, even with the terribly adverse circumstances under which Negroes live, there is not the slightest likelihood of their dying out; a nation that has endured the slave-trade, slavery, reconstruction, and present prejudice three hundred years, and under it increased in numbers and efficiency, is not in any immediate danger of extinction. Nor is the thought of voluntary or involuntary emigration more than a dream of men who forget that there are half as many Negroes in the United States as Spaniards in Spain.”) During his discussion of assimilation, Holt talked briefly about how intermarriage could bleach the black race, but how it was not desired or a good solution. Mostly he talked about education as the only possible solution (education of blacks, not whites—Ovington was in a tiny minority of whites for recognizing the re-education Euro-Americans needed). It was an exceedingly safe speech to give to that audience, because he did not challenge any current laws or practices. None of the demands of the Niagara Movement, for instance, made it into the speech.

⁸⁵ The phrase is used here because that is how he thought about it; the simplicity of his thinking is evident in the rest of the paragraph.

The next morning, journalists gleefully reported on the dinner. In their stories the dinner was caricatured as a passel of black men and loose white women proposing interracial marriage.⁸⁶ Editorialists, North and South, particularly enjoyed discussing the evening. Their descriptive language is evocative of national understandings of race relations; headlines and articles included such phrases and adjectives as “bitter contempt” and “degeneracy” (*Richmond Leader*), “loathsome,” “whole fraternity of perverts,” and “undying infamy” (*St. Louis Dispatch*). The *Houston Post* suggested that the white women present “ought to be locked up.”⁸⁷ Judge Thomas N. Norwood of the Savannah *News* excoriated Ovington as “the high priestess” of the evening; “But our horror over the decadent women is only equaled by our amazement to see editors of papers that hitherto have been considered decent, and a reputable writer for magazines, in that witches’ cauldron on that black night.”⁸⁸

On April 29th, the New York Times printed two entirely different articles about the dinner, indicating how easily race clouded Americans’ better judgment and the fierce prejudice the burgeoning movements for racial equality faced. An editorial admonished those who attended, while a careful article explained what had actually been discussed at the dinner. The only positive thing the editors could imagine about the dinner was that it would make Americans realize the “evil” forces—“social equality” and socialism—that were threatening to tear down society. The “odious” banquet advocated intermarriage, an utterly unnatural idea:

⁸⁶ Twenty years later, Abram Harris was still contending with the question of intermarriage at every one of his speeches, even though he largely focused on economics. No matter the occasion, whites heard discussions about race through the guise of intermarriage, much like many hear it through affirmative action today.

⁸⁷ Ovington, *Black and White Sat down Together*, 33.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 34.

The establishment of a race 'equality' and the intermarriage of whites with blacks are forbidden by an instinctive, prevailing and unconquerable resolve and condition of mind. Prejudice is not the name for it, since the thing is not a matter to be judged, but a matter as to which belief and conviction are innate. That belief and that conviction are so nearly universal as to be quite beyond the possibility of change; their universality and their depth are so attested by the facts of human experience that to call them in question is everywhere felt to be a public affront.⁸⁹

The editors then moved to describe the menace of socialism that had given rise to this dinner. Socialists sought “by pen and speech and by all the arts of agitation and mob leadership, by revolution if necessary, to destroy society, and with it the home and religion.”⁹⁰ It is interesting to note that today the taboo of intermarriage has almost been eradicated, while socialism remains a political bugaboo thrown at every program the left proposes.⁹¹

On page two of the same edition, the *Times* published an article explaining that the dinner was not actually about interracial marriage. In it, the paper let several of the attendees explain what the meeting was about. But even as it acknowledged that the dinner was not about intermarriage, the paper still made the *article* about it and how many of the attendees disagreed with it (all but one of the whites, none of the blacks). Tridon, the one white person who accepted intermarriage, was the man who had invited the journalists in the first place. He thought that marriage was about what two individuals desired and believed that if there was an interracial wedding, the Cosmopolitan Club would attend. In the paper, Ovington explained her belief that “the best of the colored race” should always be consulted when considering “work for the negro.” She did not “believe in the marriage of blacks and whites,” but saw “no reason why white people

⁸⁹ “As An Admonition,” *New York Times*, April 29, 1908, 6.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ I wrote this during the 2009 debate on establishing universal health care. Every proposal that changed the current system was called socialist by Republicans and conservative media outlets.

should not meet cultured colored men and women on terms of equality.”⁹² She may have felt obliged to say this in order to continue her work within the prevailing atmosphere, though none of the black attendees felt the same compunction. She made a similar statement in *Half A Man* during the same period. Describing the difficulties of black women in New York City (they could never know if they would be at the receiving end of hostility or courtesy) she told the story of a white man giving up his seat on a bus for a black woman. Her subsequent sentence makes somewhat clearer why she held the position she did on interracial marriage. “And since, while I write, I hear the cry of a class in the community who adjudge the expulsion necessary since the other course must lead at once to social equality, I make haste to add that the second story did not end in wedlock. As far as I have seen, it never does. Inter-marriage of white and black in New York is so slight as to be a negligible quantity,” though interracial sex is much more frequent, usually at the behest or force of a white man who claims to despise black women, she concluded.

The newspapers published the home addresses of all those involved. The *New York Times* included the restaurant’s address twice. Ovington received an avalanche of mail, almost all angry and ugly, most from southern addresses. The threatening ones rather amused her because “one is complimented to feel that one may have endangered one’s life for a cause.” Even so, the sheltered woman was shocked by how “nauseatingly obscene” humans could be to each other. Later, when she learned about new lynchings, her mind returned to those letters and began to understand a little of the psyches behind lynchings.⁹³ The *New York Times* editors had been sure that the positive outcome of the

⁹² “Didn’t Advocate Race Inter-marriage,” *New York Times*, April 29, 1908, 2.

⁹³ Ovington, *Black and White Sat down Together*, 35.



dinner would be no more such congress between races. Instead, “the dinner accomplished one important thing” according to Ovington. “The dining of white and colored together in New York ceased to be news.”⁹⁴

Founding the NAACP

The Niagara Movement and progressive whites began to come together in 1908. Southerner William English Walling, a millionaire, socialist, and journalist, investigated the Springfield Illinois riot of 1908. His article in the *Independent*, “Race War in the North,” “threw down the gauntlet to those who cared about civil liberties and fair treatment.”⁹⁵ He condemned northerners, who thirty years ago would have been outraged, but in 1908 piled justification upon justification for the violence. Walling urged them to create a “large and powerful body of citizens” who would resist that kind of violence.⁹⁶ Walling and his wife had only recently returned from Russia, where they witnessed and wrote about Jewish pogroms. He argued that American race riots were even worse, because there was no external Russian army aggravating local hostilities.⁹⁷ Ovington read the article and decided to found just such an organization.⁹⁸

In early January, they finally met together in Walling’s apartment with Henry Moskowitz, another Progressive social worker. Charles Edward Russell should also have been there, but was held up at the last minute. Russell, “the Socialist reformer, investigative journalist, and muckraker novelist” was a close friend of Walling.⁹⁹ They “spent the afternoon discussing the race question” Ovington remembered, “and deciding

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Lewis, *W.E.B. DuBois--Biography of a Race, 1868-1919*, 388.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 389.

⁹⁷ Ovington, *Black and White Sat down Together*, 56.

⁹⁸ Twenty years later, she still remembered this exact phrase from Walling’s article. Ibid.

⁹⁹ Lewis, *W.E.B. DuBois--Biography of a Race, 1868-1919*, 389.

on people to form a committee to start the movement he had outlined. Of course, Oswald Garrison Villard's name occurred at once, and William Ward's and Hamilton Holt's, the two editors of the *Independent*.”¹⁰⁰ Ovington asked her friend from the Cosmopolitan Club, Bishop Walters to join them; he was the first black man to do so. Walling pulled in the “cream of progressive” reform. They decided to issue a call on February 12th, “the centenary of Lincoln's birth” Ovington happily noted.¹⁰¹

The February Call was officially released under Oswald Garrison Villard's name. A committee drafted it, but the final version was “in his forceful English, with an emotional appeal.”¹⁰² Villard described the increasing wrongs African Americans had suffered in the land of their birth with “righteous wrath.”¹⁰³ He called for a conference that summer “for the discussion of present evils, the voicing of Protests and the renewal of the struggle for civil and political liberty.”¹⁰⁴ The committee of drafters scoured the country for people with a national reputation to sign the call. Those who signed included social workers Jane Addams, Lillian D. Wald, Florence Kelly, and Mary McDowell, newspaper editors and publicists Villard, Holt, Ward, Samuel Bowles of the *Springfield Republican*, Lincoln Steffens, and Charles Zeublin; preachers Parkhurst, Peters, Holmes, Wise, and Hirsch; college presidents Mary E. Wooley of Mt. Holyoke and C. F. Thwing of Western Reserve. John E. Milholland, one of Ovington's closest friends and perhaps her lover, had already built an organization similar to the Niagara Movement that he eagerly joined to this new effort.¹⁰⁵ Seven African Americans signed—W. E. B. Du Bois,

¹⁰⁰ Ovington, *Black and White Sat down Together*, 56.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ Lewis, *W.E.B. DuBois--Biography of a Race, 1868-1919*, 390.

¹⁰⁴ Ovington, *Black and White Sat down Together*, 57.

¹⁰⁵ Wedin, *Inheritors of the Spirit*.



Ida Wells Barnett, William L. Bulkley, E. H. Clement, Bishop Alexander Walters, and the Reverends Francis Grimke and Milton Waldron.¹⁰⁶

The core committee, calling themselves the Committee on the Status of the Negro sponsored a conference, National Negro Conference, on May 29th, with a reception at the Henry Street Settlement. There, they decided upon a new name, The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (a name Ovington always hated for its tongue-twisting quality).

This conference was “a visible bursting into action of long gathering thought and brooding,” according to Du Bois. Ovington planned for the conference carefully, even though her father died two weeks before the meeting. She wanted it to be dominated by scholars because she thought they would give the most careful thought to the problems they faced. She invited “twenty-four scholars. Livingston Farrand (of her Greenwich House Committee and later president of Cornell University) and Burt Wilder of Cornell led a morning’s session on ethnology. Du Bois covered labor and prejudice; John Dewey spoke on education. E.R.A. Seligman of Columbia reminded the group that mankind moved very slowly.”¹⁰⁷ Whites at the meetings told her again and again how much they were learning. She was surprised by how little even sympathetic whites knew about “the Negro problem.”¹⁰⁸ The two day meeting had close to three hundred participants; in addition to the scholars, speakers included “social reformers,

¹⁰⁶ Ovington, *Black and White Sat down Together*, 57. Wedin discovered that what united all these signers was the one person “whose contacts bridged race and class and gender lines: Mary White Ovington. She also argues that it was Wedin that brought together black and white. “Ovington made the early group interracial. Though Walling shared with her social work contacts such as Lillian Wald and Florence Kelley. Ovington was the only one with a network of blacks.” Wedin, *Inheritors of the Spirit*, 107.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 109.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

religious leaders, civil rights activists, and several public officials, including a federal judge, the former attorney general of Massachusetts, and a former Alabama legislator.”¹⁰⁹

Ida B. Wells-Barnett, one of the few activists to speak, discussed her fifteen year anti-lynching crusade. She advised the conference to fight lynching on several fronts, including public opinion and federal legislation. They should “establish a bureau to investigate and publicize the details of every lynching and actively work to influence public opinion” as well as fight for “federal protection of American citizenship.”¹¹⁰

Throughout the two days, Ovington had set up many venues where delegates could interact informally. Remembering how much she had appreciated the conversations that had taken place in between the sessions of the second Niagara Movement meeting and how difficult it could be to find a restaurant in New York City willing to cater to white and black customers together, Ovington reserved “a dining room on Union Square, where debates spilled over into soup and coffee breaks. ... The combination of formal presentations and informal social time was very effective.”¹¹¹

On the final evening, everyone gathered to make a decision about the shape of the organization to come out of the conference. Ovington’s “scientific calm” was “cast aside” Du Bois reported. “The black mass moved forward and stretched out their hands to take charge. It was their problem. They must name the condition.”¹¹² Wells-Barnett and

¹⁰⁹ Patricia Sullivan, *Lift Every Voice: The NAACP and the Making of the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: New Press, 2009), 11.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Wedin, *Inheritors of the Spirit*, 109.

¹¹² As quoted in Linda O. McMurry, *To Keep the Waters Troubled: The Life of Ida B. Wells* (Oxford University Press US, 2000).

Trotter “led in puncturing the carefully scripted proceedings.” They saw the way Villard seemed to be taking over the organization and warned those gathered of his long contact with Booker T. Washington. As Wells-Barnett gathered speed in pointed critique, she raised her voice and demanded to know what the motives of the whites gathered before her were. They seemed determined to control this organization; “How sincere were they? What were they willing to do? Questions, debate, and speeches from the floor went on until nearly midnight.”¹¹³ Ovington acknowledged the worry in her history of the NAACP; “The majority of the people launching the movement were white and therefore under suspicion. Were they going to be namby-pamby at the last, as so many whites before them had been, and counsel halfway measures?”¹¹⁴ The participants examined the meaning and underlying meaning of each phrase of the resolutions till midnight approached. Ovington watched the debate with mounting concern, knowing that “The boasted bond of brotherly love had always a loose strand ... and a good pull [often] broke the white from the black.”¹¹⁵

As the evening progressed, those gathered agreed to a set of resolution that did not formally accept any of the programs or methods of Booker T. Washington, something several attendees had feared would happen before the evening was over. Ida B. Wells wrote that she had feared an “effort would be made to tie us to the chariot wheels of the industrial education program.”¹¹⁶ Attendees determined that the NAACP’s goals were to “fight the wrong of race prejudice: (a) By doing away with the excuses for prejudice. (b) By showing the unreasonableness of prejudice. (c) By exposing the evils of race

¹¹³ Sullivan, *Lift Every Voice: The NAACP and the Making of the Civil Rights Movement*, 11.

¹¹⁴ Ovington, *Black and White Sat down Together*, 59.

¹¹⁵ As quoted in Wedin, *Inheritors of the Spirit*, 12.

¹¹⁶ Ida B. Wells, *Crusade for Justice: The Autobiography of Ida B. Wells* (University Of Chicago Press, 1991).

prejudice.”¹¹⁷ It would fight to resurrect the fourteenth and fifteenth amendments and accept no compromise with segregation.

One of the last things announced was the committee of forty who was to meet for the next year and prepare the foundations of the organizations. Some black participants complained that this group had been rigged in advance before any of their concerns had been raised. Du Bois announced the committee, giving the gloss of assent by at least one black man. Neither Wells-Barnett nor Trotter was included on the list. Villard and Ovington thought they should take a middle path, accepting neither the most conservative (Washington, who would not have accepted an invitation to participate any way) nor the most militant (Wells-Barnett and Trotter). Ovington explained that “while both Wells-Barnett and Trotter had done courageous work, they were, she wrote ‘powerful personalities’ and ‘perhaps not fitted to accept the restraint of organization.’”¹¹⁸ Wells-Barnett protested her exclusion, blaming it on the black men on the committee, particularly Du Bois, for not supporting her. She expected more from someone black than she did from the white members; she was hurt that her exclusion came “at the hands of men of my own race.”¹¹⁹

Ovington stumbled out of the hall after the meeting was done, grateful for the cool air and finally starting to feel her father’s death. She was “exhausted physically, mentally, emotionally” and “had no strength left with which to celebrate.”¹²⁰ While she was leaving, she refused to talk to anyone, including Ida B. Wells-Barnett, who carried the memory of that snub with her for years. She remembered the white woman sweeping

¹¹⁷ W. E. B. Du Bois, “NAACP (1910),” in *W. E. B. Du Bois: A Reader*, ed. Herbert Aptheker (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1995).

¹¹⁸ Wedin, *Inheritors of the Spirit*, 12.

¹¹⁹ Sullivan, *Lift Every Voice: The NAACP and the Making of the Civil Rights Movement*, 13.

¹²⁰ Ovington, *Black and White Sat down Together*, 60.

past her “with an air of triumph and a very pleased look on her face.”¹²¹ Ovington refused a ride with friends and walked the rest of the way home. Wells-Barnett wrote that Ovington “made little effort to know the soul of the black woman; and that extent she has fallen short of helping a race which has suffered as no white woman has ever been called upon to suffer or understand.”¹²² This was particularly true of a powerful woman like Wells-Barnett, who would have fit more easily among the Angela Davises and Ella Bakers of fifty years hence than she did with the black and white women of her own era. Ovington was a reconciler and a progressive, not a fighter or an activist like Wells-Barnett. It was a difference in temperament akin to the differences between Trotter and Du Bois. Trotter, like Wells-Barnett, was a militant in word and deed; Du Bois called him “a man of heroic proportions, and probably one of the most selfless of Negro leaders during all our American history.”¹²³ Du Bois, though radical in many of his economic, political, and racial ideas, confined his radicalism to the written and spoken word. Du Bois’ words were intensely powerful; the full scope of their power will be revealed throughout the next chapters. But he did not place his body on the front lines. He educated and trained; he did not march. He laid the ideological groundwork for the marchers fifty years in the future.

Ovington recognized that she had fallen back into the trap of her own personal color-line the next day. She wrote Villard in a letter that she had had her latent paternalism (maternalism really) shaken by the conference; “I find myself still occasionally forgetting that the Negroes aren't poor people for whom I must kindly do something, and then comes a gathering such as last evening and I learn they are men with

¹²¹ Wells, *Crusade for Justice*; McMurry, *To Keep the Waters Troubled: The Life of Ida B. Wells*.

¹²² As quoted in McMurry, *To Keep the Waters Troubled: The Life of Ida B. Wells*, 283.

¹²³ Bois and Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: A Reader*, 135.

most forceful opinions of their own.”¹²⁴ She continued to be sensitive to the lessons about the color line that she learned and was willing to admit out loud her mistakes, something difficult for Villard to do. In the 1930s, she admitted that she was glad Wells’ name was belatedly added to the Committee of 40, “and there it stands, where it ought to be.”¹²⁵ Ovington’s compromise or snub, depending on the viewpoint, tainted their future relationship. In 1932, Ovington was still convinced she had been right to try to limit Wells-Barnett’s involvement. The anti-lynching crusader “was a great fighter, but we knew that she had to play a lone hand. And if you have too many players of lone hands in your organization, you soon have no game.”¹²⁶ In 1934, Du Bois wrote that Trotter “was not an organization man” but “a free lance; too intense and sturdy to loan himself to that compromise which is the basis of all real organization.”¹²⁷

The NAACP remained a rather weak organization for the first few years of its life. During the first year of its existence the NAACP was primarily a white organization. The black man who would most fundamentally shape the association was still in Atlanta with few funds to travel north; he was trying to keep his Atlanta Studies Series alive. “Its platform would, as Ovington described it, ‘not seem so very radical’ fifteen years later, but in 1909 it was ‘denounced by nearly every white man who gave to Negro institutions’ and ‘a large number of colored people thought it unwise.’ The group ‘was continually

¹²⁴ As quoted in McMurry, *To Keep the Waters Troubled: The Life of Ida B. Wells*, 282. In the 1930s, Ovington wrote a history of the NAACP founding for the *Afro-American*. About that evening, she wrote “Every white person who came to the first conference...was sympathetic but the most of them expected to meet belated people who would primarily arouse their pity.”

¹²⁵ Ovington, *Black and White Sat down Together*.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 60.

¹²⁷ Bois and Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: A Reader*, 136.

urged to side-step the main issue, to unite with the conservatives, to relax a little its uncompromising tone.”¹²⁸

The young organization soon divided into two camps, on the one side those who advocated moral suasion and maintaining a primarily white membership and on the other those who wanted an interracial organization that would encourage “the mainstream public to accept ever-great civil and social rights for the nation’s historic minority.”¹²⁹

Ovington and others continued to urge the board to bring Du Bois into leadership, which they finally did in May 1910. Though the NAACP had been founded by whites and led by whites for its first few years, it would become inextricably linked to W. E. B. Du Bois and the *Crisis*. No matter the varied struggles over power and influence within the Manhattan offices—nationally, Du Bois was the NAACP.¹³⁰ The job as NAACP Director of Publicity was still so tenuous when Du Bois left that Nina and Yolande, his wife and young daughter, stayed in Atlanta for the year. That began many long separations of the husband and wife, already emotionally distant after their son’s death in 1899.¹³¹ When she finally joined him in a brownstone in Harlem, Nina was particularly glad to shake the dust of Atlanta off her heels.

Du Bois immediately began to craft the *Crisis* into the protest magazine he had long envisioned, but previously been unable to fund. He included his own editorials at the beginning, then a wide range of articles written by up and coming black writers, white writers with an interest in the organization, and established black authors. He then gave snippet views on the professional, social, and economic doings of educated black folk. In

¹²⁸ Wedin, *Inheritors of the Spirit*. Moral suasion was a term invented in the nineteenth century to describe the efforts of abolitionists to convince whites that it was their moral and religious duty to end slavery.

¹²⁹ Lewis, *W.E.B. DuBois--Biography of a Race, 1868-1919*, 387.

¹³⁰ David L Lewis, *When Harlem Was in Vogue* (New York: Knopf, 1981).

¹³¹ Lewis, *W.E.B. DuBois--Biography of a Race, 1868-1919*, 386.

some issues he might include information on the plans and policies of the NAACP, but never as frequently as the board and secretary desired. It soon became recognized among metropolitan whites and within many black communities. Circulation peaked at 100,000 in 1921, but its influence continued for at least another decade. E. Franklin Frazier noted the power of the magazine when he sent in an article in 1925 in response to an essay he disagreed with. "I am enclosing herewith an article for publication in the Crisis. Several times I hesitated to make a reply to the article which occasioned mine, but it appears to me as the Crisis is a permanent source of information on our problem, there should be something on its pages to counter-balance or set aright the errors in the first article."¹³²

Wells Barnett continued to participate in the inchoate organization, attending the second conference and being much lauded. When Spingarn took a greater role in the administration of the NAACP, she warmed to him. "I am even more firmly convinced than ever before that men like yourself [...] have the truest conception of the work and are undertaking the best method for the successful realization of our ideals. Be very sure that I accept your cordial offering of assistance in the spirit in which it was offered, and we shall be very glad indeed to count you among the few real friends in the new movement for our emancipation."¹³³ Spingarn's friendship did not protect her from others who were trying to marginalize her role in the organization.¹³⁴

Both Villard and Du Bois had recently warned her away from "interfering" with the plans for the third annual meeting in Chicago, a direct insult, since she had a lot of influence among progressives in her home city. They also "gave [her] very clearly to

¹³² E. Franklin Frazier to W.E.B. Du Bois, July 24, 1925, 131 Box 9 Folder 5, Frazier Papers, MSRC.

¹³³ Wells-Barnett to Spingarn, 21 Apr 1911, Box 95-1 Folder 38, Spingarn Papers MSRC.

¹³⁴ I am not sure how strong the friendship between the two of them was, though it is striking to see such warm letters between a militant black woman and an intellectual white man.

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understand at the executive meeting there in New York that [she] was not expected to do anything save to be a member.”¹³⁵ Wells Barnett could not imagine much coming from the efforts of the burgeoning group,

for the very good reason that Miss Addams whom they desire to mother the movement simply has not the time nor the strength even if she had the inclination to lead this new crusade. Unfortunately, a few of our own ‘exclusives’ have the same idea that Mr. Villard has, that the organization should be kept in the hands of the exclusive academic few. This same academic few are perfectly willing to be identified with a movement that has Miss Jane Addams as its head in order that they may bask in the light of her reflected glory and at the same time get credit for representing the race that they ignore and withdraw themselves from on every occasion of real need. Of course I am not very popular with the exclusive few and I can not say that I look with equanimity upon their patronizing assumptions.¹³⁶

Barnett decided to withdraw from the local NAACP and instead support the Negro Fellowship League. This group took “up all matters affecting the civil and legal affairs of the race, and where we have not been able to start the wheels of justice we have at least affected public statement. We know we are on the right track and the work is destined to grow because it has the germ of immortality that make us feel that it can never die.”¹³⁷ As tends to happen in a democracy, which pushes its members towards the middle, it was the organization that compromised that survived.

J.E. Spingarn

J.E. Spingarn had only recently joined the NAACP when he spoke up for Wells-Barnett in 1911, two years after its founding. Spingarn thoroughly embraced Du Bois’ ideas about the role of intellectuals, in part because he, his wife Amy, and his brother Arthur all embodied many of the qualities Du Bois encouraged. They celebrated

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

education and culture. Arthur Spingarn collected one of the largest collections of black literature, which he eventually willed to Howard University. Joel invited white and black intellectuals to his country estate and New York apartment frequently, and read voraciously. Robert Gay, one of Spingarn's former students, remembered that when he was 21 and his teacher was 27, Spingarn roused "astonishment, very near awe, [...] in me. We students used to tell one another solemnly that JES was the most learned man of his years in the country. I can't prove that he was, but his erudition was almost appalling. [...] He was simply precocious, though as a product of benign parental forcing."¹³⁸ At the same time, he, his wife, and his brother were all intensely conscious of their financial and personal responsibility to make the world a better place.

To begin to understand Spingarn, it is important to know that he was the son of a Jewish immigrant merchant who raised him to be a bibliophile.¹³⁹ He was a world-renowned literary critic, who introduced Benedetto Croce to the English-speaking world. In his young middle age he walked away from his professorship at Columbia University, married a wealthy woman and intellectual partner. He admired the rugged individuality

¹³⁸ Robert M. Gay, Letter in Atlantic Repartee, Box 17, Spingarn Papers NYPL.

¹³⁹ Joel Spingarn's father, Elias Spingarn, was a successful Jewish merchant in wholesale tobacco who had emigrated from Austria as a young man. When Joel, his eldest son, reached twelve, Elias Spingarn told him that it was time he began developing his own library. He was to buy no book he did not want to read and only the best edition of each book. When he had reached 10,000 volumes, he was to begin refining and substituting better texts and better volumes. "The older gentleman's idea was that 10,000 books would include everything of first importance ever written." When Robert Gay, one of his students, visited the library J.E. Spingarn had built upon his father's advice, he marveled at the way it reflected its maker; it was "so rich and comfortable and severe yet charming—very much like himself, of course."

Spingarn's mother taught him how to read and appreciate the books his father encouraged he gather. Sarah Spingarn nee Barnett had been brought to the United States as an infant from Northern England. She married Elias when she was twenty and he was thirty-nine and gave birth to six sons, four of which reached maturity. An anonymous fragment in his papers recorded her profound influence on Joel; "from his childhood she sympathized with all his ambitions, and to her fondness for poetry may be due his own early literary tastes. 'She ought to have a greater son,' he says, 'for she reminds me so much of Goethe's mother.'"

Robert M. Gay, Letter in Atlantic Repartee, Box 17, Spingarn Papers NYPL. Undated Fragment Beginning "His Mother Was Born," Box 17, Spingarn Papers NYPL. J.E. Spingarn Birth Certificate, Box 17, Spingarn Papers NYPL.

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and progressivism of Theodore Roosevelt.¹⁴⁰ He devoted much of his time and fortune in the 1910s and 1930s to pursuing civil rights and equal opportunity for African Americans. During the 1920s he had to limit his involvement as he recuperated from an illness severely exacerbated by his determined, over-zealous service in WWI.

From early boyhood, Spingarn wanted to be a writer and a hero. As a teenager, he planned a camping trip with two friends into the wilderness around his home as a teenager, because “I have always loved the exhilaration and adventure of walking trips in strange places.” When his friends backed out, he went anyway and ended up being gone for months instead of the two weeks planned. When he lost his purse, rather than returning home, he walked to Philadelphia: “there was an added thrill in the thought that I was alone and penniless. It was a real adventure now—with Jack and Alfred and plenty of money it would only have been play.” He settled in a cheap hotel, where he soaked up the tales of the men around him. “What an experience for the well-brought-up boy to live

¹⁴⁰ Roosevelt was a personal friend of the Spingarns and visited Troutbeck upon occasion. Spingarn encouraged progressive politics locally in Amenia and nationally with Roosevelt. Nationally, he first made a failed bid for the Eighteenth Congressional District Congress in 1908 on the Republican ticket before working with his friend and mentor Teddy Roosevelt to develop the Progressive Party. Roosevelt issued a “hearty endorsement for the Candidacy of the Columbia Professor,” expressing “his hearty pleasure that such men as Prof. Spingarn were becoming interested in public life. The election of men of the stamp and standing of the educator, he said, would do much for the betterment of political conditions and the advancement of the National ideals for which he stood so earnestly.” “Roosevelt for Spingarn: Heart Indorsement for the Candidacy of Columbia Professor,” *New York Times*, 20 Oct 1908, 3.

Spingarn’s progressive ideals also flourished in his local setting. He published a local reformist paper, the *Amenia Times* from 1911-26, and supported the local suffrage movement. His first Progressive project on his own land was the Amenia Field Day, which earned him the title of “father of rural cooperative recreation.” The Field Days were meant to keep young people in the countryside by making it as socially attractive as the city. They were rooted in the belief that nature and outdoor activity could be morally improving—leaning on Theodore Roosevelt’s “‘strenuous life’ ideal.” An advertising pamphlet proclaimed, “Get your boys interested in honest and healthy sports, and save them from drink and dissipation.” Organizers from the community of Amenia promised the “the whole countryside ... a free day of wholesome recreation, without gambling, fakers, vulgar sideshows, or any of the other objectionable features of commercialized amusement.” By 1913, the attendance had grown to 10,000 from the initial 3,000 in 1910. Ann Linden, Curator of the Amenia Historical Society, to author, November 24, 2007; Quinn and Quinn, “The Bentons and Spingarns of Troutbeck.” Ross, *J. E. Spingarn and the Rise of the NAACP*, 12; Smith, “Tales from Troutbeck,” 22. David L. Lewis, *When Harlem Was in Vogue*, 1st ed. (New York: Knopf, 1981), 10. Pamphlet for Amenia Field Days, Box 17, Spingarn Papers NYPL.

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in this haunt of down and outs on terms of intimacy and to hear from them the stories of their battered lives.” After working as a delivery boy, he apprenticed himself to a disaffected writer, George E. Richards, forgetting to tell his worried parents that he was safe and whole. He stayed in the writer’s house, full of good humor and the adventure of it, until the writer returned to the bottle and his father finally found him.¹⁴¹

In his early days with the NAACP, as president of the New York branch and then as chairman of the board, Spingarn was able to fulfill this childhood aim to make courageous choices as an adult. First, he stood up to the administration of Columbia on behalf of a colleague he believed was being unfairly persecuted by the administration. The colleague was ousted from the university and Spingarn left of his own accord.¹⁴² His

¹⁴¹ Untitled scrap in Box 17 Spingarn NYPL.

¹⁴² For a few years, Spingarn continued to teach at Columbia while working for the NAACP. After two years juggling both, Columbia dismissed Spingarn during a battle over academic freedom. His progressive activities and early association with the NAACP were the background for his fight with the Columbia administration. Ever since his friend and mentor Prof. George Woodberry had been dismissed from Columbia a few years earlier, Spingarn had been testing the limits of the administration. He wanted greater academic freedom for himself and his colleagues and he was never afraid to express fully his opinions. Furthermore, the department he had built with Woodberry—Comparative Literature—was being subsumed within the English department, an inferior department in Spingarn’s estimation. Thus, when colleague Harry Peck got himself in personal trouble regarding a woman who brought suit against him for breach of promise and was dismissed from the university, Spingarn stepped to his defense without considering his own position in the university might become jeopardized. He traced his own dismissal to “to the fact that when the Faculty of Philosophy met on Dec. 9, [Spingarn] introduced a resolution to the effect that there should be some appreciative expression on the part of his colleagues of the academic services rendered during twenty-two years by Prof. Harry Thurston Peck.”

Though Peck’s problem seemed personal, Spingarn viewed it within a larger question of academic freedom (Peck was dismissed before the case about the breach of promise even came to trial. It was eventually decided in his favor). To Spingarn’s horror, President Butler succeeded in cowing the Columbia faculty into an “absolutely unmanly timidity.” If Spingarn discussed Columbia’s administration in the Faculty club, other faculty members would look quickly around and move away from him. Yet at least twelve of his colleagues came obliquely to Peck’s defense following his dismissal. The prominent pragmatist philosopher John Dewey, among others, proposed to a meeting of the Faculty of Philosophy that an investigation be made into Columbia’s hiring and firing practices, arguing that “it was a shame if Columbia was to lose men of international reputation as scholars without good and sufficient reason being shown.” The proposal failed by a 16-12 vote. The scandal surrounding his case and dismissal removed any possibility of literary work for Peck, who committed suicide three years later.

Spingarn’s protests for his friend led to his own dismissal. Leaving the university that had been his home since his undergraduate days did not depress Spingarn’s spirits: twenty five years later he still hosted an annual cocktail party to celebrate it. *Time* and the *New Yorker* covered the event. The *New Yorker* made the event all about Spingarn’s horticultural passion, “The party was very gay, with clematis.”

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departure gave him more time to devote to the NAACP and his Progressive Party politics. (His departure from academia for activism mirrored Du Bois' path from Atlanta University to the offices of *The Crisis*, with a major difference—he was financially secure and while he experienced some Anti-semitism, did not suffer the kind of racism Du Bois had faced in Atlanta, with lynchings and riots).

Spingarn's marriage to Amy Einstein in 1905 gave him the independence to never rely upon a career for survival. She became independently wealthy after her father's death in 1909.¹⁴³ Before they married Spingarn asked his prospective bride "if she would mind having Negroes in the house. 'No,' she replied, 'if they were interesting, I would be very happy.'" ¹⁴⁴ They purchased Troutbeck an estate in Amenia, New York, near the Berkshires with a long literary past.¹⁴⁵ Spingarn loved nature for its flowers, its greenery,

Gay, Letter in Atlantic Repartee, Box 17, Spingarn Papers NYPL. "Prof. H. T. Peck, III, Commits Suicide," *New York Times*, 24 Mar 1914, 1. "Insurgent Spirit in Columbia Faculty: Summary Dismissal of Prof. Spingarn Stirs It to Renewed Activity," *New York Times*, 14 Mar 1911, 1. "Talk of the Town," *New Yorker*, March 21, 1936; Lewis, *When Harlem Was in Vogue*, 11; "Anniversary," *Time*, March 23, 1936..

¹⁴³ "Court to Interpret Einstein's Will," *New York Times*, 24 Nov 1913. To put it simply, she had received one third of an estate estimated to be \$2-4 million. She shared it with her brother and sister, as her mother died soon after her father. Her father had been a successful manufacturer, her sister was married to a Cambridge professor and English knight, and her brother an author and diplomat who married a divorcee against his father's wishes. The will came to national attention because J. E. Spingarn fought in the courts for his brother-in-law, who was left out of the will because of his marriage, to receive an equal share.

¹⁴⁴ Francis Thompson, Joel Elias Spingarn and Arthur Barnett Spingarn: A Profile (Unpublished Essay), Box 17, Spingarn Papers NYPL. This is a difficult source. The author claims to have interviewed family members, but the writing is poor and several factual errors crept into the text. The author sent the essay to Stephen Spingarn to edit.

¹⁴⁵ Long before the Spingarns took over Troutbeck, "a place of poets and fishermen, of dreamers and farmers," American intellectuals had congregated there. Ralph Waldo Emerson, Mark Twain, and Henry David Thoreau all visited the Bentons, the family who had built and owned the estate for a hundred years and three generations. The beautiful farm and its poet-farmer, Myron Benton, were both attractions for these writers. The naturalist John Burroughs remembered with abundant enthusiasm the land he had so frequently visited: "I have known Troutbeck since 1862. The Benton farm came nearer being the ideal farm and country home than any farm I had ever visited and after all these fifty years and more I have seen no country place that makes the same impression upon me in this respect than does the farm of my old friend. It is the most beautiful place I have ever seen."

Benton's spirit remained in the land as the Spingarns took over the house and grounds. The farm moved from Benton's capable hands to the Spingarns' soon after the poet's death in 1902. Alternatively called an estate and a farm, Troutbeck had a large house, a private lake, and fertile surrounding fields and forest. In addition to his scholarship and activism, Spingarn was a devoted horticulturalist, especially fond of clematis vines. All over his estate, he cultivated 250 different varieties of clematis vines. Following

and for its wide open spaces for contemplation; he also loved the pulse of New York City and its intellectual climate. For most of the rest of his life he split his time between an apartment in midtown New York and his home in Troutbeck.

While Du Bois was a consummate internationalist and Pan-Africanist, Spingarn exulted in patriotism. As he explained while trying with all his might to serve in WWI despite a preexisting medical condition, “from earliest youth I had recognized the meaning of love of country, not as a theory (for the fashionable abstractions of nationalism and internationalism have always left me cold) but as a concrete reality that could be met only in the equally concrete realm of duty.”¹⁴⁶ All his work for the NAACP, and it was significant in time and cost from 1910 to the end of his life, arose out of the desire to make America fulfill its promises: “Thomas Jefferson, speaking of slavery, said ‘I tremble for my country when I think that God is just;’ and I too tremble for my country

Benton, he also continued to invite literati to stay. Sinclair Lewis, Ernest Hemingway, Langston Hughes, and many others all spent time at Troutbeck. He also opened his doors to political figures, including Theodore Roosevelt. Spingarn continued Benton’s tradition of privately printing pamphlets through the “Troutbeck Press” (the description Du Bois wrote of the First Amenia Conference was printed on it in 1925). In 1936, Lewis Mumford, a prominent historian and critic of technology, and family became neighbors of the Spingarns. The Mumfords had already been friends with the Spingarns (they were one of the few white families invited to the Second Amenia Conference in 1933 as day guests). A decade later Mumford wrote about the land they now shared, “If the Bentons gave this land its first firm outlines, it was Spingarn who brought it to the pitch of perfection.” The Thurgood Marshalls also became the Spingarns’ neighbors in the late 1930s.

W. E. B. Du Bois, “The Amenia Conference (1925),” in *W. E. B. Du Bois: A Reader*, ed. Herbert Aptheker (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1995), 387. Ann Linden, Curator of the Amenia Historical Society, to author, November 24, 2007; John Quinn and Margaret Duffy Erskine Quinn, “The Bentons and Spingarns of Troutbeck,” *Amenia Historical Society Newsletter*, Feb 2007. One piece of stationary Spingarn used while at Troutbeck was titled “Troutbeck Farm and Nursery” from Spingarn to Du Bois, 27 June 1933, Reel 40, Du Bois MSS. The more common stationary simply stated “Troutbeck, Amenia, New York.” Troutbeck B&B, “History” <http://www.troutbeck.com/history.htm> (accessed November 30, 2007); Gene Smith, “Tales from Troutbeck,” *Hudson Valley*, Aug 2004. W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Amenia Conference: An Historic Negro Gathering, Troutbeck Leaflet No. 8* (Amenia, N.Y.: privately printed at the Troutbeck Press, 1925), reprinted in *W. E. B. Du Bois: A Reader*, edited by David Levering Lewis (New York: Henry Holt 1995). The ninth was a small printing of 200 texts as Christmas presents, entitled *A Troutbeck letter-book (1861-1867) being unpublished letters to Myron B. Benton from Emerson, Sophia Thoreau, Moncure Conway, and others; with an introduction by George Edward Woodberry*. Amenia, N.Y., Priv. print. at the Troutbeck Press, 1925. Amenia Historical Society newsletter, quoted from Lewis Mumford, *Green Memories: The Story of Geddes Mumford* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1947).

¹⁴⁶ Spingarn, “The Sick Soldier,” Spingarn papers NYPL.

when I think that we are not creating an American centre for the highest hopes of all our races, but are letting each race fly off at an international tangent of its own.”¹⁴⁷

Like Ovington, he started to process what he saw among African Americans by writing to Du Bois. When he moved to Amenia, Spingarn purchased the Heart of Hope Club. This club was meant to serve as a space for free hot meals and recreation for Amenia’s small black population. When Spingarn realized he had no idea how to run the club, he appealed to W. E. B. Du Bois in a letter. He then only knew Du Bois as the editor of the newly begun *Crisis*.¹⁴⁸ Du Bois responded with advice and thus began a correspondence between the two intellectuals. Spingarn soon started to read everything Du Bois had written. Many years later he remember how profoundly touched he had been by *The Souls of Black Folk*. It was “a new program and also a cry from the heart. It was reasoning plus a profound sense of passion, agony, hope and despair, and every sensitive heart, every generous heart in America,—I mean in those parts of the country where there are generous hearts—was moved by it.”¹⁴⁹

Two stories described in the *Crisis* illustrate the role Spingarn enthusiastically assumed in the fight against segregation. As president of the New York Branch of the NAACP, he established a vigilance committee to fight discrimination in the city courts.¹⁵⁰ He found the conditions African Americans faced in his Northern city even more insidious than what they faced in the South. “Colored men and women in this city are confronted every day of their lives with the most galling conditions. ... They are

¹⁴⁷ “Race Equality: Address delivered at the Twenty-Third Annual Conference of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, held at Washington, D.C., May 17, 1932” by J.E. Spingarn, President of the Association.

¹⁴⁸ Ross, J. E. *Spingarn and the Rise of the NAACP*, 12-13.

¹⁴⁹ Spingarn, transcript of speech at Du Bois’s 70th birthday party. Spingarn NYPL

¹⁵⁰ Sullivan, *Lift Every Voice: The NAACP and the Making of the Civil Rights Movement*, 19.

subject to insult, passive or active; they are refused service and courteous treatment even in places where they are guaranteed absolute equality with their white brethren by legal statutes...[and they are subject to] actual injustices in the courts of injustice.”¹⁵¹

Spingarn’s role in the local NAACP branch increased his prominence in the national organization and he soon eclipsed Villard as a leader in the organization.¹⁵²

The first story about Spingarn involved the New York City NAACP branch in a lawsuit against a theater in 1912 that refused to honor tickets bought for the orchestra seating, directing the two African Americans, tickets in hand, to the balcony instead. Before three judges of the Court of Special Sessions, the theater manager and employees denied that there was any such rule forbidding black patrons to sit in the better seats and said that they had never turned away a black theater-goer. The prosecution called Spingarn as a witness to dispute this point, but the defense attorney raised a legal question and the judges barred him from the case. After the defendant was proved guilty anyway, the prosecution requested that Spingarn be allowed to speak. The judges allowed this and Spingarn explained how he had gone down to the theater office to test the manager’s actions himself. He “asked for two orchestra seats, mentioning to the man in the box office that he desired to bring a colored man with him and hoped that no objection would be made. ‘I am sorry,’ the man in the box office said to me,” Prof Spingarn concluded, ‘but I cannot give you orchestra seats then. We do not permit Negroes to sit in the orchestra.’” The theater was fined \$50.¹⁵³ This early victory in a civil rights case boosted the spirit of the New York NAACP, even though most other cases

¹⁵¹ As quoted in *Ibid.*

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

¹⁵³ “The NAACP,” *Crisis*, March 1912, 205.

were won by defendants, despite a long standing New York civil rights law enacted following ratification of the 15th Amendment and reconfirmed in 1909.¹⁵⁴

The second episode occurred in the South during one of Spingarn's speaking tours. He had developed a philosophy of the "New Abolitionism," which made the NAACP the direct heir of Frederick Douglass and William Lloyd Garrison. All the NAACP speakers adopted that philosophy on their journeys to build local membership bases in the North, West, and Upper South. William Pickens toured for the NAACP as well and he and Spingarn met up in Louisville, KY for a joint appearance. Pickens was a black Southerner born into poverty who had worked his way to a degree at Yale. While at Yale, he was a supporter of Booker T. Washington and a great orator.¹⁵⁵ He would grow disillusioned with the ideas of Washington, but he maintained a charismatic stage presence throughout his life. Soon after the NAACP's birth, leaving his position as Dean of Hampton University, to join the NAACP's field secretaries.

Pickens traveled by train from Birmingham to get to Louisville for two speaking engagements Sunday afternoon July, 5 1914. On the way, he had to take an extra day layover in Nashville because he could not get a sleeping berth between the two cities. For the return trip, he was determined to save the valuable time and get a berth and began planning as soon as he reached Louisville. All day Sunday, before speaking, he tried multiple methods to get a Pullman ticket, all to no avail. He went frustrated to the mass meeting, his mind still churning over the problem. "As I sat waiting my turn to speak and

¹⁵⁴ MWO, Half a Man...

¹⁵⁵ He gave a speech at Yale about Haiti, arguing that it was not ready for self-governance. William Monroe Trotter heard about the speech and described Pickens in desultory terms in his paper. Pickens, never a man lacking self-respect (indeed, his healthy ego was one of the reasons he persevered through many hardships on his path to education and success) responded with a libel campaign; his lawyer was paid by Washington. Lewis, *W.E.B. DuBois--Biography of a Race, 1868-1919*, 301-2.

seeing Mr. Spingarn delivering his great anti-segregation address with the light of battle in his eyes, a new idea and inspiration came to me. I said, 'I will get this true man's assistance in my present struggle for a sleeping-car berth.'" Pickens presented his problem after the meeting and Spingarn immediately offered to help. The two men went to the train station, but Spingarn was unable to buy a ticket, because there was a new rule that the Pullman ticket had to be purchased on the train. "So it seemed that the battle was to be lost. Most men would have given up the fight at this stage, but not Spingarn." He tried ordering the ticket through his hotel, but again no luck. Pickens already had ordered a ticket over the phone, but he knew the conductor would not honor it if he showed his dark face on the train.

Spingarn had another idea. "At 9:20, therefore, with two other 'conspirators,' the YMCA secretary and the colored pastor of the First Congregational Church, [Pickens] entered the depot to await the appearance of our energetic confederate, Joel E. Spingarn. He was the most determined man I ever saw. With the fire of desperate battle on his countenance, he said, 'There is just one way left--the great American proxy; you have your suitcase, hand me your ticket and follow me.'" Some black men or women might have objected to this proxy, but Pickens embraced the subterfuge as a way to get the best of Jim Crow.¹⁵⁶ He explained to the *Crisis* readers, "We passed the gateman, he said not

¹⁵⁶ In his Autobiography, Pickens records at least one other time he did this. He and a white subordinate were on a speaking tour and could not get a hotel room. He told the young man that he would pretend to be his servant and the hotel immediately assigned them a room. The young man, from the North, was flummoxed to have to treat his superior this way, but Pickens thought it was a great joke. William Pickens, *Bursting Bonds: The Heir of Slaves* (Boston: The Jordan & More Press, 1929).. For more on William Pickens, see Sheldon Avery, *Up from Washington: William Pickens and the Negro Struggle for Equality, 1900-1954* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1989).. This might be a difference between those born into Jim Crow in the South and those who were used to being able to act straightforwardly. The latter might see this incident as denying them their dignity, while the former might see it as confirming their superior intelligence to the whites insistent upon maintaining segregation. This is a broad generalization to make, however. In his 1916 book on *The New Negro*, Pickens described what he saw in some black leaders; "Now

a word to me: he saw me bearing a white man's burden as he thought. We went straight to the Pullman conductor: 'Lower number six for William Pickens,' said Spingarn. The conductor and porter politely admitted us,--heeding not me, the burden bearer. Inside, my fellow conspirator handed me the tickets, chuckled a mixture of triumph and indignation and left the car."¹⁵⁷

These two episodes capture Spingarn the warrior, a mantle he took on throughout his early years with the NAACP, until WWI muddled his focus.¹⁵⁸ He came across to others as a hero from literature. Burton Rascoe remembered meetings of the Bookman Club with Lewis Mumford, Walter Pasch, Van Wyck Brooks and others. He described Spingarn's presence there thus: "clothed in severe good taste, a tall darkish man, like the hero of a novel by E.P. Roe."¹⁵⁹

the Negro is not only good-natured but often very cunning, and some of his leaders affect to have accepted these limitations for the sake of present profits. These men are shrewd, not honest. They believe, as they privately acknowledge, that the only way to manage a white man is to allow him to be quietly, peaceably, comfortably, and completely fooled." Pickens united his desire to fight segregation with his knowledge of some of this kind of shrewdness to successfully navigate the many different communities he entered for his lecturing and membership recruitment for the NAACP. William Pickens, *New Negro*, 1969th ed. (Neale Publishing Company, 1916), 36..

¹⁵⁷ Other passengers realized what had just occurred and reported Pickens to the conductor. In the meantime, he readied his berth and retired. After the train had started the conductor pulled back his curtains and demanded his name. He was indeed William Pickens and the conductor chose to accept the \$2.50. "By my fellow passengers I was eyed in that strange mysterious way, peculiar to Americans, as if a Negro was the rarest sight on this continent,--but I was not accosted. I learned from the porter that they had gallantly informed the conductor of my intrusion, soon after Mr. Spingarn left, and that they had asked the porter how I could be put out. Being informed that I had the best of the game and that this was impracticable, they quieted down and discussed the 'race question' in their various corners. The berth cost me: a messenger's fee, thirteen hours of work, worry and strategy, my attendance at morning church services, part of my dinner, part of my regular for evening address, the assistance of at least six other persons, three trips to the station, and *the regular fares*. And yet they say that 'Jim-Crowism' is no burden to the black man." William Pickens, "The Burden: What it Costs a Negro to Get a Pullman Berth from Louisville KY to Birmingham, Ala.," *Crisis*, September 1914, 248-49.

¹⁵⁸ In addition to being a soldier, his two great goals during that era was building a training camp for black officers and finding places within the military for those officers. He even talked the semi-pacifist Du Bois into seeking a position with the intelligence branch.

¹⁵⁹ Burton Rascoe's recollections of "Civilization in the U.S.," Spingarn NYPL.[need box] This description captured Spingarn's moral fortitude, though in an odd way for a non-practicing Jew interested, by that point, in spiritualism. A Presbyterian minister before turning to writing, Roe penned novels that were driven by his Christian faith. From the preface of *Barriers Burned Away*, his 1872 novel that became his most famous work, "About one year ago our hearts were in deepest sympathy with our fellow-citizens of

Spingarn brought an air of noblesse oblige with him throughout his work with African Americans. He was a man who became tremendously committed and yet also held himself apart. In a sense, he and Du Bois had similar personalities—driven, intellectual, artistic, justice oriented, and a bit formal around strangers. Spingarn was perhaps better as a speaker while Du Bois prevailed as a writer, though they both seemed to captivate audiences on and off the page. In *Dusk of Dawn*, Du Bois wrote “I do not think that any other white man ever touched me emotionally so closely as Joel Spingarn.”¹⁶⁰ In 1933, Du Bois described Spingarn “as one of those vivid, enthusiastic but clear thinking idealists which from age to age the Jewish race has given the world.”¹⁶¹ They were not friends because they agreed; indeed more often they antagonized each other, particularly at executive board meetings of the NAACP. Rather, they were friends because, as Du Bois later explained, “always our admiration and basic faith in each other kept us going hand in hand.”¹⁶²

Despite his zeal for action, captured in the events sketched above, Spingarn always admired the intellect more. This admiration became stronger as he aged. The New York University school paper printed Spingarn’s growing realization that youth and action by themselves, what he called “Youth as a religion (and as a meal ticket)” do not make something worthwhile by themselves. This was in response to the writers, radicals,

Chicago [after the fire that burned down the city], and it occurred to me that their losses, sufferings, and attitude might teach lessons after the echoes of the appalling event had died away in the press; and that in the lurid and destructive flames might reveal with greater vividness the need and value of Christianity.” “Edward Payson Roe - Biography and Works,” *The Literature Network*, 2000, <http://www.online-literature.com/edward-roel/>.

Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn*, 255.

ibid.

ibid.

and intellectuals who had brought America to the “End of Innocence.”¹⁶³ Like other eras after them, this generation thought the youth would save civilization from the passivity and stodginess of the old and comfortable bourgeois. He told the student journalists, “‘We sneer at the rich men who discuss pictures in terms of the money paid for them; but the test of chronology is no more artistic than the test of price.’ If we may supply an example, Mr. Ezra Pound was just as bad when he was young as he is now. ‘And so,’ says Professor Spingarn, ‘I, who once called upon young men for rebellion and doubt, now call on them for thought and faith.’”¹⁶⁴

What kind of thought or intellect did Spingarn admire? Spingarn kept a clipping in his scrapbook which defined the intellect. He had been asked to contribute to a series of articles run by the Dallas Texas New in 1924 about the nature of the “Young Intellectual” school of thought. It was not his own clipping, indeed, it was one of the few he had saved not authored by him, nor was it one of the more prominent contributors like F. Scott Fitzgerald that he kept. Rather, it was this description, written by Maxwell Bodenheim, a Greenwich Village poet who died in obscurity a few years later.

Intellect is a half-logical, half-imaginative struggle against false exteriors, surface semblances, decrepit plausibilities, emotional uproars, and outworn idols accepted and worshiped by large groups of people. It is thought and poetry refusing to be hoodwinked by the realistic pretences and clamors of life, and forever setting up newer and more daring explanations of the motives, meanings, and essences concealed by life. It is the exquisite, skilful, and at times almost venomous attack on the mental inertia, and emotional complacency which appeals to a majority of human beings, whether they are Socialists or Monarchists. It has little respect for inflexible solutions and ecstatic prohibitions, and it ignores them in favor of an endlessly searching forward motion. It has therefore been disliked in

¹⁶³ *End of Innocence*, other books. Henry Farnham May, *The end of American innocence* (Columbia University Press, 1992).

¹⁶⁴ “The Passing of Youth,” *NYU Times*, June 11, 1922, 40.

all ages and by hosts of critics, from the early Greek rhapsodists down to H.L. Mencken.¹⁶⁵

This vibrant description captures Du Bois', Spingarn's, and Ovington's overflowing creativity and deep reasoning. It also relates their hopes for the active force against the kind of social inertia that led the majority of whites to accept the kind of black legal and political inferiority insisted upon by a vocal, active minority.¹⁶⁶ In a way, though, it captures a total independence that the Talented Tenth could not afford. The intellect described by Bodenheim stands totally apart and critiques the way society moves. In one way, this perfectly captures the way many African Americans were forced to relate to society—the majority white Americans did not view them as Americans, so they took up a stance outside, as major critiques of the flaws in America's ideas. But in another way, African Americans needed each other for sustenance and support. Du Bois faced this tension continually as he built up the *Crisis*. Was he offering his own, unique, critical opinions about the world, or was he building up a movement? The Second Amenians, too, had to face that choice. When should they moderate their ideas to get along with others and unify organizations to fight together? When should they stand up for a belief and refuse to let it be formed in the likeness of others, at the risk of unproductive infighting or for the sake of true integrity? These questions will be explored throughout the text as I examine how intellectuals relate to their social and collegial peers, as well as those more and less powerful or influential than them.

¹⁶⁵ Maxwell Bodenheim, "Who are the Young Intellectuals? A Symposium Edited by Walter Holbrook," *Dallas Texas News*, July 20, 1924.

¹⁶⁶ Ovington's story about white workers... any other evidence of this in books on white racism? it's kind of a Goldhagen type thesis, which I get a sense of from living among good whites who make bourgeois choices that leave them carefully sheltered, but maybe it's not quite right?

Spingarn culminated a lifetime of thinking about intellectuals, artists, and activists with one of his last public speeches. He arrived at the flower-filled formal Atlanta University dining room for W.E.B. Du Bois' seventieth birthday party prepared to honor his long-time friend off the top of his head. He watched the presentation of a bronze portrait of Du Bois and James Weldon Johnson praise the great intellectual before rising from his seat next to Nina Du Bois and approaching the podium himself. To almost everyone's surprise he did that by bringing up the old Washington/Du Bois divide, characterizing it as that between action and thought. He praised Du Bois for having created the younger generation of black intellectuals.¹⁶⁷ The rest of this dissertation will on some level analyze that contention. To what extent did the Second Amenians spring from this idea of the world and of the role of the black leader that Du Bois, Spingarn, Ovington, and many others created? To what extent did they critique it? Who all was involved in the education of this younger generation? How did they educate and develop themselves?

Spingarn argued that the "thinker" and the "men of action" were two separate beings. It was an odd argument at the celebration of a man who had managed to combine the two for so many years at the helm of the *Crisis*. He argued that "the intellectual thinker cannot transform the world in action but he can give programs that the men of action carry out, even without understanding them and perhaps they might take any other program unless this happened to move their hearts. This is the function of the thinker. He hands out the programs that men of action will bring into action if they can."¹⁶⁸ Though

E. Spingarn, "Detroit Speech, July 1, 1937 [bulleted noted]," Spingarn Papers NYPL.. The transcript was recorded by Wilkins and not endorsed by Spingarn for publication. Many of those present heard Spingarn comparing Booker T. Washington to a fascist dictator. That was not what he meant, we realized the problems in his speech, which he blamed in part on a error-filled transcript.. J.E.

he seemingly tried to emphasize that the role of action was as important as thought, many left feeling that he had made out men of action as unthinking dolts, specifically Booker T. Washington, and were dangerously close to being portrayed as fascists.

Despite his frustration with the direction that the NAACP took in its later years, Spingarn remained proud of the organization till his death because it had trained the Talented Tenth:

We created a Negro intelligentsia. When I said that to Mrs. [Daisy] Lampkin today she said, 'You had better not mention that because people say we are too much for the intelligentsia.' I believe that every race must have a body of trained leadership. That is all 'intelligentsia' means. And there was none. Just a few stray men, disorganized, silent; Negro colleges of little account, spoken of with contempt, a place to go where you got educational training only. And we preached, 'No leadership is worth its salt unless trained. The first thing to do was to send men to high school, college, to train them. And so we created a Negro intelligentsia; the NAACP of which you are the youth. We have carried on that fight all these years; and that was the way we began.'¹⁶⁹

This quote emerged out of an old man's hubris, but also carried with it some truth about the importance of the NAACP as a whole in organizing black leadership. Just how much truth will be examined in subsequent pages.

First Amenia Conference

In order to encourage greater involvement of African American and white leaders in the NAACP, Spingarn and Du Bois planned a conference to bring a wide range of opinions together in upstate New York to talk through the so-called Negro problem. Spingarn was invested first and foremost in the cause of individual liberties; he and other founders of the NAACP believed that "the existing economic system was capable of

Spingarn, "Confidential—Not for Publication: Speech of Mr. J.E. Spingarn at Banquet honoring Dr. W. E. B. Du Bois" (Atlanta University, February 23, 1938), Box 17, Spingarn Papers NYPL.
¹⁶⁹ J.E. Spingarn, "Detroit Speech Notes," July 1, 1937, Box 17, Spingarn Papers NYPL.

providing economic uplift to all of those allowed to freely partake of it.”¹⁷⁰ This belief suited Spingarn well at the first Amenia Conference, but would run into serious opposition at the second.

The First World War in Europe and the conversations about democracy and citizenship it spawned in the U.S. had, in Johnson’s view, “conspired to break up the stereotyped conception of the Negro’s place that had been increasing in fixity for forty years, and to allow of new formations.”¹⁷¹ In light of this, and Booker T. Washington’s death a year previously, the NAACP leadership believed it was time to reassess the state of race relations.

The First Amenia Conference had a broad chasm to bridge—the enduring bitterness between Washington’s and Du Bois’ supporters over the past fourteen years. Du Bois’ essay “On Booker T. Washington and Others,” first published in the *Atlantic Monthly* and again in the *Souls of Black Folk* in 1903 drew a strict line between his philosophy of education and race leadership and Washington’s support for industrial education, self-help, and social segregation for the sake of economic integration. Not one to brook opposition, Washington mobilized his followers to suppress Du Bois’ influence, particularly as manifested in the Niagara Movement. Reflecting on this era, James Weldon Johnson wrote in 1933 that “[o]ne not familiar with this phase of Negro life in the twelve- or fourteen-year period following 1903 (the year of publication of *The Souls of Black Folk*) cannot imagine the bitterness of the antagonism between these two wings.”¹⁷² According to Johnson, “In 1916, the situation, in brief, was as follows: Booker T. Washington had died the year before, but the conservative mass of Negroes, together

¹⁷⁰ Ross, *J. E. Spingarn and the Rise of the NAACP*, 14.

¹⁷¹ Johnson, *Along This Way*.

¹⁷² Johnson, *Along This Way*, 313.

with a large part of the white South and the greater proportion of the Northern whites at all interested in the Negro, stood firm under the banner of the Tuskegee Idea” of African Americans devoting themselves to economic endeavors in order to prove themselves worthy of citizenship.¹⁷³ The NAACP, though it brought together “Negro militants and white champions of equal rights for the Negro” still attracted only a slight level of support.¹⁷⁴ In August 1916, the Association had three office members, 63 local organizations, and almost no presence in the South. Du Bois’ magazine, the *Crisis* had a dozen office staff, and had begun to attract a wide readership, but not enough to sustain the movement.

Following Washington’s memorial service, Spingarn decided to invite influential black leaders from both sides of the divide to his estate for a refreshing retreat. Guests would stay in tents and be invigorated by the outdoors. Perhaps then, they could see the end to their differences and begin to unite under one banner. The desire for unity among those fighting for black rights was a recurrent and elusive goal throughout American history (the National Negro Congress’ attempt in the late thirties concludes this dissertation). Spingarn called on all his political contacts to bring some whites from high in the power structure to visit and speak to the conference, including the governor of New York. Du Bois believed the conference “marked the end of an era and the beginning.”¹⁷⁵

The conference was held under the auspices of the NAACP, but conferees were not expected to be “committed in any way to the Association’s programme or

¹⁷³ Ibid., 313-14.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ W. E. B Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn, an Essay Toward an Autobiography of a Race Concept* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & co, 1940).

principles.”¹⁷⁶ Indeed, the organizers carefully charted who came from what school of thought. An administrative list of the Conferees broke down the names into a “Niagara Movement Man,” a “Washington Man,” and unknown. They invited eighteen Niagara men (plus four NAACP representatives—the Spingarn brothers, Ovington, and Roy Nash, the executive secretary), fifteen Washington men, and twenty one “others.” The fifty-four conferees included forty-seven men and seven women. The men included author Charles Chesnutt, lawyer George Crawford, Rev. Francis Grimke, President John Hope, Dean Kelly Miller, Major Robert Moton (Washington’s successor at Tuskegee), author and activist James Weldon Johnson, Bishop Alexander Walters of the AME church, and Dr. Carter Woodson. The women, all listed as “other” included prominent club women and educators, such as Mary Church Terrell, founder and first president of the National Association of Colored Women (NACW), Mrs. M. B. Talbert, current president of NACW, Nannie Burroughs, founder of the National Training School for Women and Girls and the Woman’s Convention, an auxiliary to the National Baptist Convention, and Addie Hunton, the first woman to represent African American interests in the National YWCA. Some prominent leaders were left out, particularly autodidact and radical Hubert Harrison and anti-lynching crusader Ida B. Wells Barnett. The second Amenia conference had no such careful delineation of set schools of thought, nor was there the expectation that the second conference would bridge such a clear divide as the Niagara/Washington one.

James Weldon Johnson, in the “Other” category on the list of invitees, received his invitation to Amenia a few months following his return from Nicaragua, where he had

¹⁷⁶ List of Names, 24-26 Aug 1916, Box 95-13 Folder 525, Spingarn, MSRC.

served as US Consul for three years after being in Venezuela for two.¹⁷⁷ He had retired from civil service in light of Secretary of State William Jennings Bryant's commitment to patronage for Democrats and the whole Wilson administration's pandering to the white South. Johnson then had to consider which of his many professions—writing, law, teaching, song-writing—to resume. He and his wife, Grace Nail Johnson returned to New York, living for the first time in Harlem. Nail Johnson's parents had followed the tide of African Americans to Harlem (they had previously lived in Brooklyn, where most educated and wealthy African Americans had lived prior to the mid-1910s). Johnson tried to resume some of his song-writing, but Bob Cole, his former collaborator, had committed suicide and his brother was then in London. He had lost the touch with Broadway and did not know what the popular forms were. The editor of the *New York Age* was looking for a new person to take over the editorial page. Through the influence of his old friend Charles Anderson, a Republican with connections to Booker T. Washington, the paper offered Johnson the position and he began a ten-year stint as an editorialist for that newspaper. Again, Johnson benefitted from the strings Washington could pull, without having to publicly ally himself with Washington. He also continued to devote time to literary writing.

When he found an invitation letter from Spingarn in the mailbox while visiting his mother in Florida, he was ready for a career change. Du Bois had scribbled at the bottom, “do come.”¹⁷⁸ Johnson had met Du Bois in 1904 while visiting Atlanta University, where

¹⁷⁷ Johnson is often identified in current scholarship as a Washington supporter because of the opportunities Washington opened for him in foreign service and because of his close friendship with Washington's primary representative in New York City, Charles Anderson. See, for example, Manning Marable and Leith Mulling's introduction to an excerpt of Johnson's *Black Manhattan* in *Let Nobody Turn Us Around: Voices of Resistance, Reform, and Renewal* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009), 267.

¹⁷⁸ Johnson, *Along This Way*, 308-09.

Du Bois was then teaching, to receive an honorary degree. This was a year after the *Souls of Black Folk* had been published; Johnson had been transfixed by its insight and strident call for action and “was anxious to meet the author.” He encountered “a quite handsome and unpedantic young man—Dr. Du Bois was then thirty-six.” At first, he found it “difficult to reconcile “the brooding but intransigent spirit of *The Souls of Black Folk* with this apparently so light-hearted man, this man so abundantly endowed with the gift of laughter.”¹⁷⁹ Receiving Du Bois’ personal exhortation in 1916 cemented Johnson’s eager determination to accept Spingarn’s invitation.¹⁸⁰

In addition to his personal eagerness, Johnson felt the weight of the times and breathed an air laden with possibilities for growth or decline.

The conference was held at a time when the fundamental rights of the Negro were in a state of flux. At no time since the days following the Civil War had the Negro been in a position where he stood to make greater gain or sustain greater loss in status. The great war in Europe, its recoil on America, the ferment in the United States, all conspired to break up the stereotyped conception of the Negro’s place that had been increasing in fixity for forty years, and to allow of new formations. What new forms these conceptions would assume depended largely upon what attitude and action the Negro himself and the white people willing to stand with him would take.¹⁸¹

The calm fields of Amenia witnessed many hard feelings that had to be put to rest.

When Du Bois first saw Troutbeck, he was enraptured:

I had no sooner seen the place than I knew it was mine. It was just a long southerly extension of my own Berkshire Hills. There was the same slow, rocky uplift of land, the nestle of lake and the sturdy murmur of brooks and brown rivers. Afar off were blue and mysterious mountains, and there

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 203.

¹⁸⁰ “National Association for the Advancement of Colored People--Amenia,” *Crisis*, October 1916, http://books.google.com/books?id=fVoEAAAAMBAJ&pg=PA277&dq=Spingarn&lr=&as_drrb_is=b&as_minm_is=1&as_miny_is=1909&as_maxm_is=12&as_maxy_is=1917&as_brr=0&as_pt=MAGAZINES&cd=19#v=onepage&q=Spingarn&f=false.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 308-09.

was a road that rose and dipped and wound and wandered and went on and on past farm and town to the great hard world beyond.¹⁸²

The black conferees stayed in a “tent colony [...] pitched on the shore of a three acre pond, equipped with cots and bedding, a commissariat, and a mess tent where the conferences can be held in case of rain,” while the whites visited only for day sessions. Attendees were warned that the accommodations would be simple, but Du Bois and Spingarn hoped that the conference would be “the more enjoyable because made an informal gathering in the open air.”¹⁸³ The pictures of the conference capture the bright white light of August and canvas tents with pointed roofs on a lush grass meadow. One even captured a remarkable sight—the usually formal Du Bois in white shirt and suspenders, sleeves rolled up, smiling while washing his hands at a basin in the morning sunlight. The basin was perched precariously on a table supported by a tripod of unhewn maple legs.¹⁸⁴

The first Amenia conference was everything the second was not. It was formally planned, with a program, clearly stated subject materials, and discussion leaders. The attending group was large, and represented the entire world of nationally known black leaders at that time; they came from “every school of thought and every form of activity—business, law, medicine, education, politics, scholarship, literature, art, social work, fraternal organizations, the church, the stage, music.”¹⁸⁵ The overnight conferees, who slept in the tents, were primarily black.¹⁸⁶ The numbers increased by half again

¹⁸² Du Bois, “The Amenia Conference (1925),” 380.

¹⁸³ “Amenia Conference Programme” 24-26 Aug 1916, Box 95-13 Folder 525, Spingarn, MSRC.

¹⁸⁴ Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois--Biography of a Race, 1868-1919*, picture insert.

¹⁸⁵ “Amenia Conference Programme” 24-26 Aug 1916, Box 95-13 Folder 525, Spingarn, MSRC.

¹⁸⁶ “National Association for the Advancement of Colored People--Amenia.” Among those present were: Fred R. Moore, John Hope, J.R. Hawkins, James W. Johnson, J.E. Spingarn, Committee. W.E.B. Du Bois, Mary Church Terrell, H.A. Hunt, Hutchins C. Bishop, Mason A. Hawkins, J. Rosamond Johnson, Addie W. Hunton, W. Ashbie Hawkins, Leslie Pinckney Hill, Montgomery Gregory, W. Scott Brown, Jr. Francis

during the day when a contingent of prominent whites visited. Spingarn had used all his political contacts to induce white leaders to attend the conference, including such powerful individuals as the governor of New York. The program, in an inversion of a typical demographic—mostly white with one or two “representative” African Americans—explained that “Representative white men and women have also been invited to take part in the discussion from day to day.”¹⁸⁷

The conference had a more formal program than Second Amenia, with scheduled speakers and responders. Each session had a presiding figure, a specific subject and two individuals to open the discussion. The subjects included “Education and Industry,” “Industry and Education,” “The Negro in Politics,” “Civil and Legal Discrimination,” “Social Discrimination,” “Practical Paths,” and “A Working Programme for the Future.”¹⁸⁸ Johnson particularly remembered the contributions of the white attendees; “At one of these [sessions], the group was dazzled by the beauty and fired by the crusading zeal of [suffragist] Inez Milholland. Another session was attended and addressed by the Governor of the state, Charles S. Whitman. I was chosen, through the suggestion of Mr. Spingarn, I am sure, to make the remarks introducing Governor Whitman.”¹⁸⁹

Informal conversations also proved useful. Johnson and Villard sat down for a long chat during one afternoon. Villard suggested that “one of the most effective steps the Negro in New York could take would be to march down Fifth Avenue in a parade of

H. Warren, Charles E. Bentley, James A. Cobb, Wm. L. Bulkley, Mary B. Talbert, William H. Lewis, L.J. Coppin, Oswald Garrison Villard, Emmett J. Scott, Geo W. Cook, Kelley Miller, J.C. Napier, L. C. Laney, Wm. Pickens, Geo. W. Crawford, Garnett R. Waller, Chas. W. Chesnutt, Arthur B. Spingarn, Brown S. Smith, Roy Nash, R.R. Wright, W. Justin Carter, John Hurst, L.M. Hershaw, R.R. Wright, Jr.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Johnson, *Along This Way*, 309.

silent protest.”¹⁹⁰ A few years later after the East St. Louis riot in 1917, Johnson remembered the conversation and organized just such a protest.

Over the course of three days, conferees arrived at a remarkable degree of unity, given previous animosities. They agreed that all kinds of education, industrial and liberal, were necessary and to be encouraged. In addition, they argued that African Americans needed complete political freedom to achieve their “highest development.”¹⁹¹ Thus, political agitation for rights was a good and appropriate role for the NAACP.¹⁹² They all recognized, according to Du Bois, a commonality of belief: “we all believed in thrift, we all wanted the Negro to vote, we all wanted the laws enforced, we all wanted assertion of our essential manhood.”¹⁹³ In addition to concessions to the NAACP side, the findings of the conference also acknowledged the Washington contingent; they recognized the special difficulties facing Southern leaders and pledged to “respect the good faith, methods and ideals of those who are working for the solution of this problem in various sections of the country.”¹⁹⁴ Remarking upon the conference, Spingarn suggested that “the members of the Conference have arrived at a virtual unanimity of opinion in regard to certain principles, and that a certain practical result may be expected from its obliterations.”¹⁹⁵

Charles Chesnutt wrote Spingarn later that he had “enjoyed every minute of the time. It was a privilege and a pleasure to meet as many interesting and worth-while people and to be associated with you and yours for a few days. I am sure you were

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Du Bois, “The Amenia Conference (1925),” 385.

¹⁹² Ross, *J. E. Spingarn and the Rise of the NAACP*, 48.

¹⁹³ Du Bois, “The Amenia Conference (1925),” 384.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 386.

¹⁹⁵ Spingarn, “2nd draft, Amenia, N.Y., August 26, 1916,” J. E. Spingarn Papers, Box 95-13, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington D.C.

pleased, as I was, with the outcome of the Conference, the real and valuable results of which will become apparent later. [...] If there were many more men like you in the United States, the solution of race problems would be a matter of a very short time.”¹⁹⁶ After two decades reflection, Johnson believed the conference had come “at an hour of exigency and opportunity, and took its place in the list of important events in the history of the Negro in the United States.”¹⁹⁷ Spingarn himself remarked to Du Bois and the *Crisis* readers, “We wish you could tell all America, too, how much it loses by cutting itself off from hearts so generous and so warm-hearted and from friends so loyal and so good to possess.”¹⁹⁸

The most important outcome of the conference was the ascendancy of Du Bois as the foremost African American intellectual in the country. He came to prominence particularly by editing the NAACP’s organ, the *Crisis*. The NAACP emerged from the First Amenia Conference as “the strongest voice speaking for blacks.”¹⁹⁹

Following the First Amenia Conference, Spingarn again wrote to James Weldon Johnson, this time inviting him to join the NAACP as a field secretary. Spingarn and Du Bois agreed that Johnson should be asked, but Ovington was hesitant. She did not want one who had been so strongly tied to Washington to have an important position in the

¹⁹⁶ Charles Chesnutt to Spingarn, 1 Sept 1916, Box 95-3 Folder 98, Spingarn Papers MSRC.

¹⁹⁷ Johnson, *Along This Way*, 308-09.

¹⁹⁸ Amy and J.E. Spingarn, “Editorial--A Card,” *Crisis*, December 1916. The rest of the Thank You note reads “Spingarns’ reaction: “We were more touched than we can say by the beautiful book that has just come to us, with the autographs of all those who attended the first Amenia Conference as our guests last August, and we shall treasure it always as a memento of those whom we are very proud and very happy to call our friends. Will you tell them how deeply grateful we are for their kind, more than kind words, and how the pleasure which we ourselves had drawn from the conference was renewed as we read what each friend had written, as we tried to feel what each of them had felt during those days and had mirrored in his soul?”

¹⁹⁹ Ross, *J. E. Spingarn and the Rise of the NAACP*, 48.

new organization.²⁰⁰ Spingarn emphasized the kind of man he sought for the position; he must have “great tact, executive skill, eloquence, sympathy, and above all unswerving loyalty to the main purpose of the Association.” Johnson would be required to travel extensively, write, and organize.

Johnson was genuinely surprised by the offer, but (at least following his thirteen year career with the NAACP) “under [his] surprise [he] was aware that what had come to [him] was in line with destiny.” His life might have taken many other paths; this path came to him “Out of such tenuous stuff”—only “the unspoken reactions between me and two other men, J. E. Spingarn and W. E. B. Du Bois.” Johnson did not believe in any set religious precepts, but he felt that this offer “could not have been other than the resultant of those mysterious forces that are constantly at work for good or evil in the life of every man.” Everything in his diverse life, “from the principalship of Stanton School to editorship on *The New York Age*, was preparation for the work I was being asked to undertake.”²⁰¹ His first role was to travel throughout the south, urging African Americans to set up local branches. This and many other membership campaigns brought in more and more black members (and a few additional white ones) that began gradually to transform who held power in the organization. There would be a question whether the nationally known names (often white) who sat on the board of directors or the local membership would determine the direction of the developing organization.

In less than a decade, the NAACP grew from an idea among a few black and white progressives to a leading organization among black professionals. Conflicts arose

²⁰⁰ Lewis, *When Harlem Was in Vogue*, 147.

²⁰¹ Johnson, *Along This Way*, 309.

in those first few years that would arise again, particularly over the control of the *Crisis*. The fundamental question about whether or not black and white could cooperate in the national office was answered in the affirmative for at least the next two decades. Steadily the organization hired more black men and women to serve in the offices and asked more to serve on the board of directors. Its fundamental goals remained in tension between what black leaders wanted and what white leaders thought would be possible. In the 1920s, the NAACP did not attract many major white philanthropists. Their primary funding came from new members brought into local branches each year by the national field secretaries and local leaders.

The NAACP was founded primarily on Progressive goals of making American democracy work for disenfranchised black Americans. Though several of the initial members, like Ovington and Du Bois, were socialists, the goals of the NAACP did not encompass economic equality or major transformations of the American economic or political structure. The American founding documents, enhanced by the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth Amendments, already promised equal opportunity and fair treatment before the law. The NAACP was determined to see America live up to its promises.

Transition

To Dr. W.E.B.D.

by Eleanor Hoysradt

Dark glittering eyes, Syrian nose,
 suave, pointed beard—
You resemble a sunburnt Jew,
A Turkish merchant from Constanti-
 nople,
An Italian count, a Cuban or a
 German diplomat,
Anything but what you are:
A Negro, born in the Berkshire foot-
 hills.
You talk most intelligently of Negro
 pride,
Negro pioneers, Negro poets, Negro
 problems.
Your two-edged bitterness is enclosed
In a subtle sheath of politeness.
But somewhere in the secret depths of
 your mind
A voice cries—
For Yolande, the dark princess, your
 daughter,
Homesick in Paris,
And for the young son, who lies
Beneath the snow, holding communion
With the approaching spring.
'Know your feelings, use your wants.'
(Ah, do not weep for them!
The dark princess will be happy with
 her lover
And he who lies under the snow, as
 heard
The first groping whispers of the hya-
 cinth roots
And is glad.)²⁰²

²⁰² Eleanor Hoysradt, "To Dr. WEBD," *Crisis* 36 (May 1929): 160.

Dr. W.E.B. Du Bois cast a large shadow over many African Americans born at the turn of the century, especially those who went through high school and college. His monthly magazine, the *Crisis*, reported on the all successes of African Americans who achieved distinction in education and the professions (less so in business). As the poem above suggests, the *Crisis* readers developed a personal relationship with the editor of the magazine. They sensed his personality and willingness to fight on their behalf in each month's forceful editorials. At the same time, growing intellectuals tested their teeth by gnawing at Du Bois's opinions.

The previous chapter introduced the ideological world that the Amenians inherited. The next chapters introduce the Amenians themselves. That nomenclature is problematic yet useful. The group I call the "Amenians" did not call themselves thus. They shared sensibilities that gave them a group identity and common enemies to attack, but also frequently disagreed. Many of the men held little regard for the intellectual achievements of the women. The women moved between enclaves of women (white and black) and enclaves of African Americans (men and women). The next three chapters analyze the Amenian women's movements, migrations, and education.

Chapter 2

“Honest Agony”

Black Women Organizing and Socializing in Harlem

“Fritz Beck must have sensed our honest agony, for he spent most of a night talking with us. He said we did not sound any more concerned with humanity than the whites and wondered whether *we* could be trusted with power. He wondered, too, whether we would be able to produce and enjoy freedom if we achieved it by murder. We fought back, and each of us was able to cite chapter and verse in describing the efforts we had made to open opportunity to all people. We were eloquent, but Fritz Beck reminded us that we did not need to be so detailed, for he was then living through the same kind of struggle as he fought the rise of Hitler. He suggested, finally, that our very experience of discrimination and inhumanity ought to convince us that, in the long run, hate is more harmful to the giver than to the receiver.”

--Anna Arnold Hedgeman¹

“Black women may be among their freest, their happiest, and, in some ways, their most fulfilled when they are together in their organizations.”

--Paula Giddings²

¹ Anna Arnold Hedgeman, *The Trumpet Sounds: A Memoir of Negro Leadership* (New York: Holt, 1964).

² Paula Giddings, *In Search of Sisterhood: Delta Sigma Theta and the Challenge of the Black Sorority Movement*, 1st ed. (New York: Morrow, 1988), 9.

In the summer of 1927, black Oregonian and Harlem transplant Mabel Byrd prepared to leave the country of her birth for the first time. The YWCA industrial secretary had won a Quaker scholarship to study settlement houses in England. To wish her well, Harlem society rallied around the 31 year old for a proper goodbye party. Roberta Bosley, librarian at the New York Public Library branch on 135th street (now the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture), hosted a musical tea in Byrd's honor on Easter Sunday afternoon. The *Chicago Defender* reported that "two hundred prominent social, literary, and musical persons enjoyed the program."³ Listening to the music and nibbling on tea sandwiches were Harlem Renaissance personalities, and veterans of European travel, including poet Countee Cullen, painter Aaron Douglass, and *Crisis* literary editor Jessie Fauset. Also in attendance were Mr. and Mrs. Charles S. Johnson, editor of the Urban League's *Opportunity*. In between piano, soprano, and tenor solos, Langston Hughes and Arna Bontemps read poetry. Many of her Delta sorority sisters eagerly told Byrd their own stories of international travel. Soror Yolande Du Bois and her parents, W. E. B. and Nina, would miss their feisty and intelligent friend, but promised to write.

Byrd had moved to Harlem from Portland, Oregon only four years previously at the age of 27, but had glided smoothly into the center of one of Harlem's communities, the literary and non-profit organizations. From her introduction to a network of black women at the Young Women's Christian Association branches in Harlem and Brooklyn, her world expanded into a plethora of organizations, including the Delta Sigma Theta

³ In 1933, Byrd reported her age as 34, but the census names her as 14 years old in 1910. "1910 Census" (Canonsburg Borough, Washington County, Pennsylvania, April 29, 1910), www.ancestry.org; "Mabel Byrd Registration Blank, Second Amenia Conference," 1933, Box 95-13 Folder 523, Spingarn Papers MSRC.

sorority, the National Association of College Women (NACW), the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the Urban League, literary salons, and grand balls. The public faces of the more well known New York organizations were often men's, but the beating hearts and working hands were usually women's.⁴

Black Harlem women of a certain class and profession created a society for themselves in those famous north Manhattan neighborhoods that captured much of the dynamism of the Renaissance period, but also conformed to notions of respectability that their Progressive Era sisters and mothers had used to confront stereotypes about rampant black sexuality. Those stereotypes were still live and well in Harlem, swaying white policemen and judges to imprison many black working class women for "soliciting," even though the women themselves argued that they were just having a social life.⁵ To avoid these dangers, black women who moved through upper class society avoided the sexualized cabarets of Harlem life which attracted white tourists, encouraged jazz and blues greats like Duke Ellington and Bessie Smith, and welcomed male authors like Langston Hughes and Arna Bontemps.

This did not mean they stayed at home. In many ways, Harlem was the best place in the country for a young college educated woman. Like-minded women from all over the country found their way to the 135th street subway station, a desk at the 137th street YWCA, a pew at Abyssinian Baptist Church, a chair in Jessie Fauset's or Lillian

⁴ Other scholars have documented a similar phenomenon in churches, where men held the formal positions of leadership, but women ran all the events and committees. Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1993).

⁵ Cheryl D. Hicks, "'Bright and Good Looking Colored Girl': Black Women's Sexuality and 'Harmful Intimacy' in Early-Twentieth-Century New York," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 18, no. 3 (2009): 418-456.

Alexander's living room, or the floor of the Savoy ballroom with legions of attractive, educated black men. Who needed a cabaret when one could attend a gala ball in one's finest, which was attended by the literati of Harlem and fully reported in the next week's *Amsterdam News*?

Even while they protected each other through their organizations, black women had many avenues blocked by the double discrimination they faced. Careers outside of the YWCA, the classroom, or the library were difficult to find. Indeed, many New York classrooms and hospitals declined to hire black teachers or nurses. Other roads to an independent, respectable livelihood, like being a shop attendant or a stenographer, were almost impossible to obtain. A few black women began to make inroads into male dominated professions, like law and medicine, but encountered almost insurmountable odds when they tried to find apprenticeships and residencies.

This society in Harlem included many future attendees at the Second America Conference, including Byrd, Marion Cuthbert, Anna Arnold (Hedgeman), Lillian Alexander, and Frances Williams, as well as their friend and colleague Juliette Derricotte (who died tragically before she could attend). All of them shared connections to the YWCA, all were migrants to the city (three from Minnesota), most travelled internationally, and all but Alexander found a home in Harlem for only a limited amount of time. Only Alexander and Arnold Hedgeman married, and only then after they had established themselves professionally. All of them had parents who encouraged higher education from an early age, bringing books into the home and requiring their daughters to succeed academically. Many of those parents were freed slaves or the children of freed men and women.

This chapter explores the organizational apparatus that sustained Harlem and provided a launching point for young black women to explore their ideas about the world and embark on their own self-education. The 1920s, at the end of the Progressive Era and the beginning of the Modern one, young African Americans began to push back at the connotations of “racial uplift.” However, it remains the best phrase for what these women were involved in because of their focus on education, culture, European manners, and their social distance from impoverished black people.⁶ Many scholars have focused on the role of a few mentors and a few literary salons in Harlem without recognizing the extensive support network that made Harlem a place where young black professionals, authors, and artists developed strength, creativity, and intelligence.⁷ Accounts of the Harlem Renaissance thus overlook how women in particular shaped and sustained this community by organizing lectures, book talks, concerts, fundraisers, professional development seminars, sororities, and parties. They developed programs to help new

⁶ Kevin Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Stephanie J Shaw, *What a Woman Ought to Be and to Do: Black Professional Women Workers During the Jim Crow Era*, *Women in culture and society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Victoria W. Wolcott, *Remaking Respectability*, 2001; Touré F Reed, *Not Alms but Opportunity: The Urban League & the Politics of Racial Uplift, 1910-1950* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008); Nancy Marie Robertson, *Christian Sisterhood, Race Relations, and the YWCA, 1906-1946* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007).

⁷ This is often the case because scholars in fields other than history have written most extensively about the Harlem Renaissance, fields that emphasize individual artistic achievement more than an uplift community. Tyrone Tillery, *Claude McKay: A Black Poet's Struggle for Identity* (1992; Amherst); Alan R. Shucard, *Countee Cullen* (Boston: Twayne, 1984); Wayne Cooper, *Claude McKay: Rebel Sojourner in the Harlem Renaissance A Biography* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987); Paul Witcover, *Zora Neale Hurston* (New York: Chelsea House, 1991); Dick Russell, *Black Genius and the American Experience*, 1st ed. (New York: Carroll & Graf, 1998); Charles Scruggs and Lee VanDemarr, *Jean Toomer and the Terrors of American History* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998); Theresa A. Leininger-Miller, *New Negro Artists in Paris: African American Painters and Sculptors in the City of Light, 1922-1934* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001); David Krasner, *A Beautiful Pageant: African American Theatre, Drama, and Performance in the Harlem Renaissance, 1910-1927* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); Arnold Rampersad, *The Life of Langston Hughes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Laurie F. Leach, *Langston Hughes: A Biography* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 2004); Caroline Goesser, *Picturing the New Negro: Harlem Renaissance print culture and modern black identity* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2007).

migrants, professionals and workers adjust to the city. At times their concerns followed **those** of white women in the philanthropic world (concerned particularly about peace **after** the violence of WWI), whom they often found themselves in discussion with, but at **other** times, they tired of endless discussions of peace in a violent world. Through their **myriad** organizations and events, these women developed a social and intellectual **community**, rooted in place and sisterhood, which shaped black leadership for decades to **come**.

At the same time, some of these black women, particularly those whom I focus on **in this** chapter (who became Second Amenians) entered male spaces. Many took graduate **degrees** at Columbia University, either in the summer or the regular school year. Many **turned** to mentors like W.E.B. Du Bois, Charles S. Johnson, Alain Locke, and Hubert **Harrison** for intellectual stimulation and advice on their projects. While these **relationships** could bear intellectual fruit, they were clouded by gender. Du Bois tended to **flirt** with women whose minds engaged him and dismiss those who did not interest **him**. Locke had a reputation for dismissing all women, in favor of the young men he **preferred**, yet encouraged Mabel Byrd during her European sojourn. Black men did not **have to** restrict their efforts to the practical peace-making emphasized by the YWCA, **because** they had a few more outlets for their intellectual efforts than did black women.

In order to illuminate these many different trends within Harlem's professional **women's** culture, I am going to present two women the same age, with very different **backgrounds**, who moved in many of the same circles. Mabel Byrd was raised in **Pennsylvania** and Portland, Oregon and attended integrated schools, graduating with a **BA in Liberal Arts** from the University of Washington. Juliette Derricotte grew up in

Georgia, the daughter of a black man and a white woman who chose to pass into the **black** world. She attended segregated schools and Talladega College, a missionary school **in Alabama** with white teachers and black students which emphasized the liberal arts. **They** met in Harlem where they joined the Delta Theta Sigma sorority (captured in one **photograph** sitting beside each other), worked for the YW (Derricotte in the national **office** and Byrd in the Harlem and Brooklyn branches), and joined the NACW (Byrd **served** as the New York branch's first president). Both also traveled abroad, Derricotte **through** the YW and Byrd for her own education. Both constantly analyzed their **surroundings**, charmed their peers and elders with quick wit, and achieved unusual places **for black** women in their time (though their service, professions, and travel were **somewhat** representative of their Harlem community).

Throughout this section, I examine these women's developing ideas on race **relations**, interracialism, race-pride, and internationalism. While each embraced a level of **interracial** cooperation, they responded in different ways to its demands. For example, **Mabel** Byrd believed in Pan-Africanism, race-pride, and directly confronting segregation. **In contrast**, Juliette Derricotte emphasized interracial cooperation and love; in that **emphasis**, she accepted a certain amount of prejudice. Byrd used Christian language as a **way to** point out hypocrisy when necessary, but rarely talked about it. Derricotte lived **and breathed** her faith; it is impossible to separate her from it. Their distinct personalities, **influenced** by their childhoods in the North and West and in the South, their shared **community**, and their individual paths of development motivate this chapter.

The community of women discussed in this chapter knew, as Toni Morrison has **described**, how "to combine the nest and the adventure;" for Harlem, they were "both

safe harbor and ship,” “both inn and trail.”⁸ As safe harbor and inn, they planned many **of** the events that characterized the intellectual and cultural vibrancy of Harlem in this **period**. As ship and trail, they pursued their own plans for “racial uplift” and **interracialism** in Harlem and abroad.

Mabel Byrd

LIKE MANY OF THOSE BLACK INTELLECTUALS AND ARTISTS who found their way to New York City in the dynamic 1920s, Byrd grew up far from the majority of African Americans in the South. Given limited sources, a major question about her young **adulthood** was when and why she became attracted to socialism. I will offer suggestions **of where** she might have encountered and explored socialism, though there is not a **definitive** answer till she writes in praise of the Communist Party in 1932. Like many **black** women in the “culture of dissemblance,” her internal life is something of an **enigma**.⁹ Unlike the vast majority of black women in the same era, some of her points of **view** were preserved in articles for *The Crisis* and reports of her activities in black **newspapers**.

Born around 1896 in Pennsylvania, Mabel Byrd and her family caravanned across the **country** to Portland, Oregon during the 1910s. Her family consisted of father Robert, **mother** Jennie, older brothers Daniel and James, older sisters Viola and Edith, and **younger** sister Frances. Robert, born in Virginia at the beginning of the Civil War, was **likely** a freed-slave. He moved his family into the middle class with his skilled trade of

⁸ Toni Morrison, “Interview with Claudia Tate,” in *Black Women Writers at Work*, ed. Claudia Tate (New York: Continuum, 1983), 117-31..

⁹ Darlene Clark Hine, “Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women in the Middle West: Preliminary Thoughts on the Culture of Dissemblance,” *Signs* 14 (Summer 1989): 912-920.

masonry, allowing his wife the rare chance, for a black woman, to be in the home **fulltime**.¹⁰ Jennie, two years older than her husband, might have been the child of slaves, **born** as she was in Ohio to parents from Tennessee. In 1920, African Americans in **Portland** made up 1,556 residents out of 258,288.¹¹ Black migration into Oregon was **curtailed** by the antebellum laws excluding black settlers. It was the only free state **admitted** to the union with such laws in its constitution.¹² The Byrds joined the small **black** population in Oregon, comprised of those new migrants like themselves seeking **greater** opportunity and those whose families had lived in Oregon since the antebellum **days**.¹³

During Byrd's teenage years, the city was a chaotic microcosm of far West ideals, **immigration** from China and the American East, remnants of the culture of Northwestern **native** peoples, and the "civilizing" efforts of the children and grandchildren of pioneers. **The air** smelled of wood smoke from all the logging factories and Mounts Shasta, St. **Helens**, and Hood lingered always in the near distance. John "Jack" Reed, born in **Portland** and educated at Eastern boarding schools and Harvard, became a famous **journalist** and socialist during these years, co-editing the *Masses*, reporting on IWW **strikes**, and describing the Mexican revolution first hand. In 1914, he met Emma **Goldman** in the Portland IWW hall on one of his few return trips to Portland and became

¹⁰ "1910 Census."

¹¹ Quintard Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier: African Americans in the American West 1528-1990* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1998), 223.

¹² Elizabeth McLagan, "The Black Laws of Oregon, 1844-1857," *The Black Past: Remembered and Reclaimed*, 2007, <http://www.blackpast.org/?q=perspectives/black-laws-oregon-1844-1857>.

¹³ African Americans had been in Oregon long enough to protest "antebellum discriminatory legislation." Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier: African Americans in the American West 1528-1990*, 17.

fascinated by her ideas and personality. Though in 1915 he depicted the city as “awful **beyond words**,” novelist and friend John Dos Passos did not believe he could escape his **upbringing**; he was a “robustious son of Oregon” and “a westerner and words meant what **they** said.”¹⁴ Would Mabel Byrd have known about this native son, born to a very **different** social class than her own? Would she have read his favorable reporting on **workers**, socialist ideas, and revolution? Was this where she first encountered the ideas of **socialism**?

Byrd’s teenage years in Oregon were not marked by the terror of the KKK or by **strict** segregation. Portland’s public facilities were mostly open to African Americans, **there** was no discrimination in voting, little discrimination in police protection, and no **lynching**. However, Byrd did know the indignity of persecution in a “‘northern’ city with a ‘southern’ exposure. ... There was practically no outlet for the trained and skilled **Negro** workman.”¹⁵ African Americans in the city consistently cited job discrimination as **their** greatest frustration over racial bias.¹⁶ In the census, Robert Byrd went from a **mason** in 1910 in Pennsylvania to a bricklayer in 1920 in Portland, perhaps representing a **slide in** status. By 1920, African Americans were beginning to enter the housing market, but **only** a quarter owned their own homes.¹⁷ As in many other cities, white neighbors

¹⁴ **Richard H. Engeman**, *The Oregon Companion* (Timber Press, 2009), 321; Michael Munk, “Jack Reed & Louise Bryant: Search for the Sites,” <http://www.marxists.org/archive/reed/bio/portland.htm>.

¹⁵ **Edwin C. Berry**, “Profiles: Portland,” *Journal of Educational Sociology* 19, no. 3, Race Relations on the Pacific Coast (1945): 158.

¹⁶ **Taylor**, *In Search of the Racial Frontier: African Americans in the American West 1528-1990*, 237.

¹⁷ **By 1930**, over 40% owned their own homes. This advance faced a startling setback during the Great Depression, when finding housing became one of the greatest struggles of the relief effort. Owners were **reluctant to rent to blacks**, claiming that “the desirability of both house and neighborhood is decreased” **when a black family took up residence**. African Americans with money were often prevented from buying homes “in desirable residential districts, ... regardless of their high intellectual or professional status.”

viewed African American newcomers with suspicion, fearing a slide in home values. Yet, **the** Byrds found a home to rent on 39th Street in Portland, the only black family on a **white** block with a mixture of owners and renters.¹⁸ Byrd probably faced little outright **discrimination** or segregation during her education, because in school district “policy **there** [was] no discrimination against the Negro children in school organizations,” but “in **practice** it [was] felt that subtle discrimination often exist[ed].”¹⁹ Byrd came away from **this** upbringing with a strong mind and a hunger to know more about black people.

Byrd started college at the University of Oregon, the first African American to do so, but received a Bachelors in Liberal Arts from the University of Washington in Seattle in March 1921.²⁰ The University of Oregon’s decision to ban African Americans from their dormitories may have precipitated this move in 1919.²¹ Perhaps, too, the University of Washington treated female students better than the University of Oregon did. UW had had female students since the beginning; its first graduate in 1876 was a woman. In Seattle, Byrd lived and worked in the home of Dr. Joseph Shaffer (it was quite common

Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier: African Americans in the American West 1528-1990*; Frances Harriet Williams, “Report of Fourteen Civil Rights Studies: Made by Local Associations, Basic Civil Rights for Negroes Questionnaire, Filled out by Portland Oregon YWCA” (Portland, Oregon, 1940), 233, Reel 107, YWCA Papers microfilm.

¹⁸ “1920 Census” (Place Precinct 180, Portland, Multnomah, Oregon, 1920), Ancestry.com, Provo, UT, USA: The Generations Network, Inc.

¹⁹ Williams, “Portland Basic Civil Rights for Negroes Questionnaire.” Rose Murdoch notes, “According to the city of Portland publication, “A History of Portland’s African American Community,” as early as 1906, Blacks voted and served as jurors, and Black and white children shared school classrooms together. They also sat side by side with whites in restaurants and theaters. As World War I brought demographic and industrial change, Jim Crow segregation took root in the city. The process of institutionalized discrimination became a reality for Portland’s Black community.” Rose M. Murdock, “The Persistence of Black Women at the Williams Avenue YWCA,” *Journal of Women’s History* 15, no. 3 (2003): 190.

²⁰ “Graduation Program,” 1921, University of Washington Special Collections; W. Sherman Savage to Robert D. Clark, November 26, 1974, Byrd Biography Single File Archives, University of Oregon Special Collections.

²¹ Williams, “Portland Basic Civil Rights for Negroes Questionnaire.”

for black students to work through college and less so for their white peers).²²

Washington already had a few African American students, including Horace Cayton, grandson of Hiram Revels, the first black U.S. senator.²³ Byrd would reunite with Cayton years later, when they both arrived in Chicago to train and work as social scientists.

Byrd knew the kinds of things that women could achieve because of the black community in Portland. One of the most influential black leaders was Beatrice Morrow Cannady, a graduate of Northwestern College of Law, editor of the local weekly, *The Advocate*, and founder of the local chapter of the NAACP in 1915. She led the frequent and fierce protests against showings of the "Birth of a Nation."²⁴

Byrd probably looked to Cannady as a role model of a successful professional woman when she returned home to her parents and elder siblings' house after graduation to lead the "Colored branch" of the local YWCA (Cannady proudly reported on Byrd's activities after the young woman left Portland).²⁵ Byrd took over the administration of the portable building at the corner of North Williams and Tillamook Streets only a year after the branch had been established. The Portland Byrd returned to was fundamentally

²² Savage to Clark, November 26, 1974.

²³ Cayton later had a checkered career as a sociologist, most famously producing *The Black Metropolis* with St. Clair Drake before moving into obscurity. Horace R Cayton, "Autobiography for Prof. Hayner, University of Washington," Cayton Papers, Woodson Library, Chicago; Richard S Hobbs, *The Cayton Legacy: An African American Family* (Pullman, Wash: WSU Press, 2002); Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier: African Americans in the American West 1528-1990*.

²⁴ Kimberley Mangun, "As Citizens of Portland We Must Protest," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 107, no. 3 (Fall 2006), <http://www.historycooperative.org.proxy1.cl.msu.edu/journals/ohq/107.3/mangun.html>. See also Mangun's forthcoming book, Kimberley Mangun, *A Force for Change: Beatrice Morrow Cannady and the Struggle for Civil Rights in Oregon, 1912-1936* (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 2010).

²⁵ I thank Kimberley Mangun for directing me to these sources. *The Advocate*, February 28, 1931; *The Advocate*, August 1, 1931; Beatrice Cannady, *The Advocate*, August 15, 1931; "Branch Association to Hear Miss Byrd," *The Advocate*, September 12, 1931..

different from the one she had left only a few years before. Black women had appealed to the national YW headquarters for a branch when they witnessed Portland beginning to segregate in the wake of WWI.²⁶ The Ku Klux Klan arrived in Oregon in 1921, inspired in part by D.W. Griffith's silent film, which premiered in the city despite Cannady's and the NAACP's protests. By 1923 between 15,000 and 45,000 men had joined the KKK, outnumbering black citizens 10 to 1. They burned crosses on Portland's Mt. Scott, an image that could be seen for miles around. One black resident remembered many years later seeing white hooded figures parade proudly through the city streets.²⁷ This upsurge in the KKK followed national patterns; the 1920s witnessed the movement of the KKK into northern and western states and the highest peak in KKK membership.²⁸

Terror threatened outside the YW and Byrd confronted segregation within it. Like most of the black secretaries working for such branches around the country, Byrd was the only paid employee of her association.²⁹ The national YWCA allowed only one local YW in a city—functionally this meant that the first branch, a white one downtown, oversaw the black branch. Particularly chaffing to many black secretaries was the central's ability to appoint white board members to be "chairmen of colored work" and their control over the black branch's budget.³⁰

²⁶ Murdock, "The Persistence of Black Women at the Williams Avenue YWCA," 190.

²⁷ Mangun, "As Citizens of Portland We Must Protest."

²⁸ David A. Horowitz, *Inside the Klavern* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999).

²⁹ Marion Cuthbert, "The Negro Branch Executive," *Womans Press*, April 1933, 190.

³⁰ Helen J. Wilkins, "Interracial Practices in Community YWCAs: A Study under the Auspices of the Commission to Gather Interracial Experiences as Requested by the Seventh National Convention of the YWCA" (New York, 1944), Reel 108, YWCA Papers microfilm; Hedgeman, *Trumpet Sounds*.

Black women had been a part of the national YWCA since 1907. When the members of the National Board decided to develop a policy on segregation that year, they contacted southern white YWCA members to determine the best policy to pursue. The southern women were pleased that the Board had extended this "courtesy" and suggested that the national association accept the existing segregated "negro student associations" but defer the "matter of work in city negro associations" in the South for a year. A National Board more eager to have unity among the white members than to address racial inequities "cordially accepted" these suggestions.³¹ To fulfill these recommendations, the Board began to organize black student groups and recruit new members. To do this, it hired National Association of Colored Women founder Addie Waites Hunton, who with her husband William Alphaeus Hunton Sr. had long worked with the Young Men's Christian Association. She was the first black paid worker to join the national YWCA.³²

Over the next six years, more and more cities like Portland applied to the national association to organize new "colored" associations as these cities witnessed the trickle of African American migrating north and west turn into a stream. All the applications assumed the new associations would be segregated; at first they were administered directly by the national association, until a relationship was built between the black branches and the local white-run association. The subsequent increase in work brought about the hiring of University of Ohio and New York School of Philanthropy graduate Eva Del Vakia Bowles in 1913. Bowles oversaw the African American work in cities, developing and leading the national association's policies toward black branches. She

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"Brief History of Colored Work," Reel 108, YWCA Papers microfilm, Smith College.

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"Brief History of Colored Work"; Robertson, *Christian Sisterhood*.

worked closely with a "Sub-Committee on Colored Work," composed of white women who were at times supportive and at times resistant to her efforts. The YWCA did not initially embrace interracial relations as a major component of its Social Gospel work because white members primarily focused on caring for working (professional and industrial) women and girls. That emphasis expanded somewhat in the aftermath of the 1914 Negro Christian Student Conference when prominent white missionary John Mott called upon black and white leaders in both the YWCA and the YMCA to work together in Christian service.³³

World War I saw the largest expansion of black branches, when black women set them up as sites to give black soldiers a place for recreation and relaxation and to provide resources for black women hired in war time factories. Over the course of the war, Eva Bowles oversaw the growth in national staff from two black secretaries in 1917 to thirteen in 1919. Across the country, sixteen local black branches grew to 49, staffed by 99 black secretaries from an initial nine.³⁴ The Portland YWCA was one of those 49 and Byrd one of the 99.

This growth meant interracial relations became a primary concern for many secretaries in the organization during the 1920s, even while the organization as a whole soft peddled this concern to avoid controversy. The national YWCA decided first to educate white women about the realities of racism, hoping that each educated person would make a change in her behavior and also influence her communities. Bowles and other interested members of the national association hoped that such education and

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Ibid.

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Ibid.

interracial gatherings would convince white women that race relations should be a **prior**ity of the YWCA. This educational work was overseen by “a Council on Colored **Work**” created in 1922; on it Bowles and National Board members cooperated and **disp**uted.³⁵

Byrd’s choice to enter YW work after graduation reflected both her limited **oppo**rtunities and her strong sense of duty to her community. The YWCA was one of the **major** sources of employment for professional black women and a place they could **inhabit** a level of autonomy difficult to achieve in a school. Few professional **oppo**rtunities existed for African Americans outside of New York or Chicago, **partic**ularly for women. Almost the only professions open to black women were teaching **and nursing**; the vast majority of black women went into domestic service.³⁶ Professional **black men**, likewise, went overwhelmingly into teaching, though they could also pursue **medicine**, law, and insurance. In general, black men went into service work, farming, and **had begun** to enter manufacturing. Those with steady jobs, like janitor work or as a **Pullman Porter**, were usually members of the black middle class. Such jobs did not offer **most highly** educated young people career satisfaction. The YWCA offered black women **a place** they could satisfy the emphasis on responsibility to the race instilled in them from **childhood**, without having to deal with white school boards, isolation in rural areas, or **children**. During the 1920s, the YWCA served rising young women, who wanted to **develop** secretarial skills, prepare for positions in shops, or increase their abilities as

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Cheryl Lynn Greenberg, *“Or Does It Explode?”: Black Harlem in the Great Depression* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Susan Tucker, *Telling Memories Among Southern Women: Domestic Workers and Their Employers in the Segregated South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988); Williams, “Portland Basic Civil Rights for Negroes Questionnaire.”

homemakers. They also began to think about the position of industrial laborers, with **some** YWs beginning to advocate for unionism and others trying to teach workers to **accept** their conditions. By 1933, a majority of the 137 black YW secretaries had **undergraduate** degrees or teaching certificates; half of those who held undergraduate **degrees** also had graduate education, which was remarkable when only a tiny percentage **of women** in general and black women in particular received a college education.³⁷

IN THE SUMMER OF 1923, 27 YEAR OLD BYRD FOLLOWED THE CALL to New York **City** that beckons so many intelligent, young, and ambitious Americans. She arranged for **a transfer** to the 137th Street YW branch in Harlem.³⁸ Though she returned throughout **the decades** to visit her parents, she never again lived in the Northwest. Perhaps the **insurgence** of the KKK and the loneliness of being the only paid secretary in her YW **branch** spurred her to leave. Perhaps Cannady passed her issues of the *Crisis* and she read **about the** cultural explosion in Harlem. In New York City, she could socialize with other **young, college educated black women.** She would be not quite so unique. Once she **arrived,** she almost immediately became a part of an extended network of black women, **spread** across and between several organizations, including the Delta Sigma Theta **sorority,** the National Association of College Women, and the NAACP's Women's **Auxiliary.** These women worked to improve education for black students, supported

³⁷ Cuthbert, "The Negro Branch Executive," 190-1. "Between 1917 and 1927, students in Black colleges increased from 2,132 to 13,580, or six fold. There was also a dramatic increase in predominantly white northern campuses. In 1914, for example, there were 60 Black graduates of northern schools; between 1920 and 1933, the annual number of such students increased from 156 to 439, or 181 percent." Giddings, *In Search of Sisterhood*, 80-81.

³⁸ "Oregon: Portland," *Chicago Defender*, September 1, 1923, 22.

black workers, sought out graduate education, raised money to support Harlem **Rena**issance and social work activities, and had a very good time doing it. They also **trave**led internationally, as the next section of this chapter will discuss. Byrd's time with **these** organizations and the relationships she developed with W.E.B. Du Bois, Hubert **Harr**ison, and Alain Locke brought her into a deep and abiding interest in socialism, her **Afr**ican roots, and the social sciences.

A week-long cross-continent train voyage, retracing her voyage as a small child, **gave** her ample time to consider this major change in her life's course. She was going to **enter** Harlem in its glory days, the height of the Renaissance. "Harlem had seemed to **flash** into being like a nova," according to David Levering Lewis. "The war ended, and **there** it was, with its amalgam of money and misery, values and vices, hope and **futility**."³⁹ Harlem attracted its piece of the Great Migration— those African Americans **seeking** industrial jobs and greater opportunity in the suddenly immigrant barren north— as **well** as many college educated blacks seeking professional positions. Like their white **counter**parts on the proverbial Main Street, talented young black men and women sought out **an** intellectual and social milieu that could keep up with their swift and creative **minds**. Newly widespread magazines, like the NAACP's *Crisis* and the National Urban **League's** *Opportunity* arrived on family doorsteps alongside national papers like the *Chicago Defender* and *New York Amsterdam News*. These papers and magazines **described** the excitement and opportunities awaiting the young in New York through **articles** on the emerging arts movement, hospital positions, political situations, gossip **columns**, and others.

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David L Lewis, *When Harlem Was in Vogue* (New York: Knopf, 1981), 27.

Emerging from the subway at 135th street and Lenox, Byrd would have seen **streets** filled with African Americans, including migrants newly arrived from the South, **superbly** coifed women with generations of New York behind them, and perhaps even the **black** police officer that so impressed the Rudolph Fisher's protagonist.⁴⁰ This young **woman**, brought up with white and Asian faces around her, walked with her suitcases **through** a vibrant throng of people, with an array of skin tones that reflected her own, the **two** blocks to the YWCA. Upon entering, she saw black women her age striding with **purposeful** intent and others in quiet conversation in "ample parlor and lobby spaces **conducive** to informal gatherings, formal conferences and committee meetings alike."⁴¹ **She** went from a small, portable YW branch to one of the most well equipped black **branches** in the nation. The air was full of industrial scents and newly constructed **buildings** filled her vision instead of pine trees and mountains.

In New York City there were three locations where black women worked for the YWCA—the 137th Street YW in Harlem, the Ashland Place Branch in Brooklyn, and the **national** office in midtown Manhattan (600 Lexington Ave). Byrd began in the physical **department** of Harlem's branch, where she encouraged other young women to explore all the **health** benefits of exercise. Was that what she had in mind when she traveled cross **country** at the behest of Harlem's beckoning hand? At least, the physical facilities and **programs** of the Harlem YW surpassed most other black branches. Anna Arnold

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Rudolph Fisher, "City of Refuge," in *New Negro*, ed. Alain Locke (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997), 57-74.

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As quoted in Giddings, *In Search of Sisterhood*, 102..

(Hedgeman), who joined the branch a few years after Byrd (and who also became an Armenian), described the facilities:

We had a swimming pool, a gymnasium, a beautiful and well-run cafeteria, a trade school which prepared young women for entry into the garment trades and other industries and the trade union movement; we had a business school, a beauty school, and a residence (those services were available to Negroes only at our branch). We were in a position to prepare young and old for a new kind of New York.⁴²

Branch secretaries also gave out career advice to young black women; this was important when most “employment agencies assumed they [uneducated black women] would work as domestics in seedy hotels and brothels” and had nothing to suggest to women with high school degrees, let alone college diplomas.⁴³

The Harlem branch introduced Byrd to her new intellectual and cultural environment. It benefited from the “‘greats’ of Negro America” who “registered at our information desks when they came to town,” Arnold remembered. YW secretaries asked them to “share their wisdom with us and with the young people (and older ones, too) with whom we worked.”⁴⁴ Prominent black women like Mary Church Terrell, Mary McLeod Bethune, bank president Maggie Walker, college founders Charlotte Hawkins Brown and Nannie Burroughs spoke to YWCA members about how to survive as a professional black woman in a harsh world. “Negro women—dentists, doctors, nurses, beauticians, a principal, social workers, a few teachers, funeral directors, florists—added their

⁴² Anna Arnold Hedgeman, *The Gift of Chaos: Decades of American Discontent* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 12.

⁴³ George Hutchinson, *In Search of Nella Larsen: A Biography of the Color Line* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), 75. Nella Larsen found a job through the YWCA employment agency when she arrived in Chicago after several years in Copenhagen.

⁴⁴ Hedgeman, *The Gift of Chaos*, 12.

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experience and suggested the necessary training required for their respective fields.”⁴⁵

Authors and artists spoke about the art renaissance currently underway in Harlem, and **civil** rights leaders shared about their work.

The 135th street branch of the New York Public Library, later dubbed the **Schomburg** after prominent bibliophile Arthur Schomburg, was just around the corner. It **too**, sponsored lectures, poetry readings, plays, and musical evenings arranged by the **black** librarians in Byrd’s new social set. A few blocks the other way, Rev. Adam **Clayton** Powell, Sr., filled the Abyssinian Baptist Church with his full and robust **preaching**. The Abyssinians joined the YW women in providing social services to the **middle** class and the poor in Harlem. It is likely that Byrd attended church as a major part **of Harlem** society, whether or not she was personally not devout.

The streets of Harlem also provided an education for a woman who grew up far **from** large black communities. Frequent parades of black fraternal organizations stopped **traffic**. Large processions of Garveyites filled the streets. These men and women dressed **in full** military regalia and proclaimed their proud and ancient heritage as Africans. **Sunday** afternoons the churches poured their parishioners onto the streets dressed in their **Sunday** best—they slowly circled the busiest streets to see and be seen. Speakers’ Corner at 125th street and Lenox attracted political speakers of all stripes. Socialist Hubert **Harrison** was frequently heard. Perhaps it was there that Byrd began to listen to and

[illegible]

accept socialist ideas. Three years after she arrived she helped Harrison develop a course **on** the “World Problems of Race” at his Institute for Social Study, 200 W. 135th Street.⁴⁶

There were some efforts at separating neighborhoods by class, but for the most **part** Harlemites mingled across class lines in public spaces. There were a few blocks, like **Strivers** Row and Sugar Hill, that housed the most successful African Americans. The “**tallest** and most exclusive apartment building” in the area, at 409 Edgecombe Avenue, **housed** Walter White’s and Aaron Douglass’ families and served as “quite a party **center**,” according to Langston Hughes.⁴⁷ Most blacks found housing where they could, **because** they were limited to black neighborhoods by white real estate agents and home **owners** unwilling to sell or rent to blacks. Apartments were rented to blacks at higher **rates** than to whites. These apartments were often quite small because realtors and owners **converted** single family homes into multi-family flats to fit more African Americans into **black** parts of town.⁴⁸

Soon after arriving in Harlem, coworkers introduced Byrd to the newly formed **Delta Sigma Theta** sorority for black women undergraduates and graduates of accredited **colleges** (this excluded several black colleges at first because they were still working to **reach** the new accreditation standards). The Deltas had begun ten years previously amid a **flurry** of black fraternal launchings accompanying a rise in the number of black college

⁴⁶ This information is from Jeffery Perry’s second collection of Hubert Harrison’s papers that is forthcoming. Jeffery Perry to Lauren Kientz, “Re: Hubert Harrison and Mabel Byrd,” September 30, 2009.. For more on Harrison, see Perry’s other works: Hubert H. Harrison and Jeffrey Babcock Perry, *A Hubert Harrison reader* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2001); Jeffrey Babcock Perry, *Hubert Harrison* (Columbia University Press, 2009).

⁴⁷ Langston Hughes, *The Big Sea: An Autobiography* (Knopf, 1945), 247-8.

⁴⁸ Lewis, *When Harlem Was in Vogue*.

1. The first step is to identify the problem or question that needs to be addressed. This involves understanding the context and the specific requirements of the task.

students.⁴⁹ While the far west did witness some of the first chapters (in California), the **Pacific** Northwest did not have any chapters when Mabel Byrd was in college.⁵⁰ The **New** York chapters, Rho for the undergraduates and Alpha Beta for the graduates, were **founded** only three years before Byrd arrived in New York in 1920.⁵¹

The Delta chapters became important places for African American women to **exercise** leadership, encourage black scholarship, sponsor the arts (for which the Deltas **became** particularly known among black sororities), and develop social bonds.⁵² Most **black** women who sought higher education were directed into normal school; new **sorority** members rejoiced to find other BA sisters in their communities. Sorority sisters **planned** parties and fundraisers. They organized an Education Week in May.⁵³ In the **summer** and fall, they went on hikes together to enjoy nature and particularly to sustain

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Twenty-two women at Howard University broke from Alpha Kappa Alpha, the first black sorority, in 1913 to found the Deltas. One of their first public actions was marching in the Woman's Suffrage March in Washington DC with Mary Church Terrell at the lead. With the support of this chapter and the second chapter at Wilberforce University in Ohio, small chapters sprang up throughout the country, some tied to universities and some to cities. Black women started most of the chapters at majority white institutions, where the sisterhood and support were even more necessary than at all black institutions.

Others formed at this time include Alpha Phi Alpha (1906), Alpha Kappa Alpha (1908), Kappa Alpha Psi (1911), Omega Psi Phi (1911), and Phi Beta Sigma (1914). Others joined over the years to make the "Divine Nine." Giddings, *In Search of Sisterhood*.

50 University of Washington—1930 University of Oregon—1945; "Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc." accessed February 18, 2009, <http://students.washington.edu/nphc/delta1913.htm>; "Sororities, Greek Life, Fraternities and Sororities at the University of Oregon," accessed February 18, 2009, <http://www.uoregon.edu/~greek/sororities.shtml>.

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Giddings, *In Search of Sisterhood*, 86.

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Unlike almost every other social and uplift organizations founded by African Americans, as Paula Giddings argues, members designed fraternities and sororities to improve the lives of individuals, rather than change society and African Americans' place in it. "The sorority may be unique among Black purposive organizations as it was not conceived to transform society but to transform the individual. The sorority is a sisterhood, and an enabler that helps individuals to grow through cooperation, leadership development, 'culture' and exposure to the leading figures and issues of the times." Giddings also suggests that black sororities melded the academic and social aims of white fraternal organizations with groups like Phi Beta Kappa. Ibid., 19, 21.

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"College Girls to Hold Annual Education Week," *Chicago Defender*, April 26, 1924.

those women who had come to Columbia to study for the summer. Many black women, **including** Juliette Derricotte and Marion Cuthbert, did graduate work at Columbia in the **summer** in the Teachers College and other departments. Anywhere else in America, this **would** have been a lonely endeavor for them as the only black women in class; in Harlem **they** were surrounded by other black women with similar interests and ambitions.

For example, in 1924, the graduate and undergraduate Deltas of New York **combined** for two hiking excursions. In the summer, Byrd, Juliette Derricotte, Lillian **Alexander** and her husband Ernest (a prominent dermatologist), Eslanda Robeson (wife **of Paul**), Gwendolyn Bennett (a Columbia student and secretary of the New York **undergraduate** chapter) and many others went on a “picnic hike” to Spring Valley, NY **with** the Deltas. They were honoring seven “visiting members of the sorority [...] **attending** Columbia University this summer.”⁵⁴ Later that fall, they went on an excursion to “**the** Ramapo mountains near Hillburn, N.Y.”⁵⁵ Among the hikers was a new sorority **sister**, Yolande Du Bois. W.E.B. and Nina’s daughter had recently graduated from Fisk **University** and was then enrolled in an English M.A. program at Columbia.⁵⁶ The party **of 30** sorority sisters and their guests, including several husbands, “climbed to the top of **the Hovenkopft** Mountain for their picnic lunch and visited some of the picturesque **mountain** homes and the cabin studio of Francis Wheaton the artist.”⁵⁷ Derricotte had **planned** Saturday hikes while attending Talladega College as an undergraduate. Perhaps

⁵⁴ “Sorority in Hike,” *Chicago Defender*, July 26, 1924, A5.

⁵⁵ “Delta Sigma Outing,” *Chicago Defender*, November 1, 1924, A4.

⁵⁶ Du Bois to The Board of Education, New York City, 8 Aug 1933, Reel 40, Du Bois Papers microfilm; **David L** Lewis, *W.E.B. DuBois--Biography of a Race, 1868-1919*, 1st ed. (New York: H. Holt, 1993).

⁵⁷ “Delta Sigma Outing,” A4.

it was through her encouragement that the sorority took these excursions into nature. Or **perhaps** Byrd longed to see mountains after growing up cradled by them.⁵⁸

The Deltas reached out to Harlem society beyond their chapter through formal **dances** that raised money for scholarships, the arts, and “racial uplift.” Byrd was a fixture **at these** dances and parties. After becoming president of the Delta graduate chapter, Byrd **sponsored** “one of the opening formal dances of the season” in December 1926.⁵⁹ **Among** the brightly dressed women and men in black suits danced sorors, poets, and **activists**, Sorority sisters Essie Robeson, Lillian Alexander, Jessie Fauset, and Yolande **Du Bois** danced and chatted with Addie Hunton, Countee Cullen, William and Minnie **Pickens**, and Dr. Du Bois.⁶⁰ Yolande and Countee, one of Dr. Du Bois’s favorite young **poets**, were beginning a public courtship. The previous month, Byrd attended a costume **party** hosted by the Ladies Auxiliary of the National Urban League.⁶¹ New Negro **luminaries** she met there and elsewhere included Langston Hughes and Urban League **research** director Ira Reid.⁶² This socialization cemented bonds between generations and **across** different professions, as well as providing needed fundraising for the new **organizations** providing services for those African Americans less well-off (unable to **afford** ball gowns or tuxedos) in Harlem and elsewhere.

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⁵⁹ Mary Jenness, *Twelve Negro Americans* (Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1936), 163-4..

⁶⁰ “D. S.T. Sorority in Formal Dance,” *New York Amsterdam News*, December 8, 1926, 4; “League’s Auxiliary Gives Costume Ball,” *New York Amsterdam News*, November 17, 1926, 4.

⁶¹ “D. S.T. Sorority in Formal Dance,” 4.

⁶² “League’s Auxiliary Gives Costume Ball,” 4.

“Side Lights on Society,” *New York Amsterdam News*, September 1, 1926, 4.

The Deltas encouraged community among African American graduates through **conventions** and scholarships.⁶³ Not only was gathering together face to face important **to develop** relationships that could support one other through trials, but sorors also **recognized** that they depended on each for financial aid. The national Deltas sponsored **fundraisers** for a scholarship to help black women through college.⁶⁴ In addition to **raising** funds for the general Delta scholarship account, the New York chapters decided to **raise** money for a specific scholarship to go to school in Europe. Throughout 1924, they **hosted** card parties and balls (note again, the difference between these kinds of activities **and** cabaret culture held in public spaces and often dependent upon white customers).⁶⁵ **By** the end of the year, they had raised a thousand dollars. They could bestow the **scholarship** in front of the national sorority because they were the hosts of the annual **convention**, held around the first of the year. The local chapters used their “electric” **motto** (as the Chicago Defender termed it)—“Watch New York”—to let the rest of the **nation** know they were planning big things. They focused the meeting on the “cultural **and** educational progress of our Race, with emphasis on the girl.”⁶⁶

All the meetings for the sixth annual conference were held in the Harlem YWCA. **Saturday** evening December 27, “an appreciative audience of nearly two hundred girls, **varying** in size, from short to tall, in color, from the deeper browns to the palest blonds,

⁶³ Giddings explains this as follows: “The sorority is a sisterhood, and an enabler that helps individuals to **grow** through cooperation, leadership development, ‘culture’ and exposure to the leading figures and issues of the times.” Giddings, *In Search of Sisterhood*, 21.

⁶⁴ Pauline A. Young, “Sorority Votes Scholarship to Help Students,” *Chicago Defender*, January 12, 1924.

⁶⁵ “New York Society Note,” *Chicago Defender*, March 22, 1924; “Delta Theta Has New Chapter,” *Chicago Defender*, February 9, 1924. For a close examination of cabaret culture, see Shane Vogel, *The Scene of Harlem Cabaret: Race, Sexuality, Performance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

⁶⁶ “Deltas to Hold Meeting in New York Dec. 27-31,” *Chicago Defender*, December 6, 1924; “Sixth Annual Convention of the Delta Sigma Theta Sorority,” *Philadelphia Tribune*, December 20, 1924.

and in dress from plainly conservative to ultra modish” listened to a performance of *Schuman* by a Delta then studying at Julliard and to two operatic arias. Frances Gunner, president of the Alpha Beta chapter and the secretary of the Ashland Place YWCA read a telegram from Delta sister Jessie Fauset, then in France. Dorothy Canfield Fisher, a novelist and short-story writer, told those assembled that “Greatness is the solution to any problem whether it be the handicap of being born a millionaire, of being born poor, of being a Frenchman, a Caucasian or a Negro.”⁶⁷ She then bestowed Alpha Beta’s first foreign study scholarship to painter and poet Gwendolyn Bennett, who “came forward daintily shy and overcome by this sudden news” that she had received \$1000 to study in France.⁶⁸ Bennett, recently graduated from Pratt Art Institute, had spent the previous semester teaching art at Howard University and was beginning to break into the Harlem arts crowd.⁶⁹ In 1923, one of her paintings graced the cover of the *Crisis* and her first poem was published in the *Opportunity*. Just prior to her award from the Delta, her poem “To Usward” was selected to dedicate the publication of Jessie Fauset’s new novel at the Civic Club dinner sponsored by the Urban League. That dinner is often considered one of the high points of the Harlem Renaissance.⁷⁰

Following the meeting, the sisters from 28 different chapters around the country met and chatted with Harlem luminaries like “James Weldon Johnson, poet and scholar; Charles S. Johnson, editor of *Opportunity*; Mrs. Addie Hunton, prominent club woman;

⁶⁷ “Art Teacher of Howard is Given Sorority Prize.” *Chicago Defender*, January 3, 1925, 5.

⁶⁸ Giddings, *In Search of Sisterhood*, 102-4.

⁶⁹ “Art Teacher of Howard is Given Sorority Prize.” 5.

⁷⁰ Sandra Y. Govan, “Gwendolyn Bennett’s Life and Career,” in *Oxford Companion to African American Literature*, ed. William L. Andrews, Frances Smith Foster, and Trudier Harris (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), http://www.english.illinois.edu/MAPS/poets/a_f/bennett/life.htm.

the Rev. William H. Proctor, Dr. W. E. B. Du Bois, editor of the Crisis; Eugene K. Jones **of the** Urban League.”⁷¹ Du Bois had attended innumerable such parties. When two **weeks** later Bennett began to plan her trip, she found herself “floundering hopelessly” **and** wrote to Du Bois “presuming on [their] friendship for any advice [he] might have to **offer** about going abroad.” She said she was still “walking on air about the whole thing.” **A** month later, Du Bois returned from a trip and replied rather snidely, as one much put-**upon** and frequently petitioned for aid, that he could offer no advice because “I do not **know** (1) when you are going, (2) why you are going, (3) where you are going, (4) what **you** are going to study, (5) how long you are going to stay and how much you are going to **spend**.”⁷² In letters to Derricotte and Byrd, he was usually more than cordial and **helpful**. Perhaps he objected to Bennett’s breezy style and her assumption that he knew **what** she was talking about.⁷³

During the next few days, the sorority sisters reached a few modest resolutions **that** showed they wanted to be involved in the community, but did not want to transform **their** society into a civil rights organization. They were for the most part very passive **resolutions**. They supported the movement to replace photographs with fingerprints on **employment** applications for federal service, so as to reduce discrimination in hiring **practices**. They also supported putting Frederick Douglass in NYU Hall of Fame, which **would** include putting a bust permanently on display. During the election of officers,

71

72 Giddings, *In Search of Sisterhood*, 102-4.

Gwendolyn Bennett to W.E.B. Du Bois, January 19, 1925, Reel 14; W.E.B. Du Bois to Gwendolyn Bennett, February 20, 1925, Reel 14, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

73 This anecdote shows the difficulty of placing too much emphasis on newspaper reports documenting **women’s** societies’ activities. Too many of the reports included who was there, but little about what was **said** or accomplished, particularly during social activities.

Pauline Young, a future Second Amenian, was reelected Journalist. Young was the niece **of poet** Alice Dunbar-Nelson, widow of Paul Lawrence Dunbar. When first elected to her **post** the year before, Young had been part of the Tuskegee Institute Press Service. She **was now** back in Wilmington, Delaware with her family, teaching.⁷⁴ The final day in **New York**, all the sororities and fraternities in town (the four main ones had all arranged **to have** their annual conferences in NY at the same time) gathered at A'Lelia Walker's **home** for a grand goodbye party. Sorority sisters and fraternity brothers could feel that **they** were part of the Harlem Renaissance for an afternoon.⁷⁵

The New York sorority sisters were no stranger to literary salons like those hosted **by A'Lelia Walker** in her "Dark Tower." The 1920s witnessed, according to Langston **Hughes** "a great many parties [...] to which various members of the New Negro group **were** invited."⁷⁶ At these parties a great diversity of folk mingled. Society journalist **Geraldyn Dismond** enthused, "What a crowd! All classes and colors met face to face, **ultra** aristocrats, Bourgeois, Communists, Park Avenuers galore, bookers, publishers, **Broadway** celebs, and Harlemites giving each other the once over. The social revolution **was on.**"⁷⁷ Some embraced these meetings as special spaces to test out their new ideas **and** new artistic attempts. Others believed attendees postured and jostled each other, **affecting** high and false manners.⁷⁸ Zora Neale Hurston and Howard Thurman ridiculed **this** crowd, which no doubt included many YW secretaries and Delta sisters, as the

⁷⁴ **Giddings**, *In Search of Sisterhood*, 102-4.

⁷⁵ "Art Teacher of Howard is Given Sorority Prize."

⁷⁶ **Ibid.**, 243.

⁷⁷ **Geraldyn Dismond** as quoted in **Ibid.**

⁷⁸ **Lewis**, *When Harlem Was in Vogue*, 105.

“*Niggerati*.”⁷⁹ They saw too much concern over seeing and being seen among this crowd, rather than dedication to ideas, literature, and political activism. Hurston would rather be down in the Harlem streets or back in Florida among more humble folk, who did not pretend to be something they were not.

Too much focus on Hurston and Thurman’s term misses how important the introduction to intellectuals could be to those who had grown up without other blacks interested in critically examining their world.⁸⁰ Byrd left no record of her impression of these salons, but another YWCA worker who grew up at a similar remove from large black communities, Anna Arnold described how excited she was to participate in intellectual conversation at A’Lelia Walker’s salon. When she first arrived in the East from Minnesota, she rode the train from New Jersey to Harlem “for freedom, recreation and social contact.”⁸¹ Arnold listened with rapt attention to Langston Hughes, “looking like a slim brown angel,” read his poetry.⁸² When offered a job within the heart of Harlem, the 137th Street YWCA, she eagerly accepted. In the elegant rooms of A’Lelia Walker’s home,

79 Ibid., 193.

80 I think posturing may have been more important for black men who had so few outlets for ego development other than as leaders in black communities. Women in the United States are more acculturated to cooperation rather than individual leadership. Still, they could have their ego stroked by seeing their name in the paper for planning or attending a big gala event. Perhaps, though, historians and cultural critics (David Levering Lewis, Carter G. Woodson, Harold Cruse) have over emphasized the posturing and missed the radicalism (or if not radicalism, other important work being done). As Brent Hayes Edwards explains, “Recent work likewise follows up on a claim particularly evident in [C. L. R.] James’s work, that revolutionary movements ‘take forms that are often cultural and religious rather than explicitly political.’” Brent Hayes Edwards, “The “Autonomy” of Black Radicalism,” *Social Text* 19, no. 2 (2001).

81 Hedgeman, *Trumpet Sounds*, 39.

82 Marcy Knopf, *The Sleeper Wakes: Harlem Renaissance Stories by Women* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1993), xxvii.

Negro celebrities came there and one could always anticipate stimulating conversation. Rose McClendon, acclaimed for her work in the theater, was one of Mme. Walker's most glamorous guests. W. E. B. Du Bois talked of Africa and pan-Africanism. James Weldon Johnson was our authority on the history of the Negro and on literature of all kinds. William Pickens, affectionately known as "The Dean" spoke of his work with the NAACP and brought humor to the discussion of race.⁸³

Pickens surprised her with his laughter and humorous stories: never before had she heard "Black men treat racial indignities with humor."⁸⁴

Lillian and Ernest Alexander also held a literary salon in their apartment at 34 West 129th Street, and later in the 1920s their house on Strivers Row, to which they invited the young women Lillian mentored through the YW and the NAACP. This female mentorship is often missed in Harlem Renaissance historiography, which tends to focus on male mentors like Du Bois, Locke, or Charles Johnson (perhaps adding in Jessie Fauset, literary editor of the *Crisis*). Indeed, research on Lillian Alexander would be excellent future work, as she is entirely absent from the historiography, but ever present in newspaper accounts of the era, as one of the most prominent black organization women in New York. Poet Langston Hughes' likened her parties to Jessie Fauset's tame gatherings where people read poetry and spoke French (Hughes preferred Walker's more boisterous parties). At the Alexander's "you met the upper crust Negro intellectuals like Dr. Du Bois," he remarked, with a hint of derision.⁸⁵

Like Arnold, Lillian Alexander had also arrived in New York from the Midwest. Born in 1876, she was raised in Ohio before attending the University of Minnesota for

⁸³ Hedgeman, *Trumpet Sounds*, 40.

⁸⁴ Hedgeman, *Trumpet Sounds*, 50.

⁸⁵ Langston Hughes, *The Big Sea: An Autobiography* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993 (1940)), 249.

her undergraduate degree. She was named to the Phi Beta Kappa honor society there. A position at the National Urban League first called her east. She resigned from that position to marry Ernest, but never resigned from social work in general. Throughout her life, she was one of the most active organization women in Harlem—supporting, fundraising, mentoring, planning, and guiding. In addition to the organizations discussed here, she was also active on the board of the Columbus Hill Day Nursery, and founded Club Caroline, “a cooperative housing project for working girls.”⁸⁶

In 1924, Alexander became one of the first black women appointed to the NAACP board of directors. She helped organize the Women’s Auxiliary of the NAACP, which, among other things, planned huge fundraising balls.⁸⁷ This was a select group, called by some “The Committee of One Hundred Women.” One of their parties in March 1925 raised \$1709.60 (Du Bois made about \$2500 in 1914 for a rough comparison). Some of the officers of the auxiliary included Rose McClendon, Schomburg librarian Richetta G. Randolph, and James Weldon Johnson’s wife, Grace Nail.⁸⁸ Alexander also supported musical concerts. She presented Lillian Evanti in a concert in 1925. Evanti was then on the cusp of international fame as an opera singer (she moved to France that year). The concert, held in the auditorium of the International House, raised money for the Fisk Endowment Fund.⁸⁹ The International House, only a few blocks north of Columbia

⁸⁶ George Hutchinson, *In Search of Nella Larsen* (Harvard University Press, 2006), 129.

⁸⁷ Fisk had to pay off all its debts so it could receive the million dollar endowment pledged by the General Education Board and Carnegie Fund. For the events leading up to this need, see Chapter 4. Thelma Berlack, “N.A.A.C.P. Gives Biggest And Best Dance Of Season,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, April 4, 1925.

⁸⁸ “Women’s Auxiliary Benefit” *Crisis*, July 1925, 125.

⁸⁹ “New York Society” by Mrs. H. Binga Dismond, *The Pittsburgh Courier*, Oct 31, 1925 p 6. Evanti was featured on the cover of the January 1928 *Crisis* magazine.

University, served as a boarding house for Columbian students from around the globe as well as a frequent site for interracial and international gatherings. It is an under researched site for interracial dialogue during the 1920s and 1930s.

Alexander supported new authors, particularly her young neighbor Nella Larsen. Nella and her husband, Elmer Imes, lived in the same apartment building as the Alexanders during the early 1920s. Larsen, who started out as a nurse, had much in common with the literary and medically minded couple. In addition, they all supported progressive politics. When Larsen applied for the Harmon Foundation grant, Alexander signed as her nominator.⁹⁰ Perhaps most importantly, they were comfortable enough with themselves that they could hear critique of themselves and their community. This is evident in their reactions to Carl Van Vechten's novel *Nigger Heaven*. Many women in the organization circle, including Jessie Fauset, cut off all contact with Van Vechten for his negative portrayal of African Americans and Harlem. The title itself repelled many. Alexander initially followed her friends' outrage, in response to reviews in the paper. But then she actually read the book. When she had finished, she wrote to Imes an apology (they had quarreled over the book, which Imes and Larsen both liked immensely). She explained how the book had spoken to her,

Really the book is an epic—to me—(and I rarely rave over anything or anybody) and is revealing in every line of Negro wants, needs, failures and why, aspirations and the vicious circle that prevents their realization.

And it is true at the same time. Most folks choke over the prologue but I just drank it in because you know how well I know my Lenox and Seventh Avenues and how I walk up and down them drinking in the magnificent comedy and the dire tragedy and woe encountered in every block. Except for some of his obscure slang, Carl knows *Nigger Heaven*

almost (?) as well as I! Love to you and Nell and when shall we see you both?⁹¹

Though Larsen and Hurston spoke about women's society in Harlem as narrow and confining, it is hard to imagine the author of these words—Lillian Alexander, one of the major leaders of women's society in New York—being categorized with those quintessential society ladies, Jane Austen's Lady Catherine de Bourg or Oscar Wilde's Lady Augusta Bracknell. It may be that Larsen and Hurston chaffed at having only one society they felt they could freely walk among—it was middle class “respectable” ladies' society or nothing, unless they chose to break major societal expectations. Hurston did choose to move among many societies, while Larsen remained isolated.

Despite their friendship, Alexander could not persuade Larsen to join in all the different organizations she frequented. Indeed, Larsen often critiqued Harlem's society women for the false nature of their relationships. Unlike Byrd, she did not enter the community of women until making a name for herself with the publication of her first novel, *Quicksand*, in 1927. Her friendship with Walter White, who after his own literary success tried to steer many other authors into publication houses, was particularly important to her.⁹² After the publication of her book, she excitedly wrote to Carl Van Vechten:

On May thirteenth, Sunday, The *Women's Auxilliary* of the NAACP is going to give a tea for me!!! [two underscores on the phrase Women's Auxilliary and six on the word me]. The good God only knows why. I hope you will get an invitation because this will be a time when I will need all of my friends. You will be very pleased to know that I was very gracious about accepting, though I wanted very much to have the pleasure

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As quoted in Hutchinson, *In Search of Nella Larsen*, p 546. Lally (Lillian A.) Alexander to Elmer S. James, 23 October 1926, Box 20, Folder 4 CVV/NYPL.

92

Hutchinson, *In Search of Nella Larsen*.

of refusing. I acted as if nothing had happened, and declared myself very flattered. I dread breaking the news to Elmer, because I'm sure he'll be so furious that he'll have a convulsion of some sort.⁹³

She **accepted** and attended the tea, but left dissatisfied with her experience. The afternoon did **not** change her perception of the society ladies. They were still too conscious of **reputation** and respectability for her.

Byrd proved her acceptance in this society soon after she arrived in Harlem by publishing an essay in the *Crisis* in January 1924 only six months after she had arrived on the **E**ast Coast. Somewhere in all her activities, someone introduced Byrd to the editors of the *Crisis*. Either W.E.B. Du Bois or Jessie Fauset, temporarily senior editor as Du Bois **traveled** to Europe and Liberia for the Third Pan-African Congress, accepted Byrd's **article** reassessing the ideas about black and white intelligence that she had been raised with in integrated schools. This article was an important marker of her entry into the intellectual community of Harlem. White magazines had begun to open to a trickle of **black** authors, but most had to seek publication through black editors. Even then, it was **difficult** to be published. Some despaired of ever being printed in those hallowed pages.⁹⁴

Byrd used her first national platform to challenge the assumptions about black and **white** intelligence that she received growing up in integrated schools. She needed to

93

Ibid., 277.

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Among those who expressed a keen desire to be published in the *Crisis* were Allison Davis, Abram Harris, Gustavus Steward, and over a hundred women. Allison Davis to W. E. B. Du Bois, April 11, 1927, Reel 23, Du Bois Papers microfilm; Abram Harris to George Goetz, Calverton Papers, NYPL; Gustavus Steward to E. Franklin Frazier, Frazier Papers, MSRC; Lorraine Elena Roses and Ruth Randolph, eds., *Harlem's Glory: Black Women Writing 1900-1950* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1996), 1-2.

purge the idea, common in textbooks, that Europeans and their descendents were the only group to have wisdom and intelligence. Her contribution to the *Crisis*, along with dozens of other women's articles, indicates several things—that women's ideas were not limited to the halls of the YWCA, that women's ideas were valued by editors (even while often regulated to women's and children's issues), and that women participated in the proliferation of writing that bound Harlem together intellectually in addition to their organizational events that bound Harlemites together physically and culturally. Byrd's *Crisis*'s article was an important marker of her acceptance into the intellectual community of Harlem. In the same issue appeared the first chapter of Du Bois's book "The Black Man and the Wounded World," about African Americans in WWI, the conclusion of Claude McKay's series on "Soviet Russia and the Negro," and a report about the "Third Pan-African Congress".

Byrd's article also offers the first glimpse of her perceptions of blackness, wisdom, and thought. She reviewed Joseph Chandler Harris' recently published first book *Uncle Remus, His Songs and His Sayings*, praising it for capturing the wisdom of slaves. Enslaved Africans developed wise proverbs from the immediate circumstances of their lives.⁹⁵

In the article, Byrd battled entrenched stereotypes that did not recognize African Americans' wisdom or intelligence, rather than taking on the new ideas floating around bohemian New York since WWI that African Americans "had retained a direct virility

95

Mabel Byrd, "Plantation Proverbs of 'Uncle Remus'," *Crisis*, January 1924, 118.

that the whites had lost through being overeducated.”⁹⁶ She did not suggest that slave wisdom should trump white ideas, like Marcus Garvey’s followers might have, but rather suggested to her readers “that taking into consideration [a slave’s] thoughts, his unconscious expressions of wisdom, would be not only justice but also kindness to him” when “judging the ante-bellum Negro of the South in attributing traits and characteristics to him.”⁹⁷ It was a kindness because, “[c]ontrary to the opinion of some critics of the Negro, the antebellum Negro did think; and the expression of his thoughts in the plantation proverbs, is the embodiment of truths of great value.”⁹⁸ When she argued against those critics, perhaps she had in mind teachers, professors, or neighbors from the Northwest. She urged her readers to see that slaves captured some of the same wisdom as whites, but arrived at it by a different, unique path. For the classic proverb that pride comes before a fall, Remus said “De proudness un a man don’t count win his haid’s cole.”⁹⁹ Byrd saw depths of wisdom within the dialect, a wisdom that arose out of particular circumstances. “Therein lies a fundamental slave trait—he saw the small comparatively unimportant side of life first.”¹⁰⁰ The commonplace nature of the saying may have made some laugh “at the mere suggestion” of its inherent wisdom, but in laughing the reader missed the deeper truth. Maybe Byrd had suffered such laughter in her earlier years; perhaps she had joined in.

⁹⁶ Malcolm Cowley, *Exile's Return: A Literary Odyssey of the 1920s* (New York: Penguin Classics, 1994), 237.

⁹⁷ Byrd, “Plantation Proverbs of ‘Uncle Remus’,” 118.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 119.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

This early article shows how proud Byrd was (or was trying to be) of the intellectual heritage her race gave her, but also how frustrated she was by Euro-American assumptions about her own intelligence.¹⁰¹ Having grown up in the Pacific Northwest, she probably knew few former slaves (even her grandparents, who had most likely been slaves, lived far away in the East) and had to learn their wisdom through Harris. Her school books had most likely advanced the common idea that Africans were innately inferior. Harris was a white journalist who was later attacked for his description of slavery as a benign institution, which served as university and apprenticeship for African slaves, teaching them the “superior” Western culture.¹⁰² In 1924, this perception of slavery was so widespread among Americans that Byrd does not even comment upon it.

¹⁰¹ Her pride was more constrained than Sterling Brown's. Brown thoroughly rejoiced at folk songs and stories, even Harris's to some extent (as long as the Remus stories were balanced out with many other portraits of black Americans). He told an interviewer in 1974, “Uncle Remus is a very complex person. Uncle Remus tells the tales, and these were folktales that Joel Chandler Harris gathered and put in Uncle Remus's mouth. Harris caught them with a good local colorist's ear. The idiom and the phrases. So Uncle Remus talks well. When the tales stay as tales, when the tales stay with the animals who, of course, are human . . . when Harris does that, he's in a very rich tradition, and this is valuable because they would have been lost without him. I think that our own second generation respectability wouldn't have kept them because of our ignorance of how good folk stuff is. The folk don't know how good they really are. They just say this is something my grandmother told me, which means one woman's old stories and that sort of thing. You know that from your own collecting. So here comes a man [Joel Chandler Harris] who was to a degree an outsider and to a degree an insider. . . . He was an insider in that he, as a lonesome kid, was thrown in contact with black people. The people who taught him were black--these “old uncles” and kids and the rest. They had something that he learned. So he learned the superficial local color idiom and other superficial things. But he collected the tales. Now, when you've got Uncle Remus becoming the teacher for the little white boy, that is Joel Chandler Harris creating a framework, and he had to do that because his audience was going to be chiefly white and chiefly plantation tradition-minded; but the stories themselves are not plantation tradition. But then you've got Uncle Remus becoming the crackerbox philosopher. Uncle Remus becomes a spokesman for what Joel Chandler Harris would put into his mouth . . . in Harris's editorials . . . you get the kinds of things I pointed out . . . how he attacks education and how he attacks Negroes leaving the South, and how he attacks. . . . He used him. Therefore you've got several Uncle Remuses, and I don't know whether he's so much a complex as compound thing. The idea is he's made up of many, but the stories themselves are very rich and very valuable. I dislike dismissing them merely because of Joel Chandler Harris. He was not a liberal; he was a reactionary, but he was more decent than [Thomas Nelson] Page. Harris was still a reactionary, but I think you ought to distinguish between them. I've been anxious to do that.” Charles H. Rowell and Sterling Allen Brown, ““Let Me Be wid Ole Jazzbo”: An Interview with Sterling A. Brown,” *Callaloo* 21, no. 4 (1998): 791-92.

¹⁰² Robert Cochran, “Black Father: The Subversive Achievement of Joel Chandler Harris,” *African American Review* 38, no. 1 (2004): 22.

That does not mean she agreed with Harris, though. She uses Harris' work to prove the innate (not schooled) wisdom of slaves, subverting his idea that slavery taught Africans all **t**hey knew.¹⁰³

In this article, Byrd echoed the perception about African Americans of those around her. James Weldon Johnson, raised in the South among many former slaves, put **p**raise for Harris' work in the mouth of his protagonist in "Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man." He named "the Uncle Remus stories, collected by Joel Chandler Harris" as **o**ne of "four things which refute the oft-advanced theory that [African Americans] are an **a**bsolutely inferior race, which demonstrate that they have originality and artistic **c**onception, and, what is more, the power of creating that which can influence and appeal **u**niversally," along with Jubilee Songs, rag-time music, and the cakewalk.¹⁰⁴ Byrd also **e**choed the New Negro movement, which focused on returning to black roots to find rich **s**oil **f**or artistic inspiration. This article gave Byrd a chance to place herself firmly within that **m**ovement.

Despite the attractions of Harlem, Byrd's tenure with that branch proved short **l**ived, as her interest in industrial work grew beyond her role in the physical department. **B**y 1932, Byrd allied herself with the communist party. It is unclear when she first started **t**o **b**e attracted to socialism, but the YWCA industrial department could have sparked her

103

Cochran argues that Harris intended for Remus to be understood as a complicated figure worthy of **r**egard, as Byrd did. "It's high time, then, to at least consider the possibility that Harris constructed his tales **a**nd their framing narratives with consummate skill and deliberate cunning, that multiple ironies were not **o**nly not lost upon him but were in fact something of his stock-in-trade, and that he was, in short, something of a **B**rer Rabbit among authors. Uncle Remus, but such an approach, is revealed as a secret hero of **H**arris's work, a figure wholly worthy of comparison with Brer Rabbit himself. In creating him, Harris put **f**orward, covertly, by extraordinarily oblique means, a vision that would have shocked and horrified the **g**reat majority of his readers, had they understood him." Ibid.: 24.

104

James Weldon Johnson, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1960), 87.

interest. A year after she arrived, she and another secretary attended a “setting up” staff conference on Work with Industrial Girls’ clubs, a social group to help factory workers deal with the problems in their workplaces and find solace in each other.¹⁰⁵ These clubs sometimes turned into proto-unions.¹⁰⁶ In the summer of 1925, Byrd attended two summer industrial club conferences; at one she was a “special group leader.”¹⁰⁷ Her work and activities during this period introduced her to the similar plights of black and white workers and to the special discrimination blacks faced. The YW at this time was working on improving working conditions in factories. Ten years previously it had permitted union work, but the national organization did not officially support unions. The national YW found them too violent and divisive for the spirit of unity that the YW professed.¹⁰⁸

In September 1925, two years after she arrived in the East, Byrd got to explore her interest in labor relations more directly “as membership and industrial secretary” at the Ashland Place Branch in Brooklyn.¹⁰⁹ This branch had been dedicated in 1918 just east of the intersection of Flatbush Ave and DeKalb. It included “social rooms, library,

¹⁰⁵ “New York Y.W.C.A. News,” *Chicago Defender*, October 18, 1924, A7.

¹⁰⁶ “New York Y.W.C.A. News,” A7; Carol Groneman and Mary Beth Norton, *To Toil the Livelong Day* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987), 195; Hedgeman, *Trumpet Sounds*, 47-8.

¹⁰⁷ “137th St. Y.W.C.A.,” *Chicago Defender*, September 5, 1925, A3; “Brooklyn YWCA,” *Chicago Defender*, September 12, 1925, A7.

¹⁰⁸ Henrietta Roelofs, “The Problem of Women in Industry: A Report of the Women’s Industrial Conference at Washington,” *Womans Press*, March 1923; Lucy P. Carner, “The Women’s Industrial Conference,” *Womans Press*, March 1926. Katrina Hagen has argued, “In fact, labor issues were a major emphasis of the political and social work of both the national and Portland, Oregon YWCAs from their foundings until the 1950s.” Katrina Hagen, “From “Industrial Girls” to “Career Girls”: Postwar Shifts in Programs for Wage-Earning Women in the Portland YWCA,” *Journal of Women's History* 15, no. 3 (2003): 203.

¹⁰⁹ “Brooklyn YWCA,” A7.

class rooms, gymnasium, cafeteria and sleeping rooms with accommodation for twenty-two girls.”¹¹⁰ The *Crisis* article introducing the branch described it as an impressive five-story building. Two decades later, Anna Arnold remembered entering a markedly different building when she took it over as executive secretary in 1937. She described the difference between the Central YWCA of Brooklyn and the Ashland Branch:

The Central YWCA of Brooklyn was located in a large, well-equipped building, while the Negro Club, Ashland Place Branch, was in an unattractive, poorly maintained clubroom-residence operation in a former brownstone residence. Approximately four blocks separated these two buildings. There was no Negro neighborhood in the immediate vicinity of the Negro branch. It reminded me sharply of the big houses of Southern white folks and the shacks of Southern Negroes.¹¹¹

She despaired at the physical conditions of the branch that rarely drew people in and the obvious segregation represented by the two YWs so close to each other. Indeed, some Brooklynites traveled the forty minutes or so by subway to the Harlem YWCA rather than enter the one in their area.¹¹²

Byrd arrived in between these two descriptions. Black newspapers frequently included columns on the activities at the Ashland Place YW that did not allude to the problematic features of the branch. Rather, they highlighted events and small successes. For example, they noted when Byrd invited Lillian Alexander to discuss “The Charm of Being Well Read” and when Byrd attended the Regional Industrial Conference in

¹¹⁰ “Horizon,” *Crisis*, April 1918, 297.

¹¹¹ Hedgeman, *Trumpet Sounds*, 72-73.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 72-75.. She did not admit this until writing her autobiography years later. At the time, she told journalists that the location of the Ashland Street Branch was a “gold mine” for how close it was to public transportation stations. “This would mean that when we get increased facilities, we will be able to reach out into the entire Negro community of Brooklyn. People coming from East New York, Flatbush and the Stuyvesant-Bedford sections all must pass through Ashland place when they go shopping or to the theatre.” This suggests that Arnold Hedgeman still thought the primary YW demographic was middle class. Marvel J. Cooke, “Woman of Tremendous Energy is Behind Guns at Ashland Place: Anna Hedgeman Gives 1st Close-up on Social Problems in Brooklyn,” *New York Amsterdam News*, May 13, 1939, 14..

Trenton, N.J.¹¹³ At this conference, “an Ashland Place ‘Y’ Club girl, Florida Pinkney” was the discussion leader of the theme Group Consciousness. The *New York Amsterdam News* made special note of this because it was “significant of the progress in race relations that a colored girl [was] chosen to lead discussion in a conference group composed of girls representing many nationalities and phases of industry.”¹¹⁴ Black YW secretaries served over and over again as diplomats entering white territory, breaking small colors lines again and again. Often, though, the color lines oozed back together in their wake.

Through her friendship with Du Bois and Fauset, Mabel Byrd learned about the Pan-African Congresses. She was excited by the idea of connecting people of African descent around the world and influencing the power and economic structures she had been teaching in Hubert Harrison’s institute. Du Bois’ coverage of the Pan-African Congresses through the *Crisis* and through personal lectures influenced Harlem toward internationalism. (Marcus Garvey’s work, also heavily international, was mostly derided among that social set). Yet it was Harlem’s society of women, through the Circle for Peace and Foreign Relations, that helped Du Bois work through his plans for the Fourth Pan-African Congress and turn them into reality. Over the past decade, Du Bois had spearheaded the Pan-African Congresses, which had met 3 times for a tour of European capitals to discuss common themes of black oppression under imperialism and

¹¹³ “Brooklyn YWCA,” *New York Amsterdam News*, September 30, 1925, 8.

¹¹⁴ “‘Y’ Delegation to Leave in Special Bus for Trenton,” *New York Amsterdam News*, Feb 24 1926, 8.

democracy.¹¹⁵ The first two had been funded primarily by the NAACP; the third largely by the Circle for Peace and Foreign Relations, a Harlem women's group.¹¹⁶

In addition to their work for the YW and the NAACP, their sponsoring of New Negro writers and artists, their club work, and anti-lynching crusades, Byrd's company of mentors organized the Circle for Peace and Foreign Relations. Officers included executive Addie Hunton, "a legend among feminists and civil rights leaders" and the first black woman hired by the national YWCA twenty years previously; Nina Du Bois, William's wife; Lillian Alexander; Jessie Fauset; Ida Gibbs Hunt, and Minnie Pickens, wife of NAACP field secretary William Pickens.¹¹⁷ They began to discuss the Fourth Pan-African Congress during the spring of 1927, while Byrd was preparing to go to Europe for the first time.

Many scholars have written that the Circle's role was only administrative, while Du Bois provided the vision (reflecting the classic women organize, men lead paradigm); the reality was more complicated.¹¹⁸ The Circle prepared Harlem to host the fourth Pan-African Congress that summer, "on a much larger scale than anything hitherto

¹¹⁵ Originally the congresses were held every two years, 1919, 1921, 1923. The third conference had worn out its members. For more information on the Pan-African movement, see Jessie Fauset, "Impressions of the Second Pan-African Conference," *Crisis*, December 1921; Imanuel Geiss, *The Pan-African Movement: A History of Pan-Africanism in America, Europe, and Africa* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 1974); Kenneth Robert Janken, *Rayford W. Logan and the Dilemma of the African-American Intellectual* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993).

¹¹⁶ Publicity Committee to Du Bois, March 8, 1927, Reel 21, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

¹¹⁷ Circle for Peace and Foreign Relations Letterhead, Box 17 Folder 18, Melville Herskovits Papers, Northwestern University Special Collections; David L. Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: The Fight for Equality and the American Century, 1919-1963* (New York: Henry Holt, 2000), 208.

¹¹⁸ Such scholars include Geiss and Lewis; Geiss, *The Pan-African Movement*; Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: The Fight for Equality*.

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attempted.”¹¹⁹ Some sources say they invited the delegates, planned the content of each speech, found accommodations at the YWCA and local churches, and circulated publicity. They also hosted a gala ball at the Savoy to raise funds for the congress.¹²⁰

Other sources indicate that at the last minute, W. E. B. Du Bois and Hunton, the executive of the Circle, realized their communication had been confused—each expecting the other to advertise and select speakers. Yet, “The clubwomen succeeded in raising three thousand indispensable dollars and a fine editorial tribute from the *Amsterdam News*, Harlem’s newspaper of record.”¹²¹ Unfortunately, the Circle did not succeed in bringing in many overseas guests and the Congress sessions were primarily attended by African Americans. The Circle had arranged “technical perfection,” but none of their efforts could conceal the “movement’s inner weakness” and their goal to establish “a permanent fund for the Pan African Congresses and the formation of a permanent organization to promote them” was not achieved.¹²²

Byrd took a strong network of friends with her to Europe, only a letter away. She had arrived in Harlem four years before with charisma, a strong academic record, and, perhaps, an inchoate interest in socialism. In New York, she discovered a social network of women that challenged her mentally, encouraged her sense of social responsibility, and provided her a large group of black college graduates with whom to socialize. She

¹¹⁹ Publicity Committee to Du Bois, March 8, 1927, Reel 21, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

¹²⁰ Geraldine Dismond, “New York Society,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, March 26, 1927.

¹²¹ Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: The Fight for Equality*, 209.

¹²² Geiss, *The Pan-African Movement*, 257. Du Bois to Annie Dingle, 9 Mar 1927, Reel 21, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

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encountered men and women interested in the immediate needs of workers in addition to the development of a society of literary salons, gossip columns, and gala balls.

Something, though, was still missing. Throughout those four years, men and women had gone back and forth to Europe, bringing back stories of the freedom found across the Atlantic Ocean, the craze for all things black in Paris, and the attempts at international governance in Geneva. Byrd knew her self-education was not yet finished and that her skills could be applied in many more places.

Juliette Derricotte

WHILE WORKING FOR THE YWCA, black secretaries had to decide whether they would embrace the very particular brand of interracialism that the national office espoused. During this period, “interracial” stood for many things. Sometimes it meant simply the conversations and plans African Americans and whites had for ending racial discrimination. As a minority in this country, most blacks recognized that ending discrimination would necessarily mean cooperating with whites on some level, but by no means did most agree that this would involve creating friendships or some kind of interracial harmony. An excellent example was raised at a meeting of the Intercollegiate Association in August, 1925 (future Amenians Lillian Alexander represented the University of Minnesota and Ira DeA. Reid represented Morehouse College and the University of Pittsburgh). Delegates grappled with the meaning and benefits of interracial cooperation; “The chairman in opening the discussion said that he did not believe in interracial cooperation as such. Some of the speakers declared that interracial cooperation was a form of patronage on the part of white people of this country; while others said that

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a great deal of good and benefit to each group had come from interracial cooperation.”¹²³

Anna Arnold’s experience in the YWCA caused her to reject all white people, for a time. More of her story will be discussed in the next section, but one vignette is illustrative here. She had gone home to Anoka, Minnesota after a decade in YWCA work throughout the country. On Sunday, she attended the church she had grown up in with her immediate family. She was warmly welcomed and the pastor invited her to share a few words about her work in the “uplift” of her “people.” The rest of the service could not penetrate her seething mind. If those she had grown up with were not her people, who was? Then there was that word—“uplift.” It had been accepted by the generation of black club women before her, but she wrestled with its implications. “Bitterness within me seethed at the word ‘uplift,’” she later wrote, “for I had come to believe that it was white people who needed to be uplifted.” On the train back to Harlem, she reflected on this latest experience with white folks and all those that had come before it:

I felt that I had no choice but to reject all white people. Even my hometown church no longer belonged to me. Beyond this personal reflection was the knowledge, born out of experience, that no Negro could expect any white person to love, respect and honor any people except white people.¹²⁴

She was grateful to return to her vibrant, adopted community full of black folks for the time being.

Three premises lay behind the YW’s interracial cooperation, according to Nancy Robertson: “The first was that the ‘best elements of both races’ needed to work together.

¹²³ Cleveland Allen, “Intercollegiates Condemn Fraternities And Sororities,” *Norfolk New Journal and Guide*, August 8, 1925, 8.

¹²⁴ Hedgeman, *Trumpet Sounds*, 43.

Second, in doing so, they would promote mutual understanding and harmony and ease racial tensions. And, finally, these efforts could be carried on within the confines of a segregated society.”¹²⁵ Derricotte focused her efforts on educating white and black college women (and sometimes men) about the realities of race and on encouraging their mutual friendship. This included an education in class-based respectability; by arriving poised, elegant, and educated at a white college, Derricotte put the lie to stereotypes about blacks just by being herself. In the words of her white friend Winnifred Wygal, Derricotte was “tall, well-built, attractive [with] an expression of keen intelligence lighted and softened in turn by a radiant wit and an unusual capacity for sympathy and for a sense of the tragic.”¹²⁶ While Derricotte operated within a segregated society, with a full understanding of southern racial etiquette, she did not fail to push at the boundaries of segregation. In order to encourage interracial friendship, Derricotte sponsored interracial conferences. Yet, these conferences confronted segregated housing and dining facilities in the north and the south. She and other YW secretaries steadily worked to improve those conditions throughout the 1920s.

Though their rhetoric bowed to many forms of segregation and discrimination, the YW encouraged peace, unity, and brotherhood above all else.¹²⁷ Immediately after WWI, this rhetoric was aimed particularly at stopping war. As the 1920s progressed, it

¹²⁵ Robertson, *Christian Sisterhood*, 62.

¹²⁶ Winifred Wygal, “Juliette Derricotte: Her Character and Her Martyrdom,” *Crisis*, March 1932, 84.

¹²⁷ Robertson has also noticed this trend. YWCA white women, particularly upper middle class women, believed the bond of womanhood extended universally, “‘deeper than all racial separateness.’” They spoke often of “‘Christian sisterhood’ as an important means to build a better world. The term both conveyed their motivation and legitimized their social activism at a time when women were supposedly relegated to the home.” She argues that many black women agreed with this ideology, even while profoundly disagreeing with white women who continued to act along Jim Crow lines. *Ibid.*, 2.

became focused more consistently on race relations nationally and internationally. White women began to recognize that “the brotherhood of man idea” discussed so often in relation to world fellowship, “somehow or other had something to do with Negroes.”¹²⁸ YW women used local and national conventions to foster positive interactions between black and white women. One article in the YW organ, the *Woman's Press*, neatly captured the worldview of the YW. The author praised the YWCA summer conference's ability “to counteract the prejudices and divisions, the fractional expressions of our national and international life.” Conferences held an international importance:

In the larger fields of activity it is true that in so far as there has been any enduring achievement in international brotherhood, it has come to pass through conference procedure. Conspicuous illustrations are the Irish Commonwealth, the League of Nations, the Washington Conference for Reduction of Armaments. Strikes, lockouts, boycotts, wars—weapons all of an unbrotherly society—have served a purpose, yet the final stage in all these processes, if any settlement be arrived at, is a conference, with the atmosphere much less conducive to brotherhood than it would have been had the conference been first, not last.¹²⁹

In the wake of WWI, the YW published a pamphlet to help educate Americans about race relations. Its readers were told “[a]mong the many evils with which our American life is confronted, none seems so acute or aggravated as the relationship between the races” and that “[u]ntil Christian white women stand by negro women, giving them that human protection and respect which is the right of womanhood the world over, there will be little progress in racial solutions.”¹³⁰ (The lower case “negro” suggests that this pamphlet was written, or edited, by a white person). Black women workers believed this rhetoric to

¹²⁸ “History of Interracial Experiment at Southern Business and Professional Conferences, Camp Marriemoode, Sapphire, N.C.,” 1935, Reel 108, YWCA Papers microfilm.

¹²⁹ “What About Conferences?,” *Womans Press*, January 1923, 19.

¹³⁰ YWCA National Board., “Interracial Cooperation: Helpful Suggestions Concerning Relations of White and Colored Citizens,” Reel 107, YWCA Papers microfilm, 35, 12.

different extents—some believing that it held the promise of the future, while others believing present hypocrisies annulled its promises of brotherhood, and many a mixture of both (with different emphases presented to different audiences).¹³¹ Byrd was one of those in the middle, who held out hope for the possibilities of interracialism, while turning a keen mind to every instance of hypocrisy.¹³²

Derricotte came to the YWCA ready to embrace its interracial ideals; indeed, she pushed idealistic white women to find practical ways to embody those ideals. She worked in the midtown headquarters of the YW and travelled the country on lecture tours while Byrd explored Harlem and Brooklyn. Derricotte was born in Athens, Georgia to a white mother and black father. Though she rarely told anyone about her mother's race and moved through life as a black woman, her mother's frustrations at the limitations placed on her daughter's education followed her. She wanted to succeed, in part, to redeem the

¹³¹ Juliette Derricotte, despite many experiences that could have turned her against hope, held on to the several positive interracial experiences as evidence that people could be changed through friendship. See Marion Cuthbert, *Juliette Derricotte* (New York: Womans Press, 1934). Four years later, Anna Arnold (Hedgeman) came to realize through association with black women laundry workers that "that individual efforts had been fruitless" and worker organization was necessary. Her interactions with white YW workers brought despair and bitterness, and the conviction that African Americans had to claim their rights, not wait for them. "Bitterness within me seethed at the word 'uplift,' for I had come to believe that it was white people who needed to be uplifted. [...] During my working experience I had only known six white people who lived as though they respected all mankind. Six, however, was too small a number to stem the tide of hatred which Christian whites felt toward their nonwhite neighbors. Even these six had spoken to me of their despair of their fellow white friends, neighbors, and churchmen. I could see only one way to freedom—nationalism. Although the word 'nationalism' was not in my vocabulary, I knew that somehow the great talent and spirit of Negroes must be developed into a unified voice to demand not alms, but its birthright." Hedgeman, *Trumpet Sounds*, 36, 43-4.

¹³² International Student Service, Sixth Annual Conference of International Student Service of the Worlds Student Christian Federation: A Report on the Speeches, Discussions and Commissions of the Conference, 36.

[illegible]

sacrifices her mother made for her.¹³³ Always eager to learn and follow Christian precepts of charity, Derricotte threw herself into the academic and social life of Talladega College in Alabama after she graduated from high school. Twice, she was president of the local YWCA club. Her mother had encouraged her to attend Talladega, where the faculty was entirely white, because she hoped that Derricotte would meet some kind white people after the intensity of growing up in Athens.

After college, a YWCA traveling secretary encouraged Derricotte to join the national YW. The summer of 1918, she went north for the first time. She remembered, “I took the summer course at the National YWCA Training school in New York City. I worked, how I worked! In the fall I was made traveling secretary for some of the colleges where there were colored students not allowed in the white Christian associations.”¹³⁴ A black woman who worked under Derricotte a few years later had the opposite experience. Frances Williams, trained at the New York School of Social Work and a future Second Amnian, claimed that she learned nothing at the summer school, in part because the entire training focused on white children, but also because the teachers had nothing to say about those white children.¹³⁵

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For more on Derricotte, see my article, Lauren L. Kientz, “There is so Much More to Love than I am Accustomed to Loving: Juliette Derricotte, Interracialism and Internationalism, 1918-1931” *Journal of African American History*, under consideration. For the information about her parents, see Juliette Derricotte and E. Franklin Frazier, “A Study of the Negro Family Form No. 616,” Box 131-97 Folder 1, E. Franklin Frazier Papers MSRC.

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Jenness, *Twelve Negro Americans*, 164-5; Cuthbert, *Juliette Derricotte*. Because of Derricotte’s tragic death, discussed in Chapter 4, many more of her words survived than have Byrd’s. It is difficult to know from the sources I have gathered what Byrd thought about her entrance into Harlem society, her work with the YWCA, or her trip through Europe. I contrast them as well as I can.

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Ruth Edmonds Hill, ed., “Frances H. Williams,” in *The Black Women Oral History Project: From the Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America, Radcliffe College*, vol. 10, 10 vols., Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America (Westport, CT: Meckler, 1991), 276-307.

From the first, Derricotte wanted to confront large social problems through an interracial framework. She joined Eva Bowles in the national YWCA office as one of Bowles' eleven new hires. Unlike Byrd, who moved swiftly into Harlem society, Derricotte's first year was lonely and miserable. She remembered going to her desk alone, eating alone, and leaving the building alone, even while working for an organization emphasizing "Christian brotherhood." She also felt stymied in her work. Everything she did was only for black students; "but all the time, though I suppose we were developing their initiative, we were keeping them just as separate as ever. We hadn't begun to attack the problem of interracial relations."¹³⁶

Derricotte faced stiff resistance throughout the national organization, where her white superiors avoided interracial work in an effort not to offend white southerners. Take, for example, the 1919 Student Volunteer Convention organized by YMCA and YWCA secretaries in Des Moines, Iowa and likely attended by Derricotte. A white secretary castigated Catharine Lealtad, another black Minnesotan and graduate of MacAlester College, for protesting the lack of accommodations provided for black delegates. Lealtad was used to conflict with white "colleagues." At her first teaching post in St. Paul, other teachers complained to the principal about working with a black woman. The local NAACP intervened and found a new post for her.¹³⁷

The white YW woman in Iowa said that Lealtad's protest went against the "customary policy" of the YWCA and could not be permitted because "they might alienate the white constituency of the Association in that state." Black students had been

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Jenness, *Twelve Negro Americans*, 164-5; "Brief History of Colored Work"; Robertson, *Christian Sisterhood*.

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The Horizon, 1918, 195-96.

promised hotel rooms, but when they arrived, no hotel would admit them. They were then shuttled to the local YWCA, which accommodated them briefly, but immediately kicked them out when the convention was over, but before a staff meeting had finished. Lealtad promptly resigned, after making “a public statement that the Christian spirit, for which they stood, had been put to the acid test in Des Moines, and that they had failed us utterly.”¹³⁸ At a follow-up meeting in New York, the General Secretary of the National YWCA told all the black secretaries that they should not expect to be housed at hotels during conventions, even if the hotels were willing, “because their presence there might be offensive to their southern white delegates, and the Association did not wish to alienate that group.”¹³⁹ Du Bois printed Lealtad’s letter describing all this in the April 1920 *Crisis*.

After that first horrible year, Juliette Derricotte began to foster interracial work with the help of Leslie Blanchard, her white boss. Blanchard subtly moved Derricotte “into the position where [she was] simply one of the staff—with a special interest always and of course working with [black] students, yet a staff person with a real responsibility for her share of the total national work,” Derricotte remembered. Blanchard explained her thinking about this to Derricotte one day, “She said that not only was it right for each person, regardless of race, to develop her ability to do the thing she could do best, but that no one could do a good job for her own people unless she first got the concept of the larger group with which they are identified.” Derricotte was amazed by “her utter freedom about it all” and told a friend that Blanchard’s support buoyed her own spirit

¹³⁸ As quoted in Robertson, *Christian Sisterhood*, 317-18..

¹³⁹ As quoted in *Ibid*.

with a personal sense of freedom. She began to define the freedom African Americans perennially sought for herself.¹⁴⁰

After visiting a few white campuses, Derricotte became a much requested speaker. While Derricotte encouraged YWCA campus groups to open themselves to different races, other students pushed the national YWCA to open membership to more than Protestants, and middle class YW secretaries began to help industrial workers.¹⁴¹ One experience in particular cemented her love for interracial work. A western woman asked that the YWCA send someone out to help mediate conflict between white and black students at schools in Oklahoma, Kansas, and Missouri. White and black southerners had migrated to these states in large numbers, and brought their racial assumptions. When the call came in 1923, two years after whites and blacks erupted into conflict in Tulsa, Derricotte was available to go and took a white secretary with her. They did not know each other before the trip “but we liked each other as soon as we got acquainted” on the train ride west. When they arrived at the Midwest school, the black students would not talk to her when she was with her white colleague, and the white students refused to talk to the white secretary when she was with Derricotte. So they separated the girls and listened to their concerns. Then they brought together ten white girls and ten black girls to work out their differences. The YW secretaries asked, “How can you call yourselves Christians? ... How can you say you want to bring freedom to all

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Derricotte as quoted in Cuthbert, *Juliette Derricotte*, 25. Such support was certainly not the case for all YW workers. Anna Arnold (Hedgeman) explained in her autobiography how frustrated she became with the segregation local YWs in Ohio, New York, and New Jersey supported and the way white YW branches controlled black ones. Hedgeman, *Trumpet Sounds*. For other women frustrated by YWCA segregation, see Robertson, *Christian Sisterhood, Race Relations, and the YWCA, 1906-1946*.

¹⁴¹

Robertson, *Christian Sisterhood*, 75.

people when there are on your own campus people that you won't speak to?"¹⁴² First the white girls, and then all the girls faced these questions directly. They wanted to continue studying, so Derricotte left behind a program that they followed for a year.

Derricotte and the students corresponded for a year. When she returned for a visit, she found that they had learned so much that they wanted to teach other students. They put on "Programs of Negro music or Negro poetry... Bars were taken down."¹⁴³

Derricotte continued to return to that campus and felt encouraged when "the whole Y.W.C.A. dropped the interracial issues and together, white and colored, went out to clean up on the campus the things that were not Christian! So I learned that the most worth while thing to do is to be yourself and do your own work, not just to attack the interracial question."¹⁴⁴ Just being herself probably also helped Derricotte negotiate the difficult atmosphere of the national YW office. She was naturally charismatic and humble, finding it easy to overcome the reticence of white women.

That same year, in one of her first articles in the YWCA magazine, *The Womans Press*, Derricotte highlighted the purposes of the YW's student movement while reporting on a conference in Canada she attended. It was important to her how centered the goals were on religion. Local YWs usually fluctuated in how much Christianity the

¹⁴² Jenness, *Twelve Negro Americans*, 167.

¹⁴³ Derricotte as quoted in *Ibid.*, 167-8.

¹⁴⁴ Derricotte as quoted in *Ibid.*, 168.

members espoused; many members were more interested in social work, amenities, and careers than the gospel.¹⁴⁵ But in the student movement, Derricotte could focus on faith.

The Young Women's Christian Association, affirming the Christian faith in God, the Father; and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord and Saviour; and in the Holy Spirit, the Revealer of truth, and source of power for life and service; according to the teaching of the Holy Scripture and the witness of the church, declares its purpose to be:

1. To lead students to faith in God through Jesus Christ;
2. To lead them into membership and service in the Christian Church;
3. To promote their growth in Christian faith and character, especially through the study of the Bible;
4. To influence them to devote themselves in united efforts with all Christians, to making the will of Christ effective in human society, and to extending the Kingdom of God throughout the world.¹⁴⁶

Derricotte focused particularly on number four, because she believed that the YW could transform the racial structures of human society that led to so much suffering in the United States.

In New York, Derricotte supervised three other black student secretaries, Frances Williams, Ethel Caution, and Juanita or Jane Saddler.¹⁴⁷ These four were at the vanguard of the YW educational campaign by speaking at black and white colleges, arranging interracial conferences, and writing and distributing literature that offered techniques for developing group interracial work. Saddler and Derricotte were particularly close. Williams, roughly the same age as Byrd and Derricotte, was of a different temperament, shy and driven to their charisma. She was the youngest child of the most prominent black principal in St. Louis and was raised with a deep appreciation for education and a clear

¹⁴⁵ David Henry Anthony argues, "it was the religious underpinnings of the work of the Student Christian Movement, the YWCA, and the YMCA that brought out the best in Derricotte." See his *Max Yergan: Race Man, Internationalist, Cold Warrior* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 129.

¹⁴⁶ Juliette Derricotte, "Impressions of the Canadian Student Conference," *Womans Press*, April 1923, 214.

¹⁴⁷ Jessie Fauset, "The 'Y' Conference at Talladega," *Crisis*, September 1923, 215.

expectation that she would be treated properly, as befit her class, manners, position, and education. If someone did not treat her kindly, she did not hesitate to confront them.

Williams said much later that she did not know the color line existed while she was growing up.¹⁴⁸ She claimed the only time her dad talked to her about race was when she answered the door and came to tell him that a “white man” was waiting for him. He asked “who?” She amended the statement to a “man” was waiting for him, earning her father’s praise. Two close playmates were the sons of German immigrants next door. Her first year away from home, at the University of Cincinnati, she floundered. Though she never explained why, it was likely because she encountered people who treated her poorly because of her race, perhaps for the first time. Her mother searched for a different school, finally deciding upon Mount Holyoke College in Massachusetts. Williams knew the search was important to her mother, so she left her to it. As the youngest, she was content to let her family push her, but as a Williams she was driven to succeed.¹⁴⁹ As she was boarding the train, one of her high school teachers gave her a goodbye hug and whispered in her ear, “Frances, you ought to make Phi Beta at Mount Holyoke.” She did not reply, but from the moment she boarded the train till her last class, she was determined to become a Phi Beta Kappa. It helped that she “loved Mount Holyoke.” Unlike her previous college, Mount Holyoke treated her with kindness and dignity. Later, she claimed that she did not learn anything new at Mount Holyoke, because her personal

¹⁴⁸ Though one wonders how much her memory may have been clouded by her recent stroke and the long years between her and her childhood. The riot in East St. Louis happened the year she graduated from college.

¹⁴⁹ She remembered, “my mother raised me on the theory that she and Father knew what was best for me to do. And I let her manage most of my life because I wasn’t interested in the things she wanted to manage, and it made her happy to manage them, so I let her take care of that.” Hill, “The Black Women Oral History Project,” 284.

exploration through her father's library had already introduced her to most of the ideas raised at college.¹⁵⁰ So she strategically chose which classes to study for, (the ones she struggled with the most), and those she would not (the ones that came easily). In that way, she walked away with a Phi Beta Kappa key. Her success did not overcome her shyness, however. Though she prepared rigorously for class, if called upon she always said she did not know.

One of her professors, Miss Hughes, who recognized her talents encouraged her to go to graduate school. Williams said she was willing, but without the money. She had already used up too much of her parents funds for her degree in sociology, which had been only partially offset by scholarship. The professor arranged for one of the colleges two graduate scholarships to be offered to Williams for her to study sociology at the New York School of Social Work. She moved to New York City the same year as Derricotte, after they both graduated in 1919. She lived at the Brooklyn YWCA among African Americans and commuted to Manhattan. Graduate school challenged her in a whole new way. She wrote her Mt. Holyoke mentor after Thanksgiving of the first year and told her to stop sending money, because "I've been to every class, I've read every book, and I listen to everybody, but I don't understand what these people are saying." Hughes replied "I'm so glad to hear you're doing so well" and included the rest of her scholarship.

She started out keeping her mouth shut in every class like she had at Mount Holyoke. One day, the assistant director of the school invited her into his office. He told

¹⁵⁰ "My father had started me...you know. Papa tells a tale about my...I remember doing this, lying flat on my stomach on our library floor in Covington, pulling his educational books out of it, and reading them, and then discussing them with him. I said, 'Papa, how could I discuss Dewey and Thorndike and all the...'. He said, 'You did very well, baby, you caught some of the points. Some of them you missed, but some of them you got.' And Papa sat up there just as serious, as ... he never let me know I was doing anything unusual." Ibid., 286..

her that many of the professors thought she was an excellent student, but others point out how difficult it would be for a social worker never to talk. He warned her that she had to start talking in class.

Williams was determined to speak in the next class period. Thirteen students were gathered in a circle discussing the novel they had read for that class period. Williams was in the middle of the circle (“I always made very good friends with people, you know, individually,” even though she could not talk in a large group). The professor came up to her “and my knees just shook. Oh, and I read my paper through, though it wasn’t like anybody else’s paper, and he just said, ‘That’s fine, Miss Williams.’ That’s all he said. I never knew whether he thought it was fine I’d found my voice or whether it was what I’d said was good, I never knew.”¹⁵¹ When she got sick the next semester, she managed to keep up her grades and take care of her health by missing about half of the classes. She finally had to go talk to her professor about her doctor’s order to take a couple of weeks off. He assured her those were good plans, requesting only that “the next time you’re in trouble I think you should let you’re friends know earlier.” That pleased her. She knew that she was cared for as an individual.

The care Williams received during her undergraduate and graduate education did not prepare her for the YWCA. She received the job with ease. Eva Bowles stopped her on the street one day and asked her if she would like to work under her at the national headquarters. She replied, “Yes, Mama worked for the YW at home, Papa worked for the YMCA” and the YW gave her a fellowship to finish her education.¹⁵² As part of the

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 288.

¹⁵² Ibid., 288-289.

fellowship a white woman at the school required that she live in a white YWCA to prove that she could. The discussion made Williams mad and she replied with typical ferocity: “Why on earth should I spend my money on ... I don’t have to show off I can live with white girls.”¹⁵³ This discussion foreshadowed treatment by YW women that “really turned me against the church. They were mean to me.”¹⁵⁴ Their insults must have seemed even harsher in light of the YW’s rhetoric preaching Christian goodwill and brotherhood.

Derricotte tended to take such slights in stride. Part of her success in relating to whites was her tact—her willingness to abide by the color line in order to get what she wanted done (though she was “no compromiser against truth and honor” as the Chicago Defender wrote).¹⁵⁵ Williams was never able to accept segregation in the same way and was one of the few YW secretaries who confronted it directly.¹⁵⁶ For example, when she was transferred to Atlanta, she always insisted that black secretaries travel by Pullman car to avoid segregation in Jim Crow cars (it is interesting that she was able to avoid segregation this way, as many other African Americans reported being removed from Pullman cars).¹⁵⁷ Derricotte’s tact and Williams’ confrontation each proved successful in different situations.

Derricotte, Williams, and the two other black student secretaries hosted a summer Student Conference at Talladega in 1923. Derricotte met with Du Bois in New York to

¹⁵³ Ibid., 289.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ “Miss Juliette Derricotte to Sail in July,” *Chicago Defender*, May 10, 1924, 10.

¹⁵⁶ Robertson, *Christian Sisterhood*, 151-2.

¹⁵⁷ Hill, “The Black Women Oral History Project,” 290.

ask for help in planning a series of conferences on Interracial Relations for Colleges, of which the Talladega conference would be a part. They met together for lunch and went over the program. Du Bois suggested beginning with the specific situation at Talladega, including facts and complaints. Then the group might consider education for white students—the ways African American education relates to them and how they could help, education for black students—how to get an education and how they should educate whites, and then for both—“the universal problem of education.” Other topics Du Bois suggested covering included employment, amusements, “political life, social services, health and physique, literature and art.”¹⁵⁸

Jessie Fauset, Derricotte’s sorority sister, spoke at the Talladega conference and noted how the students felt compelled to discuss race relations.¹⁵⁹ It brought Fauset her first “contact with a colored school of the South.”¹⁶⁰ It was also the first time that she “had ever seen so large a group of trained Southern colored girls, and [she] was greatly impressed by their intelligence, their appearance, and their beautiful spirit.”¹⁶¹ Perhaps she was more used to derogatory descriptions of black college students, from whites and blacks, and was unprepared for what she actually encountered. The student’s discussions soon turned to

¹⁵⁸ Du Bois to Derricotte, 1 Oct 1923; 5 Oct 1923 Du Bois Memo to Miss Derricotte Concerning a Program of Inter-racial Relations for Colleges; Derricotte to Du Bois, 10 Oct 1923, Reel 12 Du Bois Papers.

¹⁵⁹ Rev. Channing Tobias, recently hired as senior secretary of the YMCA's Colored Work Department, was also one of the speakers. “Channing H. Tobias: An Inventory of His Papers,” <http://special.lib.umn.edu/findaid/html/ymca/yusa0007.phtml>; Fauset, “The ‘Y’ Conference at Talladega,” 214.

¹⁶⁰ Fauset, “The ‘Y’ Conference at Talladega,” 215.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

the importance of the part which they would have to play in the near future in an attempt to solve or at least adjust the race question. For of course the conference tended to become inter-racial. What else? How can the discussion of Christianity in America on the part of colored people resolve itself into anything other than a survey of the ways and means by which the Christian religion and the fact of being Negroes may be made compatible.¹⁶²

Over and again, African Americans had to confront a fundamental irony of living in the United States—it purported to be a Christian nation, and yet its citizens acted daily to refute that claim. African Americans felt they could not fulfill the purposes of the YWCA student movement without discussing race relations. White students did not so readily recognize the importance of race relations to their country's moral well-being and had to be educated about its significance.

During her speech to the gathering, Derricotte roused the students with her message and touched them with her poise. After attending the YW conference at Talladega, a black student named Mary Gray wrote to Derricotte, the speaker who had most impressed and challenged her. She thanked Derricotte for urging her black audiences to engage in interracial dialogue from a place of self-confidence and self-love. Gray wrote that she had successfully made her proud to be black, despite a troubled background. Every other black person Gray had met had seemed “sorry she had such a hard life.” Derricotte recognized the difficulties, but she “seemed sort of ready for it, as if you had forgiven God for making us Negroes and might have done the same thing yourself if you had been Him.” Before, when Gray had been treated badly, she had “just gotten hard inside, and I thought, well, I couldn't help being born, but I certainly wouldn't bring any more colored children into the world to suffer what I suffer.” What

¹⁶² Ibid., 214.

Derricotte taught Gray was to find “a kind of happiness bottled up in everyone that nobody else can get to, and so nobody can take away from us.”¹⁶³ Derricotte’s speech transformed the way Gray thought about Christ, from a “tragic figure” who died a cruel death to a “fine, brave young man” eager for life and fighting every fight till his last breath.¹⁶⁴

From such a position of strength, Derricotte urged her audiences at Talladega and elsewhere to reconsider white people as potential friends. She remembered in her audiences “[b]rown girls, proud and distrustful, tears behind their wonder-wide eyes, at the surprise of finding for the first time sincerity in a white person’s profession of friendship.”¹⁶⁵ Gray confirmed just such a transformation. She began to think about the possibilities of educating white people. “Maybe [white people] don’t understand. Maybe they would be just if they fully knew. I was so surprised when you told about white students in the South wanting to be friends with us and of those who had already become so. It seems so queer. I wonder what it would be like to have a white friend!”¹⁶⁶

Derricotte and the white YWCA secretaries she traveled with modeled the friendships she espoused. Not only did she urge black and white women to become friends, she had already entered such territory, fully aware of the social taboos she was violating. Gray recognized this, “When you talked about your friends I did not know for a long time that

¹⁶³ Cuthbert, *Juliette Derricotte*, 29.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 24, 29.

some of them were white; you never talked about them as if they were.”¹⁶⁷ Friendship came first, before race, an unheard of thing in the South at the time. Perhaps this seems an unlikely way to attack racial discrimination, but Derricotte found that it was a powerful way to transform the lives of those around her. She believed that each black girl in whom she instilled confidence and each white girl she confronted with the realities of racism had the power to change opinions around them. In part, this was also a black woman making the most of those tools she had greatest access to.

Throughout her travels, Derricotte inspired many white women and men to rethink their perceptions about blacks, sometimes by educating them about race relations and sometimes by simply being a skilled black woman who flouted all of their stereotypes. Just as Fauset explained how the discussion of Christianity among African Americans necessarily had to turn to discussing race relations, Derricotte’s very presence as a black woman speaking at white colleges necessitated that she discuss African Americans; “there was always an absorbing curiosity about all that happened to Negro people” on white campuses. “She did not always talk about Negroes,” to satisfy their curiosity, “but as often [she spoke] of things she had thought and experienced, and of the new world which she and other young people so passionately wanted to bring into being.”¹⁶⁸ With such descriptions, she influenced several white women to start in the field of race relations, including Ruth Smith, who “spent many years teaching Negroes, a career on which she decided after hearing a brilliant and able young Negro woman—

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 29.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 15.

Juliette Derricotte—talk on race relations at a Y.M.C.A. Summer Conference.”¹⁶⁹ A white woman in California, who was initially horrified to be listening to a black woman, told Derricotte at the end of the conference, “‘My dear,’ she said, ‘I want you to know that you have opened a whole new world to me.’”¹⁷⁰ The conference was not about race relations, but about Christian worship. Derricotte thought it was important that she had won the woman over just by being herself, not by specifically addressing race relations.¹⁷¹

During the Christmas holidays of 1924, YW business kept Derricotte from celebrating the New Year with her sister Deltas. On the same days the New York Deltas hosted the national convention, the Executive Committee of YW student secretaries in black schools held their annual meeting. From their stations around the country, Juliette Derricotte, Leslie Blanchard, Juanita Saddler, Frances Williams, Emma McAllister (student representative), and new member Lucy Slowe (Dean of Women at Howard University) gathered in Madison New Jersey to discuss the upcoming year.¹⁷² Derricotte warned Slowe, “I hope all of us will have a chance to get a good rest before those days, because we shall probably be worked from morn ‘til night.”¹⁷³

¹⁶⁹ Edward N. Jenks, “Racism,” *New York Times*, June 16, 1946, BR13. Robertson writes that “meeting educated black women could be transformative for white women” because it challenged all their preconceived notions about African Americans. Robertson, *Christian Sisterhood*, 63.

¹⁷⁰ Jenness, *Twelve Negro Americans*, 169.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² proposed discussion on it in the Dec issue of the “Bulletin”]

¹⁷³ Juliette Derricotte to Lucy Slowe, November 6, 1924, Box 90-2 Folder 4, Slowe Papers MSRC.

The previous system of organization had not worked well, so the women decided to move Williams to Atlanta to lead the south-east interracial efforts in a team with Katherine Lumpkin, a white secretary. When they first began to interact, Lumpkin did not know how to interact with Williams as a peer. Furthermore, other whites tended to treat Lumpkin as the leader. They worked through their difficulties slowly, on a day to day basis, and eventually became friends and effective colleagues.¹⁷⁴ Williams remembered different highlights from those years, opening up new vistas for YW girls and students.

I met all these marvelous girls. There was nothing wrong with the children, they were just, some of them weren't dressed very nicely. I decided that they lived in too small a world, so I started them reading newspapers and sending them back and forth to each other in different... And I decided the other thing about them was—I forgot, there was two things wrong with those children. They didn't have any fun in life. So I began giving parties. [...] So after I did this for a year, the head of my staff, Miss Blanchard, came down to the YWCA conference and she said to me, 'Why do you give the children stones when you can give them bread?' She called my little parties and things stones, see? I thought, 'You don't know anything about life, lady.' I was so sure I was on the right track.¹⁷⁵

Blanchard was the supervisor that Derricotte had so praised for accepting her as a full member of her team. Blanchard and Derricotte shared a religious connection and a common goal, which perhaps aided their interactions. Williams did not lack in serious intentions, but believed that young women needed excitement in addition to education.

The YW continued to struggle with how to desegregate their national conferences. At the ninth annual YWCA conference held in Milwaukee, Derricotte, Williams, and Byrd attended with Elizabeth Ross Haynes, Eva Bowles, and Addie Hunton in May 1926

¹⁷⁴ Robertson, *Christian Sisterhood*.. "We did not discover our mistake while Juanita worked in the [southern] region because Derricotte-Sadler-Lumpkin was a perfect working machine." Ethel Caution to Juliette Derricotte, November 9, 1924, Box 90-2 Folder 45, Slowe Papers MSRC.

¹⁷⁵ Hill, "The Black Women Oral History Project," 290.

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(they met up there with another future Amenian, and one of Derricotte's close friends, Marion Cuthbert). Black delegates had first attended a national conference only six years previously.¹⁷⁶ Several of these women, as part of the Council on Colored Work, started petitioning the board in January to ensure equal treatment in Milwaukee. When arrangements were first made, hotels refused to accommodate integrated groups, which meant that the African American delegates would have to stay at the Association building or in private homes, while all the white delegates stayed in hotels. This would divide those delegations with white and black members (from different branches within the same city) who wished to remain together. The Council appealed to the "Christian ideals of the YWCA," arguing that they should not be party to such discriminatory treatment.¹⁷⁷ The Council worked with the local planning committee and the National Board to develop non-discriminatory policies. After the conference, the *Pittsburgh Courier* noted positively the small steps the YWCA was making toward racial reconciliation. For example, the National Board required "that representatives from the Central Association and branches come as one delegation. In most instances, this policy was carried out."¹⁷⁸ The managers of hotels in Milwaukee met together and decided that because of the conduct shown by YW woman at their biennial conference they would show the mixed race delegations equal hospitality.

¹⁷⁶ "Conventions and Regional Conferences," May 18, 1920, Reel 108, YWCA Papers microfilm.

¹⁷⁷ "Conventions and Regional Conferences," January 8, 1926, Reel 108, YWCA Papers microfilm.

¹⁷⁸ Elizabeth N. Elliott, "Many Race Women Attend Big YWCA Convention Being Held in Milwaukee," *Pittsburgh Courier*, May 1, 1926.

Frances Williams chartered a Pullman car so that black and white students from Atlanta could ride together “in keeping with their dignity and life.”¹⁷⁹ Her white colleagues challenged her about the cost of the trip, but her plan prevailed. Williams was eager to challenge segregation in more direct ways—imagine the response in small towns as that chartered coach passed through—while most of the other black secretaries were content to arrange accommodations behind the scenes to avoid uncomfortable situations and promote interracial cooperation.¹⁸⁰ Out of 150-200 black student representatives, 75-80 came from white schools without special recruitment. Many had never had an opportunity for such interracial interaction; the experience “gave them something to hold onto when going back on the local campus.”¹⁸¹

This conference also emphasized a common theme among YW that has not yet been raised in this chapter—internationalism. Before the student attendees, Dr. Mordecai Johnson, recently installed as president at Howard University, spoke about race relations “as never before at a student conference” a YW secretary noted. “He threw the whole interracial problem into its world aspects and then brought it down to the white and black in our country,” emphasizing all the opportunities his listeners had to change these problems.¹⁸² After the conference, a Chicago secretary told reporters that “We feel that the Kingdom of God is coming to pass and a real step in that direction is taken by the

¹⁷⁹ Robertson, *Christian Sisterhood*, 152.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ “Conventions and Regional Conferences” 14 Jan 1927, Reel 108, YWCA Papers microfilm.

¹⁸² Ibid.

YWCA in service for girls and women of the world.”¹⁸³ These steps towards interracial interaction were cautious and slow to take effect. Yet, the YW was one of the first organizations to attempt to hold interracial conferences.¹⁸⁴

SORORITY, YWCA, THE 135TH ST LIBRARY AND “NEW NEGRO” RENAISSANCE

events filled many evenings for these women, but they offered a fairly limited world—limited to those traditional female realms of socializing, volunteering, and art. The highly educated women discussed so far were not content with this limited world, but when they found black men and white women blocking other organizations, they founded their own. Black men established alternative organizations when they were closed out of the American Medical Association and the American Bar Association, replacing “American” with “National.” When the American Association of College Women closed their doors to black women, Lucy Slowe encouraged her group of friends and colleagues to form the National Association of College women, primarily along the lines established by white educated women but adding a key focus on improving the standards of black colleges.¹⁸⁵

This NACW, less well known than the National Association of Colored Women (the national umbrella organization for women’s clubs), was a group for black graduates of

¹⁸³ “Many Race Women Attend Big YWCA Convention Being Held in Milwaukee.”

¹⁸⁴ Richard Wright, *Black Boy (American Hunger) A Record of Childhood and Youth* (New York: Perennial Classics, 1993), 348-50. Academic conventions did not begin to desegregate till the 1930s and 1940s, and then only when conferences were held in the north. Du Bois spoke before the American Historical Association in 1909, the first African American to do so and the last till 1940. Lewis, *W.E.B. DuBois--Biography of a Race, 1868-1919*.

¹⁸⁵ The black middle class has often come under attack by black intellectuals and by black workers for adopting worldviews, professional ambitions, and ethical standards similar to whites of the same class. See Abram Harris to Benjamin Stolberg, Letter, August 3, 1931, Folder 3 Box 4b, Ben Stolberg Correspondence, Columbia University Special Collections; E. Franklin Frazier, *Black Bourgeoisie* (Glencoe, Ill: Glencoe, Ill: Free Press, 1957).

accredited colleges, which excluded most all black schools, like the sororities did. The NACW pushed the sororities efforts in professional development further.

It worked to improve the standards of black colleges, to provide a journal that black women could publish in, and to host conferences where black women could present. The first dean of women at Howard, Lucy Slowe, established the group in 1923.¹⁸⁶ Slowe made it clear that the organization was neither political nor social, but intended “to raise the standards in the colleges where Black women were being educated, to improve conditions for Black women faculty, and to encourage advanced scholarship among women graduates.”¹⁸⁷ The different organizations continued to share members. Derricotte and Cuthbert were original members of the organization.¹⁸⁸ At their initial meeting, NACW conferees recognized Lillian Alexander’s sway when they voted her the director for the eastern section.¹⁸⁹ When Slowe and Alexander decided to form a New York branch of the NACW (the 3rd local branch) in October 1924 with 25 others, they all

¹⁸⁶ “With the Clubs,” *Chicago Defender*, January 3, 1925.

¹⁸⁷ Linda M. Perkins, “The National Association of College Women: Vanguard of Black Women's Leadership in Education, 1923-1954,” *Journal of Education* 172, no. 3 (1990): 67.

¹⁸⁸ In her 1942 dissertation, “Education and Marginality” Cuthbert wrote that “The most important general educational organization among the college women is the National Association of College Women, which is patterned somewhat upon the plan of the American Association of University Women. Its announced purposes are: ‘I.A. To unite in one organization all our college women for mutual benefit and for united effort in benefitting our several communities. I.B. To promote friendliness among our college women. II. To raise educational standards in colleges and to improve educational conditions among our people. III. To promoted scholarship—undergraduate and graduate. IV. To bring together college women of the two races in the United States for conference in the interest of better understanding and better conditions of contact between them.’ Both the general service to communities and the interracial objective should be noted in this statement of purposes.” Marion V Cuthbert, *Education and Marginality: A Study of the Negro Woman College Graduate*, Educated women (New York: Garland, 1987), 98.

¹⁸⁹ Dorothy Pelham, “College Women form Permanent Organization,” *Chicago Defender*, May 10, 1924, 5.

elected Byrd as the first president.¹⁹⁰ Dorothy Pelham, the second national president of the Deltas, after Sadie Mosell Alexander, and a member of the NACW executive board, wrote the newspaper article describing the founding of the association.¹⁹¹

At the second annual conference in October, 1924, Frances Williams and Eva Dykes (one of the first black women to receive a Ph.D.) led a discussion on “What Can College Women Do to Improve the Social and Intellectual Life of Their Communities.”¹⁹² They might have discussed the loneliness that black women faced when they had become educated beyond the level of their communities (something Marion Cuthbert addressed in her Ph.D. dissertation in 1940). Among the 60 women attending this conference was the preeminent Mary Church Terrell, club woman and first black elected official to the DC school board. At the conference, she met her old friend recently returned from France, the prominent educator Anna Julia Cooper who that summer had received her PhD from the Sorbonne. Sadie Alexander, the national president of the Deltas and another one of the first black women to receive the Ph.D., was also in attendance. The conferees decided to begin studying carefully all those colleges that taught black women, paying attention to

the housing, physical education, medical inspection, health, recreation and social environment of the students; toward the adequate training, compensation and general treatment of teachers, toward dormitory discrimination and the equality of opportunity for all girls in the Northern and Western Colleges, especially. The association desires further to stimulate study in the field of research for women of intellectual attainment, and finally to establish itself as an educational agency for

¹⁹⁰ “With the Clubs.”

¹⁹¹ Pelham, “College Women form Permanent Organization.”

¹⁹² “With the Clubs.”

scholarship, to establish for itself such a reputation for doing work that it
can be entrusted with funds for the development of women.¹⁹³

Dean Slowe had already begun petition the trustees of Howard University to build a dormitory for women. When it was completed, artist Lois Mailou Jones christened it with a mural in the common room emphasizing knowledge and strength. This organization faced many more obstacles than the others described here. (Indeed, I have been unable to find a library that still has the early editions of its journal.) Professional organizations linked to a specific professional can act as gateways for new professionals. Sororities had the advantage of social activities balancing out volunteer and fundraising efforts. Despite rough early years, the National Association of College Women continues today as the National Association of University Women, still supporting black college women to persevere through the particular struggles they face during their education and early professional years.

Slowe and Derricotte frequently exchanged letters that fall. As a new member of the executive committee of the YWCA interracial student secretaries, Slowe helped Derricotte as they worked to expand their respective messages. Derricotte traveled extensively talking about her recent trip to Europe, including to Slowe's students at Howard.¹⁹⁴ Every Friday all the women at Howard assembled for a noon talk. Derricotte also arranged to have Slowe visit Columbia to give a presentation to a group of women studying to become Deans of Women. A "Miss Sturtevant" called Derricotte's office asking if Slowe would talk to her class. She was the head of the course for deans of women in Columbia University. The request made Derricotte and her colleagues "very,

¹⁹³ Pelham, "College Women form Permanent Organization," 5.

¹⁹⁴ For a full discussion of Derricotte's international travels, see Chapter 3.

very proud of this.”¹⁹⁵ Slowe, too, was quite excited. She told Derricotte, “I am so much interested in the possibility of speaking to the group at Columbia University that I am willing to make a trip to New York on my own responsibility for this purpose.” Though she was “as poor as can be,” she would not let “an opportunity of this sort get away from us because of a little money.” This was an opportunity to explain “our side of this race problem to such a representative group as would be found in Miss Sturtevant’s class.”¹⁹⁶ She spoke in January, while she was in town for the YWCA executive meeting.¹⁹⁷

Derricotte and Blanchard wanted to arrange for Slowe to represent black women at a wide meeting of women’s groups against war. She said she would be pleased to go, but warned that “I am not very much interested in the discussion on the prevention of war for the reason that I think my energies will be used to better advantage in some things which are a little closer to us.”¹⁹⁸ White women during the 1920s were particularly engaged in pacifism discussions, particularly through Jane Addam’s international organization, the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom. WWI had seemed like such a waste of young men for a dubious cause far away. In contrast, black women watched their fathers, sons, husbands, and brothers, mothers, daughters, and sisters struggle through life in their home country every day. When Mabel Byrd attended the 1928 annual conference of WILPF in Prague, she confronted the white attendees with the ramifications of their pacifism.

¹⁹⁵ Derricotte to Slowe, November 6, 1924.

¹⁹⁶ Lucy Slowe to Juliette Derricotte, November 11, 1924, Box 90-2 Folder 45, Slowe Papers MSRC.

¹⁹⁷ Lucy Slowe to Juliette Derricotte, December 12, 1924, Box 90-2 Folder 45, Slowe Papers MSRC.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

In November 1924, Slowe encountered her first major frustration with her new work on the YWCA committee. The Howard women were all astir over an article in the *New York Age* about a black woman who was refused admittance to the physical training school of the YWCA. The Howard YW was already weak and stories like this could not help. "It is very hard for me to maintain interest in it when I have to excuse so many things," she wrote to Derricotte, asking implicitly how Derricotte continued to persevere in her work.

Derricotte counseled Slowe to have patience and hope in the face of recalcitrant YW women:

I know it is most disappointing to have to continually excuse this kind of action on the part of narrow people who are employed by the Y.W.C.A. It is almost impossible to separate the principles of an Association from the people who are employed to carry out those principles. It simply means a constant fight with a hope that there will come a day when you can have absolute faith and trust in all the people in our fellowship.¹⁹⁹

Throughout her life, even in the midst of "honest agony" about the possibility of ever changing the world, Derricotte always chose patience and hope. A male YMCA secretary said of Derricotte, "She was able to work as a practitioner ... to get down to the roots and work from there. At the same time she had a rare forward thrust like a prophet, toward the next thing that had to be done. Then, too, she had a spirit of play that would often cause a hostile group to melt in laughter."²⁰⁰ She persevered through opposition to her work because she had hope that the Kingdom of God would come, patience to see it arrive, and wisdom to take the practical steps to bring it about. Patience could be an incredibly frustrating word when it seeped out of the mouths of rich white liberals,

¹⁹⁹ Derricotte to Slowe, November 6, 1924.

²⁰⁰ Jenness, *Twelve Negro Americans*, 170.

counseling activist blacks to wait and wait and wait some more. But for Derricotte, the spiritual disciplines of patience and hope helped her continue to build up positive interracial relations no matter the hardships.

In the 1920s, Harlem society welcomed young college educated women from Oregon, Minnesota, Georgia, Missouri, and many other states. They came from families that emphasized education and careers for their daughters. Many had been the only black student at their colleges. In Harlem, they discovered other black women with intellectual concerns and college educations. They socialized with artists and authors from the Harlem Renaissance, even if they did not accompany them to cabarets. In living rooms and lecture halls, they heard men and women discuss European and African art. At Speakers Corner, they listened to socialists and black nationalists. Downtown, concert ushers might try to escort them to the balcony despite tickets in the orchestra. But in Harlem and at Columbia, they could hear arias, sonatas, and jazz solos. When professional societies were closed to them because of their gender or their race, they created their own. These societies lacked the clout of larger organizations, but gave black women the opportunity for networking and professional development. Some, like Nella Larsen and Zora Neale Hurston, viewed Harlem society as closed and insular, while others found the dialogue stimulating and exciting.

The YW offered a paradoxical place to pursue professional development. On the one hand, it was one of the few organizations that employed educated black women and gave them some level of autonomy. On the other, the white women in power awkwardly

tried to open their organization to greater black involvement. They emphasized that education of blacks and whites was the best way to transform America's racial hierarchy. Byrd accepted the need for education, but wanted it to stretch further, to find a way to transform the international economic system which so oppressed laborers and people of African descent. Juliette Derricotte, growing up in the Deep South and learning how to interact with whites from her mother, was the most equipped of these women to deal with the patience and diplomacy required by the YW. She believed in the YW's emphasis on education and Christianity. In sharp contrast, Frances Williams, another Southerner, felt entirely pushed away from the Christianity at the heart of the YW by the hypocrisy and ill-treatment she experienced at the hands of white women. Anna Arnold, from Minnesota, reacted to white hypocrisy by retreating into all-black spaces for a time. Harlem was a healing space for her.

Harlem was also a temporary space for all these women, except Lillian Alexander who reigned over black society there for another decade. As some of the few college educated black women, their presence as lecturers and organizers were in demand around the country and the world. Black colleges beckoned as places they could expand their talents in academia and as mentors of young men and women. Many careers remained closed. Black women were primarily hired as "Dean of Women" rather than as members of the expanding ranks of black faculty.

To return to Toni Morrison's language mentioned in the beginning, in Harlem these women created a safe harbor for themselves. They were ready for the adventure, the ship and the trail.²⁰¹

²⁰¹ Morrison, "Interview with Claudia Tate," 117-31.

“There is no thrill in all the world like that of entering, for the first time, New York harbor,--coming in from the flat monotony of the sea to this rise of dreams and beauty. New York is then truly the dream-city, city of the towers near to God, city of hopes and visions, of spires seeking in the windy air loveliness and perfection.

...

“Manhattan takes me, is glad, holds me tightly. Like a vampire sucking my blood from my body, sucking my very breath from my lungs, she holds me. Broadway and its million lights. Harlem and its love-nights, its cabarets and casinos, its dark, warm bodies. The thundering subways, the arch of the bridges, the mighty rivers hold me. I am amazed at the tremendousness of the city, at its diverseness, its many many things, its spiritual and physical playthings, its work things, its joy things. I cannot tell the city how much I love it. I have not enough kisses in my mouth for the avid lips of the city. I become dizzy dancing to the jazz-tuned nights, ecstasy-wearied in the towered days.

The sea takes me away again. I am glad. But I come back. Always I come back. The fascination of this city is upon me, burning like a fire in the blood.”

--Langston Hughes²⁰²

²⁰² Langston Hughes, “The Fascination of Cities: Second Prize Essay in The Crisis Contest 1925,” *Crisis*, January 1926, 140.

Chapter 3

A Spirit of Cooperation or Confrontation?

Black Women's Internationalism

Alpha Sigma Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta met Saturday with Dr. May Edward Chinn, 44 Edgecombe Avenue. The group is sending Christmas greetings to the following members who are abroad: Miss Juliette Derricotte, who is now in India; Mrs. Paul Robeson, London; Miss Mabel Byrd, who is associated with the Industrial Bureau of the League of Nations, [Geneva]; Mrs. Yolande Du Bois-Cullen, Paris.¹

“Coming to the Student Movement did an infinite deal for me too, Jane. Here we are, two Negro women, feeling ourselves really a part of something national, something international for that matter, for the first time in our lives.”²

--Juliette Derricotte²

¹ “With the Sororities.” *New York Amsterdam News*, December 19, 1928, 6. The Deltas had gone through a change in their naming system because their rapid growth had quickly run through single letter Greek names for chapters. This chapter is the same as the Alpha Beta group discussed in Part 1.

² Marion Cuthbert, *Juliette Derricotte* (New York: Womans Press, 1934), 15.

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Harlem did not just send its ambassadors to Europe in the form of jazz bands and “New Negro” poets. It also sent highly educated, skilled young women to participate in diplomacy, international dialogue, and Christian conventions. Juliette Derricotte went to Europe and then India as a delegate to the World’s Student Christian Federation biennial conferences. There she discovered a Christian internationalism that became a motivating force throughout her life. She learned about ethnic and racial conflicts around the world, walked through a world startlingly free of discrimination aimed at her, made friends with men and women from around the world, and decided that the only way to achieve equality was to emphasize that every individual was sacred to God. Mabel Byrd encountered many of the same environments, but decided after two years research the conditions of African workers for the League of Nations that equality could only arise out of rationality and logic. They both returned to the United States determined to spread their new understandings through education—Derricotte through seminars on positive race relations and Byrd through academic research in economics and sociology. Where Derricotte returned advocating a “Spirit of Cooperation,” Byrd argued that the only way forward was by directly confronting white supremacy, whether it was embodied in imperialist government or patient, sweet Christian ladies.

Juliette Derricotte's Christian Internationalism

Throughout her interracial work, Juliette Derricotte explored internationalism, a fundamental ideal of the YW and an attitude encouraged in her Harlem society. The YWCA student group was affiliated with the World's Student Christian Federation (WSCF), an international federation of Student Movements. Through the auspices of this group, Derricotte traveled first to Canada, then to Europe, and finally around the world. The internationalism she developed as a result of these excursions provides a useful contrast to other kinds of black internationalism. This was the same era that W. E. B. Du Bois was trying to create a lasting organization out of biennial Pan African Congresses and Marcus Garvey was proposing that all blacks return to Africa spiritually if not also physically. At the same time, black soldiers decommissioned in France returned with stories about France's warm hospitality and acceptance of people of color. Such stories, and the French craze for all things jazz, lured jazz musicians and New Negro authors to European soil. Few of these individuals discussed Christianity and Marcus Garvey suggested abandoning the white man's god altogether. Part of Derricotte's enthusiasm for her international travels was meeting other Christians who were open and accepting of her as a black woman. At the same time, she appreciated, in a heart-sick way, learning about so many other racial and cultural conflicts throughout the globe. In her travels, she could foster interracial exchange (if not also love), experience beauty, and satisfy her thirst for knowledge.

Derricotte's interest in Europe must have also been peaked by all the stories in periodicals at hand.³ *The Crisis*, among other publications, reported international news in every monthly installment, particularly that relevant to people of African descent. The YWCA journal, *The Woman's Press*, also published articles with an international focus in every issue, reporting on the development of the League of Nations alongside stories of Chinese, Indian, African, and Eastern European YW members. The YWCA did not only share international stories, they also encouraged women to internalize "internationalism" with every monthly publication of the Woman's Press. They urged their readers to recognize that "our 'foreign' relationships are intrinsic in our very nature" and to draw on their "latent powers and spiritual resources which have been developed and husbanded through the years of our history" to become "intelligent world citizens." Part of the National Board, "the Council for International Peace," recommended "education and world organization" to foster world-wide peace.⁴ The YWCA's form of internationalism emphasized harmony among nations and races, more so even than the kind of cultural exchange valued in cosmopolitanism. Though it were often critical of the way individuals were treated, it did not as an organization advocate overturning colonial or capitalistic powers. That did not preclude individuals from holding such opinions. YWCA women tended to support socialism much more often than their more capitalistic brethren in the YMCA.

³ Plummer argues that "the abiding interest of black Americans in global issues and the identity and characteristics of an Afro-American attentive public" begins only in 1935 and places African Americans among isolationist Americans in the 1920s. Plummer, *Rising Wind: Black Americans and U.S. Foreign Affairs, 1935-1960*, 1,3. I place it earlier, at least to WWI, when black soldiers began serving in France and black periodicals filled with stories of their treatment there. Interest in Africa went much earlier, and included missions and return colonization ideas.

⁴ Katherine Gerwick, "'Education for Peace'," *Women's Press*, July 1923, 396-97.

The WSCF sponsored frequent conferences to stimulate cross-cultural dialogue by bringing together students from a diversity of nationalities and races. The organization began in the late nineteenth century, the brainchild of YMCA missionary John Mott and five other missionaries from England and Germany. It focused first on evangelism and second on uniting Christian students around the world, by federating discrete Student Movements under a unified organization. In the beginning its diversity consisted only of Europeans and their descendants. By the time Derricotte joined, members joined the European majority from the United States, Africa, and Asia. WSCF conference organizers realized that discussion could succeed at conferences with so many different cultures, nationalities, and races only when difference was acknowledged and appreciated. The diverse membership began at the level of tokenism, where a white group accepted a small smattering of people of color. Usually tokenism allowed white members to feel good about their openness but failed to challenge their basic world-view. But when black delegates like Derricotte and Byrd attended conferences, their contribution changed their audiences. They ardently challenged their listeners to live up to the standards of Christian behavior and directly confronted their stereotypes of African Americans.

Derricotte's first experience with the WSCF, a 1922 conference in Canada, introduced her to their particular kind of interracial and religious dialogue. She sought to understand the members of religions from all over the world while also learning for more students to take up social action based in Christian love. What might have been a contradiction for an evangelical did not strike this follower of the social gospel as a problem. From December 28, 1922 to January 3, 1923, Derricotte attended the Canadian

Student Conference. This was the first ever group of Canadian students gathered together as part of the Student Movement. They focused on what to do as students in the aftermath of the World War, or in Derricotte's words recorded in the *Womens Press*, "to face the gravest questions of the time in the light of our deepest experience of Christ. Such an eager, questioning, daring group!"⁵

She was intrigued by the mix of religious and political discussions. Though she was saddened by some students' desire "that there be no Christian emphasis in the conference," she noted that the pastor's "glowing spirit gave warmth throughout the conference days," which "must have kindled a blaze in the hearts of some of these eager souls, searching but not knowing the Way." Many conference goers chose to attend sessions of intercession (prayer), where the oft repeated desire was taken from Jesus' own prayer recorded in John 17:21, "That all may be One." Out of this desire, codified in the WSCF's motto, Derricotte rejoiced at "the spirit of tolerance" inspired by "student initiative." She found "especially impressive ... the patience of Jew and Christian, Catholic and Mohammedan, an understanding one of the other."⁶ In this same article, Derricotte repeated the goals of the Student YWCA quoted in Chapter 2, including conversion as the first goal of the organization. Another U.S. delegate, a white woman, agreed—the association as a whole based "the spirit of the movement and its future on the belief that students who come to know and love the person of the Lord Jesus Christ

⁵ Juliette Derricotte, "Impressions of the Canadian Student Conference," *Womans Press*, April 1923, 214.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 215.

[illegible]

can and will bring a new day.”⁷ Derricotte rejoiced in religious pluralism and religious conversion on the same day.

Although political discussions at the conference focused primarily on Canadian issues, students expressed “interest and faith in other student groups.” Among delegates, including those representing 15 countries other than Canada, “many a start was made toward international friendships.” Furthermore, “time and time again, Canadian students pleaded with each other to forget the hatreds that had come since August, 1914 and to lay foundations for a world of mutual sympathy and understanding.”⁸ As a real manifestation of that friendship, the conference raised several thousand dollars for the European Student Relief (ESR), an organization tied to the WSCF that cared for students’ physical, emotional, and professional needs in the wake of the War. Derricotte left Canada thinking about the significance of religion in students’ lives, realizing over and again how many students did not draw meaning from Christianity. At the same time, she was intrigued by the discussions among those of different religions and the potential for international cooperation that she had witnessed.

The glimpse of cross-racial and cross-national friendships that she had gained in Canada grew into a full portrait during a summer long sojourn in Europe. She was there long enough to have many mountain top experiences, but not long enough to experience sustained loneliness or culture shock. A year and a half later, Derricotte traveled to Europe as a delegate nominated by white and black American students to both the ESR and WSCF conferences in Germany and England, respectively.

⁷ Katherine Butler, “An Interpretation of the Canadian Movement,” *Womans Press*, April 1923, 215.

⁸ Ibid.

Derricotte's nomination for these conferences arose out of a successful interracial interaction at the national YWCA convention. She was elected to represent the U.S. at the WSCF conference during the YWCA's National Convention in New York City at the end of April 1924.⁹ After much debate and disagreement, an overwhelming majority of the student delegates at this convention pledged "to seek anew the mind of Jesus in regard to our race relationships and to know the students of other races that we may rid ourselves of prejudice and may promote justice and understanding."¹⁰ The first outlet for this new spirit was electing Derricotte to represent the YWCA at the WSCF meeting in England. They might have also been encouraged by the WSCF rule that required that the American delegation have at least one African American or Native American representative.¹¹ The *Chicago Defender* enthusiastically publicized Derricotte's selection for the WSCF conference because she "was nominated ... by Southern white students of the 'Blue Ridge Southern Conference.'"¹² Such a nomination could have indicated that Derricotte was the type of African American to foster white approval by selling out other black people—an Uncle Tom—but the *Defender* was quick to negate this supposition. "And it ought to be further remarked that Miss Derricotte, while she is tactful, is no compromiser against truth and honor."¹³

⁹ Josphine Pinyon Holmes, "Youth Cannot Wait," *Crisis*, July 1924, 128.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 129.

¹¹ "Miss Juliette Derricotte to Sail in July," *Chicago Defender*, May 10, 1924, 10. The single Miss Derricotte was accompanied by the older Mrs. William Pickens, who had previously traveled to Europe with her husband, a popular NAACP field secretary, public speaker, and one of the most famous graduates of Talladega. Mrs. Pickens sat on the board of the Harlem, 137th St. Branch of the YWCA.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

The white and black Southern members of the Blue Ridge Convention (roughly those states bordering the Blue Ridge mountains) were primed to endorse Derricotte as their representative by a dispute over segregation at their regional conference earlier that spring. During the planning stages, the southern part of the Student Council considered having a black person attend, but “they had to face the fact that Colored guests were not received as other guests at Blue Ridge, [and] that there were separate eating arrangements and a particular cottage in which the Colored guests lived.” Rather than leaving matters at that, “they asked Mr. Weatherford,” the chairman of the Blue Ridge Association, if “the Colored guests of the students [could] be received in the dining room and under the same living conditions as their other visitors,” because it was the students themselves that desired it. “Mr. Weatherford said that was impossible.”¹⁴

The YMCA made the same request and received the same answer, but then the local Chicago YMCA delegation brought an interracial group without consulting Weatherford. When they encountered the segregated facilities, they insisted that their colored members be treated the same as rest of the guests. Weatherford decided to make no difficulty regarding living arrangements, but made the black members of the Chicago delegation eat alone in an alcove. Rather than splitting the delegation, the whole group sat away from the rest of the membership. The women students at the Southern Divisional Council felt that this was an unacceptable accommodation and they started to think about breaking away from the Blue Ridge Association, though they did not go through with this

¹⁴ Juliette Derricotte to Mrs. George E. Haynes, October 30, 1924, Box 90-2 Folder 45, Slowe Papers MSRC.

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plan at the time.¹⁵ Through these protests, they began to make simple acceptance of segregation impossible. Leslie Blanchard, Derricotte's boss, brought the situation to the attention of the National Board, asking them to decide what should be done in such a situation. Derricotte hoped they would rule on the side of "a chance for more Christian relationship."¹⁶

Black students rejoiced at Derricotte's election to the WSCF conference because it meant their interests would be represented at the conference.¹⁷ Josephine Holmes spoke for all black YWCA members when she wrote in the *Crisis* that "most proud were we of *our* delegate" (emphasis in original).¹⁸ Holmes and fifty other New York City women showed their enthusiasm by planning a dance to be held at the Imperial Elks Lodge on 129th street to raise money for Derricotte's Atlantic passage.¹⁹ Minnie Pickens, one of the leaders of Harlem's society of women, volunteered to serve as the single Derricotte's chaperone on the trip. Pickens' husband was excited to follow in the steps of her husband, NAACP field secretary William Pickens, to a tour of Europe. She sent missives back to the *Chicago Defender* detailing their experiences throughout the journey.²⁰

15

Ibid.

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Ibid.

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Holmes, "Youth Cannot Wait," 130.

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Ibid.

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"Selected as One of 5 Women to Go Abroad Soon," *Pittsburgh Courier*, June 14, 1924.

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Mrs. William Pickens, "Mrs. Pickens and Miss Derricotte Arrive in Holland," *Pittsburgh Courier*, August 30, 1924.

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Crossing the Atlantic for the first time on the S.S. Paris, Derricotte and Pickens had a full schedule in front of them: “one week in Paris, Dutch student conference at Nunspeet, Holland; European Student Relief Conference, Schloss Elmau, Germany; General committee meeting world student Christian federation, High Leigh, England; international discussion conference near Berlin Germany; return September 15.”²¹ After marveling at the number of bicyclists in Holland, Derricotte traveled the Castle Elmau in the Bavarian Alps to attend the ESR conference with one other US delegate, Fern Babcock. Derricotte was struck by the physical beauty of the surroundings and by the temper of the conferees: “Alpine roses, bluebells and forget-me-nots, mountain peaks, fresh running streams, green fields and pine groves, sunny skies and gray—these, with a real spirit of good-will and friendship, go to make up Elmau and to knit together understanding sympathy nearly one hundred and fifty students of more than thirty nations.” The gathered students “talked of the present intellectual situation in each of our countries, of our ideal university, likening the search for education, for truth.” As they talked through all this, Derricotte believed, “we felt the common urge, the common desire, the common spirit which claims students all over the world regardless of their political affiliations and national difficulties, and we saw the first gleam of the light of Christian internationalism.”²² That new light excited Derricotte with its myriad possibilities.

²¹ “Harlem Notables to Write Impressions of Europe for Courier,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, July 12, 1924, 13. She traveled with/was chaperoned by Mrs. William Pickens, wife of the NAACP field secretary and a friend from Harlem. Pickens wrote several articles about the trip for the *Courier*.

²² Juliette Derricotte, “Schloss Elmau: European Student Relief Conference,” *Womans Press*, November 1924, 834.

Though there were students of many religions at the ESR conference, Derricotte felt drawn to other Christians. She wrote about the Latvian whose “country was in great difficulty and her family in grave danger during the days we were at Elmau—yet her greatest concern was, ‘How can we make Jesus Christ real to the students in our university?’”²³ Derricotte was impressed, too, by Ruth Rouse, the founder of the ESR and a woman who had travelled the world bringing women students into the WSCF.²⁴ After associating with so many different students throughout her week in the castle, Derricotte “understood what Miss Rouse meant when she said that the spirit of the European Student Relief had been an emergency spirit, an impartial spirit, a spirit of comradeship, a spirit of adventure, a spirit of sacrifice—and I knew that this experience contained ‘something that I love more than I am accustomed to loving.’”²⁵ That last phrase became part of the mantra she often repeated, which captured how she had felt stretched throughout her tour of Europe.

After leaving the Bavarian Alps, Derricotte traveled to several other student groups. She spoke to a group of women students beside Lake Geneva, discussing with them her reflections on the conference and new understandings. In the coolness of the night, with the young women gathered around her on a grass hillock overlooking Lake Geneva, Derricotte began with prayer. “*We come at even, our Father, heirs of all thy creative work, with lives enriched by others’ struggles and others’ labors. We come to own our debt to all thy children of every race and creed* [emphasis in original].” As her

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ruth Rouse, *The World's Student Christian Federation: A History of the First Thirty Years* (London: S.C.M. Press Ltd, 1948).

²⁵ Derricotte, “Schloss Elmau: European Student Relief Conference,” 834.

poetic reflections evolved, she divulged how large her world had become since traveling to Europe,

*There is so much more to know than I am accustomed to knowing,
and there is so much more to love than I am accustomed to loving
I recall all the questions which seem to block; all the conversations
I have had on race; the blindness to the situation near at hand; the people
in the North knowing the South's solution; the people in the South
knowing the North's solution; the Englishman unable to understand the
American race problem; the American saying, ... what about your Indian
problem? The Japanese sure of our injuries to them; our question of their
relations with China and Korea.*

Derricotte recognized that interracialism could not remain simplistic or at the level of a tourist's fascination. It had to face the knowledge of a history of misunderstandings and violence, while building love between aggressors and strangers. After witnessing the confusion of nationalities in Europe, she was reconsidering her notions of loyalty—how could the YWCA demand loyalty of African Americans when so many clubs refused them hospitality? How could the United States demand loyalty when she experienced greater freedoms abroad? But then what about, *“Loyalty to a Negro group that has little faith in a white group. The loyalty of the American-born Oriental. Loyalty to the kingdom of God. What will happen to us in the kingdom? Do we see the place of nation or race in the kingdom?”*²⁶ As yet, Derricotte had few answers to her many questions. In her search for answers, she relied upon her religion for guidance.

²⁶ Cuthbert, *Juliette Derricotte*, 39.

In her own understanding of that kingdom, Derricotte emphasized the second part of her mantra—in the face of fear, persecution, and confusion, they must love. This phrase arose from one of her favorite verses in the Bible, 1 John 4:7: “*Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God, and everyone that loveth is born of God and knoweth God.*” Her audience must “*ask ourselves in what ways we are giving assent to Christ’s leadership or denying it by our deeds. Do we look upon every person—white, red, yellow, black—as sons of God—sacred to God?*”²⁷ Here, then, was Derricotte’s fundamental realization after the Elmau conference. In order to live righteously and end racism, every individual had to accept that everyone, those they met and did not meet, was sacred to God. For Derricotte, this acceptance was at the heart of interracialism. This acceptance might seem easy in today’s light, but it was hard won and represented a significant change for a woman not used to “speaking normally with whites” when she first entered college ten years previously.²⁸

Towards the end of a long and fruitful European tour, Derricotte arrived in High Leigh, England in August 1924 for the WSCF General Committee’s biennial conference. Derricotte’s arrival began her tenure on the General Committee of the WSCF, which she served on from 1924 until her death in 1931.²⁹ The General Committee was “an elected group of representatives from forty-five Student Christian Movements of the world,” which met “every two years to face and discuss the responsibilities of Christian

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Mary Jenness, *Twelve Negro Americans* (Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1936), 161.

²⁹ Winifred Wygal, “Juliette Derricotte: Her Character and Her Martyrdom,” *Crisis*, March 1932, 84.

students.”³⁰ They were also the guiding body of the WSCF. The delegates were accommodated at the High Leigh estate, an expansive manor house set on “40 acres of lawns, parkland and woodland” an hour by train north of London. The estate had been converted into a Christian conference center a few years previously.³¹

Ruth Rouse noted with approval that though many disagreements arose over nationalism and the right role for religion during the conference, “[t]he first condition of unity was there—recognition of ‘the supremacy of the Lord Jesus Christ.’”³² Christian internationalism? This spiritual commonality smoothed some of the lines between racial and national diversity. The conferees represented the Federation’s growing diversity—Rouse was proud to note that “[t]hey were truly representative of the international, inter-racial, and inter-confessional character of the Federation.”³³

Derricotte later described the setting of the conference in letters to the YW and YMCA student presidents she oversaw; “Imagine a tent in an open meadow, about 175 students and professors filling the tent, sitting either on backless benches, chairs, or the ground. ‘Tis twilight; as darkness grows, the only speaker is a young man full of the spirit of his message.”³⁴ During free periods, delegates enjoyed the beautiful estate grounds. At tea time, Derricotte enthused, “It was ever so much fun to fill your pockets full of

³⁰ Juliette Derricotte, “The Student Conference at Mysore, India,” *Crisis*, August 1929, 268.

³¹ It remains so today. Christian Conference Trust, “High Leigh Conference Center,” 2008, <http://www.cct.org.uk/Group/Group.aspx?ID=42438>.

³² Rouse, *World's Student Christian Federation*, 305.

³³ *Ibid.*, 297. You can see this relative diversity in the picture of the conference republished in Rouse’s history of the WSCF.

³⁴ Juliette Derricotte to YM and YWCA Presidents, November 20, 1924, Box 90-2 Folder 45, Slowe Papers MSRC.

crackers, get a cup of tea, find a partner or several of them, a good spot in the sun, and solve all the problems of the world!"³⁵

The racial assumptions of the conference members surprised Derricotte with how different they were from what she was used to in America. On one of the "conference excursions," Derricotte visited Cambridge with other delegates.³⁶ During the tour of the college, she and Mr. Boeckman, a conferee from Sweden, wandered away from the others and decided to punt on the River Cam. At first they enjoyed the silence and the feel of the stream, before Derricotte began to speak quietly. She expressed her surprise at how the conference had affected her. "You know the World's Student Christian Federation isn't much more than a name to us at home. But here the fellowship which the thirty-five nations have shared with each other is a living proof to me that people of different customs, languages, color and race can live together in peace and harmony." Boeckman agreed that such harmony was remarkable, particularly considering the continued animosities in the wake of the World War.³⁷

Derricotte had been conditioned from an early age to expect racial tension. One of her earliest memories was of her white mother being treated disdainfully by a store clerk when he realized that the little brown child belonged to her. It surprised her greatly to find so little of it at the conference. Other members did not understand that she was of African descent, mistaking her instead for a Native American, but their initial approaches toward her were entirely in a good spirit. The tension she did find, which she discussed

³⁵ Juliette Derricotte to YM and YWCA Presidents, December 1, 1924, Box 90-2 Folder 45. Slowe Papers MSRC.

³⁶ Rouse, *World's Student Christian Federation*, 297.

³⁷ Cuthbert, *Juliette Derricotte*, 36.

with Boeckman on the River Cam, was over the role of Christianity in individuals' lives. She had had her "brain [set] awirl" by the discussions of religion at the conference, which were "often confoundedly uncomfortable' and 'maddeningly difficult.'" ³⁸ She and others influenced by Anglo-Saxon Christianity espoused a religion that was first and foremost a moral force for social action. Those influenced by German Christianity, on the other hand, encouraged spirituality and evangelism first of all. The former wanted conference sessions to focus on how Christianity related to social and political questions, while the latter wanted to spend their time close reading of the scriptures. ³⁹ In Derricotte's point of view, the Germans "believe that God is not a God of love, that he does not need man, that there is no use trying to save the world because the world does not want to be saved." ⁴⁰ To Derricotte's mind, this left no room for ideals, hope, or action. Derricotte wanted Christians to act to end racism, not wait for its end to come to them. Religion gave Derricotte to engage every day in the fight for greater racial understanding in the United States. She could not understand co-religionists who did not find an equally potent call to action in their shared faith.

In addition to illuminating an aspect of Derricotte's religion, this discussion represents the fellowship Derricotte found in England. She openly shared her surprise over racial categorizations and also discussed shared religious interests with a European. She had found the freedom to be truthful, to part the curtains of the "culture of

³⁸ Cuthbert, *Juliette Derricotte*, 36; Rouse, *World's Student Christian Federation*, 302.

³⁹ James Parkes, *Voyage of Discoveries* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1969), 87.

⁴⁰ Cuthbert, *Juliette Derricotte*, 36.

dissemblance” in front of a white man in return he listened and showed her and her ideas respect. It was an empowering conversation.

Perhaps the ease with which Derricotte took up international fellowship in the above vignette reflected the opinions of her friend, Marion Cuthbert, as much as it did Derricotte’s real experience. Cuthbert put together a book of letters, essays, and reflections in the wake of Derricotte’s death. In the book, Cuthbert emphasized the poetic and the fellowship that Derricotte found. In a letter in the immediate wake of the conference, Derricotte recognized that it had taken several days of intense living together to help bars between races and nationalities come down. She did not dismiss how difficult it was for different races to live together (as might be concluded by her above statement to Boeckman that there was so little conflict over race at the conference). However, by the end of the conference Derricotte reported that the group had come together around a common spirit: “The *needs* of a particular group are recognized as the *needs* of the whole group. The *hope* of one group is the *hope* of the whole group. The spirit of cooperation is born, and even as we pray for students the world over we are bound by this spirit.”⁴¹ For Derricotte and Cuthbert, cooperation—hard won on the front lines of racial animosity through forthright interaction between individuals—was the key to overcoming racial discord.

One of the immediate outcomes of this new spirit of cooperation was the election of African American missionary Max Yergan to the Executive Committee. Like Derricotte’s initial election by an interracial group, the whole diverse WSCF group elected Yergan with “next to the highest number of votes for membership on the

⁴¹ Derricotte to YM and YWCA Presidents, November 20, 1924.

Executive Committee.”⁴² Yergan had been a missionary to South Africa with the YMCA since 1920; his main work involved training local leaders in social work. Yergan believed his election set a precedent that gave “Negro students in America and Africa as well (for I think it was on the strength of my African connection that I was elected to the executive committee) a larger share in the full life of the whole student movement.”⁴³ Derricotte agreed, “This marks a new era for Negro students all over the world in the life of the Federation.”⁴⁴ Thus, Derricotte found real meaning in an election that could have been construed as tokenism, in part because it was transformative for her world of the YW. She had discovered how powerful it was for black and white students to see herself as a black woman in authority. It was clearly positive to expose students around the world to an intelligent black man in a leadership role. Derricotte and Yergan became friends at this conference and reunited at the 1928 WSCF conference in India.

In the aftermath of the fellowship among many nations Derricotte had found in England, she reconsidered all the racial assumptions she had been accustomed to in the United States. During this reconsideration, she held fast to the two pillars—love and knowledge—that had sustained her throughout her young life. The conference at High Leigh, like that at Elmau, had opened the possibility of a world free of racism and also introduced her to the extent of international violence.⁴⁵ Throughout the conferences, other ethnic groups and nationalities had shared the kinds of oppression they faced in

⁴² Derricotte to YM and YWCA Presidents, December 1, 1924.

⁴³ Max Yergan as quoted in David Henry Anthony, *Max Yergan: Race Man, Internationalist, Cold Warrior* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 64.

⁴⁴ Derricotte to YM and YWCA Presidents, December 1, 1924.

⁴⁵ Cuthbert, *Juliette Derricotte*, 39.

their home countries. That oppression was not the same as African Americans experienced in the U.S., but Derricotte did find parallels in their mutual stories.

Derricotte came away from the summer convinced that it was her job to pass along the “spirit of cooperation” to the students she met throughout the United States. This could be accomplished through education and individuals meeting around conference tables. She soon had a chance to put this into action. When she returned from Europe, Derricotte was often asked to combine stories of her travel experiences with her normal interracial speeches for the YW. A nascent interracial student group in Boston invited Derricotte to speak to them. They were composed of black students, who were not a part of the YW, and white students who members of “various student Christian movements.” In addition to exploring tensions between blacks and whites, they were also conscious of “a tense feeling in regard to the growing number of Jews in the various colleges.” They warned Derricotte that “they felt that Boston was quite unlike any other place and that one would have to have a peculiar appreciation in order to be able to help without seeming to dictate.” They preferred that she speak about the WSCF “rather than to do strictly inter-racial work.” Yet, when they heard her speak “about the Federation and the various groups of races making up that Federation, almost the first question asked was ‘What can you suggest for our interracial group here in Boston?’” Derricotte suggested that given Boston’s rich history, particularly concerning African Americans, “an interesting project for the interracial group would be the compilation of historical facts with an authentic bibliography which could be used in all of the groups attempting interracial education.”⁴⁶ Derricotte was able to turn a temporary trip, full of mountain-

⁴⁶ Derricotte to YM and YWCA Presidents, November 20, 1924.

top experiences that could have dissipated as soon as she descended, into lasting change. Slowe explained why these kinds of meetings could effect change; “Sometimes it is very difficult to get the right people together in a group of this sort, but I feel that the getting together of any colored and white group for purposes of serious discussion is a step toward progress.”⁴⁷ Derricotte shared her faith in education and dialogue.

One of the ways that Derricotte fulfilled this mission was by encouraging other student secretaries to host international speakers from the WSCF. Before she went to Europe, the WSCF did not mean much to her. Afterwards, she would make sure that it meant a lot to those in the YW that she touched. In spring 1925, Frances Williams and W. C. Craver, a YMCA secretary, planned the first annual officers Training Conference of the YWCA and the YMCA for black representatives. They invited T. Z. Koo, a WSCF traveling secretary and native of China, to be the primary speaker. He challenged the students to recognize how individuals in the rest of the world viewed Christianity through the actions of Westerners. Dressed in a Chinese garment, Koo told the 100 assembled students, “The heathen world is endeavoring to learn what drew men to Jesus Christ, and in order to do so are disregarding forms and are going back to Jesus himself.” They did this because the “people of the East [were] confused by the conduct of the Christian Nations and have been unable to understand why they do not practice what they preach.” His message would have resonated closely with Frances Williams, who encountered the same kind of hypocrisy of action among Christian YW women. Koo concluded with the essential message of the WSCF: “nations of the world are kept apart by the superficial

⁴⁷ Lucy Slowe to Juliette Derricotte, December 12, 1924, Box 90-2 Folder 45, Slowe Papers MSRC.

things of life but in the essentials they are one.”⁴⁸ If races, nations, political divisions, and colonialism was superficial, the boundaries they created could be overcome by the international friendship that WSCF officials travelled the world trying to inculcate. They recognized the persistent political and economic problems that the world faced, but always ended by reaffirming the spiritual unity of mankind.

Another black YW woman explained the importance of international journeys and connections to the general YW audience. Cuthbert began her publishing career in *Womans Press* and in New Negro Renaissance publications with poetry (she also published two books of poetry later).⁴⁹ Her poetic bent influenced her later writing, even as she grew towards social science. As she would in the book she compiled and edited about Derricotte’s life, she interpreted her European experience at a poetic remove. She left few descriptions of where she went or what she saw, but she did interpret the broader significance of the travels.

Marion Cuthbert moved between academic and humanitarian worlds throughout a life working as a teacher, social worker, and professor. On March 15, 1896 in St. Paul Minnesota, she became the third child born to Thomas Cuthbert, a waiter and bartender from New Jersey, and Victoria Means, a housewife from New Orleans. Thomas’s parents

⁴⁸ “Says Attitude of New World Nations Confuses Heathen.” *Norfolk New Journal and Guide*, March 28, 1925, 1.

⁴⁹ Marion Cuthbert, *April Grasses* (New York: The Womans press, 1936); Marion V Cuthbert, *Songs of Creation* (New York: Woman's Press, 1949). She also wrote a textbook for white children about African American culture, “We Sing America.” The title refers to one of Langston Hughes’ poems, “We too Sing America.” A Southern senator wanted to ban it because it contained such “disgraceful” scenes as black and white children sitting down to eat together. Marion V Cuthbert, *We Sing America* (New York: Friendship press, 1936).

had both emigrated from England. Thomas and Victoria had six children, five surviving infancy. They were the only black family on their block in the 1900 census.⁵⁰

Marion spent her childhood and adolescence in that mid-west town at the headwaters of the Mississippi among a small but active black community. So few blacks lived in the twin cities that it was possible to know everyone in the community. As Marion grew, she took advantage of the rich life of St. Paul, "the center of black intellectual, social, and cultural life in the state."⁵¹ In 1913, upon graduation from the Graduate Central High School in St. Paul, she crossed the Mississippi river to attend the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis, but financial difficulties precluded her from finishing, and she became a governess in 1915.⁵²

A year later, the family Cuthbert worked for relocated to Boston and took her with them. While caring for their children, she began attending Boston University, Teachers College in 1917. In 1918 she moved to Boston University, College of Liberal Arts and majored in English and Philosophy.⁵³ The 1920 census listed her as a servant to a private family in Newton City, Massachusetts and also as a member of her family in Minnesota. It was unusual at the time for a female student to move so easily between a teacher college and a liberal arts college, because often the teacher colleges substituted

⁵⁰ In 1900 they had had five children and four were still living. By 1910, they had one more son and an uncle living with them. City of St. Paul, Ramsey County, Minnesota, June 4, 1900, Conrad R. Schacht Enumerator, Twelfth Census of the United States, ancestry.com.

⁵¹ David Vassar Taylor, *African Americans in Minnesota, The People of Minnesota*. (St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2002), 30.

⁵² Perkins, "Cuthbert, Marion Vera," 146.

⁵³ Ibid.

home economics for the sciences required by the liberal arts colleges, which made transferring almost impossible.⁵⁴

After two years of steady work, she received her BA degree in 1920 and moved south to teach. She started as an English teacher at the Burrell Normal School in Florence, Alabama, which was sponsored by the Congregational Church for African American students. Soon after she arrived she became principal.⁵⁵ While at Burrell, Cuthbert inspired her students to raise the necessary funds to take a tour of Europe. Perhaps she had been told stories about England by her grandparents. Or perhaps she was inspired by the recent essays in *Womans Press* and the *Crisis* about Derricotte's trip. On June 20, 1925, Cuthbert and "a party of teachers and students" sailed for Europe.⁵⁶ They returned in September after the grand tour.⁵⁷ They attended a meeting that may have been an International Student Services conference (the same group as the European Student Relief, which Derricotte attended at the Caste Elmau, given a more permanent name) that summer. This is likely because by 1931 Cuthbert was on the planning committee for the first ISS conference in the United States.⁵⁸

Cuthbert's poetic rumination on her travels in the *Womans Press*, "A Student Tramps the World," focused on what a person learned on an international journey; "he who conceived not dumb [mute] shrines but eager living as the object of a journey, has

⁵⁴ Francille Rusan Wilson, *The Segregated Scholars: Black Social Scientists and the Creation of Black Labor Studies, 1890-1950, Carter G. Woodson Institute Series*. (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006).

⁵⁵ Perkins, "Cuthbert, Marion Vera," 146.

⁵⁶ Howard, "Minnesota."

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 12 Sep, A5.

⁵⁸ "Marion Cuthbert Given Y.W. Post," *Atlanta Daily World*, 24 May 1932, 1.

done more than confirm one of the pleasantest forms of vagabondage—he has opened up a world that throbs with this vexing, charming life as no textbook could ever do.”

Cuthbert did not mention her role on the trip as a teacher rather than a student. Perhaps she felt more like a student on her first journey abroad. One of the things she most appreciated was learning more about England. She learned “much more of English life at Swanwick [the setting of an ISS conference], as I idled on the lawns of the Haves with a fresh-faced English girl while she talked frankly and vivaciously (punctuating her remarks with innumerable cigarettes) of the desperateness of the labor situation and the smug cruelty of the social caste system, and of the policy of empire as interpreted by her early childhood in India, than I ever could have got from lectures.” In Munich, she talked to university students during “long talks in the gardens.” Through the “the pleasant chaff of young people, I realized that Heine and Goethe were not dead but singing again in hundreds of young hearts who followed where blithe Sylvia led, back to the simple pleasures of simple folk.”⁵⁹

Most influential to Cuthbert was the evening when several individuals sat “around a little table, talking of race as we endeavored to adjust a report of a Commission on Race. In spite of the fact that we were English, American, Canadian, Persian, Roumanian, Hindu, and South African, it came to us all as we talked far into the night how flimsy were most of our so-called barriers, once resolute hands laid hold upon them.” Like Derricotte, she reinterpreted the meaning of race when confronted by people who defined themselves along ethnic and national lines. Among like-minded people (students,

⁵⁹ Marion Cuthbert, “The Student Tramps the World,” *Women's Press*, June 1927, 49.

interested in working through international conflict), the barriers between races and nations did not seem so huge.⁶⁰

After two years of thinking about the journey, Cuthbert declared, “Life is immeasurably richer for such a voyage of understanding!” She told her readers that they could begin to experience some of that rich understanding by welcoming foreign students to America. “At the recent Milwaukee conference” she noted about the sixth biennial YWCA conference that the Harlem women of Chapter 2 desegregated, “each plea for world fellowship gained in weight by the presence of the foreign students as homogeneous parts of the whole.”⁶¹ Cuthbert knew that the general feeling in America was “nation-baiting” and isolationism. But “student pilgrims” knew that they would not be harmed by a journey to understanding. Rather, “at the worst we have been robbed only of our narrowness and provincialism, of our smug complacency and selfishness.”⁶²

At the conclusion of “The Student Tramps the World,” Cuthbert blessed those pilgrims setting out that summer. She meant particularly the twenty-four YW students headed to the annual ISS conference and the Geneva Institute on International Relations. Yet her words could be applied to Mabel Byrd, as well, who was already studying in England by the time Cuthbert’s article appeared.

To these students who will tramp half way the world this summer, may
they go as those who bear treasures—April years, the clasp of hands, the
light that breaks from the spirit through understanding eyes; let them cross

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.



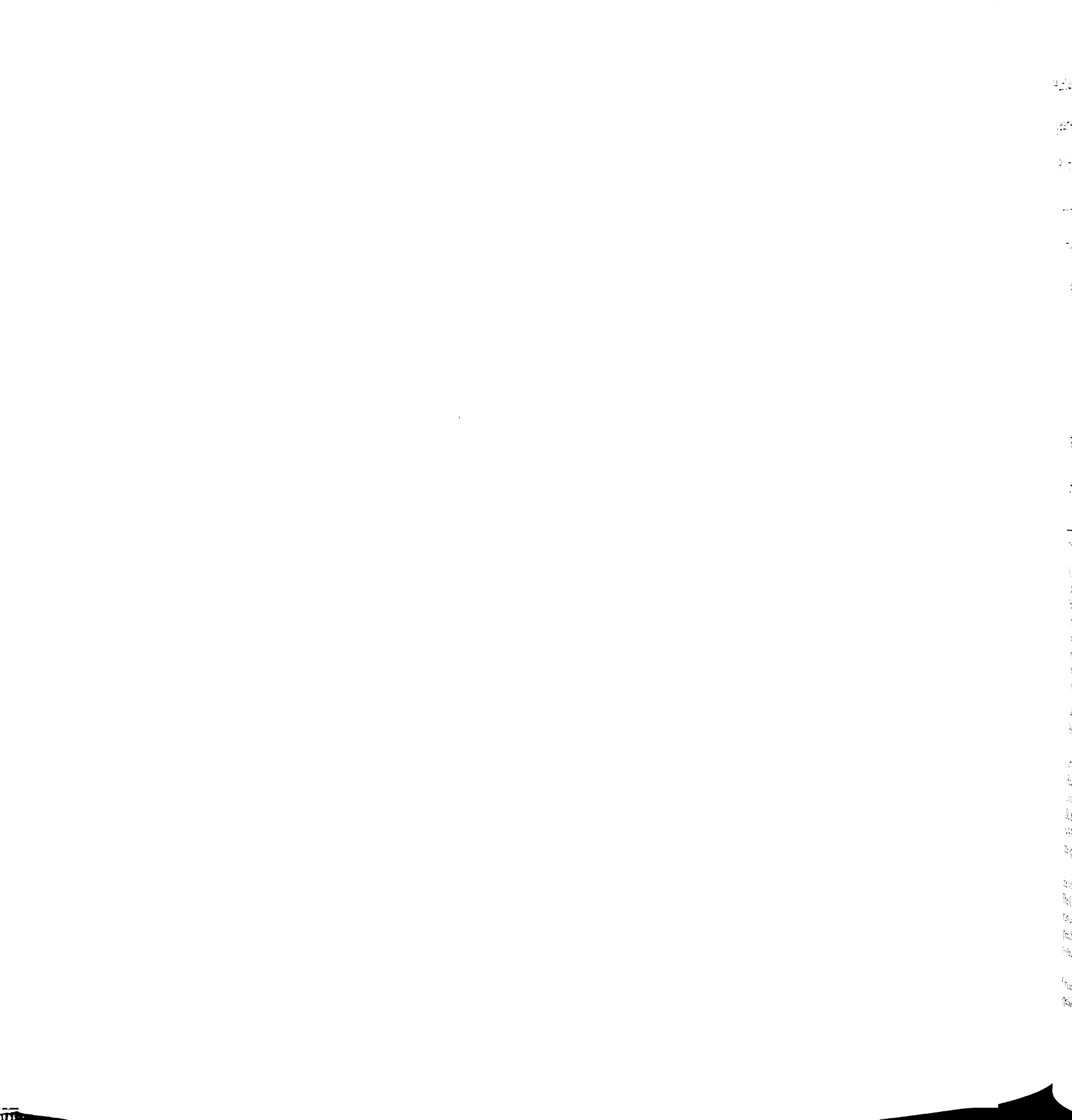
the seas and come happily to friendly shores where welcome needs not the audacity of arms nor the array of office to make high greetings between brothers.⁶³

Like Derricotte, Cuthbert envisioned international travel as a way to expand the traveler's mind and level of understanding through in depth acquaintance with new individuals. Byrd would accept this individual focus to some extent, but would also expand it into a more communal experience. She took with her through correspondence and personal visits the best of the Harlem Renaissance. She facilitated a meeting between Harlem and the League of Nations by distributing literature and introducing new friends to old ones. She also began researching the problems of societies by focusing on the way African laborers were treated under the League of Nations mandate system. Though she experienced many of the same things as Derricotte and Cuthbert, like international fellowship and lessened racial tensions, by the end of her two year journey, she had a very different understanding of international relationships and the momentum of change. Rather than the "spirit of cooperation," Byrd had discovered the power of a spirit of confrontation.

Mabel Byrd and International Government

Byrd's desire to go to Europe can be explained in part by all the stories of European openness to African American visitors swirling around her social circles in

⁶³ Ibid.



Harlem. In particular, Byrd was attracted by discussions of Pan-Africanism. For three years in Harlem, she listened to the stories of Du Bois, Alain Locke, Paul and Essie Robeson, and others about the ease of movement in Europe and the exciting culture she could partake of there without segregated insults. From Du Bois and Locke she learned two different kinds of Pan-Africanism. Du Bois discussed the importance of political and economic liaisons between people of African descent that could challenge the power of the ruling Europeans. While she prepared for her journey to Europe, the society of women around her began to plan the Fourth Pan-African Congress to be held in Harlem that summer. As the Circle for Peace and Freedom, these women had funded the Third Pan-African Congress in 1923, but would play an even more important role in the planning of the Fourth (the last Congress to be held under Du Bois's vision).⁶⁴ Locke

⁶⁴ Through her friendship with Du Bois and Fauset, Mabel Byrd learned about the Pan-African Congresses. She was excited by the idea of connecting people of African descent around the world and influencing the power and economic structures she had been teaching in Hubert Harrison's institute. Du Bois' coverage of the Pan-African Congresses through the *Crisis* and through personal lectures influenced Harlem toward internationalism. (Marcus Garvey's work, also heavily international, was mostly derided among that social set). Yet it was Harlem's society of women, through the Circle for Peace and Foreign Relations, that helped Du Bois work through his plans for the Fourth Pan-African Congress and turn them into reality. Over the past decade, Du Bois had spearheaded the Pan-African Congresses, which had met 3 times for a tour of European capitals to discuss common themes of black oppression under imperialism and democracy.⁶⁴ The first two had been funded primarily by the NAACP; the third largely by the Circle for Peace and Foreign Relations, a Harlem women's group.

In addition to their work for the YW and the NAACP, their sponsoring of New Negro writers and artists, their club work, and anti-lynching crusades, Byrd's company of mentors organized the Circle for Peace and Foreign Relations. Officers included executive Addie Hunton, "a legend among feminists and civil rights leaders" and the first black woman hired by the national YWCA twenty years previously; Nina Du Bois, William's wife; Lillian Alexander; Jessie Fauset; Ida Gibbs Hunt, and Minnie Pickens, wife of NAACP field secretary William Pickens. They began to discuss the Fourth Pan-African Congress during the spring of 1927, while Byrd was preparing to go to Europe for the first time.

Many scholars have written that the Circle's role was only administrative, while Du Bois provided the vision (reflecting the classic women organize, men lead paradigm); the reality was more complicated. The Circle prepared Harlem to host the fourth Pan-African Congress that summer, "on a much larger scale than anything hitherto attempted." Some sources say they invited the delegates, planned the content of each speech, found accommodations at the YWCA and local churches, and circulated publicity. They also hosted a gala ball at the Savoy to raise funds for the congress.

Other sources indicate that at the last minute, W. E. B. Du Bois and Hunton, the executive of the Circle, realized their communication had been confused—each expecting the other to advertise and select speakers. Yet, "The clubwomen succeeded in raising three thousand indispensable dollars and a fine

urged her, like he did so many young Harlemites, to see the beauty of her African heritage and incorporate it within whatever profession she pursued. When she began to confront different issues in Europe, she turned to these men and women for help. Perhaps she turned to many others whose letters were not saved as carefully as theirs were. The few letters we have, though, indicate how important a part of Harlem Byrd had become in her short time there.

Byrd brought to Europe her interest in race and a careful study of socialism. Like her mentor Hubert Harrison, she accepted the need for all workers to unite to overthrow their oppressors, for imperialism to be overturned, and for African Americans to adopt a positive racial identity. During the 1912 presidential campaign, the St. Croix born Harrison had toured widely speaking in support of Socialist Party Candidate Eugene V. Debs. Afterwards, he dropped his membership in the Socialist Party as he moved to the left of the party, supporting the Wobblies. He also became interested in the freethought movement and renounced Christianity in favor of humanism, placing humans at the center of existence rather than God. Harrison criticized white socialists for fighting for the white race first and class only second.

In 1917, Harrison announced the beginning of the New Negro Manhood Movement, which was much more political than the artistic movement that took its name.

editorial tribute from the Amsterdam News, Harlem's newspaper of record." Unfortunately, the Circle did not succeed in bringing in many overseas guests and the Congress sessions were primarily attended by African Americans. The Circle had arranged "technical perfection," but none of their efforts could conceal the "movement's inner weakness" and their goal to establish "a permanent fund for the Pan African Congresses and the formation of a permanent organization to promote them" was not achieved.

Publicity Committee to Du Bois, March 8, 1927, Reel 21, Du Bois Papers microfilm; Circle for Peace and Foreign Relations Letterhead, Box 17 Folder 18, Melville Herskovits Papers, Northwestern University Special Collections; Du Bois to Annie Dingle, 9 Mar 1927, Reel 21, Du Bois Papers microfilm; David L. Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: The Fight for Equality and the American Century, 1919-1963* (New York: Henry Holt, 2000), 208-9; Imanuel Geiss, *The Pan-African Movement: A History of Pan-Africanism in America, Europe, and Africa* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 1974), 257; Dismond, "New York Society," 208-9.



He intended it to “be a race conscious, internationalist, mass-based movement for ‘political equality, social justice, civic opportunity, and economic power’ geared toward the Negro common people’ and urging defense of self-, family, and ‘race’ in the face of lynching and white supremacy.”⁶⁵ He educated the masses by speaking on street corners and places that all blacks would be comfortable going to, instead of in lecture halls that may have been comfortable only for a certain class. His internationalism was primarily centered around two nodes—opposition of imperialism and a personal understanding of the connection of black people around the globe as an immigrant from the Caribbean.

By 1926, Byrd served on the eleven member executive council for Harrison’s special ten-week course on the “World Problems of Race,” which he hosted at the Institute for Social Study. No one from her other circles in Harlem joined her on the council.⁶⁶ Each Thursday night session cost students \$3. Through this institute, Byrd showed how important education was to her, as it was to Cuthbert and Derricotte. While the latter walked black and white students through the finer points of cooperation, the Institute was designed “to meet the need of this [Harlem] community for an independent agency of education devoted to a thorough study of the vital, social problems which affect the lives and welfare of the great masses of the people.” Through study classes and lectures held at a low price, students could “discover ... knowledge of the true nature of these challenging social situations, of the causes of social evil and oppression arising therefrom, and the means whereby complete social emancipation may be

⁶⁵ Jeffrey Babcock Perry, *Hubert Harrison* (Columbia University Press, 2009), 243.

⁶⁶ The Institute’s eleven member executive council included Willis N. Huggins, chairman; Mrs. William Burroughs, secretary; Dr. E. Elliot Rawlins, treasurer; Richard B. Moore, director; and Miss Louise Jackson, Miss Mabel Byrd, F. Eugene Corbie, Peter D. Codrington, N. E. White, Grace P. Campbell, and “Dr.” Harrison.

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achieved.”⁶⁷ This knowledge arose from the social sciences, which Harrison had studied as an autodidact. The council made the classes clear and concise so that they could “be readily grasped by the masses and properly applied for the improvement of their condition.”⁶⁸ Byrd took with her to Europe Harrison’s words about fighting against white supremacy, which was central to “capitalist rule in the United States,” and an incipient understanding that “true democracy and equality for African Americans implies ‘a revolution ... startling even to think of.’”⁶⁹

With so many examples before her, and with her own desire to improve the world through social science, Byrd accepted the Quaker’s scholarship and boarded a boat for London April 23, 1927.⁷⁰ The Ashland Place YWCA granted her a four month leave of absence, for that was all she meant to be away.⁷¹ She probably had no idea that she was leaving New York City, never again to return as a full-time resident.

Byrd began in Birmingham, England studying the Quaker sponsored Woodbrooke Settlement House. While there, she received an invitation to an International Student Services conference to be held in Switzerland later in the summer. Upon receipt of her invitation, Byrd picked up her pen to write W. E. B. Du Bois about her stay thus far and to request copies of the *Crisis* and publicity for the upcoming Pan-African Congress to

⁶⁷ “World Problems of Race: Syllabus, Dr. Hubert H. Harrison, Instructor,” brochure, July-Sept. 1926. HHHP-Scr B. Many thanks to Jeffery Perry for finding this lovely tidbit for me in his manuscript for the second volume of the collected Hubert Harrison papers. Jeffrey Babcock Perry to Lauren Kientz, “Re: Hubert Harrison and Mabel Byrd,” Email, September 30, 2009.

⁶⁸ “World Problems of Race: Syllabus, Dr. Hubert H. Harrison, Instructor,” brochure, July-Sept. 1926, HHHP-Scr B.

⁶⁹ Perry, *Hubert Harrison*, 395.

⁷⁰ Bessye J. Bearden, “Tid-Bits of New York Society,” *Chicago Defender*, 30 Apr 1927, 11; “Brooklyn Notes,” *Chicago Defender*, Apr 30 1927, 11.

⁷¹ “Brooklyn YWCA,” *New York Amsterdam News*, 16 Mar 1927, 16.

take with her to the conference. She wanted to educate the Europeans she met about black culture and thought. She also reported that “People are unusually kind to me and there are invitations for ever so many things which I don’t think I can attend. But it is rather nice to be invited.”⁷²

In the same letter, she requested a photograph of Du Bois to hang in a Woman’s Institute in London. They had representatives of all races hung on the wall there and Byrd could not bear the single photograph they had to represent all people of African descent. At first she was reluctant to admit they even had one, but then amended later that “the Negro one is very impossible” (emphasis in original) and that “I can think of no person who would grace this wall better than you.”⁷³ This indicates that out of all those she had met in Harlem—other YWCA women, Lillian Alexander, Hubert Harrison, poets, artists, and authors—Du Bois was the most influential. It also indicates that Byrd was very sensitive about her role in Europe; she recognized that it was not only to increase her own knowledge but also to promote the best reputation of people of African descent that she could through her own conduct. Despite, or perhaps because, of her time with workers, she was very conscious of “the politics of respectability.”⁷⁴ What was it about that “one” picture of an African that was so undesirable? Was it a stereotyped sketch? A photograph of an African in scant clothing? What was it about the light-skinned, goateed, suited Du Bois that meant so much to her? She knew was a representative African American to all

⁷² Mabel Byrd to Du Bois, 31 May 1927, Reel 22, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ E. Frances White, *Dark Continent of Our Bodies* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001).

she met in Europe and she enthusiastically embraced this role as a chance to improve individuals' opinions about black people.

Byrd brought with her to England both pride in her race and an inchoate sense of internationalism. Her first impression, "England right now is a sight never to be forgotten. I am reveling in it and enjoying it to the utmost," might have been either about the physical beauty of the country in springtime or about the less racist environment, both of which other African American travelers had commented on.⁷⁵ Yet, as the weeks passed, she learned what other black travelers had also seen—imperial England was certainly not free of racial hierarchies. In particular, she had met "those who yet believe in the divine right of rule—especially of darker Races," which she found "a bit disturbing, to say the least."⁷⁶ When poet Claude McKay had visited England for the first time a few years previously, he came filled with reverence for "Old England" and the culture he had shared with it in Jamaica. Yet, "[h]e discovered quickly that the average Briton had not the remotest idea that he and they shared at least a common culture of school and court, let alone any notion of equality between them. There was no more talk of Homeland England" for McKay.⁷⁷ For Byrd, her encounters with

⁷⁵ Mabel Byrd to Du Bois, 31 May 1927, Reel 22, Du Bois Papers microfilm. Among many others, Jessie Fauset, Rayford Logan, and James Weldon Johnson described their positive and negative experiences in England and on the continent. Paris usually received unbridled enthusiasm of the travelers, while they described England with a more careful enthusiasm. Sometimes they encountered the freedom to be "merely a man," in Johnson's words, but at other times they encountered prejudice designed either to bend to white Americans' whims or to greet people of color from the English colonies. See Jessie Fauset, "Impressions of the Second Pan-African Conference," *The Crisis*, Nov/Dec 1921; Kenneth Robert Janken, *Rayford W. Logan and the Dilemma of the African-American Intellectual* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993); James Weldon Johnson, *Along This Way: The Autobiography of James Weldon Johnson*, ed. Sondra Kathryn Wilson (New York: Da Capo Press, 2000), 207-17.

⁷⁶ Mabel Byrd to Du Bois, 31 May 1927, Reel 22, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

⁷⁷ Lewis, *When Harlem Was in Vogue*, 52.

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imperialists led her to entertain “all good wishes for the success of the Conference,” which believed in cultural cooperation rather than white racial domination.⁷⁸

In response to her earnest, enthusiastic inquiry, Du Bois flirted awkwardly through his secretary, while promising to help—“Your [sic] a pig and do not deserve an answer. Still, being naturally vain, I am trying to comply with your request. [...] I am enclosing some literature about the Fourth Pan African Congress. Meantime, if you do not send me a photograph of yourself or tell me where I can get one, I shall certainly not write to you again and certainly not speak to you when you come back.” Dropping the silliness, he then assured her that he was “very glad you had the chance to go” and implored her to “write us an article on your impression of Woodbrooke[.] Do it now.”⁷⁹ Though she did not write this particular article, other missives about her trip did appear in the *Crisis*.⁸⁰

In July, Byrd traveled the 700 miles from London to Schiers, Switzerland to meet with students from all over the world. The International Student Service redirected the focus of its predecessor, European Student Relief, from immediate relief for refugee students to rebuilding universities and developing understanding among students of diverse nations. Many of the attendees from Africa, Asia, and Latin America were students studying in Europe at the time.

The 1927 conference focused on two major themes: the University in a Changing World and the East-West Question. Throughout these discussions and in quiet corners,

⁷⁸ Byrd to Du Bois, 31 May 1927, Reel 21, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

⁷⁹ Alexander O. Taylor, “The Buckeye State,” *Chicago Defender*, 11 Jun 1927, A6.

⁸⁰ Mabel Janet Byrd, “The League of Nations and the Negro Peoples,” *Crisis*, Jul 1928, 224.

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students and professors discussed the future of international government and individual cooperation. Would the League of Nations prove able to tackle the problems between countries and those within empires? Or was another world-wide conflict possible? While at the conference, Byrd became intensely interested in this question of international government and made the contacts that led her to a position with the Bureau du International Travail (BIT) or the International Labor Office (ILO), where she was able to expand her summer study of European economies into two years focusing on African and African American laborers.

In addition to the contacts she made, Byrd also used the conference as the platform she had envisaged when she wrote Du Bois requesting material on the Pan-African Congress and recent issues of the *Crisis*. The formal report of the conference published her remarks, which she delivered extemporaneously during the time for audience participation after a major discussion about East-West relations. She drew attention to the desire for freedom and equal rights that was by no means limited to the Asian territories under European influence that other speakers had addressed. For the audience, she traced the history of people of African descent in the United States from the first ships that brought slaves from Africa to the present. Hypothetically, black Americans had had their freedom since the Emancipation Act of 1865, but she argued that "this freedom was but a scrap of paper since the negroes had hardly any representation at all and in the Southern States it was often unwise to present themselves at the polls and vote."⁸¹ She remarked that the American situation was resoundingly

⁸¹ International Student Service, Sixth Annual Conference of International Student Service of the Worlds Student Christian Federation: A Report on the Speeches, Discussions and Commissions of the Conference, 36. This is a summary of her speech, which is why "negroes" is not capitalized. In her own letters, she

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similar to the voting situation in British controlled Africa that a Mr. Gumedé had just elucidated, where the British dominated and Africans had no democratic control.

Discrimination in the United States was not limited to voting rights. Byrd also explained how labor unions denied membership to African Americans. Thus she emphasized the political and economic realities that faced blacks in the United States.

Byrd's parting words for her audience challenged them to consider the Christian roots of the organization and their own conduct; "hypocrisy is characterizing religious effort to-day, and if we are going to speak of the principles of Christianity in dealing with the race question, we must live in accordance with those principles."⁸² In this last jeremiad, she drew on the methods of black women in the YWCA and club movement, who, as Nancy Robertson has argued, "used the language of Christianity in their efforts to persuade, cajole, and even shame their white sisters into extending the full blessings of fellowship and citizenship to all."⁸³ White leaders also used Christian rhetoric to expose this hypocrisy upon occasion. In 1922, an editorial in the *Womans Press* reprinted a challenge sent forth by the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America about lynching; "The Church has not yet awakened to a realization of the extent to which, in the lynching evil, fundamental Christian principles are at stake. The conscience of America must be aroused upon the iniquity of mob law. The nation must be called to repentance

always capitalized it, as was proper among African Americans. The practice did not yet extend to the publishing industry in America or Europe, however. Du Bois himself spent several years petitioning the *New York Times* to capitalize "Negro" like all other nationalities.

⁸² Ibid. While Byrd and Derricotte before her challenged their Christian audiences to act Christian, some African Americans, like Carter G. Woodson, declared that Europeans and white Americans had in fact never been Christian in the first place. Pero Dagbovie, Francille Rusan Wilson, and William King, "Plenary: A Round Table on Carter G. Woodson's Appeal" (paper presented at the Association for the Study of African American Life and History, Birmingham, AL, 4 Oct 2008 of Conference).

⁸³ Robertson, *Christian Sisterhood, Race Relations, and the YWCA, 1906-1946*, 2.

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Byrd's discussion of Christian hypocrisy does not indicate her own religious temperament. It is certainly more at a remove than Derricotte's similar statements—she says "if we are to speak of Christian principles" not "we must act according to Christian principles." Yet, does this remove indicate that she had followed Hubert Harrison into agnosticism or Du Bois into an open spirituality inclusive of, but not limited by, Christianity?

In her speech, Byrd laid out the historical and present realities of African Americans and challenged her audience to search and critique their own behavior. Neither of these things would have been possible in most American situations. Indeed, many white American audiences would have refused to listen to her and preferred to ignore the historical realities she described. They would not have been eager to have their behavior challenged by an African American woman (though it must be noted that Derricotte did find willing listeners among white college women for her own kind of critique). Byrd found a relatively free space in Switzerland, where she listened to Asians, Africans, and Europeans all challenge the status quo and each other and where she was also listened to with respect. She did not need to obscure the reality of racism within the United States for her audience, as was often necessary in the States, to still encourage positive interracial relations.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ "Editorial," *Womans Press*, July 1922, 346.

⁸⁵ For example, in a review of Weatherford's *The Negro* in the *Crisis*, the author warns "Weatherford's book is the manifesto of that part of the South which is promoting the Inter-Racial movement. It deserves all the praise and blame of that movement. Its attitude toward the Negro is liberal but it is desperately afraid lest it be too liberal. Nearly every praiseworthy statement therefore, with which we could agree, is partially spoiled by a counter-statement which is a partial surrender to the unreconstructed South." "An Array of Books," *Crisis*, Sept 1924, 219.

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Byrd's participation in the international political discussion is perhaps what led her to seek employment within international government. After the ISS conference, Byrd decided not to return to New York and the YWCA, but to move to Geneva in the fall of 1927 to assume a position with the International Labor Office, an organization established in 1919 at the Peace of Paris to work jointly with the League of Nations to investigate labor relations. The ILO/BIT differed in part from the League in its representation because it gave every member of a national delegation—composed of two government officials, one employer representative, and one worker representative—an individual vote. In the League, by contrast, only governments held seats and each nation voted as a block.⁸⁶ Yet the ILO/BIT followed the League in giving representation only to national bodies, thus depriving those under colonial powers of a voice.⁸⁷

Byrd's role in the ILO was to bring attention to "native" workers under colonial governments. She worked in the Native Labor Office "making a study of production in relation to Negro labor in Africa and in the United States."⁸⁸ Fairly quickly, she decided to educate her colleagues about African Americans' political and economic situations. Again, she took up her pen to seek help from her Harlem contacts. Her position kept her so busy that, she told Du Bois, she "could easily use 48 hours a day."⁸⁹

Byrd came to the League well educated on its importance from reading New Negro and YW publications. Neither the NAACP, led by Du Bois's example, nor the

⁸⁶ League of Nations., "League of Nations Photo Archive" 2002 (Center for the Study of Global Change, accessed 7 Oct 2008); <http://www.indiana.edu/~league/ilooverview.htm>.

⁸⁷ Mabel Janet Byrd, "The League of Nations and the Negro Peoples," *Crisis*, Jul 1928, 224.

⁸⁸ "Along the Color Line," *Crisis*, Feb 1928, 53-54.

⁸⁹ George Libaire, Assistant Warden St. Stephens College, to Milton M. Weston Jr., 7 Jul 1928, Box 3 Folder 21, Weston Papers, Columbia.

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YWCA believed in the isolationism and anti-League attitudes then rampant in the United States. In 1923, for example, Du Bois had written in a *Crisis* editorial that

The League is still the most hopeful international movement in the world today and with all the sinister influence of Great Britain in its counsels it has nevertheless recently shown its loyalty to humanity by admitting Ethiopia, which the world calls Abyssinia, to a seat at the council table. We know of no other international movement that has so decisively risen above the hateful color bar. Most of them, both political and humanitarian, like the Red Cross which is this month appealing for funds in the United States, deserve absolutely nothing from American Negroes because of the open prejudice which stains their actions. May the League of Nations live and grow.⁹⁰

He believed that people of African descent must agitate together through a Pan-African identity to protect their rights and that the League might be able to reprimand the United States for its racist actions (foreshadowing Malcolm X's call to the United Nations to condemn the U.S. more than thirty years later). A half-year before Byrd took up her job at the International Labor Organization, Du Bois had called for a black person to be appointed to exactly that position.⁹¹

⁹⁰ Du Bois, "Opinion—League of Nations" *Crisis* November 1923, 7.

⁹¹ Three efforts under the League of Nations are of interest to colored folk ... The *third* step is that of the International Labor Organization which proposes for the next two or three years to frame with the help of experts an international treaty covering conditions for the future employment of colored laborers. Here again the misfortune is that apparently few representatives of the colored laborers have been called in council while white capital is there in force. Sometime the Negro people of the Americas will realize that they ought to have permanent representation at Geneva." Du Bois, "Opinion—League of Nations," *Crisis* January 1927, 130-1.

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Alain Locke had spent the summer of 1927 “as an accredited observer” studying the way the League of Nations administered the mandate areas in order to make a report to the Foreign Policy Association (FPA).⁹² In his proposal, he explained, “The immediate practical objective of a study of the policy and operation of the League of Nations with respect to African peoples would be to ascertain to what extent an enlightened policy of native government, education, and labor control was in operation or in prospect in and through the machinery of the League.”⁹³ Once he had discovered this, he would make a report to the FPA, which he hoped through their resources would encourage greater interest in the League among African Americans. Byrd had probably met Locke during one of his many trips from Howard University in Washington DC to Harlem. He participated as fully as he could in the New Negro Renaissance, even though his home base was the Howard University philosophy department. Perhaps he was able to stimulate her interest in the League or smooth the path for her to join the International Labor Office. She kept him apprised of her activities in Geneva.⁹⁴

Byrd educated her colleagues by providing seminal texts on African American life and by bringing in her New Negro Renaissance friends to speak to them. She asked Du Bois and Locke to send her materials unavailable in Geneva, where it was difficult to purchase American books, let alone those by or about African Americans.

Almost a year after she had moved to Geneva, Byrd continued her correspondence with Du Bois, requesting the *Crisis*, information from the NAACP

⁹² For more on the FPA, see Chapter 8.

⁹³ Alain Locke, “Foreign Policy Association: Alain Locke re African Mandates Study Project,” Memorandum, May 26, 1927, Micro 48 Reel 1, P91-2000, FPA Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society..

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annual meeting, and again asking for reports from the Fourth Pan African Congress held the previous summer in New York. She also entreated him to send her a copy of NAACP assistant secretary Walter White's novel *Fire in the Flint* because her colleagues at the ILO/BIT wanted "to be informed about American Negroes!"⁹⁵ The jazz craze encouraged Europeans' interest in black people, yet the interest of her colleagues lay more in politics. Byrd chose White's novel with a careful eye on the political education of her friends. White based his story about a small Southern town on his extensive research into lynching while first an NAACP field secretary. Though irrevocably convinced personally that he was a black man, he was light skinned enough (with his blond hair and blue eyes) to convince members of lynch mobs to tell all. White's story included many aspects of black life in the South—the formation of black communities, conflict and cooperation between middle and lower class African Americans, the cowardice of sympathetic whites, white jealousy of successful blacks, sharecropping, white male rape of black women, violent lynchings, and the complicity of powerful whites in covering up the real reasons for the lynchings. Byrd knew that those in the ILO/BIT trying to improve the conditions for African and African American laborers needed to understand the way race worked in American—that successful blacks (a Harvard and European trained doctor among them) were particularly targeted for discrimination and lynching. Improving the physical conditions of workers would not necessarily improve the level of discrimination aimed at them.

In the summer of 1928, she met Locke and Paul and "Essie" Robeson (the latter her friend from the New York chapter of the Deltas) in London on a brief vacation from

⁹⁵ Milton M. Weston Jr. To George Libaire. Draft, n.d., Weston Papers, Columbia.

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Geneva. She was intensely happy to see friends from Harlem. The Robesons were in London for Paul to perform in *Show Boat* on the London stage. Eslanda Goode Robeson, an analytic chemist, had briefly put her career on hold before pursuing anthropological studies of Africa in the 1930s. In the course of Byrd's and the Robesons' conversations, they formulated the campaign of "propaganda" she should pursue in Geneva. The Robesons leaned left, though they had not yet become communists.⁹⁶ That would wait until a trigger event the next summer, when they were refused service at the Savoy Grill, an experience in racism that turned them more definitively toward socialism. But even before this they had regularly sat at table with Emma Goldman and other socialists.⁹⁷

Returning to Geneva in September, Byrd assured Locke that she was "hard at" it and implored him to send her copies of the *New Negro*, his anthology of the New Negro Renaissance. It included poetry, essays, short stories, and artistic reprints highlighting the artistic ferment coming out of African Americans who felt free to define themselves.⁹⁸

Byrd encouraged African Americans touring Europe to stop in Geneva to talk to her colleagues at the BIT; she wanted her coworkers to get a flavor of Harlem's cultural community and continue their education in the problems affecting African Americans. During her second year at the BIT, she scolded Locke for visiting Geneva without calling on her (he apologized and said he had passed through so quickly he could not have seen anyone). At least, she told him Countee Cullen, their mutual friend, was going to visit in October. Cullen was the darling of the Harlem Renaissance; "With his high-pitched

⁹⁶ Dick Russell, *Black Genius and the American Experience*, 1st ed. (New York: Carroll & Graf, 1998), 124-128.

⁹⁷ Murali Balaji, *The Professor and the Pupil: The Politics of W. E. B. DuBois and Paul Robeson* (New York: Nation Books, 2007), 40.

⁹⁸ Mabel Byrd to Alain Locke, September 25, 1928, Box 164 19.4, Locke MSRC.

voice, nervous courtliness, and large Phi Beta Kappa key gleaming on the chain across a vested, roly-poly middle, he was the proper poet with proper credentials.” David Levering Lewis notes.⁹⁹ Cullen was in Europe on a Guggenheim Fellowship and on his honeymoon tour with Yolande Du Bois, W.E.B.’s daughter and Byrd’s sorority sister.¹⁰⁰

Byrd eagerly anticipated Cullen’s visit, both for his companionship and for his ability to influence her colleagues. Other than seeing Locke and the Robesons during her brief stay in London that summer she lamented that she had “seen no friends for over a year!”¹⁰¹ Staying in Europe for two years, rather than a couple months like Derricotte, opened Byrd to a greater depth of loneliness and home sickness than Derricotte experienced, even though it did seem that Byrd made friends in her new setting. There was something powerful in greeting someone who knew and understood the experience of being an educated black in a primarily white world. Throughout the fall, Byrd widely publicized Cullen’s visit among League people. She told Locke that “[f]rom the amount of advance interest in him that has been awakened I am certain that his public meetings will be successful. It is rather fun arranging things for him.”¹⁰² Locke promised to send the books and wished her luck “in your campaign. We all appreciate what you have done both for yourself and for the cause.”¹⁰³ After he had sent the books, he wrote, “I only

⁹⁹ Lewis, *When Harlem Was in Vogue*, 77.

¹⁰⁰ Their wedding in May 1928 had been Harlem’s “social event of the decade” but the marriage did not last long, if it ever really began. Cullen, widely rumored to be a homosexual, sailed for Europe on his fellowship after the wedding but a month before Yolande, accompanied by his “best friend” Harold Jackman. Byrd tried to learn from Du Bois how Yolande was and wondered if she would see her. W. E. B. Du Bois, “So the Girl Marries,” *Crisis*, June 1928; Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: The Fight for Equality*, 221.

¹⁰¹ Byrd to Locke, n.d. Box 164 19.4, Locke MSRC.

¹⁰² Byrd to Locke, 25 Sep 1928, Box 164 19.4, Locke MSRC.

¹⁰³ Locke to Byrd, 8 Oct 1928, Box 164 19.4, Locke MSRC.

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wish I could send you more ammunition, and I will shortly. As to previous round of it, there is of course no bill.”¹⁰⁴ Byrd took seriously her role as an educator of her colleagues.

Byrd hosted Cullen with the full strength of her new internationalism.¹⁰⁵ Her internationalism, unlike that described by many scholars, combined attention to the diaspora, awareness ““of the larger struggle of Africans and people of African descent throughout the world’ against colonization, disenfranchisement, slavery, and segregation” with the desire for international, interracial fellowship encouraged by the YWCA and the ISS.¹⁰⁶ She planned “a soiree” for Cullen’s visit “with the directors of the International Club.”¹⁰⁷ Cullen told the *Crisis* audience about his visit.¹⁰⁸ He was particularly impressed by the diversity of people with which they socialized, and how much interest Byrd had stimulated:

Geneva and a happy week there as the guest of the Quaker Hostel, all arranged through Mabel Byrd formerly of the Brooklyn and New York Y.W.C.A’s.... international gatherings where every conceivable race and country were represented; the air shot through with intense hopes and prophecies for world peace, the brotherhood of the races, the millennium. And always and everywhere a keen interest in the Negro, in many

¹⁰⁴ Locke to Byrd, 16 Jan 1929, Box 164 19.4, Locke MSRC.

¹⁰⁵ Countee Cullen, "Countee Cullen to His Friends," *Crisis*, Apr 1929; George Libaire, Assistant Warden St. Stephens College, to Milton M. Weston Jr., 7 Jul 1928, Box 3 Folder 21, Weston Papers, Columbia.

¹⁰⁶ Brent Hayes Edwards, "The "Autonomy" of Black Radicalism," *Social Text* 19, no. 2 (2001): 4.

¹⁰⁷ George Libaire, Assistant Warden St. Stephens College, to Milton M. Weston Jr., 7 Jul 1928, Box 3 Folder 21, Weston Papers, Columbia.

¹⁰⁸ He made no mention of Yolande’s presence or absence.

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Byrd's ISS and BIT friends all hoped for a place where a diversity of people could be brothers and sisters rather than suspicious, even hostile, strangers. Cullen caught the scent of that hope but sensed it would come only with the mythic "millennium." Byrd could have a greater hope because she had in fact experienced that fellowship over the past year, rather than only catching a faint whiff on a brief visit. Cullen also happily remembered the more causal socializing:

Geneva and a mountain drive on a brisk October morning; the summit reached, and fronting one in the distance the cold, austere, majesty of Mount Blanc, a moment to remember as long as the mind can remember beauty. Leaving Geneva with a sort of welcoming farewell ringing in our ears, 'Come back to Geneva and read your new poems to us when they are finished....',¹¹⁰

Even though Byrd had clearly made new friends in Geneva from Cullen's description of his time there, she found solace in maintaining and renewing her ties to Harlem. Those emotional ties helped make her time in Geneva as successful as it was by giving her a supportive place from which to launch her new friendships and connections.

¹⁰⁹ Cullen, "Countee Cullen to His Friends."

¹¹⁰ Ibid. Perhaps the use of "our ears" meant that Yolande was with him on this trip. Publicly at least, Yolande and Cullen remained together. In December 1928, the Alpha Beta chapter of the Deltas recognized Yolande's married state when they sent Christmas greetings to four of their members then abroad—Juliette Derricotte in India, Mabel Byrd in Geneva, Yolande Du Bois Cullen in Paris, and Eslanda Robeson in London. "With the Sororities," *New York Amsterdam News*, 19 Dec 1928, 6. Yet Yolande had already been writing to her father for advice as to how to end the marriage, as soon as she realized Cullen's inclinations did not include her. In reply, "Du Bois consoled his son-in-law and excoriated his daughter." When he finally recognized that the marriage had to be annulled, Du Bois quietly began the legal proceedings with Arthur Spingarn's aid. Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: The Fight for Equality*, 226.

After working as a research assistant in the BIT office for several months, Byrd wrote an article for the *Crisis* detailing the League of Nations' relationship to people of African descent over the past nine years of its existence. After explaining the mandate system, which she praised for its oversight of colonial powers, and detailing its flaws, she referenced what her own office had been doing (without explaining her connection to it). She explained how African labor recently entered the "general world economy" because industrial nations demanded African raw goods. Colonial powers often extracted these goods by forced labor.¹¹¹ Byrd's office had been compiling information and statistics on situations of forced labor. The Committee of Experts on Native Labour, for which Byrd researched the situation of African workers, presented their deliberations to "the Governing Body of the International Labour Office in October 1927."¹¹² As a result of their presentation, the Governing Body resolved that "forced labour should cease at the earliest possible moment" and that the "question of forced labour" would be "the first item on the agenda of the session of the International Labour Conference" in 1929.¹¹³

In her article, Byrd imbedded the effects of her own education campaign on her colleagues. While "participation in the development of our African brothers could only be directly achieved by representation on the Mandate Commission," Byrd remained confident about her own contribution (unnamed) to this work.¹¹⁴ Because she shared her knowledge of "the methods of educational and economic development of the American

¹¹¹ Byrd, "The League of Nations and the Negro Peoples," 224.

¹¹² Ibid.; James Myers, "American Relations with the International Labor Office, 1919-1932," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 166 (March 1933): 142.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 242.

Negro,” her office had decided to use African American development “as models [...] in Mandated areas.”¹¹⁵ The League paid “no little attention [...] to the American Negro’s life, his difficulties, and his achievements,” which then served “as guideposts in making the Mandates system ‘the sacred trust of civilization.’”¹¹⁶ Byrd’s presence within the office, bringing as she did her “propaganda” from Du Bois, Locke, Cullen and the Robesons, brought African Americans’ experiences immediately to the minds of her coworkers. Because of her efforts, the League worked within its limited capacity to protect African and African American workers. She also laid groundwork for the expanded role African Americans would later play in the administration of the United Nations.¹¹⁷

Before she returned to the United States, Byrd had one last conference to attend. The Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom invited her to their annual meeting in Prague. This meeting witnessed the resignation of their founding member and long term president—internationally known settlement worker Jane Addams. Among the United States delegates was leading Harlem figure Addie Hunton.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ See Thomas Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Race Relations in the Global Arena* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001); Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy, Politics and Society in Twentieth-Century America*. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000); Charles P. Henry, *Ralph Bunche: Model Negro or American Other?* (New York: New York University Press, 1999); James Hunter Meriwether, *Proudly We Can Be Africans: Black Americans and Africa, 1935-1961, The John Hope Franklin Series in African American History and Culture*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Plummer, *Rising Wind: Black Americans and U.S. Foreign Affairs, 1935-1960*; Penny M. Von Eschen, *Race against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997); Penny M. Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004).

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In a speech to the gathering, Byrd synthesized what she had learned from two years in Europe. First of all, peace and reconciliation only went so far. It was not worth forfeiting one's dignity and rights for the sake of maintaining peace or promoting cooperation. She once again outlined the history of African Americans for her audience, but added her new knowledge about the racial conflict in South Africa. Acknowledging a previous speaker who said, "cooperation instead of conflict is the outstanding fact of evolution," she argued that "it is difficult to understand how cooperation can be substituted for conflict until those whose rule is dominant are led to change their attitude toward the minority or dominated group." Here, she directly challenged those like Derricotte who made cooperation a cornerstone of their interracial activity. It was the burden of the dominant group to realize first "that their conviction of superiority is false, that because they find themselves in a dominating position, is no true sign of their inherent superiority; secondly that there is no divine right for one race to rule another; and thirdly, that the disturbances made by the minority groups are the constant attempts toward a real cooperation in the body politic." In so deriding white supremacy, she echoed Hubert Harrison's similar attacks. She directly challenged those in the audience who would condemn African Americans for protesting because they stirred conflict rather than working toward cooperation. What the representatives of dominant groups in the audience needed to recognize was that cooperation, under the standing social system, tended to always favor the dominant group.

Byrd had little to say about interracial commissions or "programs, and policies for protection of minorities," except that she had little hope for a "real pacific settlement" unless they accepted the premise "that no existing group, race or nation has a right to

dominate another.” The European empires were still intact when she made this declarative statement. She challenged all those women in the room who had sat on many interracial boards who believed that white Americans or Europeans had a right to rule over people of color. They would have to reassess their own internal world view while challenging the politics of their home nations and empires. To conclude her stirring speech, she quoted H. A. Miller's “Races, Nations and Classes” (a book she probably read while working at the BIT). He used religious language to justify a philosophical principle:

The way of salvation is a group conviction of sin, which will condemn the egotism and unmorality of a race or nation as severely as it does that of an individual. The myth of superiority will pass when we follow the injunction of Kant to treat every person or group as an end and never as a means. ... There is no evidence that the superiority of an existing group is based on anything but an accident; and any attempt to maintain that dominance by reason is merely the rationalization of a myth. The first step toward the solution (of these conflicts) must be a disillusionment from the belief that religion and ethics and science sanction the right of one race to rule another. If both the culturally superior and inferior will accept the fact that inherent racial superiority or inferiority is a myth, the world may be saved some of the painful experiences it has suffered as other myths of privilege and prestige have been shattered.

Unlike Derricotte, who promoted the equality of races through her belief that every person was sacred to God, Byrd argued that races would become equal only through the

application of logic and scientific education. Despite this major difference in argument (relying for justification upon God or upon science), Derricotte and Byrd's means were relatively similar, education and discussion. This is one of the most marked aspects of the 1920s that differentiates it from the Civil Rights Movement. Everyone, the radicals and the reformers, believed that education of blacks and whites was the most important road to change. The tone of that discussion could be different, with Derricotte promoting cooperation and diplomacy and Byrd agitating and arguing. We do not have enough records of their dialogues to trust such a simple binary. But it may have been that they leant in the two different directions.

Mabel Byrd spent two years abroad before finally returning to the United States. She returned unable to accept further instances of segregation, if she ever had been. Her thinking and expectations were embedded in her experiences in the American west and north and in the capital of European diplomacy, Geneva. Her initial foray into politics and economics had opened before her a new and exciting career path as a professional economist, one yet uncharted.¹¹⁸ Eight years later, Byrd could join Charles S. Johnson in real sociological and economic research at Fisk University. When her acquaintance from Harlem heard she was returning to the United States, he invited her to join him at Fisk. Byrd left active work in the YW (she remained loosely connected to some committees) behind for good.

¹¹⁸ One black woman who had tried to become a professional economist was Sadie Mossell Alexander. She had received a doctorate in economics in 1921, but had been unable to find anyone who would employ her. She returned to school and received a law degree; she could then practice in with her husband, Raymond Pace Alexander, in Philadelphia.

Juliette Derricotte Encounters India

A year later, Juliette Derricotte again explored her internationalism, this time on a six month trip around the world. Many experiences emphasized how difficult the kind of international fellowship and cooperation that she sought was, but she continued to maintain hope in it—hope that arose through her ability to laugh and her faith in God's presence. She traveled through Europe to India for the 1928 meeting of the WSCF General Committee, where she was reunited with Max Yergan, to China and Japan before returning to the US. Derricotte spent seven weeks in India, touring the country before joining the conference in Mysore. She "lived in Y.W.C.A.'s with Anglo-Indians, in the furnished camp of a Maharajah, in a deserted military camp with five hundred students from India, Burma, and Ceylon, in an Indian Student Hostel, in a mission school run by Americans, in one run by an Australian, in Indian homes, in European hotels."¹¹⁹ At the home of the wealthy rajah, an "orthodox Hindu," ninety delegates entered into the committee meetings under "a great white tent in the midst of [the rajah's] green lawns."¹²⁰ While there, she reconnected with the rest of the American delegates, including Frank Wilson (a future Second Amerindian) who held her same job with the YMCA (National Student Division Secretary, working with black men).

During interminable administrative sessions, Derricotte became frustrated that she had traveled half way around the world to discuss dull procedural and budgetary issues. When her mind wandered at one such meeting, she was struck by the relationships being created behind the scenes and among seeming enemies. She looked around and there "off

¹¹⁹ Derricotte, "The Student Conference at Mysore, India," 268.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

to my left sat a Britisher and an Indian whom I happened to know had gone hard and fast in a discussion on England in India—(the young Indian woman, upon entering church, had been told only a few weeks before that all the whites must be seated before they could give her a seat).” On the other side of the room, “sat my little Korean tent-mate who had kept me awake until 2 A.M. telling me that I knew nothing of prejudice, segregation, and discrimination; that to know the real meaning of these words I’d have to be a Korean under a Japanese government.” Across from her was Derricotte’s “newly made friend from Japan who had asked me a few questions about our immigration laws.” She also spotted the white South Africans who had earlier told her “the real spiritual experience which was theirs when they could shake hands with Max Yergan.”¹²¹

The majority of these examples encapsulate Derricotte’s continuing desire to understand everything she could about international conflict. They also illustrate her keen eye for ludicrous contrasts, bordering on hope for better race relations. The final example occludes some of the real tensions Yergan faced within the organization.¹²² White South Africans may have felt a spiritual connection with him, but Yergan had begun to feel stultified within the racial expectations imposed upon him. Within a few years, he would

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² In his biography of Yergan, Anthony makes the argument that when Derricotte and Yergan met in India, they empathized with each other about being included in the WSCF only on a token level, as an attempt to achieve the WSCF’s reputed broad-mindedness, but still being misunderstood in many ways. I disagree that this would have been a central critique of Derricotte’s. In her public voice, at least, Derricotte does not critique WSCF’s tokenism. In the private letter to Yergan that Anthony references, I believe she is actually commenting on the division then occurring between the WSCF and the ESR’s successor, the International Student Service, not on Francis Miller’s relationship to her. Juliette Derricotte to Max Yergan, July 24, 1929, RG 58, Box 13, Folder 191, Yale Divinity Library Special Collections.

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resign his position as missionary and become a leftist activist, interested more in racial and economic justice than in the façade of racial fellowship.¹²³

Despite the irony and undercurrent of tensions, Derricotte still found meaning in the promise of fellowship. Like Francis Miller, the chairman of the WSCF, she knew the fellowship was “essentially a dream, but it is a dream which its members believe can be to some extent actualized.”¹²⁴ In witnessing such relationships evolve, she could not at first decide whether “all the entanglements of international attitudes and policies, with all the bitterness and prejudice and hatred that are true between any two or more of these countries” was more powerful than the inchoate friendships among a handful of people.¹²⁵ Yet, the friendships were among diligent workers, who together thought, played, and lived “in the finest sort of fellowship, fulfilling the dream of the World’s Student Christian Federation ‘That All May Be One.’”¹²⁶ Seeing it she had hope that “this is what can happen to all the world.”¹²⁷

Like all those who had considered the potential of cosmopolitan understanding and how to foster it, Derricotte recognized the ugliness in people that could prevent the potential from ever becoming reality.¹²⁸ When she rose to address the audience in India,

¹²³ Anthony, *Max Yergan*.

¹²⁴ Francis P. Miller, “A World League of Students: Twenty-Seven National Movements Unite in the World’ Student Christian Federation,” *Womans Press*, June 1928, 391.

¹²⁵ Cuthbert, *Juliette Derricotte*, 40.

¹²⁶ Derricotte, “The Student Conference at Mysore, India,” 282.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Cosmopolitanism is used by some scholars as an alternative to Pan-Africanism or the African Diaspora as a description of black internationalism. As Paul Anderson points out, Alain Locke understood his own efforts at artistic critique, particularly his attempts to bring out the “folk” in African American artistic endeavors, through a new kind of cosmopolitanism that embraced diversity and pluralism. Paul Allen

she considered the contrasting faces before her and thought to “tell them that people were cruel. That life daily wounded its millions,” but

suddenly the beauty of life, of those gathered before her, of all life in its strangeness, its blind strength, in its stumbling promises, swept over her like a wave, and she poured forth words that caught them all up, supported and held by one who spoke from sorrows distilled into joy in her own heart. And in listening to her men and women believed again in themselves.¹²⁹

Derricotte stretched the imaginations of those listening and reinvigorated their self-purpose. She redirected her audience to the beauty within themselves, which was remarkable given the layers of conflict, discrimination, and poverty she had witnessed in India, in Europe, and in her homeland of the United States. Derricotte used the skills she

Anderson, *Deep River: Music and Memory in Harlem Renaissance Thought* (Duke University Press, 2001). Colleen O'Brien offers Pauline Hopkins' literary work as an example of “insurgent cosmopolitanism,” which “rather than a cultural cosmopolitanism that emanates from the European metropole, ... recognizes the oppressive character of the (Anglo-American) nation and the capitalist state it produces.” Colleen C. O'Brien, ““Blacks in all Quarters of the Globe”: Anti-Imperialism, Insurgent Cosmopolitanism, and International Labor in Pauline Hopkins's Literary Journalism,” *American Quarterly* 61, no. 2 (2009): 250. Brent Hayes Edwards explains why he chose not to include the term in his masterful text on the exchange of print culture between Anglophone and francophone people of African Descent, *The Practice of Diaspora*. He writes “A number of years ago, I began thinking about the status of that term in my project, after the late Claudia Tate asked me whether intellectuals such as Langston Hughes and Claude McKay should be termed “cosmopolitan” in my reading of their work and travels. In the end I tried to refrain from using the term as a privileged description of what Paris or Marseilles or New York represented to the intellectuals I was considering. This was partly due to a worry about the pitfalls of the term, particularly in a project centered around the modern metropole—even if many of these pitfalls have been addressed by the scholars associated with “cosmopolitics” scholarship. It also seemed to me crucial *not* to insist on the necessity of transnational mobility.” Brent Hayes. Edwards, “Pebbles of Consonance: A Reply to Critics,” *Small Axe* 9, no. 1 (2005): 140.

Paul Gilroy, Kwame Appiah, David Hollinger have all offered cosmopolitanism as a new political and philosophical ideal to replace post-colonial individualization of nations and cultures. Paul Gilroy, *Postcolonial melancholia* (Columbia University Press, 2005); Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism* (Penguin, 2007); David A Hollinger, *Postethnic America: Beyond Multiculturalism* (New York: BasicBooks, 1995); David A Hollinger, *Cosmopolitanism and Solidarity: Studies in Ethnoracial, Religious, and Professional Affiliation in the United States*, Studies in American thought and culture (Madison, Wis: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006).

129

Cuthbert, *Juliette Derricotte*, 41.

had developed speaking to undergraduates about beauty, truth, and racial reconciliation to sway an international audience (overwhelmed by the size of the problems they must confront) again toward hope. Derricotte recognized that interaction among a diversity of individuals required first that all involved understand each other's experiences with pain and oppression. Only then could they move on to speak about their hope for a better, more united world, about bringing the Kingdom of God to earth. Such talk had immediate value in itself by granting hope, but would only prove ultimately valuable, according to Derricotte, if those present would avoid denying "religious principles by our actions" and so be a witness to those outside the Christian fold.¹³⁰

Though she left behind an invigorated audience, she returned home filled not with idealism and hope, but aching with the confusion of all she had seen. She believed she was "no longer free" because India's problems haunted her. As she continued around the world on board an ocean liner, Derricotte's thoughts dwelt upon her experiences, "I slept in every brown body lying in the road in that factory town in India. I am in each smile or little anguish of her jeweled princesses." This brokenness and anguish could not conceal her desire for life; "Even in poverty and filth such as she had never dreamed of before, life surged up so fiercely that the exuberance of breath alone vied with the pulsing of the torrid heat." She beseeched her God, asking for her own freedom—freedom from the prejudice she knew she would face at home and freedom from "this bond of mean service." Even as she wished for a space where her future children could freely "play beneath the sun," where she was not slated to always fight for the rights of her people, she again chose the mantel of responsibility to create that space. She could bear this

¹³⁰ Derricotte to Yergan, July 24, 1929.

responsibility by choosing knowledge and anguished laughter; "Because of my ignorance I shall be greedy for knowledge. Because I know loneliness I shall be greedy for knowledge. Out of tears I shall seek men. Out of laughter, God. How amusing when one rises up because I sit down beside him."¹³¹ To protect their own sanity, African Americans have chosen many different ways to deal with discrimination and blind hatred. Derricotte chose to laugh at the absurdity of it. Even as she chose life, laughter, and service, she realized no easy answers were available; economics, religion, and race tangled together into the many vistas of persecution she had seen among the delegates in Mysore.¹³²

Internationalism on American Soil

In the late 1920s, Marion Cuthbert began spending her summers in New York City, studying for an MA at Columbia University Teachers College. While there, she helped the International Student Services plan for their first conference in the United States, to be held at Mount Holyoke College in the summer of 1931. The ISS combined two of the emphases already discussed. It continued to emphasize fellowship among many races, ethnicities and nationalities, though it separated the idea from the Christian imperative of its mother organization, the World Student Christian Fellowship. At the same time, it encouraged students and professors to find answers for world problems in the application of social science theories. As the date of the conference approached,

¹³¹ Cuthbert, *Juliette Derricotte*, 42.

¹³² Derricotte, "The Student Conference at Mysore, India," 268.

Cuthbert wanted to introduce the organization to a promising young woman who could most benefit from it. She looked around at the black women she knew and decided to invite a fellow Minnesotan, just a few years younger than herself, who was working day and night for the poor in Harlem through the YWCA.

Anna Arnold (she would take her husband's name, Hedgeman, upon their marriage in 1933) came to the Mount Holyoke conference after a decade of teaching and social work. Born in 1899, Arnold grew up in the small Minnesota farming town of Anoka.¹³³ Her father William James Arnold, a son of slaves, left the South as soon as he came of age and graduated from Clark University in Atlanta. Perhaps out of his own personal success, he devoutly espoused a self-help philosophy based in education. In Minnesota he met and married Anna's mother, Ellen Parker, whose family was one of the first to settle in the region. They were the only Black family at their church and in their schools. Right after graduating from Hamline University, a private Methodist school, Arnold traveled south to teach in at Rust College, a small black college in Mississippi. She later explained why she was so excited to go south.

Shortly before commencement day, Dr. Doran asked me where I would like a teaching position and I said that nothing would suit me better than to teach in the South. Dr. Doran did not tell me that the South was my only choice, and it did not occur to me that this was true. For me, going south

¹³³ This is the same town that Garrison Keillor grew up in half a century later. By the time his memories began, Arnold's whole family had moved to New York to be closer to her and find a new life.

meant an opportunity to find the unique culture which my father had always praised, while decrying the informality of the Midwest.¹³⁴

It is interesting how many of the future Armenians had similar conversations with a white professor or mentor, someone who often more blatantly encouraged them to serve "their people." Perhaps this indicates that they, as young educated men and women, had a tendency to listen to their educators. Or perhaps it represents how pervasive the assumption was in the United States that all African Americans belonged to each other. Even though Arnold avoided being told to serve "her people" right after school, because of her enthusiasm to go south, the statement would come soon enough.

Arnold went as far south as she could, to Mississippi. She taught at Rust for two eye-opening years. Throughout her entire time there, she felt like an outsider. Among African Americans, she lacked the warmth and mannerisms expected (she had been trained in that Minnesota way to be very cautious around strangers). More disturbing, she faced deep, implacable hatred from whites for the first time. With great relief, Arnold returned to the Midwest.

Arnold almost immediately discovered that her deep trust in the freedom promised by the north was ill-placed; she could not get a job teaching in the north, as her embarrassed white colleagues and professors from Hamline University explained to her. After a period of unemployment, she discovered that practically her only option for a profession was to enter the YWCA. She then moved to Springfield Ohio to work as executive director of the "neighborhood" branch of the YWCA. She soon realized that though there were no signs declaring segregation in the north, the wall between the races

¹³⁴ Hedgeman, *The Trumpet Sounds*, 35.

was just as implacable. The “good” “Christian” white people on the board of the YWCA refused to allow the black members of Arnold’s branch of the YWCA to attend the central facilities downtown. This downtown branch had a pool and gymnasium, which was out of the financial reach of the “neighborhood” YWCA. She left her job in Springfield with sadness, for she “now regarded both the South and the Midwest with hate and fear.”¹³⁵

Hoping that the East might offer a better situation, Arnold took a new position at the Jersey City YWCA. At this Y, she began to understand the difficulties that faced manual laborers. A group of laundry workers met at the YWCA every week and often discussed plans for subsequent weeks. Yet, “they never followed through any plans they made and in some disgust [Arnold] accused them of being irresponsible.”¹³⁶ In response, the leader of the group invited Arnold to spend her vacation working in the laundries. This experience not only introduced her to the intense physical weariness with which the group of laundry workers came to the Y, it also forced her to reexamine her father’s deeply held beliefs in the ability of an individual to work his or her way out of any problem. The laundry workers could not improve their situation (extremely low wages, no lunchroom, no restrooms) individually, because when they complained they were simply fired. Arnold explained the changes in her thinking: “During the weeks immediately following this episode, my dearly cherished Midwestern ideas about the ability of the individual to accomplish on his own changed drastically. Our Thursday evening sessions on conditions in the laundries revealed clearly that individual efforts had

¹³⁵ Ibid., 36.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 39.

been fruitless.”¹³⁷ She began to seek not only practical solutions for her laundress friends, but also a whole new system of thought not imbedded in personal advancement.

In 1927, attracted by the intensity of black cultural expression she had experienced on earlier trips, Arnold moved to Harlem to work at the 137th street YWCA. She worked with young women seeking professions during the day and attended concerts and salons in the evenings, mixing freely with the literati and intelligentsia of the Harlem Renaissance. Her two worlds were never far apart because prominent African American men and women frequently spoke at the YWCA. She was particularly happy and relieved to be in an all black environment, spiced with the hope brought north by migrants from the South and the Caribbean. In her five years of teaching in the South and working with the YWCA, she had experienced a range of white people. All that she had experienced led her to shun association with white people. Her role in the YWCA did not allow her to completely cut off contact, though she tried to avoid it whenever possible. When she had to conduct white visitors around the YWCA, and listen to them encourage patience, she demanded, “How dare any man ask a Negro to wait for his rights when he has only one life to live?”¹³⁸ Arnold does not mention in her autobiography whether she ever met Derricotte, though it is likely they would have. She most likely would have said the same

¹³⁷ Paul Allen Anderson, *Deep River: Music and Memory in Harlem Renaissance Thought*, *New Americanists*. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001); Nathan Irvin Huggins, *Harlem Renaissance* (London; New York: Oxford University Press, 1973); Nathan Irvin Huggins, *Voices from the Harlem Renaissance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976); Langston Hughes, Carl Van Vechten, and Emily Bernard, *Remember Me to Harlem: The Letters of Langston Hughes and Carl Van Vechten, 1925-1964*, 1st ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf: Distributed by Random House, 2001); George Hutchinson, *The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1995); Lewis, *When Harlem Was in Vogue*; William J. Maxwell, *New Negro, Old Left: African-American Writing and Communism between the Wars* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); Venetria K. Patton and Maureen Honey, *Double-Take: A Revisionist Harlem Renaissance Anthology* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2001).

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 53.

thing to a black woman who encouraged patience that she had to white women who did so. Arnold wanted to see something happen to change things. By inviting her to the ISS conference, perhaps Cuthbert wanted to temper some of Arnold's more militant views, or simply give her a greater foundation of knowledge to back them up.

When the Depression crashed through this all-black enclave two years after she had moved there, 30 year old Arnold struggled to meet people's most basic needs for food, housing, and sanitation. The neighborhood's population had increased more than 600% over twenty five years, without new construction to house the increase. Black people crowded into Harlem brownstones, which owners divided into smaller and smaller units. When the economy was good and the jazz spots hopping, people did not mind or notice this so much. Then suddenly jobs ended, there was no more work to be found, and the apartments became unbearably crowded.¹³⁹ Harlem YWCA social workers realized they needed to focus not on "services for people who could afford to pay," but on immediate relief.¹⁴⁰ Starvation was an ever present concern. The YWCA created a special fund for emergency cases. They had limited funds and wanted their money to go to the most pressing needs. This meant that Arnold and her fellow YWCA workers had to assess the range of need and the way the family fit with YW standards. Arnold was often uncomfortable being such a judge—an arbiter of good conduct seemed more suited to her Progressive predecessors than to the more egalitarian minded Arnold. Out of all the future Amenians, she most directly confronted class disparities in lived experience. She was shocked to enter crowded apartments and see one toilet serve four apartments, few to

¹³⁹ Harlem averaged "233 persons per acre compared with 133 for the rest of Manhattan." *Ibid.*, 56.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 55.

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no tubs for bathing, vermin, and broken toilets overflowing onto the floor below.

Particularly bad were the underground apartments, which Arnold remembered distinctly for how they represented the failed hope of the north--“Packed in damp, rat-ridden dungeons, they existed in squalor not too different from that of the Arkansas sharecroppers.”¹⁴¹

Every day for two years, Anna Arnold had stretched her every resource—physical, financial, and spiritual—to meet the needs of her neighbors. By the summer of 1931, she was exhausted. Cuthbert recognized Arnold’s “need for broader contacts” and her need for rest. She knew the perfect respite to offer, an invitation to the tenth annual conference of the ISS held at Mount Holyoke in September. She wanted Arnold to experience the conference’s intellectual discussions among students and young professionals from throughout the world. She knew the renewal that could come from such communion of like minds.

Arnold was soul weary, as she later explained in her autobiography; “I loved Harlem but I was tired of the problems of the multitude—to use the ancient Biblical word which had come to have new meaning for me. I needed rest desperately.”¹⁴² The lure of a comfortable campus and good food pulled her towards Mt. Holyoke. The promise that all her expenses would be taken care of ensured her participation, for she had long since spent all of her money beyond essentials “for bread or milk for someone.”¹⁴³ For such a

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 57.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

haven, she told "Dr. Cuthbert that [she] could even bear living around white people for the ten days that would be involved."¹⁴⁴

Arnold was not prepared for what she encountered at the conference; her surprise at what it held began on her train ride north when she sat next to another person travelling to the conference, a Turkish student named Galib Ali Rifat. His English impeccable, Rifat began immediately to share his "breadth of information which people from abroad so often possess."¹⁴⁵ He had been traveling around the country for the last year as part of a debating team, soaking up local culture and analyzing it with an outsider's perspective. Arnold was shocked to realize that he "knew more about the United States than [she] did;" she was relieved to reach Mt. Holyoke and thus postpone exposing more of her ignorance for one evening. Indeed her "conversation with him taught [her] that it would be better for [her] to listen and to say as little as possible."¹⁴⁶ In listening, she began for the first time to face "the impact of world problems" among an international contingent of her peers.¹⁴⁷ In the YWCA, she had heard world problems discussed generally and in relationship mainly to women. Her negative relationship with white YW secretaries did not encourage her to scour the *Womans Press* for more specific information about international affairs (limited though it was by a uni-directional lens of international brotherhood). "At the ISS conference, [she] encountered a broader and deeper discussion; French students spoke of the antagonisms toward Germans; Turkish and Armenian delegates discussed the conflicts between their two countries; and major drama centered

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 59.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

around the threat of Hitler.”¹⁴⁸ Like Derricotte and Byrd before her, Arnold began to understand the multiplicity of ethnic and racial conflicts around the globe and she began to ponder how the black-white conflict in the United States fit into it all.

This conference dramatically changed Arnold’s perception of racial conflict. She was exposed for the first time to intransigent conflicts in the rest of the world, particularly through the friendships she formed with other people of color attending the conference from Asia, Africa and Latin America. Talking again and again with these new friends taught her the realities of imperialism and the ways that their fight against imperialism related to the African American struggle against racism. Together they demanded answers to their deepest questions about racial prejudice from the white leaders of the ISS.

The ISS conference offered its participants a lot of space for free discussion. Following each days work, delegates could walk into town to that quintessential American institution—the “drug store” offering the “shake” (quotation marks in the original).¹⁴⁹ Thursday afternoon, the delegates divided into four groups considering four primary areas of the organization’s work. Group II—Student Self-Help and Cooperative Organization—was convened by Edward R. Murrow, President of the National Student Federation of America and later a renowned journalist, and Friedrich Beck of Germany, who of any of the speakers remained most prominently in Anna Arnold’s mind.

Throughout the early days of the conference, Anna Arnold embraced the chance to talk with other people of color under imperialism. She and her new friends, “American

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ International Student Service, “University in a Changing World: Being a Report of the Tenth Annual Conference.” 1931, Box 22 Folder 15, Kotschnig Papers, SUNY Albany.

Negro, Chinese, Japanese, African and Indian,” participated in the discussion in Group II. They listened to Beck speak of his fight against Hitler’s rise to power, his development of three student houses in Munich, and his efforts to organize student self-help in Germany since 1921.¹⁵⁰ According to Arnold, Beck “spoke eloquently of the necessity for all people to be free” and warned the group about Hitler’s threat through “his ideas of Aryan supremacy.”¹⁵¹ Afterwards, Arnold and her group rose from their seats to directly challenge Beck. His simple elegance seemed inadequate to those who had directly experienced persecution. Arnold and her friends burst forth with the “questions which burned within” them—whether or not white people were even capable of humanity and of change, whether they would “ever realize that all mankind shares superiorities and inferiorities,” or whether they were “worth the struggle to help [them] change, or must [they] be annihilated?”¹⁵² Beck’s careful answers must have challenged Arnold deeply, for she repeated them at length:

Fritz Beck must have sensed our honest agony, for he spent most of a night talking with us. He said we did not sound any more concerned with humanity than the whites and wondered whether *we* could be trusted with power. He wondered, too, whether we would be able to produce and enjoy freedom if we achieved it by murder. We fought back, and each of us was able to cite chapter and verse in describing the efforts we had made to open opportunity to all people. We were eloquent, but Fritz Beck

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Anna Arnold Hedgeman, *The Trumpet Sounds: A Memoir of Negro Leadership* (New York: Holt, 1964), 59.

¹⁵² Ibid.

reminded us that we did not need to be so detailed, for he was then living through the same kind of struggle as he fought the rise of Hitler. He suggested, finally, that our very experience of discrimination and inhumanity ought to convince us that, in the long run, hate is more harmful to the giver than to the receiver.¹⁵³

Arnold knew her frustrations and questions were honest. She knew they arose out of the agonies that she had experienced and struggled not to internalize over the last ten years. She began to wonder if her “honest agony” was entirely sufficient to motivate her work. How was this conference going to change her? The delegates were touched by Beck’s words, but unsure how they should proceed.¹⁵⁴

The following year Fritz Beck urged ISS leaders to hold a conference in Germany, hoping they might still influence the universities, but the conference was held after the Nazis grabbed power. In the summer of 1933 such influence seemed impossible. Fritz Beck stood his ground in Germany and wished his colleagues goodbye by telling them, as his ISS colleague James Parkes later recounted, “we should not see him again, for his murder was already planned by the Nazis among his own students. He was brutally killed very shortly afterwards.”¹⁵⁵

¹⁵³ Ibid. The passion and anger breathing within these words foreshadowed the debates of future black power generations influenced by Franz Fanon.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ James Parkes, *Voyage of Discoveries* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1969), 170.

Friday afternoon, the conference hosts treated the delegates to "an excursion by motor over the Mohawk Trail to Williamston, Massachusetts."¹⁵⁶ Those willing to rise early on Saturday morning, September 5th encountered two panel options, "Students and Politics," and "Students and Race." At the head table for the latter panel sat the two speakers, Marion Cuthbert and James Parkes.

The chair of this panel, Dr. Surendra K. Datta, had been called back to London by Mahatma Gandhi to be present at the Second Round Table talks about Indian independence after he had spoken on "The Crisis in the East" Thursday evening.¹⁵⁷ During that talk, he had traced the outstanding features of contact between Britain and Asia--growth of nationalism, creation of a bourgeoisie, crisis of the peasant classes, and the dominance of an urban economy over a rural one. He suggested that young Asians were looking to nationalism for solutions, but Datta believed that patriotism was not strong enough to build a society upon. Neither was the solution to be found in economics, contrary to his friend Max Yergan's opinions three years previously in India; "I cannot subscribe to any doctrine which would hold that in the final analysis, the solution or even the conflict is in the economic realm. The controversy is whether the individual was meant to be free, and if so around what his autonomy is centered."¹⁵⁸ England introduced democracy and individual autonomy to the East, quickly followed by the scientific and economic determinism of the modern age. "Thus within a century men have passed from a theocracy to the liberalism of freedom, only to find themselves once

¹⁵⁶ International Student Service. Tenth Annual Conference of International Student Service Program, Mt. Holyoke College Archives.

¹⁵⁷ Datta, "The Crisis in the East."

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

more enslaved by the new determinism. Here then lies the diagnosis of the deep seated malaise which has so suddenly overcome the younger generation.”¹⁵⁹ England and other colonial powers offered their subjects freedom and autonomy if they fought in World War I. Indians and Africans died for their European colonizers, but the survivors did not see their freedoms grow. Perhaps Datta meant Marxism when he mentioned this new determinism, but perhaps he also meant this lionizing of liberty. Datta thought it sapped hope from young people’s lives. Others found hope within those same philosophies.

Without Datta to chair their panel, Cuthbert and Parkes immediately began to present. The subsequent report on the meeting lauded Cuthbert’s “great frankness and commendable restraint.”¹⁶⁰ She could have ranted and raved about the poor treatment that African Americans suffered in the United States, but evidently she did not. She must have exhibited the diplomacy that Derricotte had perfected while working within the national.¹⁶¹ In praising her “restraint” was the author of the ISS document unknowingly fulfilling Byrd’s statement in Prague that whites equated black opinion with conflict? That whites could only listen to people who exhibited such “restraint?” This commendation also recognizes those traits most applauded by an organization still under the influence of European decorum. In contrast to Datta’s speech, which denied even the

¹⁵⁹ International Student Service, “University in a Changing World,” 11.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Anthony explained that Derricotte also exhibited this trait. “Derricotte was extraordinarily diplomatic in her treatment of controversial issues, a characteristic quite necessary for YWCA and YMCA secretaries, particularly if they were persons of color.” David Henry Anthony, *Max Yergan: Race Man, Internationalist, Cold Warrior* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 128. Scholars and pundits have treated such diplomacy either as necessary or as a disappointment. To flesh out this disappointment, Houston Baker Jr. explains why Martin Luther King Jr. was not invited to the White House after the March on Washington: “He was denied entrée because he was considered too militant—not a quiet, respectable, peaceful, and accommodating black presence fit for fruitful race relations in the United States.” Houston A. Baker, *Betrayal: How Black Intellectuals Have Abandoned the Ideals of the Civil Rights Era* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), xiv.

possibility of an economic basis for cultural conflict, Cuthbert outlined how American racial conflict was rooted in “two dominating factors in American life, exclusiveness and competition.”¹⁶² Concomitant with civilization, class distinctions grew up in the United States, with African Americans at the bottom because “‘if you have a top you must have a bottom’, and, ‘the opposite of white is black.’”¹⁶³

Like Mabel Byrd had in her speech at the 1927 ISS conference in Switzerland, Cuthbert explained how imbedded racial conflict was within American culture. In particular, she highlighted all the ways different Euro-Americans suggested treating African Americans following the Civil War—“Liberia, segregation in U.S.A., segregation in American cities, the hope that they would die off, or machine guns.”¹⁶⁴ These suggestions must have echoed statements about Hitler made by other presenters that week. Though she probably had a sympathetic audience, Cuthbert still felt she needed to urge them to recognize that African Americans were in the United States to stay. The 1930 census showed black birth rate was higher than whites. Despite the worst health conditions in the country, blacks persisted, and with increasing knowledge of sanitation and an improved economic situation, they would prosper. Even the hopes of the eugenicists proved futile—mixed unions would not wipe out the physical identity of black people. Pure segregation or transplantation was also a false hope; “Africa is divided as spoils among the European powers who find far too many blacks left on their hands to entertain the idea of taking on any more, while possibilities of isolation in this

¹⁶² International Student Service, “University in a Changing World,” 11.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

country would wreck everything from individual property rights to state sovereignty itself.”¹⁶⁵ Black persistence in this country was far more than the dashed hopes of eugenicists and racists, because African Americans had a right to call this land their own. And not just the Southern land of their ancestors. Cuthbert recognized the agricultural and industrial forces of the Great Migration, which drew African Americans to new homes throughout the country during and after WWI. With gentle sarcasm (or perhaps with a critique of the black middle class), Cuthbert warned that “a very real part of the problem is the feeling of the Negro that he is, above everything else, absolutely American, an intensity of feeling so great that he identifies himself with the majority in the country which considers itself essentially right, even virtuously right, in most of its acts, even when such identification works the rankest injustice to his own group.”¹⁶⁶ These sentiments might have found accord in an audience composed of internationals who considered the promises and problems of nationalism in their own countries, even while startling white Americans in the audience who had perhaps never put a black face to their image of the “American.”

Despite African Americans’ historic role in building American infrastructure and society, Cuthbert asked whether “it was going to be possible for [them] to stay with security.”¹⁶⁷ Any security that had developed during the 1920s had been severely undermined by the Depression. African Americans had been the first to feel the onslaught of economic depression because throughout the country one slogan resounded—“No jobs

¹⁶⁵ Marion Cuthbert, “The Negro Today,” *Church and Society* (1932).

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ International Student Service, “University in a Changing World,” 11.

for Negroes until every white man has a job.”¹⁶⁸ The economic insecurity African Americans suffered was often explained away by layers of stereotyping that asserted “inherent mental disabilities.” Those who used the stereotypes to “protect” themselves actually blinded themselves; they “either do not see or do not care to see that their control is an economic one and that what they fear is not a havoc wreaked in their midst because of [black peoples’] inability to comprehend so intellectual and complex a civilization, but that [they] will become a real contender for some of the honors and spoils of the world.”¹⁶⁹

The outcome of this suffering according to Cuthbert included serious repercussions for African Americans and for the stability of American society. First, the character of African Americans was changing.¹⁷⁰ Cuthbert explained that African Americans’ “religious experience and conviction” was fading and they were “losing confidence in God.” What loyalty they had to white people was disappearing; in its place grew the “belief that only in something which the Negro can do himself can he find salvation.”¹⁷¹ Given Cuthbert’s religious convictions and her desire for an improved position for African Americans, she must have seen these changes with mixed feelings. Her friend Juliette Derricotte had lamented a similar point about religiosity in a letter to Max Yergan. Derricotte suggested that “our young business men and our young professional men have got so involved in their thinking on this question of race and

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Cuthbert, “The Negro Today.”

¹⁷⁰ Cuthbert, like most of her generation, spoke of African Americans in the male singular, as “The Negro” and “his character.”

¹⁷¹ International Student Service, “University in a Changing World.” 11.

religion that the old time religion, for which our racial group was noted, can no longer be credited as a part of the experience of the younger group.”¹⁷²

In Cuthbert’s writings about Derricotte, they both show such sympathetic feelings toward Christianity that this lack of religion in the younger generation must have distressed them. On the other hand, they had both spent their lives working to ameliorate the pressures of race prejudice on young people and must have been eager to see the next generation of students take up the burden. Cuthbert concluded her speech by warning and proclaiming that “It is certain that the Negro is going to be a part of any social uprising in America. One tenth of the population finds it almost impossible to live in the United States. Student groups are seeking a solution to this terribly difficult problem and the last ten years have seen the beginning of change through Negro and white students working at it together.”¹⁷³ With this last sentence, she identified obliquely with all of Derricotte’s work and emphasized again the importance of education, dialogue, and a “spirit of cooperation” from both sides. As Marion Cuthbert settled back into her seat, silence descended as internationals and Americans alike considered the reality and future of racial conflict and cooperation in the United States.

James Parkes then stood to speak on the European perspective on “Students and Race,” giving a historical critique of the idea of a superior race. It was healing for Arnold to hear a white person critique the ideas and actions that she also found so repugnant. He established his foundations immediately—“the racial theory of Europe” had existed for

¹⁷² Derricotte as quoted in Anthony, *Max Yergan*, 129-30.

¹⁷³ International Student Service, “University in a Changing World.”

two thousand years and “is always political,” not biological or scientific.¹⁷⁴ He supported these assertions by tracing their reality throughout history--from the Roman patriarchs “descending” from Mount Olympus to English monarchs’ divine right to the Social Darwinists transfixed by hereditary traits. The theories of this last group were “eminently satisfactory,” he sarcastically acknowledged, “for substituting political generalisations for scientific accuracy it could easily be shown that races or groups which at any one moment were in an inferior position must scientifically remain so, since their heredity could not be changed.”¹⁷⁵

From these scientific theories, Europeans took the logical next step in racial theory to a civilizing mission. Parkes argued, “Admitting the existence of superior and inferior races, then obviously the superior ones had a moral duty to rule the others and at the same time to preserve themselves from contamination by them.”¹⁷⁶ This mission became complicated because no European group agreed who was superior and who was inferior.

The British and French in the last war had no scruple in using African troops against the Germans; the Germans who are convinced of their superiority to Jews and Slaves [sic] are unconvinced that British rule is justified by the inferiority of Indian civilization; and the Americans in

¹⁷⁴ Parkes. "Students and Race."

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

spite of an insoluble Negro question at home, grow hot with indignation at the Italian treatment of Austrians in the South Tyrol.¹⁷⁷

Though these racial distinctions had no biological reality, the groups did come to real problems, which were “matters of religion, history and tradition and in some cases, climate, and not questions of biology or race.”¹⁷⁸ While Parkes located racial conflict within culture and politics, rather than in economics as Cuthbert did, they must have felt common ground in rejecting a biological definition. Racial theory had progressed dramatically in the previous thirty years. In 1909, “[f]ew reputable scientists dared to assert the equality of the races” W. E. B. Du Bois explained to *Crisis* readers, but by 1929, “[n]o reputable scientist or public speaker today denies the essential equality of all races.”¹⁷⁹ This change arose in part through the efforts of eminent anthropologist Franz Boas at Columbia University, as well as through the efforts of black social scientists.¹⁸⁰ Throughout these discussions, Arnold learned about the way other minorities experienced persecution as well as the diversity of ways that people tried to justify that persecution.

The discussion of Students and Race continued on after lunch. In the evening, serious topics were set aside for a Stunts night led by Fritz Beck. Imperialism came under the harsh light of irony. International cooperation was given a practicum, as the report

¹⁷⁷ "Message to the American People," *Crisis*, August 1929, 265.

¹⁷⁸ Parkes, "Students and Race."

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Herbert Adolphus Miller, "Science, Pseudo-Science and the Race Question," *Crisis* October 1925. E. Franklin Frazier, "Eugenics and the Race Problem," *Crisis* December 1925.

later explained, “No one will forget [...] the significance of the presence of a Negro, a Philippino [sic] and a Jew in the United States delegation ballet.”¹⁸¹

While at the conference, Arnold was asked to read a speech by Alain Locke that starkly stated “the philosophy of the United States toward people of color.”¹⁸² Locke was unable to attend the conference; “illness” detained him in Europe. He was listed among the attendees “inasmuch as Dr. Locke was one of the most important contributors through his paper, ‘The Negro in Art.’”¹⁸³ Locke had spent the summer in Europe, as he did most summers throughout the 1920s, to fill himself up with cultural and intellectual experiences that would sustain him throughout the rest of the year, since “I can have a better discussion with almost any European waiter than with most of my [Howard] colleagues.”¹⁸⁴ He wrote to Ralph Bunche that he would stay in Europe as close as he could to the start of the school year “in spite of my moral commitment with the International Students Conference at Mt. Holyoke. But really it is a matter of health—I find myself very shot to pieces nervously.”¹⁸⁵

Locke’s nervous troubles gave an important opportunity to Anna Arnold. Sunday afternoon, she “rehearsed that paper in a boat on the little stream which flows gently through Mt. Holyoke’s campus” before a two person audience—white delegate, Sterling Jessup Hiles, and her friend from the first day, Galib Ali Rifat. After she had finished

¹⁸¹ Ibid. 17.

¹⁸² Hedgeman, *The Trumpet Sounds*, 59-60.

¹⁸³ “Who’s Who of the Tenth Annual Conference International Student Service at Mount Holyoke College,” Mount Holyoke Archives and Special Collections.

¹⁸⁴ “New Y.W.C.A. Official to Stress Merit and Training in Job Giving.”

¹⁸⁵ “Marion Cuthbert Given Y.W. Post.” Though the date on the letter is 1932, the reference to the Mount Holyoke conferences indicates it was actually 1931.

reading, “Rifat, his eyes blazing, said, ‘Please read the hell out of that tonight.’”¹⁸⁶

Subsequent conversation revealed how much insight Rifat had gained about the American racial situation while studying for his masters at the University of Illinois.

Monday evening September 7, the conference was devoted to African American art and education. John Hope, president of Atlanta University, traced the history of African American education since teaching slaves to read was illegal through the tremendous advances made during the subsequent sixty years to continued problems facing black education.¹⁸⁷ Locke brought to the ISS his theory about art that he had been honing throughout the Harlem Renaissance. The ISS had had a taste of this theory four years previously when Mabel Byrd declared at the 1927 conference that “the only real culture in the United States had come from the negroes.”¹⁸⁸ Locke wrote “that slavery had subjected the Negro to a great spiritual discipline and had isolated him somewhat ‘from the powerful materializing and standardizing process of American life, and thus had preserved the Negro sense of folk solidarity, and with it whatever peculiar folk-values were there were emotionally and spiritually intensified by suffering.’”¹⁸⁹ Before the Harlem Renaissance, African Americans were typically portrayed as a servant class without culture, but instead “by a curious irony, these rejected elements in the American

¹⁸⁶ Hedgeman, *The Trumpet Sounds*, 60.

¹⁸⁷ International Student Service, “University in a Changing World,” 8; “Says Art Raises Status of Negroes: Dr. Alain Locke Declares Nation Is Re-Evaluating Race for Its Contributions,” *New York Times*, September 8, 1931, 17.

¹⁸⁸ International Student Service, Sixth Annual Conference of International Student Service of the Worlds Student Christian Federation: A Report on the Speeches, Discussions and Commissions of the Conference.

¹⁸⁹ “Says Art Raises Status of Negroes: Dr. Alain Locke Declares Nation Is Re-Evaluating Race for Its Contributions.”

social democracy have become the cornerstone in the making of distinctive American culture and art.”¹⁹⁰

Locke had spent the 1920s urging young black artists and writers to embrace this distinctive culture. By 1931, he was ready to announce success; “On the Negro mind this has already registered. Yesterday Negroes were suppressing racial characteristics, physical as well as emotional; today on the whole, they are emphasizing them, with pride and a comparative absence of apologies.”¹⁹¹ With such emphasis in their artistic and scientific endeavors, black Americans could be “missioners of civilization” to Africa and offer white people an “antidote to Puritanism and its emotional sterility.”¹⁹² Locke gave the group a model of the ISS’s purported “‘positive neutrality,’ which recognizes the distinction of nationality, race and religion, but overcomes their divisiveness by a co-operation which provides for their full expression” that accepted cooperation only when whites acknowledged the full cultural offerings of black Americans.¹⁹³ Yet, he was not ready to accept a similarly equal role for black Africans, whom he described as black Americans’ “handicapped brother in Africa.”¹⁹⁴

Arnold finished Locke’s speech with the poem “Strong Men” by Sterling Brown (another future American). The poem had moved swiftly through black communities after

¹⁹⁰

Ibid.

¹⁹¹

Ibid.

¹⁹²

Ibid.

¹⁹³

International Student Service, Tenth Annual Conference of International Student Service Program, Mt. Holyoke College Archives.

¹⁹⁴

“Says Art Raises Status of Negroes: Dr. Alain Locke Declares Nation Is Re-Evaluating Race for Its Contributions”; Calo, *Distinction and Denial: Race, Nation, and the Critical Construction of the African American Artists, 1920-40* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007).

being published a year previously in *Opportunity*.¹⁹⁵ It soon became a standard recitation piece during community meetings because it so expertly captured the terror blacks had suffered and the strength of determination and laughter that had helped them prevail. That evening, Arnold declaimed,

*They dragged you from homeland,
They chained you in coffles,
They huddled you spoon-fashion in filthy hatches,
They sold you to give a few gentlemen ease.*

*They broke you in like oxen,
They scourged you,
They branded you,
They made your women breeders,
They swelled your numbers with bastards....
They taught you the religion they disgraced.*

You sang:

*Keep a 'inchin' along
Lak a po' inch worm...*

...

¹⁹⁵

Sterling A. Brown, "Strong Men-A Poem," *Opportunity* (Sept. 1930): 265.

*They cooped you in their kitchens,
They penned you in their factories,
They gave you the jobs that they were too good for,
They tried to guarantee happiness to themselves
By shunting dirt and misery to you.*

You sang:

Me an' muh baby gonna shine, shine

Me an' muh baby gonna shine.

The strong men keep a-comin' on

The strong men git stronger...

The bought off some of your leaders

You stumbled, as blind men will...

They coaxed you, unwontedly soft-voiced....

You followed a way.

Then laughed as usual.

They heard the laugh and wondered;

Uncomfortable,

Unadmitting a deeper terror...

The strong men keep a-comin' on

Gittin' stronger...

What, from the slums
Where they have hemmed you,
What, from the tiny huts
They could not keep from you—
What reaches them
Making them ill at ease, fearful?
Today they shout prohibition at you
'Thou shalt not this'
'Thou shalt not that'
'Reserved for whites only'
You laugh.

One thing they cannot prohibit—

The strong men...coming on
 The strong men gittin' stronger.
 Strong men....
 Stronger....¹⁹⁶

Brown's poem equates laughing at the craziness of segregation with strength; Juliette
 Derricotte had recognized that in India as well. The international audience greeted her
 words with a standing ovation.¹⁹⁷ Written out of the African American experience,

¹⁹⁶ Sterling A. Brown, "Strong Men-A Poem," *Opportunity* (Sept. 1930): 265.

¹⁹⁷ Hedgeman, *The Trumpet Sounds*, 61.

Brown's words touched all those in the audience who had similarly suffered and similarly persevered and grown.

It was a remarkable thing to leave the land of your birth and be treated with greater fairness in a foreign land. Derricotte and Byrd encountered a lot of curiosity about themselves abroad. As light skinned African Americans, many of those they met did not immediately realize that they were "black." Explaining their race only peaked their listeners' curiosity. It gratified the two women to be able to talk about their experiences in the United States with interested people from foreign countries. Furthermore, it satisfied their need for intellectual contact to be taken seriously by those at the conferences they attended, and at the League of Nations for Byrd. Many whites in the United States remained mired in presumptions about African Americans' low intelligence. Almost everywhere they went in the United States, they were a curiosity as an educated black woman, but most often they inspired negativity, not polite questions. In Europe, not only could the women move freely, they could engage in wide-ranging conversations with freedom as well.

The freedom in Europe and India gave Derricotte a chance to breathe deeply and reassess her situation. Would she choose to return to the struggle in the United States? Could she continue to choose love, laughter, and knowledge when her heart ached with the problems of the world? Would she ever arrive in a place where she could simply rest? She decided to press on, to take up her mantle of responsibility again. But perhaps she might find a place to settle more permanently. Since she had joined the YWCA almost a

decade before, she had been constantly on the move, travelling all over the country and the world visiting colleges and encouraging students. Perhaps it was time to devote her life to more extended relationships. She decided to take the position as the Dean of Women at Fisk University. Her friend, Lucy Slowe, had been working on developing standards for Deans of Women from her position at Howard University. Marion Cuthbert had moved from principal of a high school to Dean of Women at Talladega College (Derricotte's alma mater) and was one of the most successful black Deans in the country, according to Slowe. Derricotte had already spent a few years on the board of directors of Talladega, so she was well-acquainted with the particular issues that black colleges faced. She would bring her "spirit of cooperation" with her to Fisk and teach the black women there that they had allies in the fight around the globe.

Anna Arnold experienced a taste of the freedom of travel abroad only a few hundred miles from her home in Harlem. The rest she experienced there was not the cessation of activity, but the total redirection of her thoughts and ideas. Instead of the provider that she had been to the poor in Harlem for the previous two years, she could sit back and be the student and the questioner. With other young people from colonized areas, she could ask all the questions about white actions that had been burdening her for many years. Instead of acting polite but stony around YWCA women, she could demand answers of Friedrich Beck and hear his careful answers. Then, on the final day, she transformed from a woman who felt concerned over her lack of knowledge to someone who could transfix an audience with the power of a black man's words. If Derricotte and Slowe were right that interracial dialogue had transformative powers, Arnold's

experience seemed to confirm it. Arnold returned to Harlem for the time-being, but began to prepare to take up a greater mantle of leadership.

Mabel Byrd also recognized the power of dialogue and education. She brought the *Crisis*, bulletins on the Pan-African Congress, novels by black authors, and Countee Cullen himself to her colleagues at the League of Nations. At the same time, though, she emphasized that creating new relationships through dialogue were not enough to fight discrimination and prejudice. The political and economic structure of societies had to be analyzed. How did workers of African descent survive under colonialism? What did colonial governments and the League of Nations do positively for those workers? How did they undermine them? At the end of almost two years in Geneva, Byrd was convinced of two things. First, economic research was for her; what she had done through reports at the International Labor Office she could do on the ground in the United States. Second, patience and compromise at the exclusion of all else was not the best way to improve society. She wanted to directly confront the treatment of black workers in the United States, not sit in meetings and continue to discuss it. She hoped that the position of research assistant at Fisk University that Charles Johnson offered her would provide her with that chance to study and confront societal problems.

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UNTRAMMELED THINKING
THE PROMISE AND PERIL OF THE SECOND AMENIA CONFERENCE, 1920-1940

VOLUME II

By

Lauren L. Kientz

A DISSERTATION

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Chapter 4

Social Science Center or Interracial Laboratory?

Mabel Byrd and Juliette Derricotte at Fisk University

"Schools were established, not merely public day schools, but home training and industrial schools, at Hampton, at Fisk, Atlanta, Raleigh, and other stations, and later, through the energy of the colored people themselves, —such schools as the Wilberforce, the Livingstone, the Allen, and the Paul Quinn were opened. These schools were almost without exception co-educational. Funds were too limited to be divided on sex lines, even had it been ideally desirable; but our girls as well as our boys flocked in and battled for an education. Not even then was that patient, untrumpeted heroine, the slave-mother, released from self sacrifice, and many an unbattered crust was [eaten] in silent content that she might eke out enough from her poverty to send her young folks off to school. She "never had the chance," she would tell you, with tears on her withered cheek, so she wanted them to get all they could. The work in these schools, and in such as these, has been like the little leaven hid in the measure of meal, permeating life throughout the length and breadth of the Southland, lifting up ideals of home and of womanhood; diffusing a contagious longing for higher living and purer thinking, inspiring woman herself with a new sense of her dignity in the eternal purposes of nature."

--Anna Julia Cooper¹

¹ Anna Julia Cooper, "Women's Cause is One and Universal," *The Black Past: Remembered and Reclaimed*, 1893, <http://www.blackpast.org/?q=1893-anna-julia-cooper-womens-cause-one-and-universal>.

Mabel Byrd came to the South in 1929 with a full academic knowledge of the discriminations African Americans faced in that region, but little practical experience. That would soon change. Byrd spent the first year researching industrial education at several cities throughout the South, having to carefully craft her reports so that they would be accepted by the Rosenwald Fund, who provided the funds for the research directed by Charles S. Johnson. The second year, she spent more time at Fisk University and came face to face with Jim Crow on campus, one place she expected to be free of him. Leaving Europe, she had been convinced that direct protest was the only way to deal with Jim Crow, so she confronted the administration and faculty about the inequalities she recognized and appealed to W.E.B. Du Bois, Fisk's most famous alumni, for support.

The campus was not prepared to take up Byrd's concerns. It had been roiled by a wide-scale student protest in the 1924-1925 school year, which had resulted in the resignation President Fayette McKenzie. The students protested a strict disciplinary code, the cancellation of the student council, school paper, and many athletic teams, and the racial insults the president frequently directed toward the faculty and students. By the time Byrd arrived, the campus was focused on rebuilding. The new president, Thomas Elsa Jones, was relatively more courteous and open-minded, more willing to listen to students, parents, and faculty, and very excited about the academic possibilities at Fisk. He still acted like a white person, trained confident of his race's "superior" status, and tended to give white faculty greater benefits and solicitation than black professors. It was this that Byrd objected to. Only a handful of professors joined her, including another new face on campus—acclaimed sociologist E. Franklin Frazier.

While Byrd assisted Charles S. Johnson in developing his social science department and challenged Thomas Elsa Jones on his attitude, Juliette Derricotte applied her calm pragmatism to the difficult post of Dean of Women. She had mourned many of the aspects of the 1924 uprising, because she feared that it presaged the end of the one interracial space she could count on—the historically black college. During all of her tours, she had held up black colleges as examples of relatively successful interracial spaces. By the time she took over as Dean of Women at Fisk, she had made peace with the change and focused instead on improving advising for women students. She wanted to give women students the expanded some of their peers had demanded in 1924 so that they could grow into their own, ready to face the world as fully fledged adults. She also worked with Lucy Slowe and Marion Cuthbert to transform the position of dean of women at black colleges from a moral overseer to an academic dean.

The two women sat next to each other in a photograph of the Delta Sigma Theta Rho chapter in New York in 1924. They were both well-acquainted with W.E. B. Du Bois, though Byrd considered him a friend while Derricotte went to him only for advice on professional matters. They had both spent several months and years abroad since that photograph. Yet it does not seem that they were friendly at Fisk. Derricotte did not support Byrd's protest. Byrd did not recognize Derricotte's many efforts to improve advising for black women. They did not mention each other in the letters I have found.²

Black women had few professional options in the 1920s. Being black made their options few already, but being women meant that many intellectual careers were cut off

² There are a couple more places I want to go search for more letters. This chapter developed relatively late in my research and I was unable to go to the Fisk University archive, though I received several documents from their collections through the mail.

because of the assumption that women were not scholarly. Both these women undermined that stereotype, Derricotte by combining a woman's "pragmatism" with careful attention to education, and Byrd by gradually leaving behind the woman's sphere in favor of academic research. The women who attended the Second Amenia Conference, Mabel Byrd among them, had fought diligently to craft a space for themselves to pursue their intellectual concerns, chief among them the treatment of African Americans in this country and colonized peoples abroad. They were present at all the major events of black history in the interwar period, sometimes shoved to the back and sometimes in the very center, but their voices were lost in the historical record, in part because many tended to work more cooperatively (thus not attracting the same level of attention as more strident men) and also because women's work tends to be generally undervalued or prevented from evolving in the first place.

Byrd's Critique

Mabel Byrd joined a campus rich with history in 1929. Fisk University was founded in the aftermath of the Civil War on an old army base by John Ogden, the Reverend Erastus Milo Cravath, and the Reverend Edward P. Smith. They named the school in honor of General Clinton B. Fisk of the Tennessee Freedmens Bureau. The school grew from a handful of freed slaves ranging in age from seven to seventy to one of the most academically rigorous black colleges in the country. This was made possible in large part because of the funds raised by the internationally acclaimed Jubilee Singers, students who traveled extensively each year raising money through concerts full of

spirituals. The funds they raised led to the erection of Jubilee Hall, an imposing, beautiful building.³

Byrd's first task was to research the state and quality of industrial education for the Rosenwald Fund. That fund had been instrumental in building schools for blacks throughout the south (in the 1930s, it began to fund graduate education for African Americans as well).⁴ For this research, she traveled to several cities throughout the south, including Columbus, Georgia, Greenville, South Carolina, Little Rock, Arkansas, Birmingham, Memphis, New Orleans, and Winston Salem to gather data for her reports (and, on the side, collect family surveys for E. Franklin Frazier, who was then working on his dissertation *The Negro Family in the United States*).⁵ The Fund was interested in establishing more schools in the south, in part out of a genuine desire to improve black education, but also so it could control what black students learned, and wanted more

³ Rodney T. Cohen, *Fisk University* (Arcadia Publishing, 2001).

⁴ Morris Robert Werner, *Julius Rosenwald: the Life of a Practical Humanitarian* (New York and: Harper & brothers, 1939); Edwin Rogers Embree, *Investment in People; the Story of the Julius Rosenwald Fund*, 1st ed. (New York: Harper, 1949); Alfred Q Jarrette, *Julius Rosenwald: Son of a Jewish Immigrant, a Builder of Sears, Roebuck and Company, Benefactor of Mankind* (Greenville, S.C: Southeastern University Press, 1975); Betty Jamerson Reed, *The Brevard Rosenwald School: Black Education and Community Building in a Southern Appalachian Town, 1920-1966*, Contributions to southern Appalachian studies 11 (Jefferson, N.C: McFarland & Co, 2004); Peter Max Ascoli, *Julius Rosenwald: The Man Who Built Sears, Roebuck and Advanced the Cause of Black Education in the American South*, Philanthropic and nonprofit studies (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006); Mary S Hoffschwelle, *The Rosenwald Schools of the American South*, New perspectives on the history of the South (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2006).

⁵ Byrd to Frazier, n.d.; Frazier to Byrd, January 25, 1930; Frazier to Eleanor Coleman, February 17, 1930, Box 131-94 Folder 7, Frazier Papers MSRC; Edward Franklin Frazier and Anthony M. Platt, *The Negro Family in the United States* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001).

information on the status of the industrial situation. It would use this information to found industrial schools in these areas.⁶

Byrd reported data and excerpts of her interviews without further commentary. Perhaps because she was writing for the Rosenwalds, surprisingly little of the well-documented fraught Birmingham race relations came through (other than that single mention of the KKK). The same year Byrd visited the city, communist organizer Tom Johnson “dared not stage a march on International Unemployment Day” in Birmingham because “the ‘terror [was] too real.’”⁷ She also did not analyze whether industrialists modified their answers to her as a black woman. It is important to note that she did indeed receive answers from employers to her questions, that she traveled safely throughout the south, and that she was able to find complicated local answers that confirmed neither black nor white preconceptions of the situation. This is important because later Byrd would be challenged on her ability to elicit just such answers from industrialists during her tenure with the New Deal.

Byrd’s trip to Birmingham, Alabama in the winter of 1929-30 provides an example of her many skills in gathering data and the constraints she felt as a representative of the Rosenwald Fund. The Depression had brought back the conversation around industrial schools with alacrity. The difficulty that blacks had in securing jobs seemed like it might be remedied with skilled job training. Manual training in white and black schools was then popular, when ten years previously it was not. Birmingham in

⁶ Mabel Byrd and Franklin J. Keller, “Reports on the Industrial Status of Negroes” Published by the Julius Rosenwald Fund, 1930, Fisk University Special Collections; “Makes Industrial Survey,” *The Pittsburgh Courier*, 1 Feb 1930, 5.

⁷ Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Defying Dixie: The Radical Roots of Civil Rights, 1919-1950*, 1st ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 2008), 113.

particular wanted skilled workers for their many industrial plants. The discussion of an industrial school for blacks pointed “in the direction toward which the city is tending; that is, toward the development of a skilled industrial population,” Byrd noted.⁸ African Americans had previously been very present in Birmingham industries, though they had begun to be displaced by white workers interested in their jobs because of the economic depression. Machines had also displaced unskilled black workers. These early black workers had left behind them a good impression of African Americans as efficient and hard workers, making several companies indicate to Byrd “that they would welcome and give cooperation to school policies and plans for trade training of Negro youth.”⁹ Even so, black workers found it hard to be trained—unions and industries both limited access to further training and apprenticeships.¹⁰ Byrd reported that an external industrial high school was needed for blacks to bridge the gap that whites smoothly walked over.¹¹

An industrial high school for black students already existed in Birmingham, but it was sorely overcrowded. When previously the white superintendent, whom Byrd interviewed, tried to raise a bond to increase the size of this high school, “he had received direct threats from members of the Klan.”¹² He hoped a Rosenwald grant would enable him to finish the new wing. He only wanted the grant, though, if the money would “be

⁸ Mabel Byrd, “Report to the Julius Rosenwald Fund on Survey in Birmingham, Alabama, January 1930 to Determine Vocational Opportunities for Negro Youth; Reports on the Industrial Status of Negroes” Published by the Julius Rosenwald Fund, Fisk University Special Collections, 18.

⁹ Ibid. 6. For example, Drennen’s Automobile Company believed African Americans made the best mechanics and want more trained men.

¹⁰ Unions excluded African Americans in actual practice, though not by regulation. Ibid. 19.

¹¹ “The most direct and practicable method of acquiring skill at present seems to rest in the Industrial High School. The avenues for whites are much larger.” Ibid.

¹² Ibid. 9.

placed under the policy and management of the Birmingham Board of Education.”¹³ To reduce the city-wide objections to the construction of the expanded industrial high school for blacks, the work was being done entirely by white labor.¹⁴ Another troubling report was employers claim that the current training at the Industrial High School was inadequate; local employers reported “a period of breaking in [that] is costly and longer than it should be.”¹⁵ But the desire among industrialists that local men and boys would be trained for skilled jobs compelled the improvement of that training.

During her second year at Fisk, Byrd became increasingly frustrated by the Jim Crow attitudes she found suffusing the school. She decided to appeal to Du Bois, knowing his concern for his alma mater and also his concern for her. She began with dire words, “in your last Fisk address you said that ‘Fisk had fallen upon evil days.’ It is even more true now.”¹⁶ She was referring to Du Bois’s commencement speech at Fisk in 1924 that was a catalyst to student revolt. Even as she wrote, “The situation is too grave to let alone. It must be attacked now,” she realized she needed to be the one to attack it.

The following week at a Tuesday evening faculty meeting, she introduced one of the many frustrations she felt—the quality of student advising.¹⁷ Before white and black faculty members (including Juliette Derricotte, if she was there), she demanded to know: Why were all the freshman advisors white? Why were women given that

¹³ Ibid. 10. Presumably this was so the superintendant could conduct the work as he and the board saw fit, within the scope of their race relations. He claimed that while funding for black education was still below that of whites, “recent years have brought a decided improvement.”

¹⁴ Ibid. 12.

¹⁵ Ibid. 18.

¹⁶ Mabel Byrd to W. E. B. Du Bois, September 22, 1930, Reel 30, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

¹⁷ Ibid.

responsibility “who had no connection with the faculty,” particularly one who was “a recent addition to the faculty, a white woman recently from Georgia?” Why was a woman who “had so recently come out of the most prejudiced of environments” more “qualified to advise our freshmen than Negro women, who at least knows the Negro youth, his difficulties, his environment, her needs?”¹⁸ (It is interesting that Byrd here modifies the universal male pronoun to recognize the presence of female students on campus.)

After she sat, the room erupted. Dean Taylor, a black man, “replied that he knew no color.” He had chosen the advisors from a list given to him by President Jones, and insisted that “the white woman was as well qualified as Negroes. That he (Dean Taylor) had to look in the glass to know that he was Negro!” Three black men and a white woman “substantiated Byrd’s point of view forcefully”—E. Franklin Frazier, Horace Mann Bond, Dean Coffer, and Ann Boie. Most of the black faculty sat silent in the tense room (including, if she was present, Dean of Women Juliette Derricotte). Elmer Imes, mathematician and Nella Larsen’s ex-husband, “came late on purpose” to avoid the controversy. After this silence, the president began to feel that “he was on solid ground” and suggested that dissatisfied faculty were free to resign, “although he [insisted] that he encouraged ‘Honest sincere differences of opinion.’”¹⁹

After the meeting, the President invited Frazier, Boie, and Byrd to stay. He told them that they were in danger “of starting ‘race riots,’ ‘revolutions’ what not.” Byrd found it “significant that my simple questions should bring out” what was on many

¹⁸ Mabel Byrd to W. E. B. Du Bois, October 9, 1930, Reel 30, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

¹⁹ Byrd to Du Bois, October 9, 1930.

“people’s minds—namely that discrimination was at work here.” The small group began to discuss “housing, salary scales, etc.,” while the president “misinterpreted everything that was said, told Ed. Frazier that he wasn’t employed, that C. Johnson was head of the department, etc.” Byrd related all this to Du Bois, knowing Frazier did as well, hoping that Fisk’s most famous alumnus and an influential member of the alumni association would be able to do something.²⁰

Frazier had documented his strong support for resistance in his first *Crisis* article, “The Negro and Non-Resistance,” six years previously. In it, he castigated African Americans like Derricotte who relied on love and Christian morality to change whites. He argued, “The Negro does not want love. He wants justice. [...] The Negro is asking that those who administer justice shall administer it in accordance with the principles of democratic justice which are embodied in the organic law of the United States.” And justice does not depend upon love or kindness; it “is impersonal.” The main difficulty in the South today is that white people have not attained a conception of impersonal justice. Frazier urged his readers to let go of non-resistance as a (he argued false) component of Christian humility, and instead fight. “Perhaps, in the distant future, men may love each other so that they will not need to define their rights and duties in society; but in the present stage of social evolution, we prefer to fight for the observance of the established principles of democratic political society.”²¹

Mabel Byrd’s frustration with the campus atmosphere had come to a peak when she first arrived on campus in September. She soon discovered that yet another white

²⁰ Frazier to Du Bois, September 27, 1930. Reel 33, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

²¹ E. Franklin Frazier. “The Negro and Non-Resistance.” *Crisis*, March 1924, 213-214.

man had been hired on the faculty, at a higher salary than almost anyone else. A black woman had recently been dismissed from her position in the library because it was Fisk policy that two people from the same family could not be hired by the university. Yet in flagrant disregard of that policy, the wife of this white man was given a job in the library. The president claimed he had drained all the talent from the black pool and had to look to whites to hire. He also said that these white professors had to be induced to work at Fisk by higher salaries and better housing to compensate for the ignominy of teaching at a black school. When they came, many then complained about what a sacrifice they had made. While a black faculty member from England, his wife, and 6 month year old baby were put out of campus housing and forced to look for something in town, the president built special housing for the new white family. Indeed, the president built 3 new houses—two for whites and one for Imes, but when some choose to live off campus, did not offer them to black faculty. Furthermore, the president declined to give his faculty members the appropriate appellations (Mr., Dr., Mrs. or Miss) when he greeted them in the halls or called to them.²²

In reply to her passionate protest, Du Bois advised Byrd to immediately make a factual record of all that had happened and then he also began to mobilize the New York alumni. When she reported her findings to him a few weeks later, Byrd found that most of the whites hired came from Jones' undergraduate alma mater, Earlham College (a Quaker school in Richmond Virginia), that whites made more than most black faculty members, despite being less qualified, and that the president was turning over the Education department to white control. She also documented Mrs. John Work's dismissal

²² Byrd to Du Bois, September 22, 1930; Mabel Byrd, "Confidential Memorandum on Fisk University," 1930, Reel 30, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

from the library and the housing situation.²³ The president courted the white community around Fisk without protecting the dignity of his black colleagues or the education of his black students. In one of his fundraising letters, “he said that since Negroes could not be chloroformed or sent out of the country then they had to be educated to be made safe and harmless,” causing protest among black and white recipients.²⁴

Charles Johnson did not get involved in this controversy, despite his powerful position on campus, because he was temporarily absent from campus. Byrd noted that “since his absence there has been a definite effort to destroy this arrangement [of integrating research into black life into different departments] and make economics under white professors the center of the work in Social Science” by giving white economists larger salaries.²⁵ With breathless relief, Byrd wrote to Du Bois at the end of October, “How are you? Me! I am a bit excited. Dr. J. has just this minute arrived!!!”²⁶

By the beginning of November, Byrd declared the crisis over, though she hoped “another one will not find me on the campus.” Her perseverance had its advantages; she and a roommate were given a new Fisk cottage and “at least, it keeps me from constantly hearing a volcano.”²⁷ A missive sent on Christmas Eve described new aggravations, particularly that a new white Southern faculty member, “who knows nothing of Negro education and whose wife fears that Fisk will ruin her daughter’s social standing, was sent to represent Fisk [at the meeting of the Southern Association of Colleges], although

²³ Byrd, “Confidential Memorandum on Fisk University.”

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Mabel Byrd to W. E. B. Du Bois, October 24, 1930, Reel 36, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

²⁷ Mabel Byrd to W. E. B. Du Bois, November 30, 1930, Reel 30, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

the Dean was available and it is usually the dean who represents a school on these occasions.”²⁸

This represented one of Du Bois’s last incursions into Fisk life. By 1933 he told Lillian Alexander he had sworn off trying “to straighten out Fisk.” There were alumni on the Board and black professors on the faculty. The responsibility was now theirs to shape the campus as they would.²⁹

The Du Bois Inspired Student Protest of 1924

Men and women of Black America:
Let no decent Negro send his child to Fisk until Fayette McKenzie goes.
W.E.B. Du Bois³⁰

Before Byrd encountered segregation at Fisk in 1930, it had already undergone major changes. The 1920s had witnessed a wide scale retooling of black colleges. Several factors contributed to this redevelopment. Most of the colleges were started in the wake of the Civil War to serve freedmen desiring education.³¹ They attracted a range of students, usually providing high school, teaching, and college courses. Often, though, they needed to begin with elementary training for their students arriving straight out of slavery. Some focused primarily on industrial education and the trades, while others

²⁸ Mabel Byrd to W. E. B. Du Bois, December 24, 1930, Reel 30, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

²⁹ W.E.B. Du Bois to Lillian Alexander, June 23, 1933, Reel 39, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

³⁰ W. E. B. Du Bois, “Opinion: Fisk,” *Crisis*, April 1925, 250-251.

³¹ The classic text on black education in the South following emancipation through the 1920s is James Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988).

focused on the liberal arts.³² Many graduates, like W.E.B. Du Bois himself, had to take another two years at a northern college before they could start graduate school because those colleges viewed their degrees as inferior to those given by white institutions, in part because there was little understanding in which schools about the quality of education provided in black colleges. By the 1920s, the first generation of educators, often black and white missionaries, had begun to die off. In replacing them, schools had a choice of where to focus their strengths. While deciding, they had to deal with new accreditation standards.

Accreditation, spreading across the country for the past few decades, had finally reached black colleges. Since the mid to late 1800s, different disciplines created such professional organizations as the American Bar Association, American Historical Association, and American Psychological Association. Accreditation boards were set up to assess the strength of different universities and create a standard by which all institutions could be compared. In particular, these boards emphasized that faculty members should have graduate education. Many small schools, black and white, did not have MAs or PhDs on their faculty. Rather, professors tended to come straight from undergraduate degrees or even teaching colleges. This was no longer acceptable for modern colleges wanting to train leaders for the twentieth century. Accreditation provided a quantitative way to assess the quality of black college education as compared to white schools, so that black students desiring graduate degrees would have a transcript

³² This dichotomy has been frequently discussed as regards Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois's debates. The debate made the distinction seem clearer than it was on the ground. James Anders Levy has an interesting work on the actual shape that the industrial schools took in the south in final preparation for publication. "Black Progressives: The Politics of Knowledge in the Age of Washington" *Creating and Contesting Intellectual Traditions in 20th-Century American Thought* Panel, US Intellectual History Second Annual Conference, Center for the Humanities The Graduate Center CUNY November 12-13, 2009.

that northern schools understood. Yet it represented whites still judging the quality of black education through their own ideas of what was and was not important. Just as the AMA used their professionalization standards to discredit the primarily female chiropractic medicine and move female midwives out of the birthing chamber, whites charged with assessing the strengths of black colleges and universities had a lot of power over what was considered acceptable and unacceptable (this is raised again much later when Andrew Flexner visited Howard University in the late 1930s).³³

Black students also forced the colleges to change. The World War I era had radicalized many of them. Black soldiers returned from France, bringing stories of a land where they could be “fully human,” only to face suspicious southern towns. Many black soldiers were attacked while still wearing their nation’s uniform because that clothing represented to white attackers too much power and dignity in one black body. Towns across the country were ripped apart by race battles or riots in which young white males attempted to reassert the control of whites over the economic and political structures by attacking black communities. The black communities did not passively accept the attacks. For a time, the streets of America, north and south, witnessed outright race wars.³⁴

Out of this hideous precedent, black students arrived at colleges with behavior standards suited more to the staid Victorian era than the swinging twenties. These students came out of well established black middle class families, often from the north,

³³ See Paul Starr, *The Social Transformation of American Medicine* (New York: Basic Books, 1982); Darlene Clark Hine, *Black Women in White: Racial Conflict and Cooperation in the Nursing Profession, 1890-1950*, Blacks in the Diaspora (Bloomington, Ind: Indiana University Press, 1989).

³⁴ See William M. Tuttle, *Race Riot: Chicago in the Red Summer of 1919*, Illini Books ed., Blacks in the New World (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996); Mark R. Schneider, *African Americans in the Jazz Age: A Decade of Struggle and Promise* (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006); Robert Whitaker, *On the Laps of Gods: The Red Summer of 1919 and the Struggle for Justice That Remade a Nation*, 1st ed. (New York: Crown Publishers, 2008).

who were used to proper treatment and the recognition of their dignity. Their parents were ready to get involved in campus affairs if they had to; they expected colleges to protect their children from the vagaries of the Jim Crow system, teach them modern ideas, given them a true college experience, and discipline them if need be. This was a very different generation of college student than those that had arrived at campus with only a few dollars in their pocket, sharecropping or slavery in their immediate past, and parents far away.³⁵

College administrators, both black and white, had always emphasized excessively good behavior standards in order to counter-act stereotypes of blacks as sexually lax. St. Clair Drake remembered this from his student days at Hampton College in Baltimore Maryland; “They were trying to get you ready for Harvard or Yale. But they believed that blacks had a predisposition for sexuality, needed strict rules to keep boys away from girls, so that the brain could express itself.”³⁶ Presidents also ruled their campuses with a firm hand and did what they believed was best with little consultation with students or faculty, but a keen (and necessary) eye towards the charitable boards that provided funding to their schools. Men and women were strictly divided. Women had conservative dress codes (at Fisk, for instance, they could only wear specifically selected black or gray gowns, as a symbol of seriousness). Also, women could not travel into the local towns without faculty chaperons. Because almost all these schools were started by Christian churches or missionaries, chapel was a daily requirement. Even Howard University,

³⁵ Martin Anthony Summers, *Manliness and its Discontents* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

³⁶ As quoted in William M Banks, *Black Intellectuals: Race and Responsibility in American Life* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996), 95.

funded by the federal government and not a missionary board, required daily chapel attendance. Students began to protest this vast *in loco parentis* regime.³⁷ Black colleges were by no means alone in placing such restrictions on their students. White and black colleges continued to do so until the 1960s. But the rules and regulations were much more restrictive at black institutions than at white.

Many colleges refused to teach anything related to African American culture or history. For instance, the Tuskegee Institute's music director allowed his students to play only European classical music, not the jazz or blues that many had grown up with (Ralph Ellison's bio). Howard University was ripped apart in 1925 over Alain Locke's desire to teach a course in black art and literature, a requirement that all male students participate in the ROTC, and the requirements for daily chapel. Locke was temporarily fired, before Mordecai Johnson, the first black president of the university, was hired (see Chapter 3).

Fisk University was one of the first to institute wide-scale change because of student rebellions. For several years in the early 20s, there had been student unrest over President Fayette McKenzie's rules, though most students remained quiet for fear of being blacklisted or expelled. McKenzie had launched into a program of fundraising to create a one million dollar endowment for Fisk. No other black college had achieved this yet, not even Booker T. Washington's Tuskegee Institute, the most well funded before McKenzie's campaign. According to a 1923 report on 33 black colleges by the John S. Slater Fund, "Ten have no endowment at all, ten others have less than \$100,000, six others are from \$100,000 to a quarter of a million and only one has an endowment of

³⁷ Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935*; Banks, *Black Intellectuals*; David L. Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: The Fight for Equality and the American Century, 1919-1963* (New York: Henry Holt, 2000); Summers, *Manliness and its Discontents*.

over one-half million” (the last referred to Tuskegee).³⁸ The fundraising required that McKenzie and other administrators woo many different white philanthropists who had very certain ideas about black colleges. McKenzie listened to these philanthropists’ opinions with more care and concern than students, parents, or alumni. In the spring of 1924, black newspapers were filled with the news that McKenzie had reached his goal—Fisk would be the first black college to reach a one million dollar endowment. All that African Americans far from campus knew about Fisk was this momentous achievement.³⁹

Du Bois kept close tabs on the student unrest through his daughter, who attended Fisk from 1920-1924, and also through his position as president of the New York area alumni association. He had great hopes that his daughter would follow in his intellectual footsteps, hopes that often overrode her own desires for her life. Yolande strove continually to live up to his expectations in these early years, even when she destroyed her health in the process. It had been a hard road to get to the day of graduation, because Yolande was tempted by the social life of campus and also suffered several illnesses. Du Bois was rightly proud of his daughter’s pending graduation.

He was also proud of their shared school, protesting loudly when some claimed that he should not support the school because it symbolized segregation. In 1923, Du Bois “stirred up a hornet’s nest in Philadelphia” when he seemed to support, in the words

³⁸ W.E.B. Du Bois, “Black Colleges,” *Crisis*, January 1924, sec. Opinion, 104.

³⁹ “Fisk University is Given Half Million,” *Chicago Defender*, June 5, 1920; “Rockefeller [sic] Gives \$2,291,737 to Colored Schools and Colleges,” *Afro-American*, February 25, 1921; “Fisk University Mass Meeting a Grand Occasion,” *Philadelphia Tribune*, April 23, 1921; “Rosenwald and Party Visit Fisk University,” *Chicago Defender*, April 23, 1921; “Endowment of a Million for Fisk University,” *Norfolk New Journal and Guide*, July 19, 1924; “Fisk’s Million Dollar Endowment Fund,” *Opportunity*, August 1924.

of the *Norfolk New Journal and Guide*, the “‘segregation and jim-crowing’ of the race” by stating simply that “I am proud of Jim-crow schools because my daughter is a product of one.”⁴⁰ The audience, “which came to worship” the editor of the *Crisis*, evidently acted like they had had ice water thrown on them. Du Bois explained all the other aspects of life where African Americans had segregated institutions—hospitals, churches, lodges, insurance companies, undertakers, and graveyards—in light of all these, Du Bois “therefore, glory[ied] in separate schools.” The *Norfolk New Journal and Guide* journalist suggested that there were in fact two layers of rights and privileges—on the level of separate institutions and on the level of the Constitution—Du Bois understood the distinction while his audience did not.⁴⁰ The audience, had it been paying close attention to the *Crisis*, should not have been so surprised. Three years earlier, Du Bois had published an article by G. David Houston calling for the end of religious domination and white presidencies in black colleges. Houston foreshadowed Du Bois’s opinions shared in Philadelphia when he wrote,

Since American democracy has decreed that there shall be two races in this country, — a human race and a Negro race, and since conditions have forced Negroes to have their own institutions of learning, from the kindergarten through the university, every effort should be made to bring these institutions up to the highest standards. The college must be made a strong unit in the scheme of educating Negro youths, as it is for educating white youths.⁴¹

It was in this vein of improving the education of black youths that Du Bois focused all of his critiques of black colleges.

⁴⁰ “Dr. Du Bois Creates a Stir,” *Norfolk New Journal and Guide*, July 21, 1923.

⁴¹ G. David Houston, “Weaknesses of the Negro College,” *Crisis*, July 1920, 124.

He was particularly critical when religious ideals seemed to stand in the way of educational goals. In 1920, Du Bois wrote an editorial criticizing recent events at Wilberforce University (where he had held his first teaching position more than two decades before and had left because of his conflict with the religious administration). Wilberforce was divided into two schools—a state run secular branch and the African Methodist Episcopal Church run branch. In the past ten years, president W. A. Joiner had vastly improved the physical and educational status of the state-run institution. When a state investigation revealed how far the church run school lagged behind, and how many of the state resources went to the school, state officials began to reorganize the trustee board. The religious branch retaliated and arranged for Joiner's dismissal. Du Bois barely concealed his anger at this religious control of education; "If we let this pass unrebuked what can we say if the State of Ohio puts white men in charge at Wilberforce on the ground that 'Negroes cannot conduct a school?'"⁴²

When Du Bois arrived at Fisk to give the commencement address four years later, he brought with him many years experience at black colleges, well-formed ideas about the best way to educate incipient black leaders, and a visceral connection to his alma mater. He was deeply concerned over the future of the university. Fisk students told him they were particularly upset by the strict rules for female behavior, by the new requirement that all student meetings have faculty observers, by the neglect of the physical spaces, by the refusal of the administration to hear their demands (particularly by the termination of the student council and school paper), and by the cessation of several student activities, most importantly, baseball. After cancelling the student council,

⁴² W.E.B. Du Bois, "Wilberforce University," *Crisis*, August 1920, 178.

the student paper, and the Athletic Association, the president went so far as to even discourage students from pulling weeds and planting flowers.⁴³ The scores of the football team and debate club still appeared in newspapers.⁴⁴ When the alumni club heard that Du Bois would be visiting Fisk University in April, 1924 for Yolande's graduation, they asked if he would give the commencement speech. He at first refused, saying that he was coming only to be a parent. The alumni prevailed over his objections and he agreed to speak. He agreed in part because he was so angry at the way students were being treated.

Du Bois' speech listed McKenzie's "long train of abuses and usurpations" that gave the Fisk students, parents, and alumni the right and duty to "to throw off" the administration for a new one.⁴⁵ On the basis of his own visits, letters from students, and interviews, he listed the problems:

1. The vision of Fisk students is being deliberately curtailed by propaganda and discouraging of ambition.
2. They are being humiliated and insulted in order to attract the sympathy of Southern whites.
3. Colored teachers are being dismissed and white teachers of mediocre ability employed.
4. Student activities are being discouraged, self-expression given no scope, discipline is unduly severe and the roll of those sent away and expelled is almost a roll of honor.
5. Finally and above all at Fisk University today the president and most of the white teachers have no confidence in their students, no respect or hope for the Negro race and are treating the students with suspicion and governing them by fear.

⁴³ "Fisk," *Crisis*, May 1925, 40-1.

⁴⁴ "University 16; Kentucky State 0," *Afro-American*, November 5, 1920; "Fisk Downs Wilberforce by 14-0 Win," *Chicago Defender*, November 19, 1921; "Fisk Defeats Knoxville in Inter-Collegiate Debate," *Chicago Defender*, April 22, 1922; "Tuskegee 7; Taladega, 0," *Chicago Defender*, November 17, 1923; "Walden Trounces Fisk University," *Chicago Defender*, April 19, 1924.

⁴⁵ Thomas Jefferson, *The United States Declaration of Independence*, July 4, 1776, <http://www.ushistory.org/declaration/document/index.htm>.

Before they had even seen the full text of Du Bois' speech, the Board of Directors released a formal statement supporting McKenzie in everything that he was doing. The next fall Du Bois repeated his conclusions in the *Crisis* and challenged, "Are my conclusions in accordance with the truth? If they are, Fisk University needs a new president, a reformed Board of Trustees and a reconstitution of its faculty."⁴⁶ When describing a successful speaking trip across the north and south, Du Bois concluded "and finally there was Fisk University but of that I shall speak again. Of that I shall speak again and many times; for it was to me a place of sorrow, of infinite regret; a place where the dreams of great souls lay dusty and forgotten."⁴⁷

That fall, George Streater, leader of the student protest, wrote Du Bois and others the details of student dissent and actions of the administration. He wrote about the many students who refused to join because they feared punishment or expulsion. To a former faculty member he wrote that "one must either swallow his manhood and conscience in silence, or suffer the penalty of expulsion or failure to graduate."⁴⁸ Their fear was not unfounded. The president was working to expel anyone remotely connected to the unrest. He had cooked up a minor infraction to place on Streater so that Streater would be expelled. By October, more students joined Streater and made their complaints official:

arbitrary and unwritten rules of conduct; the absence of forums for the expression of students' voices, such as an undergraduate council and a student newspaper; the strict supervision of student activities; an environment of distrust, which produced a 'wide-spread system of spying' and the inspection of students' mail; the replacement of qualified black

⁴⁶ W. E. B. Du Bois, "Opinion: Fisk," *Crisis*, October 1924, 251-252.

⁴⁷ W.E.B. Du Bois, "Opinion--Travel," *Crisis*, September 1924, 203.

⁴⁸ As quoted in Summers, *Manliness and its Discontents*, 265.

faculty members with ill-equipped, conservative southern whites; and the capitulation of McKenzie to 'southern white prejudices.'⁴⁹

They concluded their list by calling for McKenzie's resignation or firing.

The students decided in November to move beyond the politely delivered demands that McKenzie continued to ignore and planned to stage a protest. All the trustees as well as representatives from the Rosenwald Fund would be gathering for Founders Day and a celebration of the new endowment. The protestors (they are described as exclusively male in all the newspaper and magazine reports) decided it would be a perfect time to make the trustees listen to their complaints.⁵⁰

The men gathered outside the trustee meeting and wandered the halls of the college chanting:

... Before I'll be a slave,
I'll be buried in my grave,
And go home to my Father and be saved.

and

'down with the tyrant,' and 'away with the czar.'⁵¹

and

Hey boys, who boys, Du Bois! Down with McKenzie.⁵²

Faculty warned the president to remain in hiding, because allegedly the students made threats of violence. Students and some faculty, according to the *Philadelphia Tribune* (the only paper I found that reported on the uprising; in the same edition they reported that

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ "Students Rebel Against Head of Fisk Univ.," *Philadelphia Tribune*, December 6, 1924.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² As quoted in Summers, *Manliness and its Discontents*, 266.

Morehouse had won the annual “Turkey-day” game against Fisk 52-0, a stark reminder that Fisk’s athletic budget had been slashed), “contend that the attitude of the president has been one of absolute defiance and that he positive refuses to accord the students any consideration when they contend for certain rights which effect their standing as men and women.”⁵³

Throughout the discussion here and later, the newspapers and Du Bois used gendered language to explain the rights of students.⁵⁴ They needed the freedoms to fulfill their status as men and women. Impavidi Progridiamur wrote to the editor of the *New York Amsterdam News* that “To yield on the question of untrammelled education” is to accept that the status of “the black man is but one of submission and acquiescence.”⁵⁵ James W. Ford, later Communist Party nominee for Vice-President, wrote to Du Bois that McKenzie had attempted to suppress “manhood and courage” while Ford was a student at Fisk between 1914 and 1918.⁵⁶ Du Bois warned later that accepting white philanthropy had the danger of emasculation. He urged, “If they give to our uplift we accept and show our deep appreciation by manhood and accomplishment and not by sycophancy.”⁵⁷ In an act that most inflamed parents, McKenzie threatened black womanhood, not in his rhetoric or policies but quite literally in his actions. In his reckless pursuit of funding, he

⁵³ “Students Rebel Against Head of Fisk Univ.”

⁵⁴ I noticed the gendered language of the primary sources and then discovered Martin Summers making a similar argument. Summers, *Manliness and its Discontents*.

⁵⁵ Impavidi Progridiamur, “Praises Du Bois’ Fisk Stand,” *New York Amsterdam News*, February 11, 1925.

⁵⁶ Ford to Du Bois, Feb 20, 1925, Du Bois Correspondence Volume 1, p 307

⁵⁷ Du Bois, “Opinion: Fisk,” 250.

made black female students go down “back alleys to sing for white men.”⁵⁸ Such an image could not help but evoke deep wells of concern in the hearts of black mothers and fathers so used to white rape of black women.⁵⁹

After the November protest, the trustees decided to give the students a few more freedoms (less restrictive uniforms for the women, a student government, and more support for athletics). McKenzie agreed only to modify the dress code. Women could now choose their own hats, as long as they were black and conservative. The rest of the dress remained the same. The two antagonists—McKenzie and Du Bois—then launched into a nationwide speaking tour to woo whites (in the former case) and alumni (in the latter) to their side.⁶⁰ The New York alumni was understandably the first alumni chapter to support Du Bois’ call for McKenzie’s resignation.⁶¹

All of this protest troubled Derricotte, because she believed the black colleges were one of the few places that had successfully cultivated positive interracial relationships. She had experienced that herself while at Talladega College as an undergraduate and then learned about it over again as she visited white and black colleges throughout the country on her YWCA lecture tours over the past six years. She intimately knew the concerns of students, yet she was worried that they were recklessly throwing away good white teachers in the heat of the moment. (Du Bois had tried to preempt this

⁵⁸ Ibid., 247.

⁵⁹ Lester C. Lamson continues this language in his 1974 analysis of the strike. His introduction states “Fisk students sought recognition of their status as men and women instead of accepting increased white paternalism in the form of curricular and extracurricular restriction.” See his “The Black Community in Nashville and the Fisk University Student Strike of 1924-1925,” *The Journal of Southern History* 40, no. 2 (May 1974): 225.

⁶⁰ “Fisk Alumni Hears Du Bois on M’Kenzie,” *Chicago Defender*, January 24, 1925.

⁶¹ “Fisk Fight Goes On,” *New York Amsterdam News*, February 4, 1925.

concern in October by starting off his opinion piece with praise for his old white teachers at Fisk, but warning that that generation of missionaries was dying off and being replaced by a new generation not concerned with blacks). In the fall, she decided that she needed information, so she met with Du Bois in New York. She was then planning a meeting for November with representatives from church boards to discuss the Fisk situation and hoped she could get Du Bois or someone with specific information to speak about the “conditions.” He was “most cordial” and gave her “the use of much confidential material which describes conditions in many of the schools, but especially in the present Fisk situation.”⁶²

Derricotte hoped Slowe would come north for the November meeting, because “this is a thing so far-reaching that we must have your wisdom in our discussions.” She wrote Slowe that “[t]his problem of southern education for Negroes is getting so serious that I do hope the opportunity will come very soon for you to go into some of these schools and see at first hand some of the things we are up against.”⁶³ The pervasive sense of antagonism pained Derricotte, “I think sometimes that when we feel that we are getting along well with interracial relationships, suddenly difficulties burst out in a new place.”⁶⁴ To represent her side (I am unclear whether her side was pro-white teachers against Du Bois or pro-students against McKenzie or, more likely, a third pragmatic path), she had already arranged for Channing Tobias, from the YMCA, George and Elizabeth Haynes “the former representing particularly the Federal Council of Churches,

⁶² Juliette Derricotte to Lucy Slowe, November 6, 1924, Box 90-2 Folder 4, Slowe Papers MSRC.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

and the later representing the [YW] National Board,” Josephine Pinyon Holmes of the YW (she had experience with black schools and worked with the Student Volunteer Movement, a student missionary society), Eva Bowles of the YW Council on Colored Work, Elmira Holmes “who taught for so many years at Hampton, and who can make a very valuable contribution to this school [discussion] because she is one of the white teachers who has experienced some of the things we shall be describing,” and Leslie Blanchard (Derricotte’s white supervisor and friend). She also hoped James Weldon Johnson of the NAACP would come.⁶⁵ Unfortunately, the other side cancelled the meeting before it could be held.

Part of Derricotte’s concern was that she did not agree with the students that the disciplinary measures were so wrong; indeed, she believed the loosening conduct codes contributed to dissipation and feared that the younger generation was turning away from religion in general.⁶⁶ (Her later actions as Dean of Women prove that she did believe in giving female students more autonomy, so that they could develop responsibility and self-confidence. Perhaps this showed a change in her opinion, or her one letter

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Summers quotes another critic of the riots who decries the students for turning away from “producer” values in favor of the “consumer” values beginning to take over the nation in a dramatic way in the 1920s. “In charging that its core consisted of ‘moral cowards’ who were looking for ‘immediate advantage,’ this critic of the strike argued that the movement against McKenzie was engineered by youth who were antipathetic toward the moral education offered by Fisk. The reference to ‘immediate advantage’ also suggests that the critic was characterizing the students’ resistance toward ‘discipline’--or the conformity to producer values--as the result of their immersion in a consumer culture that encouraged self-gratification rather than self-denial.” This generational conflict was different from the worry that Derricotte expressed. She was concerned over losing the one place she felt she could definitively point with positive interracial relations. Summers explains the clash between producer and consumer values, “As all of these letters suggest, more than the presidency of McKenzie was at stake. The strike represented, for an older generation of middle-class blacks, the unbottling of youthful iconoclasm. To the extent that the strike and its forced resignation of McKenzie resulted in a number of changes on the campus--such as a more relaxed dress code, the granting of dancing privileges, and the removal of the ban on Greek-letter organizations--the iconoclasm of black youth at Fisk was tied to the ascendancy of consumer culture.” Summers, *Manliness and its Discontents*, 269.

mentioning his opinion of disciplinary measures at colleges did not encompass her entire opinion.) She feared the way the conflict undermined the black and white desire for cooperation she had been trying to build. After watching the changes black colleges went through over the next several years, Derricotte bemoaned the loss of the “fine old white personalities” that had long taught at the schools in favor of young black teachers, just out of graduate school. When Derricotte went to Talladega, the whole faculty was white and yet she loved her time there.⁶⁷ The younger black professors did not know how to live in the south; they were “very impatient with certain things which they have to go up against in the South. There is missing much of the old ‘personal relations’ of the older days.”⁶⁸ Derricotte mourned the passing of these campuses as “the one place where we can prove that an interracial community can exist.”⁶⁹ This opinion is not the one normally shared by scholars who document the significant changes to black colleges during this era.⁷⁰ Rather, scholars follow Du Bois’ opinion, which was that Fisk’s president McKenzie represented “an autocratic, outmoded model of superintendency [that] was yet another case study in a game plan of social subordination by powerful

⁶⁷ Mary Jenness, *Twelve Negro Americans* (Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1936), 168.. Her mother urged her to go to a school with an all white faculty so that she would have a positive experience with whites. Her mother probably hoped that white missionary stock would treat her daughter better than the white Georgians she grew up around.

⁶⁸ Juliette Derricotte to Max Yergan, July 24, 1929, RG 58, Box 13, Folder 191, Yale Divinity Library Special Collections.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ See, for example, Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935*; Summers, *Manliness and its Discontents*; Banks, *Black Intellectuals*. This is much more prevalent in public history sources that see the Fisk student rebellion as a direct forerunner of the direct protests of the Civil Rights Movement. To me, it seems like the protests fit more squarely within the long tradition of students in the United States and abroad protesting to have a say in their education, though through a very particular racial overlay. Suggesting that this protest is not a direct antecedent of the Civil Rights Movement does not in any way undermine its significance. Indeed, by separating it out to reflect the demands of its time—the increased black middle class, the growing need for accredited black colleges, the difficulty that a white president had understanding his students’ needs—makes the event even more significant.

white reactionaries.”⁷¹ Derricotte’s push for interracialism, marked particularly by significant interracial fellowship, friendship, and common work, was different from the kind of integration many black Americans strove for—an integration that allowed blacks equal opportunity for success without requiring significant interaction with whites.⁷² Du Bois had ideals supported by long experience and wide knowledge, but still primarily existing on an ideal realm. Derricotte’s ideals were based first in her daily, weekly interactions on black colleges and with black and white students.

In the winter, Derricotte began sending letters to black college students and faculty across the south asking for their assessment of the situation. Through her questions, she pitched her agenda. She asked whether white teachers were indeed so poor, whether black students wanted to get rid of white teachers, whether black faculty were over-confident, and whether the interracial Student Movement had affected opinions at all. At least one black student responded. She explained the problem with white faculty was not their white skin, per se, but with their assumptions about “the abilities and characters of colored students, and who have difficulty in changing these ideas. These same persons seem to want the colored student to advance to a certain extent and no farther.” Students resented these kinds of teachers, but some were able to love and respect those white teachers who did not have these false assumptions.

This student acknowledged the change in the air that the 1920s had brought; “To be sure, colored students, like all other young people of to-day, are no longer accepting without question the ideas handed down to them, neither can they remain content under

⁷¹ Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: The Fight for Equality*, 133.

⁷² Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935*; See for example Banks, *Black Intellectuals*.

conditions which chafe them.” She could not agree with Derricotte’s statements about black faculty. Rather, “It seems to me that the lack of confidence in themselves would be more disastrous.” Their superior education justified their belief in their ability “to do the same piece of work in the world. And yet I could quote several examples of cases where white teachers have resented the placing of capable colored persons in places of responsibility and have discussed the same with colored students. And thus ‘there is confusion.’” (This later refers to Jessie Fauset’s first novel published in 1924). While acknowledging that black students could be oversensitive, she argued that it was essential that white faculty members be selected with exceeding care. This was, after all, the largest realm for interracial work.⁷³ St. Clair Drake, a student at Hampton College, identified a different problem with white teachers. In his experience, his white professors believed in his ability to be educated like anyone else, but they were convinced that African Americans’ extra-strong sexuality had to be curbed in order to let their brain work. He found the restrictions insulting.⁷⁴

Lillian W. Vorhees, a white English professor at Tougaloo College, also answered Derricotte’s query. She argued that rather than rejecting white professors, many black families actually preferred schools with mixed faculty over those with an all-black faculty. Parents assumed that schools with white faculty were better, she suggested, “because they feel that we have a standard to which the other schools have not yet attained.” Indeed, “some of the A.M.A. schools had lost prestige because white teachers

⁷³ MRP, student to Juliette Derricotte, confidential copy to Dean Slowe, January 7, 1925, Box 90-2 Folder 46, Slowe Papers MSRC.

⁷⁴ As quoted in Banks, *Black Intellectuals*, 95.

were too soon withdrawn.” (Franz Fanon and Aime Cesaire would no doubt call this a perfect instance of false consciousness or the slavery of the mind).

Vorhees knew many alumni who “heartily approved and supported” Tougaloo’s mixed faculty. In her personal experience, she knew it was harder to build up relationships between races, but “my relations with my students have always been most pleasant, and I have felt in both dormitory and class-room an atmosphere of affectionate loyalty.” The key, she said, was to actually get “to KNOW my students, [which] has been a real delight.” She had greater capacity to do that because she worked in the dormitory as well as the classroom.

Sometimes poorly qualified white teachers were sent to the schools “and colored students cannot be blamed for their resentment” at these teachers, but she did not think that this was an instance of race feeling, but simply of bad teaching. She recognized that black teachers could be over-confident, and indeed that it was “something to be reckoned with in the interracial situation,” but believed “that the best educated and most able colored leaders recognize a sincere desire to be helpful, and feel that they want our cooperation, not only in bringing about better educational advantages, but in securing a sound basis for fellowship and mutual helpfulness.”⁷⁵

While Derricotte was still digesting these responses to her letters, the situation at Fisk blew up when McKenzie drastically overstepped his position and unquestionably showed his true alliances. Because McKenzie had been so uncooperative, the students decided to stage another protest. On February fifth, 100 students roamed campus, yelling their demands and their slogans, but were back in bed by 11 o’clock. McKenzie had

⁷⁵ She also said, probably to Derricotte’s dismay, that “The Youth Movement, I think, is not well enough known among our students to be a vital factor in their thinking.”

evidently been waiting for just such an uprising. He called in the local police, who arrived in full riot gear. There were fifty police men—one to every two students. They broke into the male and female dormitories (even though, according to newspaper reports, only men had protested) and “invaded private rooms, forced open trunks in search of firearms, and herded the surprised students into the office of the president.” The president announced that the students had three options: go to jail, leave the campus, or recognize his authority. Almost the entire campus vacated, leaving only a few students there on full scholarship.⁷⁶

According to McKenzie, the police arrested seven leaders of the protest that evening. Actually, they only arrested five, as Streater explained to Du Bois, because two of the supposed leaders of this “riot” (including Streater) were not on campus at all that evening. McKenzie was targeting the leaders of the previous fall’s disturbance. “The arrested students declare that at no time in the course of their demonstration was the race issue brought up,” according to the *Philadelphia Tribune*. “They also indignantly deny that any threats were made against any teacher.”⁷⁷ When the news broke two days later, the *Norfolk New Journal and Guide*, reported that McKenzie had been threatened by students and the noble police had to come save him.⁷⁸ When other papers explained that the protestors had in fact been in bed when the police arrived, the *New Journal* tucked its

⁷⁶ Du Bois, “Opinion: Fisk.”

⁷⁷ “Fisk University Students Hold Meeting; McKenzie Calls Riot Squad,” *Philadelphia Tribune*, February 7, 1925.

⁷⁸ “Extra! Fisk Campus Place of Terror Because of Students Riot,” *Norfolk New Journal and Guide*, February 7, 1925.

tail and declared that the “Fisk ‘Riot’ Faked.”⁷⁹ Soon, various papers began to clamor for McKenzie’s ousting.⁸⁰ The tide of public opinion had turned against him and the trustees could no longer support the condemned man.

In the spring, the *Crisis* published several obviously and subtly relevant articles that buoyed Du Bois’ belief in an education that developed self-reliant and independent thinking leaders. Du Bois recounted the long history of the uprising, praising the students who protested and were arrested. Finally, he found students after his own heart. “I am uplifted by the student martyrs at Fisk,” he wrote. “At last we have real radicalism of the young--radicalism that costs, that is not mere words and foam.” In contrast, everything before seemed like “simply internal jealousy.” They had fought with the Garveyites and with “the young black Socialists who started out ten years ago to attack capitalism and ended by attacking every Negro whose head appeared above the mired mass.” The students, though, represented the “real radical, the man who hits power in high places, white power, power backed by unlimited wealth; hits it and hits it openly and between the eyes; talks face to face and not down ‘at the big gate’. God speed the breed!”⁸¹ Perhaps most gratifying to Du Bois was how powerful his own words had proven to be. He had chosen the typewriter and the press for his activism; that he had inspired protestors fulfilled all that he had hoped.

As an editor, Du Bois had suggested an alternative to the closed society at Fisk the previous month. Jessie Fauset, spending the year at the Sorbonne, wrote a long

⁷⁹ “Fisk University Students Hold Meeting; McKenzie Calls Riot Squad”; Progridiamur, “Praises Du Bois’ Fisk Stand.”

⁸⁰ A few were “Fisk! Thy Sun is Setting,” *Philadelphia Tribune*, February 14, 1925; “McKenzie, You’re Through,” *Chicago Defender*, February 14, 1925.

⁸¹ Du Bois, “Opinion: Fisk,” 250.

history of the institution in March. She titled the piece “The Enigma of the Sorbonne” purportedly because of its complex structure and intriguing history, but the spirit of the piece wonders how such a place of mixture could even exist in a state of peace. Though not directly commenting on the Fisk situation, readers could not help but draw a stark comparison between the institutions. Where Fisk was bound to the conventions of Tennessee and the American South, “the specialty of the modern Sorbonne is its cosmopolitanism.” Where Fisk was stymied in old fashioned codes of conduct, “nowhere are students so free, so unfettered, so completely themselves as at this shrine which Robert de Sorbon dedicated to the study of God through mankind.” Fauset loved to sit and simply watch the great progress of mankind rush and saunter past her in the guise of students.

Across the court-yard they file, loitering, rushing, gesticulating, living, being,--*being* simply what they are; unhampered by externals, impervious to criticism. No criticism exists. Two absolutely black girls swing through the rectangle, Haitian, I judge from their accent, pure African I am sure from their coloring. Their hair, stiff, black and fuzzy frames cloudily the soft darkness of their faces; their voices ring clear and staccato; their movements are unrestrained. Louis Pasteur and Victor Hugo, ruminating at the base of the church steps, regard them with a benign indifference and the same indifference of extreme tolerance informs the countenances, yellow, brown, white, and ruddy, by which they are surrounded. But of this the black girls are unaware. In this atmosphere so completely are they themselves that tolerance is a quality which they recognize only when they are exercising it toward others.⁸²

Yet in the United States, whites and blacks were still trying to figure out how to simply talk to each other without calling in the riot police.

Just ten pages before Fauset’s article, Yolande Du Bois contributed her first article to her father’s magazine (he had begun to publish her drawings since her

⁸² Jessie Fauset, “The Enigma of the Sorbonne,” *Crisis*, March 1925, 219.

graduation the year before). She wrote a paean to a white teacher from Atlanta who had recently passed away. Lizzie A. Pingree, whom Yolande Du Bois knew while growing up at Atlanta University, went south “not for glory or praise as a martyr, but quietly as a teacher and a friend.” She looked on her black students and saw “no difference” because her eyes “saw through the veil of our shadowland and she was willing to stand beside us and say ‘Thy people shall be my people!’” In referring to the veil, Yolande Du Bois used here that description made so famous by her father two decades prior. As a baby, Du Bois “turned naturally toward her room for I had not been taught that she was white and I was black.” The boys she looked after as matron “could not have loved and respected her more had she been their own mother.” Du Bois imagined Pingree lying in peace “with her gentle face turned south toward the people to whom she gave the best of her years in service. Verily we shall rise up and call her blessed—we who are black.” Through these two articles, written by women very close to him, W.E.B. Du Bois, the editor, disproved any claim that the fight at Fisk had simply been about race. He valued cosmopolitanism and honored dedicated whites. Those who claimed that the Fisk students had been trying to expel all the white teachers in favor of black, rather than protesting the quality of education they were receiving, were the simplistic thinkers, not the students they criticized.

As a writer, Du Bois attacked the supposition that the protest was based entirely in race more forcefully the next month when he explained that the future of Fisk “involves the tremendous question as to whether Negro youth shall be trained as Negro parents wish or as Southern whites and Northern copperheads demand.” He warned, “Let the attention of no Negro be distracted from this main and crucial point.” People were

letting their attention to the vague concept of “discipline” distract them (McKenzie’s policies had gone way beyond responsible discipline, Du Bois argued). Others let the desire for interracialism distract them, but Du Bois clarified; “It is not a question of color or race. No colored man has demanded a colored president at Fisk. No colored man has demanded a white president at Fisk; but we do demand a president who can teach and inspire and not merely drive and repress, and we care not what his color may be.”⁸³ He changed part of his mind in 1940 (or was willing to express publicly what he had thought at the time) when he wrote in *Dusk of Dawn*, “How far can a Negro college, dominated by white trustees and a white president and supported by white wealth, carry on in defiance of the wishes and best interests of its colored constituency?”⁸⁴ The main point was still whether or not Fisk administrators would listen to Fisk students, parents, and alumni, but in 1940 Du Bois was more willing to identify McKenzie’s deficiencies in his race than he was in 1925. In the earlier era, he seemed to feel that arguing a point through the lens of race undermined that argument.

A majority of Fisk students walked out of the college in response to McKenzie’s ultimatum. They stayed away for two months, until he resigned on April 16, 1925. Throughout the boycott, the black community in Nashville wholeheartedly supported the students. Those who could not afford to go home stayed with families in town. The board accepted McKenzie’s resignation and began to search for a new president who could be more open to the requests of black students, parents, and alumni while continuing to foster a positive relationship with white philanthropists and white Nashville. It appointed

⁸³ Du Bois, “Opinion: Fisk.”

⁸⁴ W. E. B. Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn: An Essay Toward an Autobiography of a Race Concept* (Transaction Publishers, 1984), 282.

Herbert Adolphus Miller, a sociologist from Ohio State University, to lead the search. He reinstated all of the striking students, restarted the school paper, student council, and Athletic Association, and allowed fraternities and sororities to join the campus for the first time. In February, 1926, the board hired Thomas Elsa Jones, a white Quaker with a Ph.D. in sociology from Columbia, as the new president. While some of those connected to Fisk were disappointed that he was not black, Jones continuation of Miller's more relaxed policies made him an acceptable choice.⁸⁵ He still had to figure out how to live in the South and relate to African Americans as peers, not as the objects of charity. Mabel Byrd was there to educate him on that transition. Jones managed to learn things that his predecessor had refused to, because he stayed at Fisk until 1946, when Charles S. Johnson took over the presidential office. Under Jones' leadership, Fisk was the first historically black college to receive a Class A rating from the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools and the first to be approved by the Association of American Universities.

Charles S. Johnson's Development of a Social Science Center

One of the first, and perhaps the most important, step Jones took was hiring Charles S. Johnson to develop a social sciences department on campus. Johnson willingly left his influential position in Harlem as editor of the *Opportunity* in order to return to his academic roots. Johnson joined the faculty one year before Mabel Byrd came to campus

⁸⁵ Lamon, "The Black Community in Nashville and the Fisk University Student Strike of 1924-1925," 243-44.

as one of his research assistants.⁸⁶ Jones also wooed NAACP executive secretary James Weldon Johnson to campus in 1929 by talking “about the University—and no one can hear President Jones talk about Fisk without feeling the galvanic force of his tremendous energy and enthusiasm—and said that he wanted me on the faculty.”⁸⁷

Charles Johnson had a three stage plan for building the social science department, and had the fundraising chops to accomplish each stage. He began “systematic demographic studies, followed by more specialized studies” first in Nashville, then in select Southern cities, then in the South as a whole region.⁸⁸ At the same time, he fulfilled research grants he brought with him to the university, including a Rosenwald grant to make an extensive study of southern schools. Ever since his days as a promoter of the Harlem Renaissance, he had “established the pattern of identifying, developing, and promoting young black talent.”⁸⁹ He was also in the midst of building a talent pool at Fisk, including graduate students, special fellows, assistants, and new faculty members. One of the most important men Jones brought to campus was E. Franklin Frazier (future Second Amnian), already well-published as a sociologist, who was then working on his

⁸⁶ Francille Wilson comments on the different reputations this department has earned: “Charles Johnson’s research shop in Nashville was regarded as either a timid group of fact collectors or an impressive research enterprise, depending on the assessor’s political views. And in reality it was both.” Francille Rusan Wilson, *The Segregated Scholars: Black Social Scientists and The Creation of Black Labor Studies, 1890-1950*, Carter G. Woodson Institute Series (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006), 171.

⁸⁷ James Weldon Johnson, *Along This Way: The Autobiography of James Weldon Johnson*, 1st ed. (New York: Da Capo Press, 2000), 407.

⁸⁸ Johnson to President Jones, as quoted in Patrick J. Gilpin and Marybeth Gasman, *Charles S. Johnson: Leadership Beyond the Veil in the Age of Jim Crow* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 94.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 97.

doctorate at the University of Chicago after leaving Atlanta University in a storm of controversy.⁹⁰

E. Franklin Frazier was an up and coming sociologist often published in the pages of the *Crisis*, *Opportunity*, news magazines, and sociology journals. Born in 1894 in Baltimore, Maryland, he earned a BA from Howard University in 1918 and an AM in sociology at Clark University in 1920. When the *Crisis* reported his graduation from the latter, it quoted one of his Clark professors, who described Frazier as “a man with an unusually good mind. He thinks clearly and incisively and has demonstrated to my own satisfaction that he is capable of doing high grade work of a scholarly nature. By competitive examination held in the colleges and universities throughout the country Mr. Frazier won a fellowship amounting to \$850 at the New York School of Social Work.”⁹¹ He followed the School of Social Work with a stint in Denmark to study Folk Schools. From 1922 to 1927, he taught at Morehouse College in Atlanta and directed the Atlanta School of Social Work.

Frazier and his wife Marie were driven out of Atlanta after he published “The Pathology of Race Prejudice” in *Forum* magazine. It linked white’s race prejudice to insanity. Sterling Brown, a young poet and professor in Missouri who became friends with Frazier as they met each other at Talented Tenth functions, remembered the first time he read the essay.

Here I felt, along with many others, was a clear, unequivocal revelation of an important truth about America. It was unsparing, it was sharp, it said

⁹⁰ See E. Franklin Frazier, “The Pathology of Race Prejudice,” *Forum*, June 1927; Jonathan Scott Holloway, *Confronting the Veil: Abram Harris, Jr., E. Franklin Frazier, and Ralph Bunche, 1919-1941* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Anthony M. Platt, *E. Franklin Frazier Reconsidered* (New Brunswick [N.J.]: Rutgers University Press, 1991).

⁹¹ M.G. Allison, “The Year in Negro Education,” *Crisis*, July 1920, 126.

what many had certainly suspected but had not been able to express so well. Here many of us saw that a man of learning, passion and courage had emerged. [...] ‘The delusions of the white man under the Negro complex show the same imperviousness to objective facts concerning the Negro,’ Frazier wrote in that early essay. His career in teaching and scholarship was devoted to establishing and communicating such objective facts.”⁹²

White journalists in Georgia threatened Frazier’s life, and the administration at his school worried about keeping him on campus. Charles Johnson wrote to Frazier, “I was in Atlanta a few days after Sam somebody, in his column in the Constitution, went into hysterics over your Forum article. Everywhere I went the colored populace was asking, ‘Have you read Frazier’s farewell to the South?’ I understand that the newsstands have been exhausted of the issue. I tried unsuccessfully to get a copy of the Atlanta Constitution for the article by this Sam gentleman, but had to leave town before I succeeded. Have you an extra copy or can you loan me your own?”⁹³

The Fraziers left the South for Chicago. Edward F. Franklin changed his pen name to E. Franklin Frazier and started a Ph.D. in sociology at the University of Chicago. Forrester Washington, someone more willing to work within the strictures of race in the South, was hired as Frazier’s replacement as director of the Atlanta School of Social Work. Within a year, Johnson convinced Thomas Elsa Jones to hire Frazier at Fisk University.⁹⁴

Frazier arrived at a university markedly different from that racked by student riots and administrative iron-fisted control four years before. In 1928, Du Bois reassessed Fisk during a tour of black colleges throughout the South (except Howard). He was

⁹² Sterling Brown, “Frazier Memoriam,” 1962, 166 Box 50 Folder 3, Logan Papers MSRC.

⁹³ Frazier to Johnson, June 29, 1927, 131-11-11, Frazier Papers MSRC.

⁹⁴ Frazier to Johnson, August 10, 1927, 131-12-11, Frazier Papers MSRC.

happy to see that “There has been reconstruction at Fisk University. It is the one institution that I visited which feels thoroughly modern, and that feeling comes in some very little things,” like students’ ability to choose when to have breakfast within a window. The rest of the colleges set a specific time for breakfast; this was Du Bois’ unconscious “test of modern culture.” Men could smoke at Fisk and while he was not sure if the women could too, “I hope they do.” The sexes could “mingle quite naturally” together. Du Bois “saw them walking and talking together at times and places, which would have sent us to the penitentiary in my day, and made them liable to hanging, drawing and quartering under the McKenzie regime.”⁹⁵ All this freedom made Du Bois sigh with relief “to see baby nurses and swaddling clothes dropping at last from grownup Negro students.” Despite his joy at this freedom, Du Bois feared what would be done with it. Though the Fisk faculty was growing with black members, “these men do not know enough not to proceed the hostess out of the dining room. Difficulties of culture and knowledge are bound to recur at an institution like Fisk.” Knowledge always seemed to come before “culture,” in Du Bois’s opinion. This opinion suggests Du Bois’ firm connection to the Progressive Era, when instilling manners in ignorant folk went hand in hand with improving education and feeding the poor.

Fisk also showed promise in academic arenas. It had a good library and “excellent laboratories in Chemistry and Biology.” One of its greatest needs was buildings; “everything except historic Jubilee Hall and the chapel could well be swept out of existence and modern structures put up.” Du Bois was excited that Fisk included “The Russian Revolution” as a lecture topic during his visit, the only college on his route

⁹⁵ W.E.B. Du Bois, “A Pilgrimage to the Negro Schools,” *Crisis*, February 1929, 67-68.

besides Talladega to do so. During the reception after the lecture, teachers and students mingled, including white teachers, black students, black teachers, a few white students from Vanderbilt, “and fifteen or sixteen representatives of foreign peoples: Chinese, Italians, South Americans, Russians, Dutch, Swiss, and others. It was an unusual and inspiring scene.” Du Bois’ biggest concern for the institution was the sway that whites from Nashville’s educational community continued to try to exert over Fisk’s policies. “Unconsciously they will seek to dominate and advise, and the authorities at Fisk may easily be tempted to defer to this public opinion, rather than to the more reticent and poorly expressed public opinion of the black world. But right here, let Fisk beware. It went on the rocks in a former administration because the Chamber of Commerce of Nashville tried to set standards for it. The standards of Fisk University are being set today by its own Alumni and the colored world. It must continue in this line despite Vanderbilt, Peabody and all white Nashville.”⁹⁶

Dean of Women Juliette Derricotte

One of the marked improvements in Fisk University’s environment was Juliette Derricotte as Dean of Women. Though she had worried that student protests would eliminate the one successful, long-term interracial arena, she agreed that the students needed more independence in order to grow up into mature women. She also wanted to address one of the concerns that Mabel Byrd had also evoked, advising female students. As a Dean of Women herself, she was part of a movement to transform that position into an academic dean rather than a behavior or moral dean. As she had throughout her life,

⁹⁶ Ibid.

she wanted to achieve this change through cooperation rather than protest. That is, I imagine, why she did not support Mabel Byrd's protests. Byrd was encountering pervasive Jim Crow for pretty much the first time in her life (though Portland's level of racial rancor had risen sharply in her young adulthood). Derricotte had known it all her life. Furthermore, Derricotte believed she made pragmatic decisions. In a letter to Max Yergan, she gendered this decision making process:

You know what you men say about us—that we are unsound theologically, we are not scholarly, we are pragmatic; and you know what we say about you—that you are dogmatic theologically, you are religious idealists, that you get everything you want done by politics, and that you know not the first thing about the educational procedure.⁹⁷

There were probably many discussions among YWCA and YMCA secretaries backing up Derricotte's observation, and no doubt frustration on Derricotte's side to be so categorized. Despite her ventures into scholarship, she does seem to have been an eminently pragmatic woman not focused on theology. It is interesting, though, to note that Mabel Byrd did not fit this dichotomy. She started out in the more pragmatic wing of the YWCA (in the physical fitness department, no less) and joined many women's organizations. To the extent that this gender division is accurate, Byrd was no doubt exposed to it during her years in Harlem. Yet, she chose to become a scholar, to flout the prevalent idea that women were not scholarly. In confronting the discord at Fisk, she also chose the markedly political option of formal protest.

As Dean of Women, Derricotte decided to give her female students more freedom than they had before encountered; to treat them like friends instead of like a matron. Instead of living with them in the dorms, she took a cabin nearby. They were free to drop

⁹⁷ Derricotte to Yergan, July 24, 1929.

by for advice whenever they wished, but she would not be breathing down their neck or staring over their shoulders as they figured out who they wanted to be. She hoped that with their new freedoms, her students would develop maturity and responsibility; they were rather “childish and irresponsible” when she first moved to Fisk.⁹⁸

In addition to her responsibilities to Fisk women, Derricotte worked with Lucy Slowe to develop more rigorous standards and training for black deans of women throughout the south. Slowe, Derricotte, and Marion Cuthbert developed an Association of Advisers to Women in Colored Schools and held the first meeting in the spring of 1930. The next summer, Cuthbert left her long time position as the Talladega Dean of Women to pursue her doctorate at Columbia University. Starting in 1928, Cuthbert had attended Columbia every summer to work on her Masters degree in psychology, which she received in 1931. Derricotte went with her and also studied psychology.⁹⁹

Spending their summers in New York City, Derricotte and Cuthbert imbibed the cultural life and pursuing their own educational opportunities. During their winters in Alabama and Tennessee, they fostered the next generation of black leadership. On July 27, 1929, they joined a group of international travelers at the Harlem YWCA to give advice and exhortations to an eager group of black college students about to embark for a European tour. The group’s purpose, “to develop friendship between the various national youth groups and good will through contacts,” was very much in accord with the

⁹⁸ Jenness, *Twelve Negro Americans*, 176-178.

⁹⁹ Derricotte perhaps received an MA—many sources say this, but it has been more difficult to document with Columbia than Cuthbert’s degrees.

International Student Services'.¹⁰⁰ While in Europe, they would meet with "youth from all over Europe and America [...] around the conference table to discuss such international problems as minority groups, race relations, economics, and war."¹⁰¹ Among those gathered to offer the students advice was Merritt Hedgeman, the future husband of Anna Arnold.¹⁰²

During the summer 1930, Derricotte met with Mabel Carney of Teachers College, a professor at Columbia University, to discuss the training of black Deans of Women.¹⁰³ In that period, Deans of Women at white and black colleges were a range of different people. The position had been created when women began to enter the male zone of college campuses. They were meant to advise and protect women throughout their college education.¹⁰⁴ At black campuses, various women were given the position based on their need, rather than on their training. Widows of ministers or wives of faculty were told to watch over the girls on campus without any sense of what was intended by the interaction (other than, presumably, preserving the women's chastity). Slowe, Derricotte, and Cuthbert represented a new kind of Dean, more interested in their student's education than just controlling their behavior. They were each highly trained, with graduate educations. Slowe and Derricotte wanted to bring this training to the rest of the black

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It is unclear from the newspaper report whether that was the organization they cooperated with, though the stated goals were very similar to the ISS's.

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"Student Party Sails for Tour of European Countries," *Chicago Defender*, 27 Jul 1929.

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"Students Off for Tour of Europe," *The Pittsburgh Courier*, 27 Jul 1929, 11.

¹⁰³

Richard Glotzer, "The Career of Mabel Carney: The Study of Race and Rural Development in the United States and South Africa," *International Journal of African History Studies* 29, no. 2 (1996): 309-36; Kathleen Weiler, "Mabel Carney at Teachers College: From Home Missionary to White Ally," *Teachers College Record* 107, no. 12 (December 2005): 2599-633.

¹⁰⁴

Robert Arthur Schwartz, "How Deans of Women Became Men," *Review of Higher Education* 20, no. 4 (419): 419.

Deans and establish standards for their hiring. This goal fit within the National Association of College Women, previously discussed, which they were all original members of.

Carney, along with Miss Sturtevant (the woman who had first invited Slowe to speak at Columbia in 1924) wanted to join with Derricotte and Slowe in this training effort. They planned to develop a training center at Howard University, and maybe Fisk, that women who were already deans could attend from around the country. Slowe had already started classes at Howard for women interested in becoming deans. She hoped that eventually it would become a part of the graduate school. Though she knew, “it will be sometime yet before Negro schools are willing to accord deans of women their rightful place in the administrative group, but we shall hasten such recognition by setting up the highest standards possible for those who go into this work.”¹⁰⁵

Derricotte could see one major problem with Carney and Sturtevant’s plans. They had already received funding from the General Education Board. She wrote to Slowe, wondering “how far do we, as a group of Negroes in education, follow the General Education Board’s program in financing Negro education which really means controlling Negro education?” She knew there were no black sources of funding to rival the GEB, but still wondered what kind of concessions it would demand in exchange for its resources. “The substance of my questioning is that I want to be sure that our eyes are wide open as we accept any of this money.” Though she advocated interracial accord, and praised white teachers at black schools, that did not mean she did not understand racial politics. The General Education Board was one of the primary contributors to the Fisk

¹⁰⁵ Lucy Slowe to Juliette Derricotte, October 4, 1930, Box 90-2 Folder 47, Slowe Papers MSRC.

million dollar endowment. She had been an eye witness to the havoc that bending to the whim of philanthropists could bring.

She also worried about bringing black women from small colleges, “with such meager background and training matriculate” to large universities; “Can we control the types of persons who come to such training centers?” Was she more worried about what the representatives from Columbia thought about her or about whether the women from small colleges got anything out of the experience?

Derricotte was still not sure if she would remain at Fisk or begin a Ph.D. program. She was thinking about Cuthbert off in New York pursuing her Ph.D. At least she would join her again next summer. She told Slowe that “I have not yet decided whether I shall go on working in personnel administration directly or whether I shall go on in psychology. I want to see far enough ahead the need in Negro education in the South to see where I will fit in.”¹⁰⁶

Slowe replied directly to some of Derricotte’s statements, and more obliquely to others. Understanding Derricotte’s fear of accepting GEB’s money, Slowe said that any way “it looks as if we have accepted so much already that the damage to our independence has already taken place.” In answer to Derricotte’s questions over her life purpose, Slowe wrote, “Marion Cuthbert’s loss to our ranks is deeply regretted by me, for we certainly used her influence in our pioneer efforts. I was very much surprised when I learned that she had resigned her position.”¹⁰⁷ The words did not demand that Derricotte remain at Fisk, but they did quietly plead with her to stay.

¹⁰⁶ Juliette Derricotte to Lucy Slowe, September 27, 1930, Box 90-2 Folder 47, Slowe Papers MSRC.

¹⁰⁷ Slowe to Derricotte, October 4, 1930.

Derricotte made no more mention of leaving, though she did not abandon her summer plans. She and Slowe began to prepare for the next meeting of black deans. They would, of course, discuss the training center. Otherwise there was nothing else that concerned Derricotte “to any great degree other than the work on extra curricular activities of the women on campuses.” African American deans sent many other suggestions to Derricotte for discussion topics.

For example, the questions which have come to me have centered around such simple facts as dormitory organization, social activities, under which fall parties, dances, calls with the men, moving pictures, regulations for women leaving the campus, the relation of the University to any women’s enterprises, an adequate health program, helps in vocational guidance, the dean’s relation to the administration, the dean’s relation to student government, work with freshmen or work with new students, how to direct personal work.¹⁰⁸

There were many practical concerns that the women could work out together, sharing their own experiences and solutions.

Derricotte suggested that they hold the meeting at Talladega so that they could assess Cuthbert’s absence. The administration had chosen not to replace her, but instead appoint three untrained women students to take over different pieces of the role.

Hopefully, having all the black deans of women descend on Talladega would persuade the administration to reconsider their decision.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ Juliette Derricotte to Lucy Slowe, January 31, 1931, Box 90-2 Folder 47, Slowe Papers MSRC.

¹⁰⁹ Juliette Derricotte to Lucy Slowe, October 20, 1930, Box 90-2 Folder 47, Slowe Papers MSRC. Throughout these letters, Slowe gives her love to a Mrs. Goin. Goin sounds like Derricotte’s assistant. She sends Goin to the National Meeting of Deans of Women in Detroit so that she can learn more about colleges (Derricotte had much more experience with colleges than Goin did). At the same time, Slowe gave her to love to Goin in the same place that letter writers frequently placed a similar word to a wife or husband. It makes one wonder if Derricotte’s relationship to Goin was more than colleagues. I have not found any evidence of Derricotte’s love life or whether she tended towards males or females. Given how private she was, and how strong her Christian sense of morals, it is unlikely that she would have left evidence behind of any kinds of love affairs. Fisk had certainly known of them before. Ophelia Settle Egypt, another of Johnson’s research assistants, straightforwardly wrote about her heterosexual affairs in

In November 1930, several college presidents visited Fisk for the dedication of their new library. Derricotte knew most of them quite well and they had several conversations about the state of the different institutions. They all told Derricotte that they had come to respect the role of the Dean of Women over the last five years. They wanted more trained women for the position, not the minister wives and widows they were often stuck with. Derricotte felt very encouraged by their words.

They planned the third annual meeting of the Association of Advisers to Women in Colored Schools for April 10 at Talladega, with Slowe presiding. At the last minute, though, Slowe became too ill to travel from Washington and Derricotte had to take over the meeting of the 14 representatives from different colleges. Derricotte started off the discussion addressing many of those questions she had received over the last year in a session on "Business of Being a Dean." She defined that business "as being broadly 'to interpret the student to the administration and also to interpret the administration to the students.'" This was a role she had held since her own undergraduate days at Talladega, when she was the faculty representative. Other speakers included Dean Cater, the academic dean of Talladega, on the "Relationship of the Dean of Women to the Academic Dean," Dean Whiting of Virginia University and Industrial Institute at Petersburg on "The Dormitory as a Home," Miss Ferguson of Talladega (one of the students replacing Cuthbert) on "The Social Life of Students," and Dean Landers of Tuskegee on "What Sort of a Health Program Have you on Your Campus?" The

letters to her best friend Glenn Carrington (they had established such camaraderie at Howard University that Carrington wrote about slow realization of his homosexuality to her). See Carrington's Paper collections at the Schomburg and the MSRC. Also, Du Bois used Horace Cayton's house at Fisk in the late thirties for a tryst with Shirley Graham before she became his second wife. Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: The Fight for Equality*; Gerald Horne, *Race Woman: The Lives of Shirley Graham Du Bois* (New York: New York University Press, 2000).

delegates closed the weekend thoroughly encouraged and vowing to increase the representation at next year's meeting.¹¹⁰

From her sickbed, Slowe wrote Derricotte; "I cannot express to you my deep appreciation for the way in which you handled the Talladega Deans' Conference." She rejoiced at the report of the meeting Derricotte sent the National Association of College Women. It had "formed the basis of a most helpful discussion at one of our afternoon sessions." She was most interested in the way the men at the conference, President Sumner and Dean Cater of Talladega, acted. She thought "If we could have more men sitting in with us at our discussions, I feel that our work would be very much easier."¹¹¹ She closed the letter hoping she would improve enough for them to both have a long talk at Columbia that summer.¹¹²

Derricotte herself became ill that summer and spent much of it in bed. Then, before she had seen the outcomes of her changes on campus or build the network of Deans of Women, Derricotte died in the horrific aftermath of a car accident.

On a Friday afternoon early in November 1931, when most of the campus was focused on the upcoming football game, Dean of Women Juliette Derricotte decided to drive from Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee to her hometown Athens, Georgia to show her mother in person that she had finally overcome her illness. In addition to her physical illness, she had been overcome by her worries over the increased secularism of

¹¹⁰ "Noted Speakers at Women Deans Meet at Talladega," *Chicago Defender*, April 11, 1931, 6.

¹¹¹ Lucy Slowe to Juliette Derricotte, April 18, 1931, Box 90-2 Folder 48, Slowe Papers MSRC.

¹¹² Lucy Slowe to Juliette Derricotte, July 1, 1931, Box 90-2 Folder 48, Slowe Papers MSRC.

the student body at Fisk. She had “lain wide-eyed far into the night, going deep into her soul to bring forth those securities with which she could face the morrow.” After working specifically in the Christian ministry of the YWCA and WSCF, it pained her to hear the students rail “at any suggestion of more than human guidance in a world so obviously, so pitifully topsy-turvy.”¹¹³

Three students, Edward Davis, Nina Johnson, and Marian Price, accompanied her in the car for the three hundred mile drive. They, like many African Americans with sufficient means in the period, traveled by “automobile in order to avoid the ‘Jim-crow’ cars of the South, and the difficulty in getting meals and other transportation.” The journey started well. “The four in the car laughed and chatted” all the way to Chattanooga, where they stopped for lunch. In the afternoon, Derricotte took over the driving from Davis. Her friend Marion Cuthbert, fellow YWCA secretary and Talladega Dean of Women, reconstructed her thoughts; “she felt so well and strong and it was sheer joy to be at the wheel, flying along the highway. ... Some curious exultation of living had welled up in her.” Outside of Dalton, Georgia, another car approached in the other lane. Edward Davis, who sat in the front with Derricotte, later recounted what happened next,

I was talking to Miss Johnson and Miss Price when I suddenly turned around and noticed another car very close to us. A second later the two cars hit each other. Miss Derricotte snatched the steering wheel to the right, turned it loose and called to me. When I reached for the steering wheel the car was beginning to turn and by the time I got hold of it the car was turning over. I then turned the wheel loose and threw up my hands in an effort to save myself. The last I remember then was hearing the crash.

¹¹³ Marion Cuthbert, *Juliette Derricotte* (New York: Womans Press, 1934), 51.

All four were flung from the car. Johnson and Derricotte were the most seriously injured. The other driver of the car, a white man in overalls, approached Davis and asked what would be done about his car. Davis explained that they needed to seek medical attention first. The driver disappeared.¹¹⁴

White bystanders gathered the injured into their cars and sought medical help. Though several asked local townspeople for directions to a hospital, no one directed them to Hamilton Memorial Hospital because the locals knew it was for whites only. Instead, they were taken to see white physicians, who tended their immediate needs and then moved them to a black woman's home, which often served as a place for injured blacks to recuperate. Later reports described the home as dirty and with "no evidence of facilities for handling such cases." Johnson and Derricotte were kept there for five hours, sometimes with doctors present, sometimes without, before the other two students managed to contact friends in Chattanooga and Nashville. Ethel Gilbert, Derricotte's white colleague and friend at Fisk, investigated the accident and subsequent events. She later recreated a conversation she had with the attending physician.

I: How soon was she removed to the house where Negro patients are taken?

Dr. Steed: Just as soon as first aid was administered.

I: To your knowledge, was any attempt made by anyone to get them into Hamilton Memorial Hospital?

Dr. Steed: Oh, no'm. We don't take 'em there.

I: But knowing the seriousness of this particular case, did no one attempt to get them in in spite of the usual procedure?

Dr. Steed: Oh, no, m'a'm. You see, we don't even have any wards for them there.

¹¹⁴ W. E. B. Du Bois, "Dalton, Georgia," *Crisis*, March 1932, 86; Cuthbert, *Juliette Derricotte*, 52..

Over and again Gilbert thought about the primary lesson about race relations she had learned; “I shall always have to remember that, within one-half hour after the accident, I would have been in a modern hospital.”¹¹⁵

Derricotte’s friends from Chattanooga and Nashville arranged for an ambulance to come and transport the injured women to an African American hospital in Chattanooga. “The road had a long detour, about fifteen miles [...] of rough dirt road” where “in spite of the careful driving the car swerved from side to side.”¹¹⁶

Cuthbert later recreated what Derricotte might have felt and thought in those last few hours. She might have thought about her world tour speaking about love and beauty, where her audiences embraced her as “*She who has opened our hearts tonight to the low voice of God because she has not kept from us the dark beauty of her people.*” Yet her pain and agony might have led her to question her previous mission. “To dare to cross the seas to speak of love! What lies! What lies! ... What shall I say to these who gather in a strange land? They burn and slay my people in a land called at its birth The Free.” Next came her mother’s answer to these doubts about her life’s purpose. “*The Master of All Life has heard your words. You have spoken from the deeper than Now. Love is a fire that burns away dross. When your people are free they shall remember that you promised it.*”¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ Du Bois, “Dalton, Georgia,” 86.

¹¹⁶ Cuthbert, *Juliette Derricotte*, 53; Du Bois, “Dalton, Georgia,” 86; Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: The Fight for Equality*, 297.

¹¹⁷ This and subsequent quotes are italicized in original. Cuthbert, *Juliette Derricotte*, 53-54..

Derricotte stayed for several hours at the Chattanooga hospital, a place Gilbert believed “could not be dignified by the name of a hospital.” There, she died around six o’clock the next day, Saturday November 7. Gilbert pronounced her opinion of the two days with scorching words; “If anybody makes a report that says in effect ‘everything that could be done was done’ it merely means that everything that could be done for Negroes was done.” Students at Fisk, including a young John Hope Franklin, “plunged into a period of mourning and outrage that the university had lost a student and its young administrator to segregationist practices.” Langston Hughes remembered his disgust: “That she should die of injuries, neglected on a Georgia road because the medical facilities of the South were segregated, horrified me, too. It just did not make sense—not *decent, humane* sense, at any rate.” Derricotte had devoted her life to stopping racism by building interracial understanding among individuals and between friends, but in the end an impersonal racism, which could not see the beauty she fostered in her life, prevented her from receiving adequate medical care. She was not the only black person to die in this era by auto accident and lack of hospital care. Others included blues singer Bessie Smith, Walter White’s father (within days of Derricotte’s death), and scientist Charles Drew.¹¹⁸

For many years, people like W. E. B. Du Bois, Addie Hunton, Walter White, Max Yergan, and Langston Hughes, among many others, remembered Derricotte. Only two years before her accident, the *Chicago Defender* had called her one of “the nation’s best

118 John Hope Franklin, “John Hope Franklin: The Fisk Years,” *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, no. 49 (Autumn 2005): 74-83; Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: The Fight for Equality*, 297; Du Bois, “Dalton, Georgia”; Langston Hughes, “I Wonder as I Wander,” in *The Collected Works of Langston Hughes*, ed. Arnold Rampersad and Dolan Hubbard (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2001), 74. The Commission on Interracial Cooperation found that the events preceding and following Derricotte’s accident were not “were not seriously affected by the race situation.” “Philadelphia Yearly Meeting Committee on Race Relations,” Minutes, December 1, 1931, Box 2, Record Group 2, Swarthmore College Friends Historical Library.

leaders.” Yet, now she is mostly forgotten. This paper not only reconstructs her life, it uses her life to analyze the state of race relations during the 1920s, an era more usually associated with jazz joints and isolationism than conferences about racial harmony and internationalism. Derricotte believed she was helping to establish the Kingdom of God on earth by developing interracial and international friendships. The individuals she educated and befriended could transform the racial preconceptions of others they encountered. In that way, the transformed individual would renew existing societal structures. The Kingdom of God was the central component of social gospel theology; Walter Rauschenbusch defined it as “humanity organized according to the will of God [through] a progressive reign of love in human affairs.”¹¹⁹ Derricotte organized her whole life and mission around love of God and love of neighbor.

Juliette Derricotte lived in a time rarely associated with civil rights.¹²⁰ It was long after the rights gained in Reconstruction had been lost in the pervasive system of segregation commonly known as Jim Crow and long before boycotters demanded their rights as Americans on the byways of Montgomery. Yet she achieved an important level of interracial cooperation that, when her own life was claimed by the terrors of the

¹¹⁹ “Students to Attend Kings Mt. Conference: Outstanding Leaders to Lead Discussions,” *Chicago Defender*, May 25, 1929; Walter Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1922), 142.. The only thing that is remembered about her is her death. See, for instance, this recent blog post on the New York Times website, Brent Staples, “Rooting out Racism in Medicine,” August 14, 2008, <http://theboard.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/08/14/rooting-out-racism-in-medicine/?scp=2&sq=Juliette%20Derricotte&st=csc>.

¹²⁰ This is beginning to change with the new scholarly emphasis on “The Long Civil Rights Movement.” The phrase was first used by Jacquelyn Dowd Hall and carried to success in Glenda Gilmore’s latest work. Yet, even in Gilmore’s work, her coverage of 1919-1929 is remarkably brief compared to the rest of her work. Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Defying Dixie: The Radical Roots of Civil Rights, 1919-1950* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2008); Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, “The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past,” *Journal of American History* 91 (2005): 1233-64..

southern racial system, lived on in her colleagues and the lives of those she had transformed, as Max Yergan attested.¹²¹

I shall, above everything else, remember her for her quality of true friendship; such a quality is so rare, so necessary, and so seldom found in any real and enduring sense, that Juliette Derricotte's conception and practice of it constitute one of her unique gifts to our time. Our race could ill afford to lose such a gifted member; the larger human and spiritual cause which she served transcending race and nation, is now without one of its strongest and proved advocates; the realm of friendship has in its ranks an empty place because we mourn the untimely death of this sweet and gentle soul.¹²²

Derricotte's road to interracialism, which she assessed as moderately successful, included urging black students to have pride in themselves, teaching white students about the reality of black people's lives, and connecting internationally with other oppressed peoples. She then extended her understanding of interracialism among Americans to internationalism among Europeans, Asians, and Africans.

During this period, "interracial" stood for many things. Sometimes it meant simply the conversations and plans African Americans and whites had for ending racial discrimination. As a minority in this country, most blacks recognized that ending discrimination would necessarily mean cooperating with whites on some level, but most did not agree that this would involve creating friendships or some kind of interracial harmony. Nancy Robertson explains three premises behind interracial cooperation, "The first was that the 'best elements of both races' needed to work together. Second, in doing so, they would promote mutual understanding and harmony and ease racial tensions.

121

Nancy Marie Robertson argues that Derricotte's "treatment starkly revealed the consequences of the 'separate and unequal' system and pointed to the limitations of a strategy for racial adjustment that relied on educating individual whites, while accepting segregation." See her *Christian Sisterhood, Race Relations, and the YWCA, 1906-1946* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 130.

122

Cuthbert, *Juliette Derricotte*, frontispiece.

And, finally, these efforts could be carried on within the confines of a segregated society.”¹²³ Derricotte focused her efforts on educating white and black college women (and sometimes men) about the realities of race and on encouraging their mutual friendship. This certainly included class-based education; by arriving poised, elegant, and educated at a white college, Derricotte put the lie to negative stereotypes about blacks. This paper shows that while Derricotte operated within a segregated society, with a full understanding of southern racial etiquette, she did not fail to fight segregation. In order to encourage interracial friendship, Derricotte sponsored interracial conferences. Yet, these conferences confronted segregated housing and dining facilities in the north and the south. She and other YW secretaries steadily worked to improve those conditions throughout the 1920s.

Derricotte’s life contrasts with the way another black southerner described black culture in the same era—Richard Wright wrote in his autobiography that “I used to mull over the strange absence of real kindness in Negroes, how unstable was our tenderness, how lacking in genuine passion we were, how void of hope, how timid our joy, how bare our traditions, how hollow our memories, how lacking we were in those intangible sentiments that bind man to man, and how shallow was even our despair.”¹²⁴ Derricotte developed real friendships with white and black women, full of tenderness, who then devoted their lives to race relations. She delivered Christian hope to international audiences and urged them to make the Kingdom a reality.

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¹²⁴ Robertson, *Christian Sisterhood*, 62.

Richard Wright, *Black Boy (American Hunger) A Record of Childhood and Youth* (New York: Perennial Classics, 1993), 37.

Byrd Leaves Fisk

Byrd left Fisk and the South after her second year with relief to be away. In fall 1931, she moved to the University of Chicago to pursue her master's degree in economics, funded by a scholarship from the Rosenwald Fund (Ralph Bunche was also given a Rosenwald that year to pursue his dissertation research in Africa).¹²⁵ The *New York Amsterdam News* mentioned Byrd as one of the few to receive a Rosenwald that year who was well known to New York society.¹²⁶ Johnson's close relationship to Edwin Embree of the Rosenwald Fund often resulted in grants, either for his own work in building up the Department of Social Sciences at Fisk or for his Special Fellows and assistants.¹²⁷ E. Franklin Frazier also probably helped her make connections at his alma mater. During the summer, she traveled to each coast, visiting her friends in Harlem, including Mr. and Mrs. Aaron Douglas, and her family now living in Seattle, Washington, before settling in the middle of the country.¹²⁸ An unnamed white woman student requested Mabel Byrd as a roommate, making her probably the first black woman to reside in the dormitories.¹²⁹ Byrd entered a city Richard Wright later described as "the city from which the most incisive and radical Negro thought has come; there is an open

125

"39 Given Rosenwald Fund Fellowships," *Chicago Defender*, August 1, 1931, 13.

126

"Fellowships Announced by Rosenwald Official," *New York Amsterdam News*, July 29, 1931, sec.

A14.

127

Gilpin and Gasman, *Charles S. Johnson*, 93-105.

128

"39 Given Rosenwald Fund Fellowships," *Chicago Defender*, 1 Aug 1931, 13; "Dr. Anna Cooper Johnson Entertains for Miss Byrd," *New York Amsterdam News*, 15 Jul 1931, 4; "Fellowships Announced by Rosenwald Official," *New York Amsterdam News*, 29 Jul 1931, A14.

John

by R

129

Benjamin Elijah Mays, *Born to Rebel* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2003), 135.

and raw beauty about that city that seems either to kill or endow one with the spirit of life."¹³⁰

She was not the only black person on campus, though. Frances Williams had left **the** YWCA two years before to start studying for her Masters degree at the University of **C**hicago in the Social Science Division. She completed the masters in two years while **w**orking as a research assistant for Dr. Robert E. Park and Harold F. Gosnell. She helped **the** latter in his study of "The Negro in Politics."¹³¹ When Byrd arrived on campus, **W**illiams had just started to study for her doctorate. She introduced Byrd to Gosnell, and **BY**rd served as his research assistant for the two years she was on campus.¹³²

The Communist National Nominating Convention came to Chicago the summer **a**fter Byrd's first year in graduate school, on May 28-29, 1932. Byrd watched the **s**peeches and discussions unfold with eager eyes. She soaked in every detail to write up **b**ecause she was the official representative of the Associated Negro Press. With what she **s**aw and heard swirling through her mind, she began to depart from the opinions of the "a**c**cepted leaders" of Chicago. These leaders, according to sociologists St. Clare Drake and **a**nd Horace Cayton, "tend to be people who stress the use of political and economic **p**ressure (without violence) and gradual advancement by slowly raising the economic and **e**ducational level of the entire group."¹³³ When she walked in the doors of the **c**onvention, she immediately noticed that she was not the lone black figure in the room,

130

Rev. Richard Wright, "Introduction," in *Black Metropolis: a Study of Negro Life in a Northern City*, vol. 1, and enl. ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), xvii.

131

"Frances Williams Gets High Post With Y. W. C. A.," *Atlanta Daily World*, September 5, 1932, 2.

132

"Gets Place in NRA Research Division," *Pittsburgh Courier*, September 9, 1933.

133

St. Clair Drake and Horace Roscoe Cayton, *Black Metropolis*, (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1993), 393.

as she had been so often in her classrooms of late. Fully fifteen percent of the members and twenty five percent of the speakers were African American. Then the delegates, eighty-five percent of whom were not African Americans, nominated James W. Ford as the vice-presidential candidate. Communist ideology also attracted Byrd, after three years of witnessing economic devastation within black communities across the nation, with little hope for future change under the democratic system which favored the already powerful. When a few months later, Du Bois requested essays espousing the different political positions in the presidential race that year, Byrd eagerly wrote on behalf of the communists.

The reasons Mabel Byrd chose to become a communist are murky.¹³⁴ But she has left many rich clues behind. In Harlem, she sat on a board overseeing Hubert Harrison's educational institute, which taught regularly about socialism and workers' rights. In the YWCA, she confronted directly the numerous needs of workers and the difficulties they faced. In Geneva, when she wrote Du Bois and Locke for "propaganda," she meant materials about African Americans and did not mention workers or communism in her letters. But what did she discuss with the Robesons, who were already beginning to lean left? And what conversations did she have in Geneva, where communism was more accepted than in the United States? When she toured through Birmingham asked about industrial conditions, did she encounter the Alabama Communist Party?¹³⁵ Most likely, she embraced communism because she could be a race-proud internationalist within it. By 1932, the Comintern had already declared that

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¹³⁵ There are still a few repositories I need to search.

See Robin D. G. Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists During the Great Depression*, *The Fred W. Morrison Series in Southern Studies*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990).

Negro self-determination was to be a major part of communist practice in the United States. Communist Party leaders had begun to follow through with this dictate by organizing white and black workers in the South, despite frequent failure and the ease with which they could have (and previously did) cooperate with Jim Crow. Before a startling 1932 endorsement of the Communist Party in the *Crisis*, Byrd evidenced no partiality for communism in her few extant letters or articles. Yet, she had associated with others, like Hubert Harrison, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Paul and Essie Robeson, who were making a similar journey leftward at the time. Also, she had been consistently involved in labor questions since her initial interest in industrial workers from her early days with the YWCA almost a decade before, to her work with the ILO, and her sociological studies with Charles Johnson. She was able to analyze firsthand how industrial education was working in the south. In her formal reports to the Rosenwald Fund, she hedged her own opinions about their success, but in the *Crisis*, she noted how industrial education failed in the South because public schools were closed to blacks.

In September, Mabel Byrd returned to Harlem for three weeks, where she stayed at the newly christened Emma Ransom House (the YWCA on 137th St.).¹³⁶ Mr. and Mrs. William T. Andrews of 405 Edgecombe Ave threw a party for Byrd and another visitor on a Wednesday evening. "Among the guests at the party were Dr. and Mrs. Payton Anderson, Mr. and Mrs. Ira deA. Reid, [...] Rev. Father Markee of St. Louis, Dr. Robert White, Emmett Scott Jr., Mrs. Julia Delaney, Dr. Earnest Alexander, and Miss Nicholson of" DC.¹³⁷ While she was in town, presumably she sought out her friends the

136

137 "New York Society," *Chicago Defender*, October 1, 1932.

"New York Society," *Chicago Defender*, September 17, 1932.

Du Bois' and eagerly told them about the communist meeting. The previous year, Du Bois had started to study Marxism more closely. He had written Abram Harris for a study outline, as discussed later. She was in town when the *Crisis* brought out her robust support for communism.

At the beginning of the fall election season, Du Bois gave Republican, Democrat, Socialist, and Communist representatives a chance to explain in the *Crisis* how their candidates would help African Americans. In her essay, Byrd declared that the Communist Party's nomination of Ford marked "the beginning of the third epoch in the history of the Negro in the United States."¹³⁸ The first two epochs had been slavery and emancipation. African Americans had not been silent during either epoch, but their condition did not improve. Her periodization did not echo many middle class African Americans' emphasis on progress, but rather the sense of pervasive doom that the Depression had brought to Du Bois and many others. After emancipation, "they sallied forth from their enchainment with a belief in their God, the North and the Republican Party, that has taken almost 60 years of growing disillusionment to die and to be replaced by a frank recognition of their realities."¹³⁹ Those realities included "wage-slavery, bound hand and foot by political disfranchisement and social ostracism."¹⁴⁰

To protest their wage slavery and improve their status, African Americans tried educating themselves, engaging in political protest, and working their way up economically. In Byrd's estimation, all three attempts had failed. "Education, law,

138

139

140

Byrd, "Socialists and Communists Bid for the Negro Vote: The Black and Red Convention." 279.

Ibid., 280.

Ibid.

work,—which translated, means training, politics, wealth—these three have they tried, but the Negro arrives in 1932, yet on the lowest rung of the economic ladder, disenfranchised, and a social outcast.”¹⁴¹ Only the Communist Party could offer African Americans an alternative because out of the existing political parties only they actually acted on their rhetoric. Other political parties claimed that the issues of black people were important to them up till the day their candidates were elected; then they abandoned those issues. In contrast, the Communist Party convention showed that the party actually believed it when its platform called for “equal rights for Negroes.”¹⁴² This was shown in the relatively large representation of black people at the convention. This was not because the party wooed black people, but “increasingly, Negro masses are deciding to speak and act for themselves [not simply following black leaders]. Within the last year or so, it is the Communist Party that is the chosen medium through which they are asserting their demands.”¹⁴³ Though this was an exaggeration, it was certainly true that since the beginning of the depression and the Scottsboro case, African Americans had begun to turn their attention toward economic solutions and the communists.¹⁴⁴ The black speakers, “the most articulate Negro group that I have ever seen assembled” (despite living through the peak of the New Negro Renaissance in Harlem) spoke at the convention not only about the injustices they had suffered, seeing “ahead of them

141

Ibid.

142

Ibid.

143

Ibid.

144

Glenda Gilmore has also charted the significant influence of communists on the “Long Civil Rights Movement,” beginning after WWI (though her book largely documents the 1930s). She argues the Communist Left “redefined the debate over white supremacy and hastened its end. By brooking no compromise with full social equality for a decade after they entered the South in 1929, the Communists gave Southerners a vision and a threat. Their small numbers mattered less than their very existence.” Gilmore, *Defying Dixie*, 6.

struggle, fight, hardship, but they [also] visualized a Society in which equality will be an actuality.”¹⁴⁵ Not only did they decry “‘white chauvinism’ but they suggested means for its eventual extinction. There is a philosophy of hope and enthusiasm that has not been known since the days of emancipation.”¹⁴⁶

For Byrd, the greatest thing that the Communist Party did for African Americans was give them a space to develop and show their self-respect. No matter the outcome of the election,

these truths seem to be increasingly self-evident: the Negro masses are now speaking for themselves, as evidenced on the convention floor. They are becoming increasingly aware of their status in the American Commonwealth: through their conception of, and belief in, the philosophy and program of the Communist Party, they are awakening that attribute for so long made dormant by the Negro’s social and political environment—self-respect. [...] They have taken their first step in the repudiating of the old line parties which they hold have so consistently betrayed their trust in the past. In the words of one of the most ardent delegates of the Convention, ‘the dis-inherited became the inheritors of the most important treasure in the world—that vivid, energizing force of self-respect.’¹⁴⁷

The Atlantic Daily World agreed with her when it reported on the convention—“The whole attitude of the Negro workers was one of intense belief in the movement. There was a sense of belonging, of being an integral part of the assemblage. They were at home. In a sense the Negro dis-inherited felt himself the inheritor of his God-given rights as a human being, he had come into his own—his self respect.”¹⁴⁸

Byrd embraced the communist message for three central reasons that illustrate the problems with simple dichotomies between integration and nationalism, civil rights and

145

Byrd, "Socialists and Communists Bid for the Negro Vote: The Black and Red Convention," 280.

146

Ibid.

147

Ibid., 300.

148

"Negroes Active in Communist Meet" *Atlanta Daily World*, Jun 6, 1932, p 2.

black power. She believed in the hope and enthusiasm communists offered, first because they created a space where African Americans could develop and inhabit self-respect and leadership; second, because she had experienced in Europe a society where people of many races could work successfully together and truly believed it was possible to recreate it elsewhere (despite many other experiences of failed interracialism); and third because of their political and economic message.

Byrd's and Derricotte's efforts to improve Fisk University indicate two very different ways to work for social change. Derricotte worked from the inside, with a careful on what would work rather than what was theoretically "right." Her education in the South had taught her the value of pragmatism. The fellowship she found in Europe and India gave her hope that ultimately her efforts might lead to transformation. Her faith in God and understanding of her responsibilities kept her devoted to the work. Her death was tragic in so many different ways. One thing I am struck by is how she devoted her life to changing the minds of individual people about the talents and abilities of African Americans. There is much evidence that she changed many people's minds for the better, white women who followed up her work in race relations. Her death, though, came at the hands of anonymous racial assumptions. The people who refused to admit her to the white hospital did not know her as the talented world-traveler, but acted on their own race-based assumptions about the world. This does not in any way lessen the power of

what she worked for, but it does indicate that the world also needed people to fight power structures and wide-spread assumptions. Someone like Mabel Byrd.

Byrd worked from the outside. She had grown up far from most black communities in Portland Oregon, where blacks made up a tiny minority. At the YWCA, she kept pressing for more academic research to back up their efforts. She did not fit in as a secretary content to lead physical education classes or seminars on job placement. At the same time, she found leadership where she could, as president of the Delta Sigma Theta Rho chapter and among the community of society women. She joined intellectuals in discussions about how to improve the status of workers and blacks. Then she was able to pursue that research even more thoroughly in Europe, first by studying a settlement house in England and then through studying African workers for the League of Nations. At Fisk, she chose to protest and fight. In communism, she found a combination of race pride, discussion of large societal problems, and willingness to directly confront problems.

Pursuing inter-cultural, international cooperation in the years between WWI and WWII was intensely difficult. The world had just exploded in one of the greatest conflagrations ever seen, driven on both sides by nationalist rhetoric about saving civilization. People in Africa and Asia had been promised freedom if they only supported their colonial power in the war, yet after the war that promise was quickly retracted and colonialists rushed to bulwark the borders of their empires. In the United States, the KKK saw a rebirth in an era of isolationism and the number of lynchings rose, even as the country stretched its economic arms toward empire. By the time the Depression fell upon

the nation, most individuals were more concerned about the status of their next meal than the status of race relations in the country. Consistently, African Americans found work only in the worst paid, dirtiest jobs. Even educated African Americans often had to support themselves in jobs far below their skill level; good jobs were portering luggage or delivering mail. Unions could not help, because many refused to accept black members based on the stereotypes and complicated reality of strikebreakers.

Juliette Derricotte, through her work with the YWCA and the WSCF had to exhibit careful diplomacy, but she also successfully inculcated self-worth and pride within black listeners and challenged white listeners to live up to the goals they professed. As much as Derricotte, Mabel Byrd, Marion Cuthbert, and Anna Arnold Hedgeman had their eyes opened to the diversity of conflicts beyond the black and white borders of the United States, while encouraging their international audiences to take African Americans seriously. Their own deportment and level of intelligence spoke the lie to every stereotype their audiences had ever imbibed. Furthermore, they sustained each other during their pursuit of knowledge, sharing how to deal with the US's racial apartheid and also sharing the joy of discovery when they traveled abroad. They took up the mantle of responsibility expected of members of the Talented Tenth, while pursuing their own individual curiosities and loves. They were race women and unique individuals.

The YWCA women's responses to the world of the 1920s and early 1930s add an intriguing comparison to the men we will begin to examine with the next section. They chose, or were forced to by exclusion, to create this magnificent society in Harlem that drew some in with appreciation for its projects and socializing. The same society then repulsed a few very creative and talented women like Zora Neale Hurston and Nella

Larsen. The major organizations in their childhood in this era—the Urban League and the NAACP—could not have survived without the fundraising efforts of African American women. They responded overwhelmingly positively to the Second Amenia Conference in letters to the organizers. Because they were polite? Or because they genuinely appreciated it? In contrast, the men responded mostly with serious critiques of the conference's efforts. These women chose mostly not to marry or marry late in life, whereas the men primarily married fairly early to a helpmate that was very important in giving them enough time to concentrate on their scholarship. Each woman embraced a different response to racial discrimination, some by ignoring it, some by confronting it, many by attempting to transform it through diplomacy. They had different understandings of their own identity, from great pride in their race to wanting to subsume their racial identity into their general sense of humanity.

By working closely with students, white people, educated African Americans, and poverty-stricken African Americans, these women had immense wisdom and insight to bring to J. E. Spingarn's estate in Amenia New York in August of 1933. There, they would meet representatives from the black colleges, some familiar to them and some new acquaintances, with representatives from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the National Urban League, and with a smattering of African Americans leaders from throughout the country. Often economist Abram Harris is given all the credit for discussing the economic foundations of racism, but all these women had consistently seen the connections between race and class on their national and international journeys. With the group at Amenia they could share their world travels, continue to mourn Juliette Derricotte, and struggle to find the solution to the world's

problems. With many other groups, this might have seemed an audacious task, but this group gathered their extensive training and knowledge of world systems and set their capable minds to the task.

From the YWCA women, we are now going to turn to the other major group at the Second Amenian Conference, the group of professors at Howard University who styled themselves the “Young Turks.” The source material for them was the exact opposite of that for the YWCA women—an overflowing abundance, to which I tried to bring some order.

Part 3

“Objective or Intellectual or ‘Detached’ Type”

The Education of the Young Turks

If the Negro's ever-increasing self-assertion is not guided by Negro intellectuals possessed of catholic vision, it will build within the present order a self-illuminating black world oblivious to things white. If guided by such leadership, his contributions to music, art and literature may exceed present calculations, or his alignment with some phases of liberal thought may definitely be established. Such a task is more easily delegated to the Negro intellectual than accomplished by him. His education and balked ambitions render him more race conscious than the ignorant and disadvantaged Negro. Secluded in his room, a Negro intellectual may try to surpass Marx in determining how best to deliver the capitalist into the hands of the proletariat. When this same Negro enters his real world where he encounters the apathy of his own group and the hostility of the white, very likely he ponders the feasibility of the converse proposition.

--Abram Harris, 1925¹

(f) Objective or Intellectual or ‘Detached’ Type: attempt to view problem in its social perspective and entirety. Do not keep an active, alert, ever-present consciousness of race with them. ‘Emancipated’ Can be insulted, but only by deliberate, personal insults, not abstract ones.

--attitude when leaving So. For No. cities

No acceptance of situation as is, but an understanding of its underlying causes and therefore a sounder basis for resisting and attacking it. No resentment against whites in general or particular; sees similarity between his own problems and those of many in other group. Sees problems as considerable more than prob. of a ‘race’.

This attitude may also be a form of accommodation?

--Ralph Bunche, speech notes, 1936²

¹ Abram L. Harris, “A White and Black World in American Labor and Politics,” *Social Forces* 4, no. 2 (December 1925): 381.

² Ralph Bunche, “Some Historical and Psychological Factors in Status of Am. Negro,” Speech Notes (Northwestern University, Class in Social Psychology, December 9, 1936), Box 43, Bunche Papers UCLA.

Introduction

In the summer of 1932, a crowd of black adventurers and social scientists gathered on the deck of the *Bremen*, moored at a dock in midtown Manhattan. Visitors said goodbye to their intrepid friends and the passengers milled around finding their way. In one corner, twenty young leftist intellectuals and actors laughed and joked with new friends and old, including Louise Thompson. They waited for Langston Hughes, the most well-known of their group, and anticipated making a film in the Soviet Union. Ralph Bunche bid his stoic wife Ruth and their tiny baby Joan a loving farewell, still trying to talk them into coming with him for his year of dissertation research in Europe and Africa. Alain Locke went quickly to his first class cabin, eager for the trip to Europe to begin and to put the United States and all its backwardness behind him. National Urban League Research Director Ira Reid and Atlanta University President John Hope chatted with colleagues from the Urban League about their research plans for their own trip to the USSR. The visitors were put off and the boat prepared to leave, when finally one last man rushed up the gangplank. Langston Hughes had just sped from coast to coast in his Ford, arriving in Manhattan just in time to pay a hasty farewell to Harlem. He picked up his ticket and “loaded down with bags, baggage, books, a typewriter, a victrola, and a big box of Louis Armstrong, Bessie Smith, Duke Ellington and Ethel Waters records” climbed the gangplank, relieved to have finally stopped his frenetic movement. He missed all the friends who had gathered at the dock to see him off. On board, Bunche moved between the first and third classes, as eager to talk with the Hughes crowd as

with Locke, his traveling companion from Howard.³ Locke remained firmly in first class, determined not to see the younger poet who he had tried unsuccessfully to woo.

This short vignette illustrates the thick network of intellectuals, artists, scholars, and activists that African Americans moved through in this era, a network which included intellectual inspiration, passionate politics, and personal flames. It also highlights how mobile a few blacks were able to be during the Great Depression. This section of the dissertation introduces a cadre of men who came to the Amenia conference. It begins when they were spread across the country, as children and students, and follows them as they attempted to establish their intellectual chops in environments that alternatively encouraged and discouraged them. Abram Harris' life provides a framework on which to hang this exploration because his struggle, left behind in poignant letters, captures the growing pains of becoming a black intellectual. He responded to/rebelled against leaders before him, criticized his peer group—the black bourgeoisie—and painstakingly gathered materials for publication, worrying about and glorying in his abilities. In agreement with the other Young Turks he disliked the black “bourgeoisie,” but could find no easy union with the black “masses.”⁴ His many differences from the other Young Turks, particularly his utter rejection of any kind of race pride or nationalism, also provide illustrative comparisons. In between major points in Harris' life, this section will examine the process of education and teaching in the lives of the other Young Turks, particularly poet Sterling Brown and political scientist Ralph Bunche. By

³ Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Defying Dixie: The Radical Roots of Civil Rights, 1919-1950*, 1st ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 2008), 137; Langston Hughes, “I Wonder as I Wander,” in *The Collected Works of Langston Hughes*, ed. Arnold Rampersad and Dolan Hubbard (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2001), 96.

⁴ Charles P Henry, *Ralph Bunche: Model Negro or American Other?* (New York: New York University Press, 1999).

the end of the chapter, the Young Turks had begun to come together as the self-conscious cohort of intellectuals so vocal at Amenia.

In the early 1930s, Howard University attracted dynamic young black scholars, some ready to remake the world through “objective” social science, others eager to seek out black “folkways” to renew art and literature. These men, all with brilliant minds eager for knowledge, felt competing pulls to satisfy their desire for intellectual things, to fulfill their responsibility to black communities, and to fight the persistent discrimination that dogged their every ambition. They found solace in each other. Together they could fashion a new identity for the black intellectual, taking a few things from older black leaders and a few things from white intellectuals, and then making their own. In their desire to make something new, they called themselves the Young Turks. Those present at Howard in 1933 included Abram Harris, Ralph Bunche, Emmett Dorsey, Sterling Brown, Mercer Cook, and Gus Auzenne. Others, including Ira Reid, Allison Davis, and E. Franklin Frazier, participated when they came to town. Charles Hamilton Houston and William Hastie had their own crowd in the law school that intersected with the Young Turks upon occasion. Alain Locke, Charles Johnson, and W.E.B. Du Bois functioned sometimes as social peers, sometimes as mentors, and sometimes as stalwart elders against which the Young Turks rebelled.

The original Young Turks had been a group of intellectuals in the Ottoman Empire prior to WWI that criticized the monarchy and set themselves up as dissenters. In 1911, they successfully overthrew the Ottoman sultan. For the black faculty at Howard, the name represented their frustration with the oppression of white systems of power and with black leaders’ responses. They desired something much more radical than middle class materialism, the NAACP’s focus on civil liberties, or Marcus Garvey’s black nationalism. At

the same time, they struggled to develop a space in which their intelligence and pursuit of ideas were fostered and developed.

Before the 1920s, white faculty dominated black colleges. By the mid-1920s, a wave of student protests at Howard University, Fisk University, Lincoln University, and others forced white administrations, college regents, and missionary boards to begin hiring black faculty. At the same time, funding agencies, graduate schools, and education experts were instituting new accreditation requirements that mandated that faculty members have advanced degrees. Thus, by the end of the 1920s, the United States had a growing number of black faculty members pursuing graduate education.

These men succeeded in an era in which most African American men struggled to find and keep a job, even while encountering persistent forms of discrimination. Their success resided in a complex array of family guidance, unceasing energy, ability to network, luck, and faint cracks in the United States' racial system. They, like the YWCA women in the previous section, had families very supportive of education. They tended to be idealistic in high school and college, but at some point had to encounter a world full of racism—none maintained the same starry-eyed idealism in their adult life that they had expressed as teenagers, yet they did not lose it entirely. Harris dabbled in the Communist Party before rejecting its methodology for a form of Marxism he believed was closer to the originator. Bunche moved from the kind of world-peace undergraduate rhetoric that fit comfortably in a valedictorian's mouth to winning the Nobel Peace Prize. When Harris moved out of idealism, he also moved into pessimism. Bunche and Brown, though, never lost a persistent sense of optimism. Robert Weaver commented later about his days with Bunche at Harvard that “What impressed me most about Ralph in those days was his optimism. I soon realized that it

was not rooted in wishful thinking, as is often the case, but rather based on a long history of overcoming obstacles and an uncanny ability to produce stupendous amounts of work over long sustained periods of application.”⁵ These men all shared this tremendous work ethic and the ability to overcome obstacles that confounded most of their peers. For Bunche, much later as a UN under-secretary, this ability came under much criticism when he became the “Model Negro” that supposedly proved all others’ inability to work their way out of racism. Stokely Carmichael famously remarked when told that Bunche’s success showed the progress of civil rights, “You can’t have Bunche for lunch.”⁶ In the 1930s, Bunche criticized those he saw as “Uncle Toms’,” only to have the term thrown at him in the 1960s. These men’s limited success does not prove the limited affect of racism, but rather their constant need to fight and create opportunities where there were none shows how hard it was for educated blacks to find professional outlets for their abilities.

Howard University was at the center of an exciting development in Washington DC that rivaled the Harlem Renaissance further to the north. Social Scientists, politicians, and philanthropists flocked to DC for conferences about African Americans’ experiences of the Depression, efforts toward integration, and new plans for a segregated black economy. From the late 1920s through the 1930s, there was a constant flow of lectures, conferences, ideas, and strategies from Howard University. The Young Turks started at the edge of these discussions, but as they gained strength and influence at Howard, they moved to the center, until they were the ones planning and driving the conferences (like the influential one in 1935 that led to the creation of the National Negro Congress).

⁵ As quoted in Brian Urquhart, *Ralph Bunche: An American Life*, 1st ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1993), 43.

⁶ *Journal of Negro Education*

In their intimate relationships and in their personal identities, the Young Turks defined themselves fairly exclusively along gender lines. Bunche and Brown settled into their masculine identity more easily than Abram Harris, because they each had very successful athletic careers as well as academic ones. Harris, though, disliked sports and defined his masculinity along the intellectual lines that modernists reclaimed.⁷ Though they all married intelligent women who could keep up with their endeavors, only Sterling Brown sought out his wife Daisy's input on his poetry. The others treated their wives more as their house managers than their intellectual equals (even while having a loving successful relationship, like that between Ralph and Ruth Bunche). Abram Harris in particular did not respect women's ideas. He viewed women, including his wife Callie and his paramours, only as pleasant and annoying distractions from his more important academic work.

The Young Turks' intellectual development lay within a trajectory of personal ambition and shared struggle among friends. Where the YWCA women pursued friendships largely through common work and organizations, the Young Turks developed friendships around similar ambitions and ideas. In particular, this section compares Abram Harris intense relationships with two white men, V. F. Calverton (George Goetz) and Ben Stolberg, with his friendships with the other Young Turks. Interracial relationships, tense and fruitful, are not a common story of the 1920s, which is usually described as the second recurrence of the KKK and reactive isolationism. The network of friendships they entered crisscrossed the United

⁷ Maureen Molloy argues that "Modernist movements were impelled, at least in part, by men's attempts to claim or reclaim creative space and intellectual endeavor as legitimately masculine, not to say manly. ... Seeing themselves caught between the feminized repression of New England gentility, the anti-intellectual pragmatism of an outdated pioneer mentality, and the de-skilling and de-individualizing (and thus emasculation) of the machine age, modernist men from Herbert Croly and Van Wyck Brooks to Waldo Frank and H.L. Mencken sought to create a new meaning for (high) culture as the redemptive realm of modernity, and as fit work for men." *On Creating a Usable Culture: Margaret Mead and the Emergence of American Cosmopolitanism* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2008), 12.

States, centering particularly in nodes like Chicago, New York, Washington DC, and Nashville (and in London and Paris in the mid-1930s). The arguments, frustrations, marriages, and festivities shared by these intellectuals illuminate an important part of black leadership that is missed when the only focus is on the level and kind of activism. It was humans, fully fledged with flaws and passions, that pursued the end of American apartheid.⁸

⁸ I stress these black scholars' humanity because that is often subsumed within the discussions of their activism, their trailblazing, and their place as representations. Annette Gordon Reed explains why this is so important in her discussion of the Hemmings family of Monticello; "throughout American history there has been a tendency to see African Americans as symbols or representations rather than as human beings. Even when specific details about an individual life are available for interpretation, those details are often ignored or dismissed in favor of falling back on all the supposed verities about black life and black people in general. For African Americans, social history almost invariably overwhelms biography, obscuring the contingencies within personal lives which are the very things historians and biographers usually rely upon to reconstruct events and lives." Annette Gordon-Reed, *The Hemingses of Monticello* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2008), 290.

Chapter 5

The Education of the Young Turks

High School and College

“UCLA was where it all began for me; where, in a sense, I began;
college for me was the genesis and the catalyst.”

–Ralph Bunche

As children and adolescents, the Young Turks lived and breathed books, poetry, music, and education. Loving families encouraged their pursuit of the highest intellectual attainment. Sterling Brown grew up in one of the most exciting black communities in the nation, with a cohort of eager, rambunctious friends who also excelled academically. He knew definitively the intellectual abilities of African Americans. When he went to college, he had to learn how to interact with whites, everyone from scared classmates, strict teachers, administrators with a bias against black students, to administrators with a family heritage of abolitionism. Ralph Bunche's childhood was very different, filled with movement, change, and interracial schooling. His extended family braced him through repeated tragedies, including the death of his mother when he was just thirteen. His grandmother continued to encourage his academic and athletic prowess. Between high school and college, he briefly considered cruising Central Avenue with his new black friends instead of going to college, but his grandmother prevailed. Once he was at the University of California Los Angeles, he adopted the academic life as his own. Also from a middle class family that believed in books and education, Abram Harris discovered communism and its racial biases during college in Virginia. Harris had an intimate understanding of segregation and discrimination, something that both Brown and Bunche had both been protected from to some extent. He emerged from his childhood with a fierce dislike for what he called "race psychology"—whites' and blacks' tendency to analyze the world through a narrow racial lens that prevented them from thinking about economics. Even more so, he hated being confined to a prescribed method of thought based upon his skin color.

Dunbar High School in Washington DC

A high school lay at the center of Washington DC's vibrant civic life. The highly educated teachers anchored the community. Bright and ambitious students brought sparks of life and entertain their parents and neighbors. The community may have been barred from many local cultural events because of race, but the teachers and students filled out the calendar with debates, plays, sporting events, and concerts. Eight of those invited to Amenia came from the same high school, the famed Dunbar High School in Washington DC. This high school, founded as the first black high school by abolitionists in 1870, attracted families to DC from throughout the country. It was "the pride of the colored community for more than eighty years."¹ By federal standards, black teachers at Dunbar received pay equal to white teachers, and women received pay equal to men. This "attracted to Washington the best trained colored graduates from Northern and Western colleges, in the early days, and later from local colleges as well."² Math and Latin teacher Anna Julia Cooper, graduate of Oberlin College and author of the black feminist book *A Voice from the South*, acted as principal for a few (1906-1909) of her decades at the school. Under her guidance the school transformed from a good school to an excellent one that attracted attention from northern colleges. In 1916, the school (then called M Street High School) moved into a new building. It took up an entire city block and rose three tall stories into the air, towering over other buildings in the picture of it published in the *Crisis*. That photo showed white columns gracing the second floor entrance at the top of an extended staircase. Tall narrow windows showed off long, graceful curtains. At one

¹ Mary Gibson Hundley, *The Dunbar Story: (1870-1955)*, (New York: Vantage Press, 1965), 13.

² Ibid.

corner of the building stands a telephone pole, connecting the school to the rest of the city, just out of view of the photograph. With the move, they rechristened the school Paul Lawrence Dunbar after the recently deceased and widely acclaimed black poet. Many schools in the District were named after famous black people and abolitionists, including Lucretia Mott, Thaddeus Stevens, Benjamin Banneker, and Henry Highland Garnet.³

This high school was for the college-bound only, and teachers maintained ties with their colleges, including Williams, Amherst, Bates, Brown, Dartmouth, Oberlin, the University of Pennsylvania, and the University of Pittsburgh, in order to help Dunbar graduates be accepted to those schools. Dunbar was so successful in training its students that several New England Ivy League colleges, including Williams and Amherst, granted scholarships to the best graduates each year, prodded first by Anna Julia Cooper when she was principal. Many graduates also went to Miners Teachers College, adjacent to Howard University, for a teaching degree.⁴ The list of prominent graduates include Percy Barnes, chemistry professor at Howard, William Hastie, future federal circuit court judge, Charles Drew (researcher in blood plasma), Jean Toomer, and Charles Hamilton Houston.⁵ Sometimes Duke Ellington, who was raised in Washington DC, is listed among alumni, but he attended Dunbar's rival, Armstrong Technical High School.⁶

³ Joanne V Gabbin, *Sterling A. Brown: Building the Black Aesthetic Tradition* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1985), 20.

⁴ Genna Rae McNeil, *Groundwork: Charles Hamilton Houston and the Struggle for Civil Rights* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983), 28-30.

⁵ Gabbin, *Sterling A. Brown*, 40.

⁶ Though Armstrong was a "technical" high school, they still taught academic subjects. Ellington remembered that "In addition to arithmetic, algebra, history, and English, which were taught as the most

At the turn of the twentieth century, when most of the future Amenians were born, DC was “the Mecca of black intelligentsia,” attracting educated African Americans from throughout the country.⁷ Dunbar was one of many attractions that included jobs in the federal government and post office and positions serving the strong black community. Two of those professionals attracted to Washington DC were Sterling Nelson Brown and Adelaide Allen Brown, poet Sterling A. Brown’s parents. They came to Washington with Fisk undergraduate degrees; Sterling Nelson also had had formal religious training from Oberlin College Seminary. They had been classmates of W. E. B. Du Bois’s at Fisk and Allen Brown had been valedictorian of her small class.⁸ They had both been born and raised in Tennessee, Brown into slavery in 1858 and Allen Brown soon after emancipation. In DC, the Browns settled on 6th Street at the top of a tall hill, then an integrated neighborhood, across the street from the north end of Howard University’s upper quadrangle.⁹ They quickly became an important fixture in black Washington

vital things in the world, my teacher--Miss Boston, the principal of the school--would explain the importance of proper speech. It would be most important in our lives to come. When we went out into the world, we would have the grave responsibility of being practically always on stage, for every time people saw a Negro they would go into a reappraisal of the race. She taught us that proper speech and good manners were our first obligations, because as representatives of the Negro race, we were to command respect for our people. This being an all-colored school, Negro history was crammed into the curriculum, so that we would know our people all the way back. They had pride there, the greatest race pride, and at that time there was some sort of movement to desegregate the schools in Washington, D.C. Who do you think were the first to object? Nobody but the proud Negroes of Washington, who felt that the kind of white kids we would be thrown in with were not good enough.” Mark Tucker and Duke Ellington, *The Duke Ellington reader* (Oxford University Press US, 1995), 10.

⁷ Pero Gaglio Dagbovie, *The Early Black History Movement*, Carter G. Woodson, and Lorenzo Johnston Greene (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007).

⁸ Sterling Allen Brown, *A Son's Return: Selected Essays of Sterling A. Brown* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1996), 3.

⁹ Year: 1910, Census Place: Precinct 8, Washington, District of Columbia; Roll: T624_153, Page: 5A, Enumeration District: 153, Image: 451.

society, a circle which included Frederick Douglass, Senator B. K. Bruce, and Congressmen John M. Langston and John K. Lynch.

Each parent gave Sterling A. different strengths. From his father, Sterling A. learned about strength, dignity, and leadership within a black community. Brown Sr., who from a young boy had dedicated himself “to the idea of winning others to the Christian faith,” found two positions in DC. He taught in and then administered the School of Theology at Howard University and also pastored Lincoln Temple Congregational Church.¹⁰ At Lincoln Temple, he hosted debates and bull sessions for solving “the race problem,” including several highly publicized debates between W. E. B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington. Brown Sr. and other black leaders pushed progressive reformers to give blacks nothing “short of a full man’s chance to be and do their best.”¹¹ Sterling A. Brown wrote about a conference at his father’s church in 1903 that was part of the discussion that led to the founding of the NAACP within his description of Washington DC written for the WPA writer’s project in the 1930s, without indicating his own connection to the hosts. “In 1903 at Lincoln Temple Congregational Church there was a conference on ‘How to Solve the Race Problem.’ Suggested solutions were the setting up of a forty-ninth state, the conciliatory gradualism of Booker T. Washington, and the demanding of full citizenship rights. It was urged that a ‘Commission to Consider Every Phase of the American Race Problem’ be appointed by Congress, and a ‘Permanent Commission on the American Race Problem’ was set up. Many of the militant members of the conference, hardly to be satisfied with commissions

¹⁰ Gabbin, *Sterling A. Brown*, 15-16.

¹¹ Sterling Nelson Brown, as quoted in *Ibid.*, 17.

and committees, later joined forces with liberal movements which in 1910 culminated in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.”¹²

During her time in Washington, Allen Brown became “an avid patron of the literary arts” and introduced their six children—Sterling Allen was the youngest and only son—“to poetry and to the pleasures of reading.”¹³ She read to him “Longfellow; she read Burns; and she read Dunbar—grew up on Dunbar—‘Lias! ‘Lias! Bless de Lawd!’ ‘The Party’ and ‘Lay me down beneaf de willers in de grass....’”¹⁴ The grown man remembered following his mother around as a small boy while she worked. She would stop in the middle of sweeping to stand “over that broom and read... poetry to me, and she was a good reader, great sense of rhythm.”¹⁵

On many twilight evenings, the Browns hosted young men who came to court their daughters. These Dunbar students did not yet have the independence that cars later gave high school students, so they courted under the careful eye of at least one parent.¹⁶ In the days leading up to the First World War young cadets and childhood friends Rayford Logan and Campbell Carrington Johnson paid formal calls to Elsie Brown, one

¹² Brown, *A Son's Return*, 37.

¹³ Year: 1910, Census Place: Precinct 8, Washington, District of Columbia; Roll: T624_153, Page: 5A, Enumeration District: 153, Image: 451; Mark A. Sanders, "Forward," in *A Son's Return: Selected Essays of Sterling A. Brown* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1996), x.

¹⁴ As quoted in Gabbin, *Sterling A. Brown*, 19.

¹⁵ As quoted in *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Logan recalled, that there was “practically no sexual promiscuity because there were few automobiles in those days. As I told you, we had to call on our high school classmates in the parlor with their father and mother, keeping a watchful eye.” Rayford Whittingham Logan, *Growing up in Washington: A Lucky Generation*.

of their classmates in the evenings.¹⁷ During the day, the valedictorian and president of the senior class, respectively, filled their days with class and cadet corps practice. Logan, later a prominent historian of Haiti and African Americans at Howard University (and at the edge of the Young Turks group), remembered with fondness their visits. “Mrs. Brown would come downstairs, sit in the parlor, listen to us talk with Elsie in our erudite and, I am afraid, somewhat pompous fashion about the causes of the Balkan Wars and other topics.”¹⁸ After graduating in 1913, Rayford Logan left for Williams College. WWI interrupted his college career. When W. E. B. Du Bois and J. E. Spingarn made it possible for young black men to be trained as officers, Logan immediately volunteered, confident in his abilities from his successful cadet days. Two hundred other Dunbar cadets served in WWI.¹⁹ Logan was not prepared, though, for the intensity of persecution shoved his way by white soldiers and in disgust he stayed in France after he was discharged. He filled his days with currency speculation and Pan-African Congress planning.²⁰

Still prepubescent, Elsie’s younger brother Sterling Allen might not have attracted much attention when Logan came to call, but he eventually became Logan’s mentoree; Sterling Allen called Logan “one of my best friends.”²¹ Novelist Jean Toomer was

¹⁷ M Street High School Class Night Exercises Class 1913 M Street High School Tuesday June 10, '13.

¹⁸ Logan, *Growing up in Washington: A Lucky Generation*.

¹⁹ Hundley, *The Dunbar Story (1870-1955)*, 56.

²⁰ See Kenneth Robert Janken, *Rayford W. Logan and the Dilemma of the African-American Intellectual* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993).

²¹ Sterling Allen Brown and Mark A. Sanders, *A Son's Return: Selected Essays of Sterling A. Brown, The Northeastern Library of Black Literature*. (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1996), 9. Sterling Allen Brown, 'Reminiscences of Growing up in Segregated Washington I' Audio Recording of a Conference Held at the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington D.C. Entitled 'in the Shadow of the Capitol'.

another man from Logan's year that Brown befriended, and *Cane* was a primary source of inspiration to the young poet.²² When it came time for Sterling A. Brown's own high school career at Dunbar, he followed in many of Logan's steps. He became involved in the Student Army Training Corps because, he explained, "people I respected" like Logan had been in it.²³ He also followed Logan to Williams College on the same scholarship for Dunbar graduates, but missed the war because of his age. Brown, if anything, surpassed his mentor in campus leadership. Nicknamed "Dutch" (after a private joke about the Flying Dutchman), Brown dominated the campus through a strong and fun-loving personality. Some of those in his circle included William Hastie, Allison Davis, future anthropologist, and Mercer Cook, son of composer Will Marion Cook and future Franco-Africa scholar. He remembered looking up to the undergraduates at Howard University, like E. Franklin Frazier, who was leader of "the Young Howards, a neighborhood gang." Frazier was "a campus leader, a striking figure in the small student body where, to the eyes of growing boys, so many were outstanding." Particularly exciting for Brown, a lifelong tennis player, Frazier excelled on the tennis court. Brown remembered him as "one of the campus big wheels, as one of the deep ones, the heavy ones, as one of the brains."²⁴

Brown became captain of his cadet corps as a junior, an honor normally reserved for seniors. Cook, private #3 rear rank, remembered that "as company commander, [Brown] sang out his orders crisply and clearly, strutted like 'Sporting Beasley' and

²² Gabbin, *Sterling A. Brown*, 40.

²³ Brown and Sanders, *A Son's Return: Selected Essays of Sterling A. Brown*, 4.

²⁴ Sterling Brown, "Frazier Memoriam," 1962, 1, 166 Box 50 Folder 3, Logan Papers MSRC.

radiated confidence almost all year long.”²⁵ His leadership was based in scholastic and extra-curricular success, Cook explained:

He won the drill, the debates, the scholastic honors, the unquestioned leadership of the student body and, most importantly, the friendship, admiration and respect of all his peers. Who but Dutch Brown could have organized a debating society, a club (the Independents), the Dirty Thirsty and a minstrel show, painstakingly researched at the old Howard Theater?²⁶

The minstrel show riffed on the most popular form of entertainment then available, tweaking it enough that a faculty committee feared that it was “too radical” to perform. Brown based the performance on things he had heard from visitors to the school “As kids then in the high school, we had semi-folk; we had the travelling man; we had minstrels that come down to us in semi-folk song.”²⁷ Across the country and a couple years later, Ralph Bunche’s interracial graduating class also performed a minstrel show; he was the interlocutor and a couple of black classmates the end men.²⁸ Unlike Brown, though, Bunche despaired of “being ‘Negro’ enough, compared to my Negro chums.”²⁹ He was as popular as Brown, but for his athletic abilities and gregariousness, whereas Brown captivated classmates for his ingenuous plots, leadership, and sense of fun.

Brown was not the only student at Dunbar pulling pranks and hatching plots.

Charles Hamilton Houston (another future American), who later created the NAACP legal

²⁵ Mercer Cook, ‘Dutch at Dunbar’ [Birthday Tribute to Sterling Brown] Delivered Museum of African Art on May 1, 1979. After Brown graduated, Cook became the commander of the entire third Regiment of High School Cadets. Hundley, *The Dunbar Story (1870-1955)*, 56.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Charles H. Rowell and Sterling Allen Brown, ““Let Me Be wid Ole Jazzbo”: An Interview with Sterling A. Brown,” *Callaloo* 21, no. 4 (1998): 806.

²⁸ Charles P Henry, *Ralph Bunche: Model Negro or American Other?* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 22.

²⁹ As quoted in Ibid.

department that eventually pursued the *Brown v. Board of education* decision, was a student at the school a few years before *Brown*. With the encouragement of his parents, he had pursued summer studies for several successive summers. That meant he was quite a bit younger than his classmates. He had seemed at times “more interested in pranks and attention than in poetry and algebra.”³⁰ At one point, Jessie Fauset had to advise his mother that “‘Charles’ persistently annoying conduct both in the classroom and especially in the Study Hall makes it necessary for me to write you.’” Fauset asked his mother to “speak with him about his ‘nonsense and trifling.’”³¹ (Sterling Brown remembered that Fauset was “a little impatient with stupid kids.”)³² By his senior year, however, Houston had settled down enough to receive excellent marks in all his classes and act as first lieutenant in the cadet organization. He graduated at the age of 15 in 1911.

Dunbar High School was successful for several reasons, including the teachers, the protection from segregation, the student atmosphere, and the resources. Students took extensive college preparatory classes in small classes. Logan did not “recall having been in any class larger than twenty until I went to college.”³³ Cook remembered “the teachers at Dunbar were there for the students. They gave you the feeling that you could do anything, you know. There were no limits.”³⁴ The teachers were intent on developing students “equal in worth to any high school in the country,” another alumni remembered.

³⁰ McNeil, *Groundwork: Charles Hamilton Houston and the Struggle for Civil Rights*, 29.

³¹ As quoted in *Ibid.*, 30.

³² As quoted in Gabbin, *Sterling A. Brown*, 21.

³³ Logan, *Growing up in Washington: A Lucky Generation*.

³⁴ Mercer Cook, Interview by Ruth S. Njiri. Phelps-Stokes Fund's Oral History Project on Former Black Chiefs of Mission. Silver Spring, Md.

“They wanted us to be judged by universal standards.”³⁵ Universal in this sense meant the students would be judged by the white power structure when they went to college and moved into professions. The school was overwhelmingly successful in this pursuit; peel back the layers of almost any successful group of African Americans for the next thirty years, and a Dunbar graduate will be uncovered.

Curriculum combined the classical and liberal arts. In math, the school offered “Plane and Solid Geometry, Trigonometry, College Algebra.”³⁶ Languages included four years of mandatory Latin, with French and German also offered. Logan’s four years of Latin with Anna Julia Cooper seeped from the classroom into his social life; “when we boys became involved in some discussion, we would put our hands in our coats, like the senators in their togas, and declaim O tempora! O mores!”³⁷ Angelina Grimke, “a poet and beautiful lady” in Brown’s estimation, was one of the English teachers.³⁸ Cook remembered that historian Carter G. Woodson had a particular influence on him, before Woodson left first for Howard University and then to devote his entire energy to the Association for the Advancement of Colored People.³⁹

³⁵ 'Education in Segregated Washington I' Audio Recording of a Conference Held at the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington D.C. Entitled 'in the Shadow of the Capitol'.

³⁶ Logan, *Growing up in Washington: A Lucky Generation*.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Brown, 'Reminiscences of Growing up in Segregated Washington I' Audio Recording of a Conference Held at the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington D.C. Entitled 'in the Shadow of the Capitol'.

³⁹ Cook, Interview by Ruth S. Njiri. Phelps-Stokes Fund's Oral History Project on Former Black Chiefs of Mission. Silver Spring, Md.

Students took several years of French from “Miss Jessie Fauset, Cornell, Phi Beta Kappa, 1905,” Logan remembered with precision.⁴⁰ Fauset, known for her later tenure as novelist and literary editor of the *Crisis*, prepared her students so well in “this tongue of beautiful words and fine phrases” that when many of them later went to France, they were able to understand the language thoroughly.⁴¹ Indeed, after Logan was discharged in France following WWI, he became W. E. B. Du Bois’s assistant and translator for the Pan-African Congresses. During all the speeches he would stand next to the podium and contemporaneously translate. Fauset and Logan had a pleasant reunion when she accompanied Du Bois to Europe for the Congresses in 1919 and 1921. Logan had become acquainted with Du Bois during high school, when copies of the *Crisis* and *The Souls of Black Folk* were passed around and debated among the students and faculty.⁴² It held pride of place on the Brown family bookshelves.⁴³ Brown also soaked up Fauset’s teaching. She motivated him to minor in French at Williams, but sent him there with a condition on his skills that he had to make up.

Brown grew up with no doubt in his mind that black folk had a culture to be proud of. Du Bois’s *The Souls of Black Folk* had a proud and prominent place on their family shelves. It seemed a book written directly to his class and cohort. Du Bois’ production of the “Star of Ethiopia Pageant” was particularly memorable to Brown. The

⁴⁰ Logan, *Growing up in Washington: A Lucky Generation*.

⁴¹ Fauset remembered her own introduction to French during a *Crisis* article introducing the Sorbonne; “Looking backwards I am able to recall, I find, my earliest acquaintance with the French language. The hero of a story which I was devouring in the Sunday supplement of a great American newspaper employed as his pass-word,--‘*je viens, tu viens, il vient*’. That was my introduction to this tongue of beautiful words and fine phrases made long before I had entered with more or less seriousness upon its formal study.” Jessie Fauset, “The Enigma of the Sorbonne,” *Crisis*, March 1925, 216.

⁴² Logan, *Growing up in Washington: A Lucky Generation*.

⁴³ Gabbin, *Sterling A. Brown*, 20.

purpose of the pageant was to deliver an epic history of African culture and society to groups of black Americans who had never before been shown that their ancestry had history and culture to rival Europeans. Across its four productions in New York City, Washington DC, Philadelphia, and Los Angeles, Du Bois reached tens of thousands of African Americans with this message.⁴⁴ In DC, Du Bois used a cast of thousands that included hundreds of students from Dunbar and Armstrong High School. His first production was held in 1913 in New York City, but Du Bois was not content to let it rest at one performance. By 1915, he overcame his fears about recreating the size and scope of the play in a different location and “looked around the world and hit upon Washington at once the most promising and the most difficult of places; the largest Negro city in the northern hemisphere and yet for that reason exceedingly hard to reach and interest with a new and untried thing.”⁴⁵ Among those he recruited for the play committee was Mary Church and Robert Terrell and Reverend Brown.⁴⁶

Everything threatened the successful outcome of the pageant. Pulling together so many different actors and depending upon them to show up and perform was difficult enough, but then they had to raise adequate funds for escalating prices and compete with threatening weather the week before the play. They scheduled the performance at a ball field to hold the audience and the cast, but then had to discuss compromises with the

⁴⁴ David Krasner, “‘The Pageant Is the Thing’: Black Nationalism and The Star of Ethiopia,” in *Performing America: Cultural Nationalism in American Theater*, ed. Jeffrey C. Mason and J. Ellen Gainor (Ann Arbor: Univ of Michigan Press, 1998), 106-122; Clare Corbould, *Becoming African Americans: Black Public Life in Harlem, 1919-1939* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2009), 5-6.

⁴⁵ W.E.B. Du Bois, “The Star of Ethiopia,” *Crisis*, 1915, 92.

⁴⁶ Du Bois’ article includes a picture of the committee that identifies the members only by their last names. I am assuming that Mr. Brown is the Reverend Sterling Brown because of his prominence in the community.

field's manager. Du Bois recounted their difficulties; "The music looked dubious; the regulations of the ball field seemed about to interfere with even our walking firmly on the grass; the electric lighting got into inextricable tangles. The tickets were late. The costumes were later and the properties latest of all."⁴⁷ Finally, though, the first day of the play dawned clear and bright; "Then (by what miracle who knows), came three nights, each more perfect than the other and sandwiched in between rains. Some said God did it and I am not disposed to dispute."⁴⁸ Everything coalesced for the performance and Du Bois was as dazzled by the end feat as young Brown in the chorus.

I shall never forget that last night. Six thousand human faces looked down from the shifting blaze of lights and on the field the shimmering streams of colors came and went, silently, miraculously save for the great cloud of music that hovered over them and enveloped them. It was no mere picture: it was reality. The Herald cried, 'People of Washington arise, and go. The Play is done.' And yet the play was not done. Some things are quite too beautiful ever to be finished. So I walked home alone and knew the joys of God."⁴⁹

Brown, too, remembered taking part in the play and soaking up its message. Years later, he could still recreate "the seriocomic clash of the Ethiopians from Dunbar and the Armstrong Arabs and mimic the shrill voice of Du Bois, 'And Ethiopia shall stretch out her wings....'"⁵⁰

Dunbar, and to a lesser extent the federal nature of DC before Woodrow Wilson came to power, protected its students from the harsher realities of the segregation in the rest of the South. Cook explained, "of course there was segregation in Washington.

⁴⁷ Du Bois, "The Star of Ethiopia," 93.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Gabbin, *Sterling A. Brown*, 19.

Washington was a deep South city in those days, but [Dunbar teachers] just convinced you that, oh no, oh no, you have unlimited possibilities, you see. They carried that over, they brought that over, and it was embedded in us.”⁵¹ Teachers taught students “to trust in our own powers.”⁵² Brown, with his friends and family for support, could at some level simply ignore the existence of segregation during his childhood. “Segregation was of course, a disgrace to any ideals of democracy. George Washington Cable, [said segregation was] not to keep the races separate, but to keep us despised. [...] As far as I was concerned, and as far as my buddies were concerned, and as far as my parents were concerned, we were not despicable, we were not to be despised. There was definite separation, segregation in Washington.”⁵³

Unlike many schools which ignored African American history (including at that point Howard University just up the hill from Dunbar) and the problems facing blacks in the United States, Dunbar teachers were free to talk with students about the issues they would face as adults. In fact, Brown remembered using teachers’ willingness to talk about discrimination in order to sideline them from the lecture topic. History teacher Neville Thomas, “was tough. He was teaching us ancient history, but we knew a way, if we hadn’t studied, to get by him, and that was to start talking about race discrimination....He would ask us about the Peloponnesian War, and we would say, ‘Yes, Mr. Thomas. But we want to tell you we went into Hecht’s store last evening and they

⁵¹ Cook, Interview by Ruth S. Njiri. Phelps-Stokes Fund's Oral History Project on Former Black Chiefs of Mission. Silver Spring, Md.

⁵² 'Education in Segregated Washington I' Audio Recording of a Conference Held at the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington D.C. Entitled 'in the Shadow of the Capitol'.

⁵³ Brown, 'Reminiscences of Growing up in Segregated Washington I' Audio Recording of a Conference Held at the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington D.C. Entitled 'in the Shadow of the Capitol'.

wouldn't let us eat at the diner..." Then he would give us a long lecture. He was a great NAACP man. He was a great teacher. He might have gotten away from Rome, but he taught us a lot about what it meant to be a Negro in the United States."⁵⁴

One place that students regularly encountered the segregated, racist life of Washington DC was in the city's newspapers. Logan remembered that the *Post* and the *Star* "were vicious in reporting news. Negroes were invariably called 'a big, burly Negro.'"⁵⁵ They feared lynchings to follow such news.

One advantage of the federal nature of the city was that many of the federal buildings were not segregated.⁵⁶ Logan, who grew up before Woodrow Wilson came to power and segregated much of the city that had remained untouched by Jim Crow, remarked on how important it was that "the Public Library and the Library of Congress were not segregated." In some ways, these resources were even more important to him than Dunbar; "And it is my belief that, because the absence of segregation in the halls of learning is why, with some vicissitudes, I finally decided upon teaching and scholarship as a career."⁵⁷ In addition to these libraries, students could peruse art galleries, museums and federal buildings, but theaters, "amusement parks, restaurants, concert halls and other places of public accommodation" were all closed.⁵⁸ Teachers accommodated for this by

⁵⁴ As quoted in Gabbin, *Sterling A. Brown*, 21-22.

⁵⁵ Logan, *Growing up in Washington: A Lucky Generation*.

⁵⁶ Among others, Logan lists "There was no segregation on the streetcars. There was no segregation in the ballpark. There was no segregation in the zoo." *Ibid*.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*.

⁵⁸ Hundley, *The Dunbar Story (1870-1955)*, 31.

inviting visiting actors and artists, in addition to illustrious alumni, to come to campus to present their work to students who could see it no other way.

In addition to teaching high caliber scholastics, giving space for numerous extra-curricular activities, and instilling self-worth and pride in its students, Dunbar teachers also instructed each of their students in how their life was not their own. Rather, it belonged to the race. It was their responsibility to work for the betterment of the race. This education they received was given to but a handful of blacks; they had to use it as if it belonged to all African Americans. Rayford Logan captured this sense in his Valedictory address, given in the spring of 1913, “Shall we be able to put into effect our motto, Viam reperiā an faciam, I will find a way or make one?” They had to leave high school “to do our share of the world’s work in return for the many privileges we have enjoyed.”⁵⁹ Logan’s speech is striking not for its content, which is quite similar to other valedictorians’, but to its pervasive sense of hope and a future. Only a few years later, wandering through France, his tone had turned bitter and demoralized—not, strikingly, because of the war itself (as did the Lost Generation), but because of white Americans’ treatment of him during it. He had learned that his beloved high school had been a cocoon for what he would later call “a lucky generation” in a peak of nostalgia. The cocoon could not protect him from racism.⁶⁰ The question for each Dunbar graduate was what they would do with the personal strength they had been given.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ He called his generation lucky because of the way they were protected from the worst of the world, for all that Dunbar and the libraries gave them, and for the innocence he presumed they had—in his memory, they visited drug stores and called on girls, there was no sexual promiscuity or drinking, and no television. Telling his story decades later in a DC ravaged by riots, it was understandable he would be nostalgic for his childhood, though this is quite surprising at first glance for a man raised in the Jim Crow south, speaking after the Civil Rights movement.

Abram Harris Finds Communism

Born on January 17, 1899, Abram Lincoln Harris Jr. grew up in a middle-class home in Richmond, Virginia, the son of a butcher and a normal school graduate. His parents filled their shelves with books and ensured that their son would receive a strong education by sending him to Armstrong High School in Richmond.⁶¹ Later, he often felt at a distance from black colleagues because of his passions. Even at this early stage, he was separated from them because so many were at the premier black high school up the road in Washington DC, a place of intense scholarship that cultivated community.

Abram Harris stayed in Virginia for college, unlike those like Sterling Brown who ventured into northern white territory. Harris attended Virginia Union University, a black Baptist institution, beginning in 1918. Harris wrote on his draft card in 1919 that he was a “theology” student—marking perhaps his first and only formal affiliation with religion. Future sociologist and Urban League research director, Charles S. Johnson attended preparatory school and Virginia Union in Richmond as well, graduating just before Harris in 1916 and heading for the Department of Sociology at the University of Chicago.⁶² His relationship to Harris began like the mentorship of Logan and Brown, but did not remain so amicable.

⁶¹ William Jr. Darity, “Introduction,” in *Race, Radicalism, and Reform: Selected Papers of Abram Harris*, ed. William Jr. Darity (New Brunswick: Transaction, 1989), 8. [more about Armstrong—was this the same Armstrong as the rival of Dunbar? but that was in DC]

⁶² Francille Rusan Wilson, *The Segregated Scholars: Black Social Scientists and the Creation of Black Labor Studies, 1890-1950* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006), 145.

Harris' first public act was a protest against the white establishment's over-zealous persecution of "radical" African Americans, represented by William Monroe Trotter. His upbringing in a middle class house full of books had given him the confidence, and his personality gave him the brashness, to take on the Richmond Virginia racial hierarchy at the young age of 20 years old. His education gave him the means—a letter writing campaign to local newspapers. He also tried to interest the national black press by sending a letter to the editor of the *Crisis*, Dr. W. E. B. Du Bois—a letter that marked the beginning of a long, fruitful relationship between the two. Harris' protest letter was filled with militancy and derision for the white power structure in Richmond, Virginia, who prevented William Monroe Trotter from speaking because they feared a race riot. Their fear was misplaced and unfounded in Harris' opinion, and resulted in denying Trotter's constitutional right to free speech. With his opening line, Harris establishes a strident, colorful style filled with every bit of eloquence he could command, perhaps trying to capture the Victorian elegance and verbosity of Du Bois' prose in *Souls*: "America, the satellite of the Diadem of Democracy, has sent out a dogmatic pronouncement assuring the world that it has been made safe for Democracy (a lie equally colossal as pernicious) and that a peaceful and harmonious [sic] development of society is assured." In particular, Harris critiqued the white community for disrupting Trotter's "errand of peace" with its unfounded fear of "social equality." Harris concluded his specific critique with a general warning:

Tho you in authority may escape the just resentment of an enraged people, the drowsy justice intoxicated by the poisonous draught prepared for her cup, still nods upon her rotten seat, yet be assured that such complicated crimes will meet their due reward. [...] Yet be assured that this people of mine shall not always remain in a slough of passive docility, but some day shall awake and demand of you a full realization of those principles for

which they have died upon the fields of Flanders and the uttermost parts of Europe.⁶³

This letter represents the awakening of the New Negro after WWI—democracy had been promised to Europe, but not to those black Americans who had fought to preserve it. The letter, which Harris demanded Du Bois publish, exhibited neither the *Crisis*' more detached tone nor its level of analysis and content. A week later, Du Bois wrote simply that there was not the room to publish it.⁶⁴

Undismayed by this rejection, Harris continued his experimentations with radicalism throughout his college tenure. During the 1920 election season, a VUU professor became frustrated by the Republicans' failure to listen to African Americans, other than the handful of "Lily Blacks" who accepted the current situation because it gave them a small mess of power. He invited his students to come to his house to discuss the campaign. Harris and the other students deplored the way Republicans took blacks for granted, but could not see themselves joining the Dixie Democrats. The only alternative seemed to be the Socialist Party. To join this party, Harris went on a night time excursion into the white part of town, beyond what had "hitherto ... been his boundary line, separating darkness from light."⁶⁵ He had not crossed the line before because "he knew the darkness, loved it; it was his world of light." Yet, not wanting to disappoint those waiting on him, "he ventured across the 'dividing line' into this strange world—this world of light, sullen despite its illuminated streets and windows, and cold with

⁶³ Abram Harris to W. E. B. Du Bois, October 27, 1919, Reel 8, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

⁶⁴ W. E. B. Du Bois to Abram Harris, November 8, 1919, Reel 8, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

⁶⁵ The article Harris wrote about this experience has pseudonyms, but was based upon a real experience in his life. There are two main characters in the article. I presume "Manning" is Harris because of the similarities in their personalities and the central role he takes in the article.

traditional aloofness.”⁶⁶ When he had finally located the meeting place of the Socialist Party, down a dark alley, he bluntly asked them whether they would accept African Americans as brothers. An old man, who looked like an anarchist Harris had spoken to in New York one summer, jumped to the floor, spewing “socialist terminology.” By the end the whites were calling Harris Comrade (an appellation he would sign his letters with into the 1920s) and assuring him “that the colored brothers would be organized.”⁶⁷

Harris, his professor, and a fellow student started Branch 3 of the Socialist Party (Branch 1 was for whites and Branch 2 for Jews) and campaigned for Eugene V. Debs, the Socialist Party Presidential Candidate. At its peak, Branch 3 had 200 members. After the election, when the Lily Blacks of the Republican Party had again triumphed, membership fell off until only five remained. By April 1921, Harris and his friend requested that their branch be merged with the others. Amid “pale faces crimsoned,” the Socialists refused to make a decision. Before the next meeting, Harris and his friend went to a summer resort to work for tuition money. When they returned, “with roseate anticipation of regenerating their fellow students in the name of Marx and Engels,” they found the Socialist Party disintegrated and a “new species of revolution” born in the Workers Party of America, the name communists then went by in the United States. Upon invitation, they joined this new group.⁶⁸

A few months into their membership, the city erupted in a street railway strike. Harris and his friend joined the strikers and organizers, planning to make no mention of

⁶⁶ Abram Harris, “Black Communists in Dixie,” *Opportunity*, July 1925, 197.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 198.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 199.

the few black workers that were also affected. Entering a hall for a planning meeting, they grabbed the drafted placard describing the protest and stared incredulously at the fine print—black workers had to sit in the gallery. When they protested, the white communists blamed them for distracting the issue away from class by bringing up race. When Harris and his friend protested that it was not they who had brought up race, but the organizers, the organizers defended themselves by saying that they had to bow to social norms and the prejudices of the working class in order to succeed. Harris could understand following the law, but asked whether embracing existing social forces was really how they planned to win the revolution? The discussion ran till half past midnight without resolution.⁶⁹

A few weeks later, Harris and his friend were summarily dismissed from the party for not understanding Communism, particularly by displaying “marked petty *bourgeois* tendencies—specifically by their stressing the ‘race question’ and proposing to carry on propaganda chiefly among the *intelligentsia* of their race.” Fundamentally, they did not grasp that “a class war is being waged in behalf of the proletariat alone by the Workers’ Party.” Alone, without consideration of racial oppression.⁷⁰

Remarkably this experience did not turn Harris away from Marx, though it did introduce him to the hypocrisy within the Left. Never again would he embrace an ideology or a leadership structure without rigorous analysis. He would also only reluctantly involve himself in organizations. This story also indicates why Harris was able to be involved initially with so many different organizations and magazines, from

⁶⁹ Ibid., 199-200.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 200.

the moderate National Urban League (NUL) to the radical *Messenger*. Harris could operate successfully within these organizations, because he had discovered flaws with rigid ideology. He worked for these organizations, used them as platforms to get his message out, and educated himself from within them. But he was never a part of them in the same way that Derricotte devoted her life to the YWCA. Both groups sought scientific analysis of race and class problems. For now, that was enough.

* * * *

Ralph Bunche's Childhood

Along with Mabel Byrd, Ralph J. Bunche was the only other westerner to attend the Amenias Conference. Born in Detroit, his family moved to New Mexico and then Los Angeles. Bunche grew up in a loving extended family, which filled their home on 434 Anthon Street with vibrant music and singing. His grandmother, Lucy Johnson, watched over her five children and two grandchildren with a careful eye. For many years after her husband's death, she worked long hours to provide for her children. Now that they were all adults, they took care of her and she could stay at home. Everyone else in the family worked, even the tiny paper boy Ralph. Bunche remembered much later, "'We were a proud family--the Johnson clan. ... We bowed to no one, we worked hard and never felt any shame about having little money.'"⁷¹

The family had devoted themselves to education since James H. Johnson, Ralph's great-grandfather, a preacher and a free man, taught all of his eleven children to read and

⁷¹ As quoted in Brian Urquhart, *Ralph Bunche: An American Life*, 1st ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1993), 23.

write. One of his sons, Thomas Nelson Johnson, Lucy's husband and Ralph's grandfather, went on to Shurtleff College in Alton, Illinois. He put himself through school by teaching literacy to freed slaves and teaching night classes. In one of his classes, he met a shy student who caught his eye, Lucy A. Taylor. They married and had ten children over the next fifteen years; five lived to adulthood. Throughout their marriage, Thomas's passion was educating freed slaves and he took over a school for black children first in Kansas and then in Texas. He also edited a newspaper and was an amateur astronomer. After Thomas's early death from malaria, thirty-five year old Lucy moved the family to Michigan, where she worked as a chambermaid and in a knitting factory. The oldest surviving child, Olive, took care of the children until they could also go out and work. The family particularly liked to attend local baseball games. At one game, when Olive was seventeen, she caught the eye of a travelling barber who was working for the circus that was in town. Fred Bunch had been an orphan taken in by a Kansas farming family and was a charismatic, attractive man.⁷² When the Johnsons moved to Detroit a few years later, Fred and Olive married.⁷³

Olive and Fred Bunch continued to live with the Johnsons after their marriage. The Johnson clan stayed together as the primary family unit, while Fred came and went as he was able to find work. For a time he worked in a fancy barbershop downtown Detroit that catered to whites only. Ralph joined the family in 1903 and Grace in 1909. At one point, Fred took the family away from the Johnsons, but was unable to find steady work. Ethel, the next eldest Johnson, found her older sister, her nephew and her niece in

⁷² Lucy added the "e" to Ralph and Grace's name when they moved to Los Angeles.

⁷³ Urquhart, *Ralph Bunche*, 25.

an apartment without heat in Toledo. Olive lay on the floor, hacking and coughing; back in Detroit with her mother, she was diagnosed with tuberculosis, as was her younger brother Charlie. Olive spent two years in a sanitarium while Lucy took care of Ralph and Grace (the Johnson's had moved to a smaller house, one without room for Fred. He visited his children frequently). Ralph remembered later that during his early years in Detroit he felt neither race prejudice nor a strong sense of wider black community. This was a few years before the major demographic change that brought a large stream of black migrants to the city. He lived in an integrated neighborhood and played with German and Roma neighbors. His neighborhood was filled with music, from organ grinders to his Uncle Charlie's expert drumming. Then, Lucy heard that the New Mexico climate was the best thing for people suffering from tuberculosis, and the family began to depart one at a time for the Southwest, starting in 1914. Fred was the last to arrive, catching the boxcars from Detroit to Albuquerque.⁷⁴

Ralph particularly remembered roaming the New Mexico grasslands with his Uncle Charlie and shooting prairie hens and other small game. A neighbor of theirs remembered the family long after they had left. Ralph's ambitions had been clear to her even then and when she heard about his Nobel Peace Prize, she believed she had seen the markers in that young adolescent. She said,

It was easy to be kind to Olive, because she was so gentle and good. I used to think she was about as near an angel as anyone I would ever see. Ralph used to come and sit in my kitchen and talk as I worked. He was a great talker, but a dreamer too. He used to look at the range of blue mountains through the window, gaze at the white line of rock trail along their top,

⁷⁴ Urquhart, *Ralph Bunche*.

and then say decisively, 'Some day I'm going to walk those mountains.' I like to think of that remark as prophetic.⁷⁵

Ralph and his mother attended Sunday afternoon band concerts together. He would put her on the trolley because of her fragile health, and then run to the event, thus saving money and increasing his physical endurance. Fred left looking for work, promising to send for his family, and never returned.⁷⁶

Despite the better air in New Mexico, Olive passed away in February 1917. Charlie knew his own health was also fading and did not want to put his family through his slow wasting, so he took his own life a few months later. Lucy, Ethel, and the children were thrown into the waves of grief for several months. Ralph remembered much later that "Now, more than ever, I seem to regret that I lost my mother when both she and I were so young. I feel cheated to have been deprived of her. I have retained an image of her as a pretty, very sweet and romantic lady, a dreamer, accomplished in music and poetry, and always an invalid. I can never get it out of my mind that on that night of her death in Albuquerque she had asked for milk and there was none in the house because I had drunk it up."⁷⁷ After two years of grief, Lucy decided that nothing further held them in New Mexico and they—Nana Lucy, Aunt Ethel, Aunt Nelle, Uncle Tom, Ralph, and Grace—would relocate to Los Angeles for a new start in 1919.⁷⁸

They lived at 37th Street and Central Avenue in the middle of the small but growing Watts neighborhood, an area with many African Americans, Mexican

⁷⁵ As quoted in *Ibid.*, 28.

⁷⁶ Urquhart, *Ralph Bunche*.

⁷⁷ As quoted in Brian Urquhart, *Ralph Bunche: An American Life* (W. W. Norton & Company, 1998), 29.

⁷⁸ Urquhart, *Ralph Bunche*.

Americans, a few Native Americans, and Euro Americans. When light-skinned Tom went ahead from New Mexico to rent their first house, the owner eagerly gave him the keys. On moving day, when he saw the darker Ralph and Nelle, he quickly changed the locks. Tom pushed open the door anyway, and they stayed the full length of their lease, before moving into their own home on 37th Street.

In Los Angeles, Ralph continued to excel at school and in sports. He was on the debate team, competed in four sports—football, basketball, baseball and track, and graduated valedictorian. He continued to contribute to his family's livelihood by selling newspapers, working odd jobs, and serving in a film actor's house. His grandmother, Nana, encouraged Ralph to do his best in everything and have pride in his family and his roots. She was also morally strict and encouraged strict Sabbath keeping. Ralph did not have the same kind of devotion to the Second Baptist Church as his grandmother, nor did he feel the same kind of "call" to be baptized.⁷⁹ He did take to her frequent admonition to "let them, especially white folks, know that you can do anything they can do" and always felt motivated by a strong "spirit of competition," particularly when pitted against white people."⁸⁰

Unlike Abram Harris, who eagerly embraced college, Ralph Bunche was unsure at first whether he wanted to go to the trouble of a college education despite a distinguished career in high school. He spent the summer after high school graduation cruising Central Avenue with a group of black friends, one of the first times in his varied childhood that he felt connected to others of his race. At his high school in Los Angeles,

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ As quoted in Urquhart, *Ralph Bunche: An American Life*, 29.

he was one of only a few blacks, a major difference between himself and the other Young Turks. The summer he graduated, he hung out with his black friends, went to jazz joints and late night cafes, and boxed at the Y, all of which offered Bunche attractive alternatives to an integrated, intellectual life. Even while thoroughly enjoying himself, however, he felt a persistent sense that he was not “Negro enough” compared to his friends who had more typical “race traits,” like the ability to sing and dance. He remembered, “I envied George Duncan’s ability at buffoonery. Sometimes shy, sometimes uproarious, but always, as I thought, distinctly Negro. By contrast, I felt something like the interlocutor in a minstrel show and somehow racially short changed.”⁸¹

Despite this persistent sense, Bunche felt fully present in the 1920s youth verve. Unlike Logan or Brown—who courted in their parents’ living room—Bunche’s group, “a gang of ‘New Negroes,’” gained independence through car ownership. Bunche bought an old jalopy after working as a carpet layer, which gave him and his friends the freedom to pursue their fascinations. The group felt a defining break with the older, slower generation. They would not accept the way things were, in race relations or in culture. They were motivated by their theme song, “There’ll be some changes made.”⁸²

Bunche’s carefree summer met squarely the implacable determination of his grandmother. Nana was determined to see her talented grandson attend the Southern Branch of the University of California (now UCLA), and had been saving for several years to see this happened. Those savings, coupled with an athletic scholarship and odd

⁸¹ As quoted in Henry, *Ralph Bunche*, 22.

⁸² As quoted in *Ibid*.

jobs, brought Bunche to UCLA in 1922. The campus had been founded only four years before on Vermont Avenue and would move to its permanent home in the middle of his tenure.⁸³ There, Bunche's life transformed dramatically. His intellectual curiosity opened up, demanding to be recompensed. He still managed to be at the center of a compelling social life, gregarious and fun-loving as he was, but he returned to an interracial life. After just a few months as a member of Kappa Alpha Psi, a black fraternity, he turned in his key because he did not believe a separate Greek organization was necessary on an integrated campus. At the same time, he worked with others to break the hold Greek life had on the social life of the campus. This, in addition to his far-west upbringing and positive interracial experiences, would separate his background from many of the others at the Amenia conference, for whom black Greek organizations were a dominant part of their social lives.⁸⁴

UCLA responded to Bunche's eager integrationism in various ways. When a white team member from Louisiana complained the first day of football practice about having to play with a black man, the coach informed him that the simple solution was for the white player to hang up his cleats. When he decided to stay, the coach put him opposite Bunche, who soon won him into friendship. Bunche also developed fruitful relationships with his white professors, particularly with Dean Rieber, who mentored him in life-choices and offered more specific advice, such as how to write his valedictory speech. In contrast, the debating society refused to accept Bunche, so he simply formed

⁸³ "UCLA Timeline," *University of California Los Angeles*, 2010.
<http://www.uclahistoryproject.ucla.edu/Timeline/Home.asp>.

⁸⁴ Urquhart, *Ralph Bunche*; Charles P Henry, *Ralph Bunche: Model Negro or American Other?* (New York: New York University Press, 1999).

his own. He participated in many other clubs on campus, including the Blue C Society, Pre-Legal Club, Cosmopolitan Club, Forum, and Agenda. He wrote for the *Daily Bruin* and was the sports writer for the yearbook. He met his first white girlfriend at the Cosmopolitan Club.⁸⁵

Bunche suffered two injuries during his undergraduate days that bothered him throughout his life. On a hayride with a girlfriend, a piece of straw lodged in his ear and festered, giving him severe headaches. Two surgeries later, the first botched, he had lost his hearing in his left ear. He quit college to recuperate and only returned in the fall of 1923 at his grandmother's insistence. His second injury occurred football season. A blow to his leg created a blood clot, which required constant tight bandaging, and ended his football career. As "a versatile young man of limitless energy" (according to his coach), he simply switched to basketball, in point guard position. His team won the Southern Conference championship 3 years in a row.⁸⁶ Leg pain followed him the rest of his life, throughout travels around the globe.

Bunche developed a passion for political science and international relations at UCLA, which he expressed in a surviving speech from spring 1926 called "That man may dwell in Peace." In this speech for an oratorical contest, he attempted to find a way to ensure peace in the aftermath of WWI brutality. Not content with pragmatic solutions of limiting armaments, he declared "The world must sweep war completely and uncompromisingly from the face of the earth." How would this be achieved? By "international organization, involving *every* nation of the world; and the full development

⁸⁵ As quoted in Henry, *Ralph Bunche*, 22. 23

⁸⁶ Urquhart, *Ralph Bunche*, 38.

of the International Mind or Will.”⁸⁷ He praised the League of Nations and the World Court as “indispensable ... initial steps in the inevitable banding together of all national entities into an international body-politic.” Nationalism and “race-pride” need not be subsumed within this “universal human brotherhood” that Bunche advocated, rather they could be utilized to build a united nations that would become (like the union of states) a cohesive republic, rather than only independent states. But to achieve this, Bunche argued, human nature would need to be changed to accept peace and brotherhood. Like Mabel Byrd and to some extent Juliette Derricotte, he argued that modern social sciences could achieve this change. For those who would argue this was idealistic, Bunche offered modern psychology’s and sociology’s insights into human plasticity. Social education was the answer; international organizations must coordinate in a wide-scale reeducation effort.⁸⁸ Bunche thus began early his belief that the social sciences and international government could be relied upon to shape positive future change.⁸⁹ He also echoes here the interest that the *Crisis* and the YWCA showed in the League of Nations, as previously discussed.

Around the same time, Bunche also delivered a speech to an all-black audience called “The Young Negro,” in which he attempted to explain to the older generation that despite cultural differences, his generation cared about activism and community as much or more than the older group. This speech indicates that while he had chosen college over

⁸⁷ Ralph Bunche, “That Man May Dwell in Peace, Ralph Bunche Papers online,” Spring 1926, <http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/hb711nb70k/?&brand=oac>.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Henry, *Ralph Bunche*; This is also pointed out in Jonathan Scott Holloway, *Confronting the Veil: Abram Harris, Jr., E. Franklin Frazier, and Ralph Bunche, 1919-1941* (Chapel Hill [N.C.]: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

a life with his buddies cruising Central Avenue, he had not given up his affection for that lifestyle. He argued that the lifestyle did not preclude political awareness; indeed, it fostered it. Yet he could hardly enter a barbershop without hearing

some 'old-timer' ranting and raving about the evils of the modern-day society. He invariably disparages the young negro.—Calls him wild—criminal—evil—everything but good. And without fail he ends up by the sinister prophecy that the young negro of today is dancing and "motoring" his way straight to hell.⁹⁰

Bunche urged his audience not to discount the younger generation for incorporating the major cultural changes that the 1920s brought—including bobbed hair, cars, jazz clubs, and dancing—for “we are merely the children of our age just as you were in your youth.” Instead, he urged his audience to see the common political questions that faced both generations, and indeed, to see that the younger generation offered some innovative solutions to them. First of all, the younger generation was no longer bound to the Republican Party solely by affection for Abe Lincoln.⁹¹ Nationally, this was optimistic. It would still be several more years before African Americans broke from the party of Lincoln, urged particularly by Franklin Roosevelt’s attentions during the Depression. Yet, Bunche’s awareness of this change indicates that his political sensors were already keenly tuned to changes in the wind. It also united him with Harris’ critique of the Lily Black Republicans a continent away.

For his second point, Bunche flared into righteous indignation over a new incident of segregation. Los Angeles had largely avoided segregation up to this point; their own Central Avenue had a “pure, liberty-inspiring atmosphere.” But they had just segregated

⁹⁰ Ralph Bunche, ““The young Negro”, given in Los Angeles (draft),” Bunche Papers UCLA.

⁹¹ Ibid.

the local swimming pools, and Bunche's "blood boil[ed]" at the thought. Local African Americans had begun to fight, but they had stopped after only a "feeble protest." Bunche urged them on; "should we not rise in a body to fight such an absurd action in a state which guarantees freedom and equality to all alike? ... If we accept this can't you see that we will only too soon have separate inferior schools, parks, and who knows, perhaps even jim-crow cars forced upon us?"⁹² His desire to fight again echoes Harris' college experience, which is important because the 1920s is not normally known for such protests and because both later turned away from race-based organizing and protest.

The younger generation was ready to fight because it had not become "inured" to segregation, as Bunche believed the older generations had. But he was determined to stir up the other generations as well. He told them that "If we don't combat such segregation to the bitter end, we can draw only one conclusion.—That the Los Angeles negro is cowed—that he lacks racial pride and racial consciousness." Bunche then used a "darkey" story to describe his "ideal type of negro."⁹³ Most historians pass this over by marking it as an irony and moving on.⁹⁴ Rather, it represents, first that Ralph Bunche was very much a product of his time. Abram Harris across the country was still having to argue that African Americans were equal in intelligence. Marion Cuthbert (discussed later) was acknowledging and disputing the many ways whites discussed removing the "race problem" by removing black Americans. Bunche, too, was attempting to show off

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Urquhart, *Ralph Bunche*; Henry, *Ralph Bunche*. Holloway does not comment on the darkey stories, though he does place the roots of Bunche's "provocative and anti-racist speeches of the 1930s" in this speech. Particularly, Bunche's call for youth and education to end segregation were echoed in the 30s. Holloway, *Confronting the Veil*, 161.

his understanding of his racial identity, an understanding that he was only beginning to figure out. He wanted to be like his black friends, and yet thought about them in a somewhat stereotypical way based on their “race traits” (ability to sing and dance, buffoonery), which he envied. Bunche’s “darkey” story could also be read, not an acceptance of the racial regime that laughed at blacks, but a “New Negro” way of subverting it. The New Negro sought wisdom from African ancestors, instead of relying solely on European wisdom. Like Mabel Byrd, who found black wisdom in the Remus parables collected by Joseph Chandler Harris (discussed earlier), Bunche sought that insight in fictionalized stories that were usually used to prove blacks’ inferiority. Bunche’s story described a Southerner who believed Booker T. Washington was greater than Teddy Roosevelt (president in the story). He wished others could see the greatness within black people like this fictional “darkey” had. Bunche also used the story because he liked to punctuate his speeches with tales. Fifty years later, Sterling Brown praised this quality in his colleague from Howard; “I am the best yarnspinner at Howard University. I am the best liar at Howard University, in the Mark Twain tradition. I can outlie Ralph Bunche, who was a great liar.”⁹⁵ In his use of this “darky” story, Bunche was trying to prove his own race consciousness and to tell a folk story with a bite to it.

In addition to fighting segregation, Bunche had decided that the most potent form of resistance was education. He had finally taken his Nana’s lessons to heart. “Whatever progress we may make in the future, whatever forward steps may be taken toward the breaking down of this infernal inferiority complex which besets so many of our kind; whatever success we may have in convincing the other races of our absolute equality in

⁹⁵ Brown, *A Son's Return*, 2.

every line of endeavor, must come thru the medicine of ever-increasing education.”⁹⁶

Some might present Bunche’s use of the darkey story as an indication of his own inferiority complex, yet he believed it proved the exact opposite. At the same time, he advocated excelling in the Euro-Americans education system to prove black people’s “absolute equality.”⁹⁷ This belief in education as the fundamental way to change society would mark the entire Amenia group.

Spring 1927, the end of his tenure at UCLA, found Bunche considering the many options for his future. Rather than study law or medicine, like many expected, he decided to pursue his interest in political science at Harvard University. Unlike most of the other Young Turks (who were older than him and started their careers at the beginning of the 1920s rather than towards the end), Bunche went straight to graduate school without a stop first to teach at a black college or be a secretary in an uplift organization.⁹⁸ He could do this in part because Dean Rieber had procured a scholarship from Harvard and his California black community, including the Second Baptist Church, had raised \$1000 for his living expenses in Cambridge. Before and during his three thousand mile trek from California to Massachusetts, Bunche sought out “leaders of my race,” as he wrote Dean Rieber, to discuss “their methods of approach, their psychology and benefit my own development by their influence.”⁹⁹ Here again is that acceptance by blacks who grew up in multicultural areas of their primary relationship to their race, whether pushed or

⁹⁶ Bunche, ““The young Negro”, given in Los Angeles (draft).”

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Both Harris and Brown received their MA soon after undergrad, but waited several years to start their Ph.D. Brown never finished the Ph.D. Bunche, in contrast, went straight from the MA to the Ph.D. Frazier also spent several years between undergrad and the Ph.D.

⁹⁹ Bunche to Rieber, Oct 26, 1927, Bunche papers, UCLA.

expected by whites or from within their families and themselves. He wrote W.E.B. Du Bois, whom he had met several times on his visits to Los Angeles, though he did not expect the older man to remember him, as he was “just another college student.” This humble letter was rather different from Harris first bold and declarative one. Bunche expressed his long-held desire to be of “service to my group” and asking if there were any positions open with service organizations in the east or south that summer. Du Bois, inundated with similar letters from aspiring black young people, did not offer any advice or guidance, but wrote almost a month later that he did not know of any opening and would “keep your case in mind.”¹⁰⁰

Despite this less than promising reply, someone at the *Crisis* office was very aware of Bunche’s record. In the annual education issue, Bunche’s career was described in glowing terms, listing every organizational membership and noteworthy achievement, concluding with “His whole school record has been little less than extraordinary.”¹⁰¹ His accomplishments also appeared in the *Pittsburgh Courier*, the *Baltimore Afro-American*, and the *Chicago Defender*.¹⁰²

Other black leaders provided Bunche with the guidance he sought and he decided to devote his life “to the realm of the scholarly rather than the purely legal” and to “bend every effort toward the attainment of the Ph.D.” It is interesting that Bunche felt his greatest service could be within scholarship, rather than in more practical arenas like civil

¹⁰⁰ Bunche to Du Bois, May 11, 1927 and Du Bois to Bunche, June 7, 1927, William Edward Burghardt Du Bois and Herbert Aptheker, *The Correspondence of W.E.B. Du Bois* (Univ of Massachusetts Press, 1997), 353-4.

¹⁰¹ “Along the Color Line: Education,” *Crisis*, August 1927, 196.

¹⁰² Marie Dorothy Rout, “Los Angeles Society,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, June 25, 1927; “Leads California Class,” *Afro-American*, June 25, 1927; “California News,” *Chicago Defender*, August 27, 1927.

rights law or medicine. It is indicative of the moment in which he sought advice—one turning toward scholarship and the expansion of higher education for blacks (thus the need for more black professors). He started his life's work immediately, stopping several times during his trip across the country to deliver speeches in San Francisco, Chicago, Detroit, and New York.¹⁰³

Bunche also carried a letter of introduction to Raymond Buell, a faculty member at Harvard who became very important in the graduate student's life. Allana Hunter, someone from Mt. Hollywood Congregational Church wrote the letter based upon a brief visit she and Buell shared during a stop Buell made at the Union Theological Seminary.¹⁰⁴

Ralph Bunche maintained his sense of fun and ease of companionship throughout his life. In many different situations—Harvard, Howard, London, Johannesburg, Kenya, Indonesia, the United Nations, and others—Bunche easily fostered friendships among people of African descent and across race lines, often through card games and pick up sports games. As his Harvard friend Robert Weaver remembered, “He made male and female friends with ease and charm, and he had a well developed sense of humor, which embraced the capacity to laugh at himself.”¹⁰⁵ At the same time, he combined his humor and playfulness with driving hard work and a competitive spirit. The limits of his endurance in play and work would often be tested over the next decade.

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¹⁰³ Marie Dorothy Rout, “California,” *Chicago Defender*, September 10, 1927, 9.

¹⁰⁴ Allana Hunter to Raymond Buell, August 13, 1927, Box 126, Bunche Papers UCLA.

¹⁰⁵ As quoted in Urquhart, *Ralph Bunche*, 43.

Sterling Brown Heads North for College

Sterling Brown's college career offers a third kind of experience within the Young Turks' education; Harris and Bunche had both stayed within their home cities, though they branched out into different communities (Harris into the communists, Bunche into the integrated campus life of UCLA). Sterling Brown went far north to Williams College in 1918, one of a handful of African American students in an unwelcoming but academically stimulating environment. After living the life of the big man on Dunbar's campus, Brown became a small black "fish" in a white "pond." Suddenly a junior, "another one of the token Negroes," was beating him up for the thirty dollars a month he got for being in the Student Army Training Corps during WWI. When Brown tried to show off his Dunbar ROTC training in front of an incapable (in his opinion) white officer, he got busted down to "number four in the rear rank of the first squad of D Company."¹⁰⁶ He memorized the letters on the eye chart because he was too nearsighted to get in on his own eyes' ability. Put into the artillery unit, he would lie out in a "freezing cold" pit, shooting craps, covered only by thin raincoats. "It was a beautiful experience" to Brown, as was the similar hardship J.E. Spingarn suffered during officer training at the beginning of the war.¹⁰⁷ They each had a desire for a rugged manhood that could bear physical trials.

Williams' officials decided to house all the black students (one in each year) together at a boarding house, instead of in the dormitories or fraternity houses, because

¹⁰⁶ Brown, *A Son's Return*, 4.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

“they thought we would be happier together.” This was a typical justification (sometimes joined with concern for white Southerners sensitivities) for preventing African Americans from living with white students. In the same era, the NAACP led a protest against Harvard for suddenly deciding to prevent African Americans from living in the dormitories, after being one of the most open northern institutions to black students. Used to being a spokesman, Brown stood up for all the black students, even though he was only a sophomore, and told the administrators that “we came to Williams for an education, and let Williams give us the education and we would look out for our own happiness.” One way he looked out for his own happiness was by buying a phonograph and whatever jazz and blues records were available. The other black students waited until midnight to come listen to the records and when they got there tried to sound proof the room. They were afraid that the whites in the next room would hear them listening to what was then considered crass music. Brown hated the phoniness of their actions, but sympathized with their double-consciousness.¹⁰⁸

Despite his confrontation with the administration, Brown continued his charismatic ways. He “was doing a lot of grinning then, and [he] had a lot of bounce,” Brown remembered about himself. Perhaps he meant that he grinned to hide and get through the trauma he later, sometimes, admitted to. Unlike Harris, Brown rarely gave in to introspection, so it is difficult to trace how he felt about his experiences. From students, faculty, and administration he faced “benign neglect.” The white students, who “had never seen a Negro,” refused to socialize with him at first. He, too, had never “spoken to a white boy except the little son of the drugstore man where we used to go to

¹⁰⁸ Gabbin, *Sterling A. Brown*, 23.

get sundaes for my family; and he and I were friends until Negroes came around with me or whites came around with him. Then we didn't know each other." Everyone called him Brownie at Williams—was this because of his name or his race? Regardless, Brown felt degraded by it (rather than cheered by the collegiality of "Dutch" at Dunbar).

At his fifty-first class reunion, Brown acknowledged some things that Williams had done for him, despite the indignities. "I learned how to read at Williams. I learned how to teach at Williams." He held a literary salon in his room "and a lot of the intellectuals and the mavericks—you know the ones who didn't mind being known to associate with a Negro—the rebels—they would come in there."¹⁰⁹ He also made a few important friendships. The lasting ones were all with other African Americans. Allison Davis, a friend from Dunbar, followed him to Williams. They played tennis together and as a doubles team won national competitions.¹¹⁰ The two of them and Ralph Scott (later a government worker in DC) "used to go for long walks, and we decided the race problem, we decided the problem of women," particularly since they were cut off from almost all female attentions. There were no black women in town and they could not court white women, even in Massachusetts.

One time that he got to associate with women was on a trip to Boston to be initiated into Omega Phi Psi, a black fraternity. He was late for his initiation because he had been visiting several "beautiful women" in town. They were all beautiful to him, after such a "monastic" time at Williams. His *cofrères*, mostly from Lincoln and Howard Universities, beat him up and down Boston for being late and for having an Ivy League

¹⁰⁹ Brown, *A Son's Return*, 18.

¹¹⁰ Gabbin, *Sterling A. Brown*, 23.

ego. When he returned after cutting several days of classes and particularly chapel sessions, the dean told him he would be suspended from school. In response, Brown

committed one of the worst deeds of racism in my career. I said to Dean Howes, 'You would not do this if I were not a Negro.' It was the college law, he would have put out Nixon's son or daughter. He would have put out anybody—I had broken the law. I threw race at him and said he's picking on a poor little Negro. And it worked. He was the descendant of abolitionists. This man's grandfather had probably fought at Chickamauga or something, and he nearly cried. He said, 'Mr. Brown, do you really feel that?' I said, 'Yes, and the other fellows feel it too.' From then on I not only consecutively cut, you know, I ain't thought about chapel. That's not true really, but it's a good lie.¹¹¹

Brown noted that he was not very religious, probably to the consternation of his Reverend father. In this, he was more like Bunche than Harris; neither held Harris' animosity towards religion. It simply did not interest them very much. This would change for Brown when he began to explore African American folktales in the South, so many of which centered on religion. Even as he became interested in the forms of religion, it was not personal for him.

Brown respected his Williams professors. Logan had tried to warn him away from one English professor, Southern born, because he used "nigger" in one of Logan's classes. Brown took him anyway and had no trouble with him. During his senior year, Brown had difficulty getting all his work in on time for this professor. His classmates "wanted to raise the devil because they said Licklider, from the Deep South, is pressing this poor Negro, you know. So they sided with me. Because they felt a kind of neglect from him, they were still from the North. So they fought my battle. But I said, 'nay, nay,

¹¹¹ Brown, *A Son's Return*, 9.

my work is late.”¹¹² He refused to use racial discrimination as an excuse again, after that one incident over missing chapel. Brown’s favorite teacher was George Dutton, “one of the warmest human beings I have ever met. ... Dutton *taught* me, he *taught* Allison Davis, he *taught* Mortimer.”¹¹³ Dutton, who embraced critical realism, introduced British Romantic and modern novels to Brown (which was his topic), as well as Flaubert, Dostoevski, Sinclair Lewis, and Henry James.¹¹⁴ He explained much later that though he had always loved language, he had never thought to major in English till Williams.

I came from a house of books. I loved poetry. I was interested in writing. I'd written a few conventional sonnets at Williams [College]. I hadn't intended to major in English, but I met at Williams a teacher who inspired me. His name is George Gutton [sic]. He taught me to see the importance of English.

After graduating from Williams in 1922, Brown decided to continue studying poetry and American literature through a Harvard Masters degree. While in Cambridge, he “was studying Shakespeare line by line, word by word, with [George Lyman] Kitteredge. I was studying Milton.” Then he one day he went into Boston and bought Louis Untermeyer’s *Modern American Poetry*. This book “radically altered his view of art,” by introducing him to Robert Frost, Carl Sandburg, Vachel Lindsay, and Edwin Arlington Robinson. As their words unfolded before his eyes, he witnessed a way of “melding vernacular language, democratic values, and ‘the extraordinary in ordinary

¹¹² Ibid., 14.

¹¹³ Ibid., 15.

¹¹⁴ Gabbin, *Sterling A. Brown*, 24.

life.”¹¹⁵ He particularly liked the way these poets used contemporary language and dialects to capture New Englanders and Midwesterners.

I read Edwin Arlington Robinson, particularly the poems about Tilbury Town, where he takes the poor, the undistinguished, and the ordinary; he gets at the extraordinary in their lives. Of course, I knew Burns; I knew Wordsworth; I knew Thomas Hardy; and I knew Mansfield. In American literature, I had Robinson and [Robert] Frost. Frost was a great influence--and Sandburg. I always loved language, I loved slang, and I loved the folk stuff I knew. [...] So I always had an ear for the spoken word. I always had an ear for the ballad. I go to college, and I get this book. I read Frost and I read Sandburg and I read Edgar Lee Masters. I saw what could happen with the American idiom. But I hadn't seen it done with the Negro folk idiom much.

He had not yet decided that he was the one to fill that hole, but the recognition of writing poetry in the black “folk idiom” stayed with him.

When Brown realized at the end of his Masters that above all he wanted to teach, even when some friends said his talents deserved more, his father and Carter G. Woodson encouraged him to take a position at the Virginia Seminary in Lynchburg. There, for the first time, he began to consider writing poetry himself, because he later remembered, “I found something to write about. I found a world of great interest and it was a world of people and the poetry of the time—the poetry that I was reading—was a people’s poetry.”¹¹⁶ He returned to the South and remained there for the rest of his life.

* * * *

All of the future Young Turks excelled in high school and undergrad inside and outside the classroom. Brown had the advantage of a rich intellectual and cultural life

¹¹⁵ John Edgar Tidwell, “Brown, Sterling A.,” in *The concise Oxford companion to African American literature*, ed. William L. Andrews et al. (Oxford University Press, 2001), 53.

¹¹⁶ As quoted in Gabbin, *Sterling A. Brown*, 33.

within a large black community. The love of his family, adulation of peers, and successful examples all gave him a strong ego that buoyed him throughout his life. Bunche, too, came away from high school and college with a healthy ego, even though he had suffered through frequent moves as a child and the loss of his parents. Unlike Brown, his social accomplishments happened within a black and white environment, giving him a slightly different perspective on Euro-Americans than the other Young Turks. Still, like many black intellectuals, he questioned how his pursuit of the mind affected his identity as a black man. Abram Harris, raised in the South with a full range of black and white people, never questioned whether he was black enough. He worried whether he was intellectual enough, and was determined to force everyone—black leaders and white intellectuals—that he was indeed. To test his independence and his identity, his first stop was New York City.

Chapter 6

Growing into Themselves

Harris and Brown as Young Scholars

If you view the fact that I pay a lip-service which I despise in my heart to W.E.B. Du Bois and the rest of his sentimental ilk, I suppose the damn habit of thinking they're really great is slowly crystallizing. So you can at once stand under my emotional reaction to your criticism of friend W.E.B. and the rest. Intellectually, I feel that with time and study, I could clean the whole bunch if we were simultaneously employed with a job that demanded, clear cut objective and philosophic thinking. They have met on these lyrical rhapsodies of racially-inflated ebullience. Sometime I wish I could get on the Woolworth building and say God-damn the Negro and his problems so loud that the pronunciation would ring in the ears of a universal audience.

--Abram Harris¹

¹ Abram Harris to George Goetz, n.d. [Fall 1925], Box 7, Calverton papers.

In 1924, Charles S. Johnson declared that something new was afoot. A new liberal magazine, the *Modern Quarterly*, planned to publish a series of article by black authors who could “with complete justice, be styled intellectuals.”² He offered his readers Abram Harris as proof of the existence of black intellectuals, directing the reader to his articles in *Current History* and his essay in the *Modern Quarterly*, “The Negro and Economic Radicalism” the first in the series by a black author. In the years after graduating from Virginia Union University and joining Howard University’s faculty in 1927, Harris pursued the identity of the intellectual with single minded determination. A rich friendship with V.F. Calverton, founding editor of the *Modern Quarterly*, helped him to process living in far away corners of the country, struggling to relate to colleagues at small schools and at the National Urban League, and finding what he wanted out of life. After he moved from Institute, West Virginia to Minneapolis, his frustration at his isolation exploded when Alain Locke passed over him during his selection for the *New Negro* anthology.

Externally, Sterling Brown’s twenties were similar to Harris, but internally they could not have been more different. Brown purposely sought out small schools and rural byways. He had been born into a place where black intellectualism was not only accepted, but assumed. His struggle was not to self-identify as an intellectual, but to find space for his own identity apart from his family and from Howard University. Would he choose the path of words and books laid out by his parents? Or would he choose to abandon those in favor of something more visceral and exciting? Neither. He found a middle path by soaking in the words and the stories of rural African Americans, inflected

² Charles S. Johnson to J.S. Price, January 27, 1925, Calverton Papers, NYPL.

by the rhythm of the blues, and translating them into poetry and mentoring young African Americans.

Movement was essential to these men's earlier professional years and also to the growth of a national black intellectual cohort. Each man moved almost every year to meet the demands of the pocketbook and the demands of their ambition. In each place they went, they associated with workers, farmers, middle class businessmen, radicals, and students. This necessary movement kept them far from their fiancées, whom they courted through letters and brief visits. Each Young Turk married intelligent women; trusting and respecting those women was in times a boon and in other times an impossibility, depending on the man's own sense of himself as leader of the family.

Harris' failure to attract attention with his letter writing campaign in Richmond did not dissuade him from his desire to write, nor did his confrontation with white Communists dissuade him from leftist politics. They did, however, force him to seek out new writing techniques and venues to find an audience rather than the *Crisis*' dismissal. After graduation from Virginia Union in 1922, Harris moved to New York City to attend the New York School of Social Work. Harris accessed a network of Union alumni to introduce him to New York's intellectual and social world. Charles S. Johnson, who had graduated from Union a few years previously, had recently arrived from the University of Chicago to direct the National Urban League's (NUL) research department. Johnson had been studying sociology for several years and Harris looked to him as a mentor and an employer (Harris assisted him in the NUL research department). This friendship between

Harris and Charles Johnson eventually cracked apart as Harris gathered his own intellectual feet under him and began to challenge Johnson's theories and methods. Harris could be friends with someone he disagreed with, but not someone he could not respect. At this point, though, Johnson offered something newer and more exciting than other sociologists (like George Haynes, who founded the NUL and practiced a sociology grounded in uplift rather than science). He patronized the black arts and rigorously researched data on African Americans, both exciting trends.³ Harris helped Johnson start the NUL's magazine *Opportunity*, which included strong attention to New Negro writers and careful publication of sociological studies. In addition to its studies, the NUL aided new migrants to the city who needed a guide to the mores of the urban life as well as practical necessities like places to live and employment.

While pursuing a data-centered research agenda with Johnson, Harris did not neglect his radical associations. Chandler Owen, another Union alumnus, introduced Harris to the radical world of the *Messenger*, including New York's population of black and white socialists. In the early 1920s, A. Philip Randolph and Chandler Owens pushed the *Messenger* to its radical peak before softening its message later in the decade. They positioned their magazine against the older black leadership, asking George Haynes of the NUL and Du Bois of the NAACP to step aside "to make way for the new radicalism

³ As Francille Wilson argues, "He was young, a patron of the black arts, and most of the younger intellectuals such as Abram Harris, who agreed with the *Messenger* that Haynes was a hopeless mossback, believed they saw a different type of black man in Johnson." Francille Rusan Wilson, *The Segregated Scholars: Black Social Scientists and the Creation of Black Labor Studies, 1890-1950* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006), 154.

of new Negroes.”⁴ They criticized Haynes’ and Du Bois’s sociology as too literary and not scientific enough.

Among the many radicals Harris began to socialize with, most importantly he met white radical George Goetz, professionally V. F. Calverton, who had similar interests in objective social science and affection for Marx. Calverton was born on June 25, 1900 in Baltimore, Maryland and pursued literary criticism, fiction, history, and anthropology throughout his active career. Where Harris began to pursue his intellectual journey within academia, Calverton remained in the older mode of the New York intellectual as independent magazine editor.⁵

Harris began to publish extensively in New York, submitting a series of book reviews to the Urban League’s magazine, *Opportunity*. He also wrote “The Negro Problem as Viewed by Negro Leaders” surveying and criticizing the current perspectives of black leaders. In an article describing the process of black migration to the North for *Current History*, Harris continued to probe his interest in the labor movement.”⁶

Harris had found an intellectual home in New York like no other he had ever experienced, but chose to leave it for more education. He wanted above all to become a social scientist, but needed funding to pursue more graduate education. He did not have the luxury of some in New York City to stay and try to make a life as an itinerant intellectual (like Malcolm Cowley would later do, first by starting a literary magazine,

As quoted in *Ibid.*, 134.

Leonard Wilcox, *V.F. Calverton: Radical in the American Grain* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992); Philip Abbott, *Leftward Ho!: V.F. Calverton and American Radicalism*, Contributions in political science no. 315 (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1993).

William Jr. Darity, “Introduction,” in *Race, Radicalism and Reform* (New Brunswick, NY: Transaction Publishers, 1989), ????

then through advertising).⁷ When the Urban League offered him a fellowship to attend the University of Pittsburgh for a masters in economics, he took the opportunity and moved to his second new city in as many years. The Urban League created these fellowships not only to support young social scientists, but also to collect reports on different black communities throughout the nation.⁸ Harris' research later turned into his MA thesis, "The New Negro Worker in Pittsburgh."⁹ Future Amenian (and friend to the Young Turks) Ira Reid followed Harris to the University of Pittsburgh the next year as an Urban League fellow. He wrote his masters thesis on "The Negro in Major Industries and Building Trades of Pittsburgh."¹⁰

After receiving his masters in 1924, Harris took a position at the West Virginia Collegiate Institute. This college, now West Virginia State University, was established in 1891 in the town of Institute, West Virginia under the second Morrill Act that provided funds explicitly for black land grant colleges (the first Morrill Act established that every state should have a land-grant college to foster agricultural research). Eight miles from downtown Charleston, the college begun a recent transformation from a trade school, influenced strongly by frequent visitor Booker T. Washington, into a liberal arts

⁷ Malcolm Cowley, *Exile's Return: A Literary Odyssey of the 1920s* (New York: Penguin Classics, 1994).

⁸ Touré F Reed, *Not Alms but Opportunity: The Urban League & the Politics of Racial Uplift, 1910-1950* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008).

⁹ Abram Lincoln Harris, "The New Negro Worker in Pittsburgh" (M.A. Thesis, Pittsburgh: Department of Economics, University of Pittsburgh, 1924).

¹⁰ Ira Reid, "The Negro in Major Industries and Building Trades of Pittsburgh" (M.A. Thesis, Pittsburgh, PA: Department of Economics, University of Pittsburgh, 1925).

campus.¹¹ It had It began to offer college degrees only in 1915. By the time Harris joined the campus, it had about 300 students.

During his tenure at WVCI, Harris extended his acquaintanceship with V. F. Calverton into an intense intellectual friendship, maintained primarily through letters and infrequent visits. Calverton, a Jewish graduate of Johns Hopkins teaching at Baltimore High School, was that fall preparing to launch the *Modern Quarterly*.¹² He lived near and socialized with a young black woman, Callie Starks, whom Harris was courting.¹³ Though only Harris' side of this correspondence survives, the pair's warm friendship is readily apparent. Through these letters the friends critiqued each others writing, discussed life events, developed systems of social science, and prepared themselves to be intellectuals. Harris relied upon Calverton as a connection to a wider intellectual world, and for someone to challenge his mind, because he felt trapped in Institute. The miniscule size of the library and the muted intellectual queries of his colleagues and students all worked against his own free-ranging curiosity and desire to do "great" things. Harris came to WVCI—a college which had only recently moved into liberal arts—a fully convinced radical social scientist. He was ready to shake up the calm, conservative quarters of Institute.

Harris had little time for those who could not provoke him intellectually. In September 1924, at the beginning of their correspondence, he thanked Calverton for a stimulating letter. He warned Calverton that "You will find me to be very poor in

¹¹ "Booker T. Washington--Influence on WVSU," <http://www.wvstateu.edu/btwi/influence/default.aspx>.
"The Horizon" *Crisis*, Oct 1924, 277.

¹² Abram Harris to W. E. B. Du Bois, October 28, 1924, Reel 14, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

¹³ Abram Harris to George Goetz, November 4, 1924, Box 7, Calverton Papers, NYPL.

replying to letters whose contents are not that provoking.” Yet even as he warned his friend, he knew he need not, because “from our short association, I know our correspondence will not savor of the banality and triteness clad in platitudinous English, which have characterized much of the correspondence I have dropped, perforce of these nauseating properties.”¹⁴ Even while this relationship proved an immense solace to Harris, it also challenged Harris to ever improve his skills. All his articles were sent to Calverton for critique and approval, often with an opening caveat apologizing for their inferior condition.¹⁵ Calverton complied by sending back both—ample amounts of encouragement and praise accompanying serious appraisal of Harris’ work. Calverton also sought out Harris’ approval and advice—a rare thing in a relationship between a black and white man in the early 1920s. Calverton had not yet become famous (as he would after the *Modern Quarterly* became a success), so the height of their letter exchange, 1924-26, was just on that cusp when they were both talented young men with ambition who could encourage each other in that ambition. (Calverton’s friends, including Sidney Hook and Louis Adamic, later complained that his rampant ambition came before everything else for him in the 1930s, including careful scholarship.)¹⁶ Each were determined “to do some work that’s worth while.”¹⁷

Harris offered suggestions about the content of the *Modern Quarterly*, especially how it should address race relations and to which black leaders Calverton should send

¹⁴ Abram Harris to George Goetz, September 17, 1924, Box 7, Calverton Papers, NYPL.

¹⁵ For example, “I am not insensible to some of the crudities and literary inelegances which mar this first contribution to the *Modern Quarterly*. But for lock I can do no better.” Abram Harris to George Goetz, 1924, Box 7, Calverton Papers, NYPL.

¹⁶ Abbott, *Leftward Ho!*, 3-4.

¹⁷ Abram Harris to George Goetz, June 18, 1925.

subscription blanks. He petitioned Du Bois to give assistance to Calverton in making the *Modern Quarterly* attentive to racial issues.¹⁸ After Harris intervened on Calverton's behalf, Du Bois came to appreciate the magazine for being "sympathetic to the Soviet experiment but probingly critical" and to like Calverton "for his lively mind and mission to bring advanced ideas to the common man and woman."¹⁹

In November 1924, Harris wrote a letter introducing the magazine "from a detached position" to other African Americans, though he told Calverton, "I see no reason why white intellectuals should not be asked to subscribe upon the basis of it also."²⁰ In the subscription letter, he explained that while "our publication is admittedly radical," it was "not of the propagandist brand."²¹ Rather, the magazine would favor scientific analysis, subjecting "history and social problems to microscopic criticism," over "outpourings of maudlin sentimentalism and classically uttered platitudes."²² One of these social problems that the magazine authors would study was "the American Race Problem," with Harris offering the first such treatment in the Winter edition. "Critical study will be made of the Negro's attainments and possibilities in art, literature and music; and this race in American political and economic life."²³ Harris hoped the *Modern Quarterly* would accelerate "the growth of an intellectual class of liberals and radicals," but recognized it would only happen if they responded sympathetically to

¹⁸ Harris to Du Bois, October 28, 1924.

¹⁹ David L. Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: The Fight for Equality and the American Century, 1919-1963* (New York: Henry Holt, 2000), 198.

²⁰ Harris to Goetz, November 4, 1924.

²¹ [Abram Harris] to Mr. A.--- Gopher Prairie---, 1924, Box 7, Calverton Papers, NYPL.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

“Modern Quarterly’s idealism.”²⁴ Harris concluded with a brief introduction to himself, as the first author to address the “American Race Problem.” The anonymous style of the letter allowed him to state his own importance as he saw it: “Intellectual persons among both races must needs be interested in Mr. Harris’ discussion even tho they may happen to disagree with what he will say.”²⁵

Harris stimulated Charles Johnson’s interest in the *Modern Quarterly* and the editor started to pick it up at Brentano’s book shop. He found it refreshing and was eager for collaboration between *The Modern Quarterly* and *Opportunity*. For other black authors, Johnson suggested Calverton contact E. Franklin Frazier (“one of the keenest of this newer group of writers”), Eric Walrond, Alain Locke, Elmer Carter, and Gustavus Stewart (Frazier’s close friend).²⁶ Johnson and Calverton bundled the *Opportunity* with the *Modern Quarterly* for \$2.00. To publicize this, Johnson wrote to *Opportunity* subscribers that “The Modern Quarterly has planned to print a series of articles by Negro writers, who can, with complete justice, be styled intellectuals.”²⁷ The *Modern Quarterly* and other liberal publications sensed a new time, when it was possible to break “an age-old taboo. They are offering through their columns an exchange of ideas and reaction on these problems to that group of liberals, white or black, who can think through their color.”²⁸ Calverton’s journal had the greater advantage of being “courageously liberal, brilliantly edited, and lacks, happily, the social and political prejudices so common to our

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Charles S. Johnson to V. F. Calverton, December 16, 1924, Box 8, Calverton Papers, NYPL.

²⁷ Johnson to Price, January 27, 1925.

²⁸ Ibid.

stock publications.”²⁹ Johnson eagerly directed his correspondents to the first essay in the series, Harris’ article. “You have encountered the calmly analytical discussions of Mr. Harris in *Current History* magazine. In this article he lays bare with swift, clean strokes, the difficulties which many of us have been content merely to sense, worry over, and try to forget. It should be read.”³⁰ Harris was attempting to become an intellectual starting in an era when Johnson felt he had to assure his black and white readers that the existence a black intellectual was even possible.

Harris and Calverton shared opinions over different articles and books that each had read. In one letter, Harris revealed to Calverton his slowly evolving opinion about Charles Johnson’s work. Harris worried that Johnson’s concentration solely on facts would not draw out the larger economic trends so disabling to blacks and workers. Johnson’s latest article on migration was “objective as usual”—a category both Calverton and Harris highly prized. This was a common position in the 1920s, when many scholars had turned away from the Progressive era use of scholarship for uplift. Social Scientists were also trying to prove the validity of their research by setting themselves apart, through a scientific objectivity, from untrained writers. Harris, Calverton, and their friend Melville Herskovits were not disillusioned with using social science to improve society, as the Progressives did, but changed their tactics from that earlier generation. They used objectivity “like other [Franz] Boasian anthropologists” to “discredit social scientists who supported the status quo in race relations or advocated reactionary policies designed to

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

control non-whites or minority groups.”³¹ Despite its objectivity, Johnson’s article did not “not grip [Harris] as some of his other stuff. I think his economic themes have been lost in a maze of statistical analyses. The economic determinism which is quite visible to me as a student will, perhaps, not attract attention of the less critical. Still I agree with Johnson in his views on migration.”³² This criticism became more prominent as the years progressed and Harris moved ideologically away from his mentor.

Harris and Calverton’s enthusiasm for scientific objectivity did not prevent them from seeking to propagate their radical opinions.³³ At some point in the fall semester, Calverton asked Harris if he would use Calverton’s new social economy text in his course. Harris hoped to use the book, though he was constrained in the courses he had to teach. He explained that while his main field was social economy, he had to teach some business and fiscal economics, at least until WCVI hired another instructor (promised in July). The courses he offered were “Economic theory I and II, Economics III or Industrial society, “which is a critical analysis of the evolution of modern industrialism its antecedents and cultural consequences.”³⁴ But when it came to how he taught these subjects, he did “have some freedom.”³⁵ He was “not at all afraid of your veering too

³¹ Jerry Gershenhorn, *Melville J. Herskovits and the Racial Politics of Knowledge* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 129. Gershenhorn later points out that while Herskovits’ emphasis on objectivity was common, his subject matter was not. “The young scholar’s embrace of a strictly detached scholarship focusing on blacks as subjects and as culture builders placed him at odds with the dominant view of the foundations,” who emphasized maintaining the status quo.

³² Abram Harris to V. F. Calverton, September 17, 1925, Box 7, Calverton Papers, NYPL.

³³ “Harris had no confidence in the NAACP’s program of legal redress and incremental integration. He, too, was convinced that the problem of the century was essentially one of class exploitation, of which racism was merely the most virulent manifestation.” Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: The Fight for Equality*, 197.

³⁴ Harris to Goetz, 1924.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

closely to the fringes of propagandism [in the textbook]—this does not worry me in the least.”³⁶ Indeed, in Economics III he hoped to “get across a whole bunch of radical thot without calling it such.”³⁷ Harris started all his analyses in objective social science, but drew conclusions based on his preference for Marxist theories, and had no compunction teaching his students both modes of thought.

Harris’s frustrations with his life situation built over the course of the fall semester. They festered in overwork; in November he told Calverton, “I would have answered yours before now but I have been on the verge of a mental collapse. I think I am going at too rapid a gait.”³⁸ One of Harris’ major frustrations with his students and colleagues was their commitment to what Harris called “an extreme race psychology.” Harris was confounded when “[s]enior students here objected to being represented by one of their number of whom they said contained so much white blood that a white audience would attribute his ability to his being white.”³⁹ Harris could not abide categorization based solely on race and was attempting to develop a philosophy based on “humanitarianism” or “universalism.” He also developed this universalism in opposition to the religion so many African Americans depended upon. If blacks could step away from race and religion, then “the economic exploitation which the Negro has experienced and is experiencing [would] inevitably lead to a universal outlook upon life making for feeling of commonality with the rest of those who are similarly economically

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Harris to Goetz, November 4, 1924.

³⁹ Abram Harris to George Goetz, March 25, 1925, Box 7, Calverton Papers, NYPL.

disadvantaged.”⁴⁰ This desire for universality was part of the reason Harris emphasized “objectivity” to such an extent.

Scientific objectivity and the rejection of religion was not the only way African Americans tried to find universalism in this era. As discussed previously, Juliette Derricotte believed the connections between Christians could lead to as great a feeling of universalism as science could. She and other YWCA women also thought extensively about the shape a “human brotherhood” might take that could connect all humans through recognition of an individual’s humanity and spirituality. In 1893, Anna Julia Cooper posited another kind of universalism that black women entered into—that of human rights. She urged the gathered women at the World’s Congress of Representative Women in Chicago to recognize their particular strengths as women and their universal rights as humans.

Let woman's claim be as broad in the concrete as in the abstract. We take our stand on the solidarity of humanity, the oneness of life, and the unnaturalness and injustice of all special favoritisms, whether of sex, race, country, or condition. [...] We want, then, as toilers for the universal triumph of justice and human rights, to go to our homes from this Congress, demanding an entrance not through a gateway for ourselves, our race, our sex, or our sect, but a grand highway for humanity. The colored woman feels that woman's cause is one and universal; and that not till the image of God, whether in parian or ebony, is sacred and inviolable; not till race, color, sex, and condition are seen as the accidents, and not the substance of life; not till the universal title of humanity to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness is conceded to be inalienable to all; not till then is woman's lesson taught and woman's cause won—not the white woman's, nor the black woman's, not the red woman's, but the cause of every man and of every woman who has writhed silently under a mighty wrong.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Anna Julia Cooper, “Women's Cause is One and Universal,” *The Black Past: Remembered and Reclaimed*, 1893, <http://www.blackpast.org/?q=1893-anna-julia-cooper-womens-cause-one-and-universal>. For more on Anna Julia Cooper’s feminism and theorizing, see Vivian M. May, *Anna Julia Cooper, Visionary Black Feminist: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2007).

Like feminists, African American philosophers and activists have often discussed the connection between the universal and the particular. In the western world, the “universal” ideas of democracy and human rights were embedded in documents, like the United State’s “Declaration of Independence” and the French Revolution’s “The Rights of Man” that took for granted that the universal rights bearing individual was a landed white man. Is it, then, better for those excluded to open that definition to include workers, people of African, Asian, Indian descent, or women. Or to focus on the ways that the particular strengths of these individuals means they should be included?⁴² Or is it better to cease focusing on some kind of amorphous “universality” and focus instead on a multicultural diversity? Like any complicated intellectual, Harris changed how exactly he wanted to define universality—sometimes in a way that defined race out of existence and sometimes in a way that took race very seriously.

Harris’ time in the town of Institute was marked increasingly by frustration with the conversations and tenor of thought around him. Sterling Brown had a remarkably different perception when he went south to teach in 1923. His was similar to James Weldon Johnson, who had taught in a rural school in Georgia a quarter century before and became “anxious to learn to know the masses of my people, to know what they

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Joan Scott described this essential dilemma in her book, *Only Paradoxes to Offer: French Feminists and the Rights of Man* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997).

thought, what they felt, and the things of which they dreamed.”⁴³ As a child in Washington DC, an undergraduate at Williams, and a beginning graduate student at Harvard, Brown had learned only about middle class black life and Euro-American culture. He did not regret these lessons, but did feel something missing. He left Harvard knowing how “to *put it down*, not how to feel about things.”⁴⁴ Though he could have returned to Washington DC immediately to assume a position at Howard University, he followed the advice of his father and Carter G. Woodson to go south for “a different kind of education.”⁴⁵

Over the next seven years, Brown taught at three different HBCUs—Virginia Seminary and College, Lincoln University in Missouri, and Fisk University in Tennessee—before joining Howard University’s faculty in 1929. He used his time in each locale to explore the surrounding countryside. He sought out the language and rhythms of “ordinary” black people and in them found the emotions he had missed at Harvard. Teaching at Virginia Seminary, Brown said “I learned the strength of my people, I learned the fortitude. I learned the humor. I learned the tragedy. I learned from a wandering guitar player about John Henry, about Stagolee, about ‘The Ballad of the Bollweevil.’ I learned folktales. I learned folkstuff. I was a sponge.”⁴⁶ He squeezed out all that he had sopped up into his poetry, in which he used his innate aesthetic muscles,

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James Weldon Johnson, *Along This Way: The Autobiography of James Weldon Johnson*, 1st ed. (New York: Da Capo Press, 2000), 120.

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John Edgar Tidwell, “Brown, Sterling A.” in *The concise Oxford companion to African American literature*, ed. William L. Andrews et al. (Oxford University Press, 2001), 53.

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John Tidwell, “An Introduction” in Sterling Allen Brown, *Sterling A. Brown’s A Negro Looks at the South* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 6.

46

Sterling Allen Brown, *A Son’s Return: Selected Essays of Sterling A. Brown* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1996), 15.

his Williams training, and the inspiration of black folkways to create poems filled with the “common, racy, living speech of the Negro in certain phases of *real* life,” as James Weldon Johnson observed.⁴⁷

One of the ways Brown learned folk tales was by seeking out black storytellers in the local community and keeping his ears open everywhere he went. He asked students and colleagues at the Virginia Seminary to introduce him to members of the community. When he met students’ mothers, he encountered Mrs. Bibby, whose “keen perception” and irony would grace many of his poems. The residents of the Blue Ridge Mountains took to “Brown’s honest, uncondescending friendship” in a way that far surpassed the reception of Harris’ acerbic personality in the Appalachian Mountains 230 miles to the northwest. Students congregated in Brown’s rooms at the Seminary,

because these students were about my age. They were old to be in school, and I was young to be out of school. They were coal miners, farmers, hard workers, waiters down at the hotel. ... Many of them were studying to be ministers, but they had to work like hell in order to make enough money to come for those school months. So these kids knew my interest, and they brought Big Boy to the room. Big Boy came there with his guitar. He was an education for me He knew a full John Henry. Though the second night he’d sing a different John Henry. It wouldn’t be the same one at all. I’m inaccurate by saying “at all.” It would be the same one seven-eighths or another eighth. Or he’d forget it. He’d say, “Oh, Mr. Brown, you remember that. I forgot that one.” Then he’d change it, you see. But I heard a wonderful John Henry. Then he’d tell me lies about John Henry. He’d tell me tales in addition to the song.⁴⁸

Big Boy used instruments in unusual ways to capture the feel and sounds riding
On the railroad. His creativity fascinated Brown,

⁴⁷ James Weldon Johnson, “Introduction to the First Edition,” in *The Collected Poems of Sterling A. Brown*, 1st ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1980), 15.

⁴⁸ Charles H. Rowell and Sterling Allen Brown, ““Let Me Be wid Ole Jazzbo”: An Interview with Sterling A. Brown,” *Callaloo* 21, no. 4 (1998): 806.

Then he had a beautiful song that later Louis [Armstrong] sang. This was "The Hobo Song." Big Boy was riding a train; with his guitar, he would have the rumble of the wheels and he would have the whistle. He said when the train comes to a crossing, it never blows its whistle. It blows this way . . . two longs and two shorts. . . . He used a bottle and he'd break a bottle and put the glass top over his thumb and he'd run out. Then he'd use a knife. He would say that when a freight train goes through the yards it doesn't blow its whistle; it rings its bell. And he'd ring his bell on his guitar, and he was talking all the time about this hobo. He sees this brakeman, and the brakeman wants to throw him off. He looks at the brakeman, and he sees the brakeman is a blues man. Then he plays the blues: "If you ever been down, you know just how I feel, like a broken down engine, got no driving wheel." He would knife this. Then he'd run into the conductor. The conductor wanted to throw him off, and he saw the conductor was a religious man. So he would play for him "Nero my God to thee." And he always made it N-E-R-O "my God to thee." He was playing that, and you could hear the rumbling in the wheels. It was a little fascinating performance. When he finished, he played the blues, low down blues. When that was over, he would always sing his mother's favorite; he'd play "When the Saints Go Marching Home." Then he'd leave.⁴⁹

Big Boy inspired three of Brown's poems, "Odyssey of Big Boy," "Long Gone," and "When de Saints Go Ma'ching Home." In exchange for his stories and songs, Brown "used to write his letters for him; he couldn't read and write."⁵⁰ Brown marveled at the depth of passion and creativity within an uneducated man. He learned poetic method from Harvard, but he found his vision and voice in Big Boy's music and myths. Later, Brown brought Big Boy to meet his students and groups of left-wingers. At one such meeting, a white woman got really mad that Brown and others were calling the guitarist "Big Boy," because she believed it was degrading. Brown tried to explain that that was all he had ever been called, but she asked how he would feel being called boy. He remembered his response, "I know damn well how much I would have resented it if one of them had called me 'boy,' but 'Big Boy' was his name. That's all he knew. He wanted

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

to hit the woman. She was one of the ultraliberals. He was a heavy drinker.”⁵¹ Life was more complicated than ideology allowed.

While he was teaching in Lynchburg, Sterling Brown often drove fifty five miles to Roanoke to play tennis with his friend Arthur Downing (Brown played tennis in major tournaments into his thirties, including appearances in the national black doubles championship teamed with Allison Davis).⁵² While there on a weekend visit in early November 1924, dressed in his characteristic tweed coat and carrying a tawny pipe, he met an auburn-haired woman with “brave eyes.” Miss Daisy Turnbull had recently returned to Roanoke to take care of her sister during a severe illness.⁵³ Turnbull had grown up there, hearing her grandmother tell traumatic stories about being enslaved to a prominent family. Though she watched others with a similar light complexion move into white society, she refused to do so because of her grandmother’s experiences. Like Brown, she loved the stories and the black people of the South. Unlike Callie Harris (whose husband felt he had to teach her to reject bourgeois ways), Daisy “was the first to applaud [Brown’s] rejection of the typically bourgeois stance with its contempt for the lower classes and its evasion of ‘life.’”⁵⁴ When Brown took a teaching post at Lincoln University in Missouri and Turnbull returned to her job in Baltimore, he “just about bought the railroad, the Norfolk, and Western Railroad. Of course, I bought the Southern,

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Ibid., 808.

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Thomas Young, “Tally and Ted Win Doubles,” *Norfolk New Journal and Guide*, August 27, 1927;

“Sterling Brown Stops Old Master on Howard Campus,” *New York Amsterdam News*, July 15, 1931.

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Joanne V Gabbin, *Sterling A. Brown: Building the Black Aesthetic Tradition* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1985), 37; “Roanoke, VA,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, November 8, 1924.

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Gabbin, *Sterling A. Brown*, 38.

too, because I had a girl up in Baltimore.”⁵⁵ They finally overcame the distance by marrying in December 1927 and staying together for over 50 years.

Daisy and Dutch Brown returned to Lincoln University, though their honeymoon year was by no means solitary. Brown often brought interesting people home to talk to, including Old Man McCorkle, an eighty-four year old wandering preacher who told stories about slavery “simply and eloquently, relishing the rapt attention of my family and friends, a seemingly forlorn but really proud walker out of a far land and time.”⁵⁶ The couple also hired a student, Buck, to help around the house. He started serving them breakfast in bed on weekends, so that he could make extra food and give it to his friends, because he knew the Browns would not want it to go to waste. When the Browns learned what Buck was doing, they gave him money for a proper breakfast and invited all the students over. Over porkchops Saturday morning and during discussions in the evening, they exchanged stories and listened to jazz records and the blues. Where Harris decried his students’ lack of talent, Brown listened to their tales. The young men had all had myriad experiences—some had worked as Pullman porters, others on road-building gangs, and several in the local hotel. They traded sightings of jazz and blues greats like Ma Rainey, Duke Ellington, and Louis Armstrong. Brown bragged that he had gone to high school with Ellington, even though the maestro had gone to a competing school. One student had witnessed a lynching and could not cleanse the image from his mind. They all had a sense of honor; because “they couldn’t eat a man’s porkchops Saturday morning and flunk his tests on Mondays,” they studied even harder the lessons that

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As quoted Ibid., 37.

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Brown, *Sterling A. Brown's A Negro Looks at the South*, 53.

Brown offered, struggling to master even Emerson's *Nature* and Shelly's "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty."⁵⁷ The stories they gave, and the music they shared, repaid Brown "in better coin."

Throughout his travels, Brown remained connected to the Harlem intellectual community, though he never desired to live there because he was "hostile to the rowdy atmosphere of the city where popular traditions are commercialized and prostituted."⁵⁸ Brown read fellow Dunbar graduate Jean Toomer's novel *Cane*, rejoicing in its originality and in its capture of "the plaintive soul" of the folk. He eagerly read Langston Hughes' work, published in New York journals and in two books, because Brown and Hughes found similar voices among African Americans (Hughes in urban and Brown in rural areas). And in 1927, Brown began to publish his own poems in the *Opportunity*, *Crisis*, and in a Countee Cullen edited anthology. Readers began to pay attention to this unique, throbbing, ironic new voice.

Brown accessed the long tradition of the Brer Rabbit character in African American stories, who subverted the order of things and landed on top, but brought that character into the twentieth century with a more direct voice. For example, in the poem "Slim Lands a Job?" from his first poetry collection *Southern Road*, he captured the crazy illogical aspects of racial politics in the South. "Slim" asks for a job at a café in Arkansas and the proprietor is happy to give him one because his present employee was too slow. Then that employee showed up, "A noise rung out / In rush a man / Wid a tray on his head / An' one on each han' / Wid de silver in his mouf / An' de soup plates in his vest /

⁵⁷ Ibid., 37-40.

⁵⁸ Jean Wagner as quoted in Gabbin, *Sterling A. Brown*, 41.

Pullin' a red wagon ... Wid all de rest." Slim catches one glimpse of "Dat wuthless lazy waiter!" and "threw his gears in / Put it in high, / An' kissed his hand to Arkansaw, / Sweetheart...good-bye!"⁵⁹ A man might not be able to get ahead in a society like that, but he could move. Slavery and sharecropping kept blacks tied to a place, but in the 1920s they could migrate and find new and better places.

Brown's mocking humor attracted many of his readers. In another poem, "Slim in Atlanta," Slim discovers that "De whitefolks got laws / For to keep all de niggers / From laughin' outdoors" and mandates that they do all their laughing in a telephone booth. Slims sees the telephone booth and the "hundred shines / In front of it, waitin' / In double lines" and thinks his sides will bust for the desire to laugh. He rushed into the box and laughed for four hours. "Den he peeked through de door / An' what did he see? *Three* hundred niggers there / In misery.— / Some holdin' deir sides, Some holdin' deir jaws, *To* keep from breakin' / De Georgia laws." Every time he peeked out the door, Slim went *back* into gales of laughter until they called for the ambulance. "De state paid de railroad / *To* take him away; / Den, things were as usural / In Atlanta, Gee A."⁶⁰

Another recurring theme in Brown's poetry was manly strength. As discussed earlier, Anna Arnold Hedgeman read one of his most prominent poems, "Strong Men" at the 1931 International Student Services Conference. In "Strange Legacies," Brown thanked Jack Johnson for teaching them how to take punishment standing "there like a man" and John Henry for teaching "us that a man could go down like a man." Despite the difficulties that faced African Americans "in our time of fear," they could follow these

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Sterling Allen Brown, *The Collected Poems of Sterling A. Brown*, 1st ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1980), 79-80.

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Ibid., 81-82.

men and mutter “beneath an unfriendly sky, / ‘Guess we’ll give it one mo’ try. / Guess we’ll give it one mo’ try.”⁶¹

The Browns arrived at Fisk University in the mid-1920s. Their house continued to be a safe haven for other black intellectual migrants. Ophelia Settle, a graduate of Howard University and one of Johnson’s new research assistants, along with Mabel Byrd, arrived at Fisk around the same time as the Browns. She was not as enthusiastic as Brown about the area, though she called Johnson “a most efficient and pleasing chief.” She complained about the restricted culture. “I miss New York and Philadelphia terribly. No good music or plays here, or if there are we can seldom get a seat decent enough to warrant our going.”⁶² Nashville’s Jim Crow lines were fierce and implacable. The Browns’ presence helped the transition, she told Langston Hughes, because “I go to their little apartment often and laugh and chat with them or listen to Sterling play the guitar and sing your blues and other blues and ballads.”⁶³

In contrast to Brown opening his house to students and searching back roads for inspiration and communion, Harris showed little respect for the milieu he found himself in West Virginia. He felt more like Settle, that the culture of his college town restricted rather than intrigued. After associating with black middle class West Virginians, Harris could not abide what he believed was a fierce independence that refused to listen to

⁶¹ Ibid., 86-7.

⁶² Ophelia Settle to Marvel [?], February 6, 1929, Du Bois Papers Reel 30.

⁶³ Ophelia Settle Egypt to Langston Hughes, February 19, 1929, Box 59 Folder 1110, Hughes Papers, Beinecke.

reason. He wrote Calverton that “the Negro group, despite homes and other physical accoutrements of great wealth, are as backward, spiritually as the earliest frontiersmen.”⁶⁴ He particularly disliked that they treated him with such dismissiveness. Like W.E.B. Du Bois in Wilberforce, Ohio decades earlier, Harris was young and educated. Du Bois and Harris both believed that their education gave them the ability to talk with authority to older people. The older people believed that their age and experience gave them wisdom that should be listened to with respect. “Ye Gods—and such insolent ignorance buttressed by a splendid isolation which none but the imponderably mighty can penetrate. Poor lil Abe Harris—a damn social worker and erstwhile professor in a backward nth class college has the effrontery to attempt to speak authoritatively on something.”⁶⁵

What Brown saw as “black folkways,” which led to interesting stories and histories, Harris confronted as a persistent “race psychology,” which prevented African Americans from understanding the economic foundations of society. Harris’ expressed his frustration with “race psychology” in an article he wrote for *Social Forces* while teaching at WVCI. *Social Forces*, founded by Howard Odum only 3 years previously, was a journal designed for sociology, a newly emerging discipline. Odum, founder of the Sociology Department at the University of North Carolina, considered himself a liberal on race relations, compared with his fellow southerners, and had tremendous control over

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Abram Harris to George Goetz, December 12, 1924, Box 7, Calverton Papers, NYPL.

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Ibid.

“the study of social problems in the South.”⁶⁶ He used that control to garner and distribute research money from philanthropies and the federal government.⁶⁷ Odum also published Frazier within *Social Forces*.⁶⁸

Before a primarily white scholarly audience, Harris criticized “race psychology” for thwarting “comprehensive progressive political action and the growth of liberalism in America” and “universality of thought among Negroes.” His willingness to criticize African Americans and to explore liberalism must have made his article attractive to Odum and the other editors, because were markers of his “universality” and scientific objectivity. Black intellectuals’ thorough absorption in “the race problem” prevented **them**, in Harris’ opinion, from analyzing the “problems of labor, housing, taxation, **judicial** reform and war” that affected African Americans just as much.⁶⁹ Currently, **these** problems seem obviously connected to the problems of African Americans face in **the** United States. The ability to make such a “common sense” connection rests on the **work** done by social scientists beginning in the 1920s, like Harris.

Too often, the “race question” came down to one issue—whether or not African Americans were mentally inferior because of their African bloodlines. Harris felt that his **own** thoughts and writings could only be about “advocating remedial racial legislation, **organizing** equal rights leagues or proving that his race is not mentally inferior to the

⁶⁶ Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Defying Dixie: The Radical Roots of Civil Rights, 1919-1950* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2008), 20. Odum had written two dissertations, both “impressionistic accounts of black life laced with unfounded generalizations.”

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ E. Franklin Frazier, “Psychological Factors in Negro Health,” *Journal of Social Forces* 3, no. 3 (March 1925): 488-490.

⁶⁹ Abram L. Harris, “A White and Black World in American Labor and Politics,” *Social Forces* 4, no. 2 (December 1925): 381-382.

white.”⁷⁰ These constraints drive a black man aspiring to “to intellectual heights ... to his wit's end in an attempt to syncretize incongruous ideals.”⁷¹ Harris’ frustration with “race psychology” did not lie in his frustration with the black culture that so excited Brown and Hughes. Harris was not like the father and mother that Hughes described in “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain” who so praised white people and things that their children came to understand that “white” was a synonym for “beauty, morality, and money.” This sank so deeply into their souls that they could not see the “beauty of [their] own people.”⁷²

In his article for *Social Forces*, Harris still ends up engaging in the discussion around African peoples’ inherent capabilities. Imagine his frustration that this was still necessary. One of the reasons he so strongly advocated universalism in this article and in his correspondence with Calverton was because it seemed like the best way to enter the current academic dialogue. He despaired of other black intellectuals being taken seriously (and as always, he would be analyzed first as a black man and only later as an individual) as scholars and social scientists without adopting universalism or showing how blacks

70 Ibid.

71 Ibid.

72 “But let us look at the immediate background of this young poet. His family is of what I suppose one would call the Negro middle class: people who are by no means rich yet never uncomfortable nor hungry--smug, contented, respectable folk, members of the Baptist church. The father goes to work every morning. He is a chief steward at a large white club. The mother sometimes does fancy sewing or supervises parties for the rich families of the town. The children go to a mixed school. In the home they read white papers and magazines. And the mother often says 'Don't be like niggers' when the children are bad. A frequent phrase from the father is, 'Look how well a white man does things.' And so the word white comes to be unconsciously a symbol of all the virtues. It holds for the children beauty, morality, and money. The whisper of 'I want to be white' runs silently through their minds. This young poet's home is, I believe, a fairly typical home of the colored middle class. One sees immediately how difficult it would be for an artist born in such a home to interest himself in interpreting the beauty of his own people. He is never taught to see that beauty. He is taught rather not to see it, or if he does, to be ashamed of it when it is not according to Caucasian patterns.” Langston Hughes, “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain,” *Nation*, June 23, 1926, 692-3.

were part of that universality. And he certainly intended to become a serious scholar.⁷³

So he urged white scholars to realize that black intellectuals' failure to promote universality and their "absence of intellectual aggressiveness" were not

the result of non-purposiveness in thought stunted by gratuitous African life, but a reflex of the social forces of the environment in which the Negro has lived almost three centuries. It does not seem to be inferior mind stuff which renders him apathetic to liberal social movements, but a circumstance of race which demands him to think 'black.'⁷⁴

Those social forces "buttressing these walls of race division" were "competition between white and black workers; American individualism and the Negro's belief in it; the Negro's religious orthodoxy and his quickened sense of injury and resentment to it."⁷⁵ None of these forces directly blamed the structure of white society or racist individual whites. And two of them blamed African Americans themselves, a critique rising out of Harris' desire for objectivity. These social forces divided black and white, creating separate worlds in the U.S., and unlike any "alleged influence" of the African environment before enslavement, these forces were "fatal to the growth of working class consciousness and the Negro's intellectual achievement and emancipation."⁷⁶ In his identification of negative social factors, Harris echoed work being done far to the south of him at the Atlanta School of Social Work by E. Franklin Frazier, who was then studying the black

⁷³ In the beginning, he wanted to be more an intellectual than a stuffy academic. He told Calverton that he preferred Bohemian intellectuals to academic types, as he assumed Calverton did as well. But regardless, he expected his economic work to be taken seriously by competent scholars. Abram Harris to George Goetz, October 3, 1924, Box 7, Calverton Papers, NYPL.

⁷⁴ Harris, "A White and Black World in American Labor and Politics," 383.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

family, cooperative movements, business enterprises, and other aspects of black communities.⁷⁷

When the article came out several months later, Harris was equivocal about it. On the one hand he “decided that it needs to be done over” in book form, with an expanded, separate explanation of the “Economic Basis of American Color Psychology.” But on the other hand, “with all of the faults that I find of the present work, I incline to the belief that this “White and Black Worlds” is the best of my contributions.”⁷⁸

Race psychology was not the only thing holding African Americans back from understanding the world, in Harris’ view. “Religion I hold is antipathetical [sic] to this [force] of universality—as much as it demands the acceptance of dogma, ritual and the worship of mystical fetishes.”⁷⁹ Harris’ resistance to and criticism of religion also contributed to his social isolation. In his *Social Forces* article, he identified religion as a “deterrent to the advance of Negro liberalism.” He recognized that African American became dependent upon religion during slavery as a basic survival tactic. Forced to suppress their emotions in normal social environments, slaves “found a channel of expression” for their emotions in Christianity. Emotions “were directed toward constructing sentiments around an otherworldly symbolism; and thus [a slave’s] world of despair was robbed of reality.”⁸⁰ People who think African Americans are innately religious miss, in Harris’ view, what “is in truth a mere compensatory or defense

⁷⁷ J.H. Schiele, “E. Franklin Frazier and the Interfacing of Black Sociology and Black Social Work,” *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare* 26, no. 2 (1999): 105-125; *E. Franklin Frazier and Black Bourgeoisie* (Columbia, Mo: University of Missouri Press, 2002).

⁷⁸ Abram Harris to George Goetz, December 25, 1925, Box 7, Calverton Papers, NYPL.

⁷⁹ Abram Harris to George Goetz, February 10, 1925, Box 7, Calverton Papers, NYPL.

⁸⁰ Harris, “A White and Black World in American Labor and Politics,” 382.

mechanism which persists because the complexes which gave rise to it have only been superficially disturbed.”⁸¹ The problem with this mechanism was that it led to religious orthodoxy and a mass of religious leaders enforcing orthodoxy rather than creative thought or social action. For Harris, these religious leaders were not as “acutely imbued with a sense of social justice” as they should be.⁸² Harris joined many black intellectuals who critiqued black ministers during this era for not attacking racism. In a post-Martin Luther King Jr. world, this seems surprising, but it was a common theme during the 1920s and 1930s (and earlier) that black churches focused too much on heaven and not enough on the earth around them.⁸³ Adam Clayton Powell Sr.’s Abyssinian Baptist Church was a leader in the era in focusing on the social needs of his parishioners as well as their spiritual needs.⁸⁴

Harris’ primary critique of religion was how it prevented complicated thought. “Under these conditions [of orthodoxy], advanced thinking, whether it brings religious skepticism, economic radicalism, social reform and re-adjustment, or the repudiation of hoary political traditions, must futilely run the gauntlet of religious orthodoxy, if it would

81

Ibid.

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Ibid.

83

S.P. Fullinwider explains why the transition to shift “other-worldly” thought among American intellectuals to “this-worldly” concerns did not touch African American churches at the same time. These impulses had been present throughout the 1800s among white intellectuals, but because black churches were led primarily by black pastors with little education whose power lay in “intrigue” rather than in education. As more black leaders became highly educated in the 1920s, they started to criticize black churches for emphasizing the end times more than they discussed the experiences of black people day by day. S.P. Fullinwider, “Racial Christianity,” in *African American Religious Thought: An Anthology*, ed. Cornel West and Eddie S. Glaude (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 477-94. Timothy Fulop explains the theology behind millennialism in his essay “‘The Future Golden Day of the Race’ Millennialism and Black Americans in the Nadir, 1877-1901,” in *African-American Religion: Interpretive Essays in History and Culture*, ed. Timothy E. Fulop and Albert J. Raboteau (New York: Routledge, 1997), 227-56.

84

Adam Clayton Powell, *Against the Tide: An Autobiography* (R. R. Smith, 1938).

gain audience.”⁸⁵ Harris brought the weight of scholarly accord to his argument; “Sociologists are about agreed that a religious faith requires an uncritical belief in its doctrines and demands that these be placed above other truths as sacred eternal verities.”⁸⁶ Though West Virginia Collegiate Institute was a state college, the faculty was still overwhelmingly religious and daily chapel was required. Harris’ opinions about religion did not win him any soul mates among the faculty and students.

Among the national black network, religion was also still too sacrosanct a topic to come under much scrutiny. In 1923, when William Pickens, field secretary of the NAACP, publicly criticized black Christians in the *Messenger* for believing in a physical hell and espousing Christianity through a fear of it, black newspapers up and down the country ran huge headlines like “Pickens Denies Resurrection, and Tells Why: Nobody Believes, He says, Billion Billion Bodies Will Ever ‘Rise from the Dead.’” Some columnists railed against him as an agnostic, though he had professed a kind of Christianity that would accord with any white liberal protestant or adherent of the social gospel. He almost lost his job in the controversy, and might have if Spingarn and Du Bois did not sympathize with his statements (if not with his tactics).⁸⁷

Though most black newspapers and the NAACP leadership roundly condemned Pickens’ criticism of black Christianity, Harris and Pickens were not entirely alone in

⁸⁵ Harris, “A White and Black World in American Labor and Politics,” 382.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Pickens, “Intelligent Christianity: Not the Fear of Hell” *Messenger*; Pickens, “Things Nobody Believes” *Messenger* February 1923; “Dean Pickens’ Agnosticism” p 11 by R. R. Wright Jr. *Christian Recorder*; “The Religion of Today” by E. Ethelred Brown” Feb 21, 1923; “Pickens Denies Resurrection, and Tells Why: Nobody Believes, He says, Billion Billion Bodies Will Ever ‘Rise from the Dead’”; “Preachers Defend Hell”; “Dr. Pickens out of Harmony with his Church—Coppin” Reel 7, Pickens Papers, Schomburg.

their criticism. In 1920, Du Bois published an article identifying the weaknesses of black colleges by G. David Houston, which included a direct attack on the religious nature of those colleges. Houston was a Harvard graduate who taught English at the Tuskegee Institute, 1905-1907, before raising Booker T. Washington's ire by privately attacking his autocratic leadership. After Tuskegee, Houston moved to the English department at Howard University.⁸⁸ Houston opened his article with a blazing attack upon the "religious dogmatism" that so tightly hemmed in black colleges that they could not "be expected to take an outstanding place among American institutions of learning."⁸⁹ Houston identified the source of this dogmatism in "the same mildewed objective of making professing Christians and developing prospective preachers" that still prevailed "in the minds of trustee boards."⁹⁰ Moreover, there remained the expectation that the president of black colleges be only a "man of soul," a preacher, rather than being "an educator of ripe and successful experience, or a scholar of copious industry and promising renown, or an administrator of tried and approved judgment."⁹¹

Houston could have been seeing into the future, watching Harris in his first academic post, when he wrote, "Thus the Negro college is becoming more and more repulsive to the broadminded, liberal-thinking Negro professor, who is more ambitious to direct the training of promising minds, or to make some recognized contribution to education, than to establish an enviable record for chapel and prayer-meeting

⁸⁸ Louis R. Harlan, *Booker T. Washington* (Oxford University Press US, 1986), 153-155.

⁸⁹ G. David Houston, "Weaknesses of the Negro College," *Crisis*, July 1920, 122.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

attendance.”⁹² Or, rather than seeing the future, perhaps essays like this helped form Harris’ opinions about religion.

Harris’ frustration hit one of its peaks in December 1924. He had given up writing an essay for the *Crisis*’s essay prize (one of the major awards of the Harlem Renaissance era) because “this damned little library at Charleston with its (3) five foot book shelves and its supercilious but vacuous brained attendants could give me scant material.”⁹³ In order to write, he felt he “must get out of this ossifying environment. One is completely constricted from the best intellectual contact by a life pocked amid these Appalachian slopes. If I could stand it two years perhaps my relief might come.”⁹⁴ Writing Calverton about his frustrations at the school, Harris thanked him for the support he offered:

I must say that a sympathizing note—the kind you wrote—is something which makes a fellow feel that after all some of these imponderables, which weigh heavier than material weights can be born; that where the majority of human kind is unable to tolerate you, there is an infinitesimal minority which appreciates your struggles and sympathize with your ambitions. Your note was real consoling; a balm to a wounded and rebellious disposition. Thanks—I am graciously appreciative.⁹⁵

Harris’ statement that the majority of humans could not tolerate him might sound like he is expressing frustration about racism. That frustration was in the background, but in the foreground were his interactions with his black colleagues. He felt like his colleagues viewed him, not as a promising young intellectual at the beginning of his career, but as a

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ Harris to Goetz, December 12, 1924.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ Abram Harris to George Goetz, April 6, 1925, Box 7, Calverton Papers, NYPL.

“social monstrosity.”⁹⁶ His colleagues at WCVI were probably surprised at Harris’ radical leanings, loud ambitions, and persistent intention to write prolifically, submitting articles to monthlies and scientific journals. If it distracted him from his teaching duties, they may have actively discouraged his ambitions for this scholarship and future Ph.D. work.⁹⁷ They were probably also surprised by his refusal to analyze situations through their usual lenses of race and religion.

The Christmas season of 1924 offered a break from teaching, but not a break from his intellectual work. Release from teaching allowed Harris to work more feverishly on his articles. At this point in time, Harris focused his writings toward two audiences. He wrote short pieces on the economic situation of African Americans for magazines like *Modern Quarterly*, *The Nation*, *Crisis*, and *Opportunity*. At the same time, he prepared longer, more extended analyses for academic journals.

Despite his persistent sense of isolation, he had a few points of intellectual contact beyond Calverton’s letters. Fall 1924 marked the beginning of an enlivening correspondence with Du Bois as well as Calverton, though it did not yet consist of the conversation between intellectual equals that their later letters comprised. Harris had also been reading Countee Cullen’s poetry and deemed his genius better than Paul Lawrence Dunbar even on Dunbar’s “balmiest days.” He entreated Calverton to send him a review copy of *Fire in the Flint* by Walter White, so he could read the newest of the New Negro novels.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ **A**bram Harris to George Goetz, February 11, 1925, Box 7, Calverton Papers, NYPL.

⁹⁷ **H**arris to Goetz, April 6, 1925.

⁹⁸ **H**arris to Goetz, December 12, 1924.

Harris thought he might have found an intellectual comrade when he met Rev. Mordecai Johnson in the streets of Charleston. Johnson, the future first black president of Howard University, preached at First Regular Baptist Church of Charleston, which served the black professional class. He had initially been drawn to the area because childhood friend and college roommate, John W. Davis, was president of WCVL.⁹⁹ Harris was surprised by Johnson, because “for a preacher gentleman” he had a sound “knowledge of sociology and appreciation of revolutionary economics and social doctrine.”¹⁰⁰ His knowledge came from the University of Chicago, where he earned his second bachelors degree in 1913 (the first had come from Atlanta University).¹⁰¹ Harris took the opportunity to convince Johnson to subscribe to the *Modern Quarterly*. Out of such a brief exchange started a decades long relationship that Harris was at turns grateful for and frustrated by. Johnson would finally hire Harris at the capstone of black higher education—Howard University—after he was initially rejected by Johnson’s predecessor as president, Stanley Durkee. Harris’ ambiguity over Johnson began immediately. He next saw the Reverend at a public speech. He heard Johnson say that blacks were ready to embrace Communism with open arms. Such a statement blew away his previous regard—how could such a man be so “utopianly gullible?” Later, he questioned Johnson’s statement and was relieved to discover that he had misheard. What Johnson had meant was “that there is a diversity of political opinion [among] Negroes; that they are no

⁹⁹ **Richard I. McKinney**, *Mordecai The Man and His Message: The Story of Mordecai Wyatt Johnson* (Washington DC: Howard University Press, 1997), 39-40.

¹⁰⁰ **Harris** to Goetz, December 12, 1924.

¹⁰¹ **McKinney**, *Mordecai The Man and His Message*, 30.

longer solidly Republican, that some would even welcome Communism.”¹⁰² Though he found that he and Johnson shared this opinion about the diversity of black political opinions, Harris still found it difficult to treat the man as a close friend. They both left their encounters with the sense that they had met an unusually intelligent man. When they met again as president and prospective faculty member three years later, that perception would return, if briefly.

To shake his colleagues up a bit, and get them to think critically (particularly in a Marxist way) about the economic situation of African Americans, Harris invited Calverton to come to campus in the spring as a special speaker. He nurtured “the loudest anticipation” about the attack Calverton’s ideas were sure to provoke. During his planning, Harris assured Calverton that his colleagues were good people (if not radical or politically astute) and used to associating with white people “of bourgeois and philanthropical leaning.”¹⁰³ Though WVCI knew they were hiring a man with radical leanings, Harris had shielded many of his viewpoints from his colleagues. He explained, they do not “know that I exist other than as a social monstrosity. My students are warming up to me. The thing few people can understand about me is that I am a Southern Negro—that is my friends who are black—the others (white) can’t understand how a Negro or in fact why a Negro should have such leanings as I have.”¹⁰⁴

He felt like the only African American to reject “race psychology” and felt a combination of pessimism about racialism changing and determination to maintain his

¹⁰² Abram Harris to George Goetz, January 19, 1925, Box 7, Calverton Papers, NYPL.

¹⁰³ Harris to Goetz, February 11, 1925.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

opinions in the face of all persuasion. “The racialists will win, I am sure. If they do, I shall get my chance to shoot fireworks at this “manifestation” of race consciousness. Damn the Negro intellectual is in a hell-u-va-way,”¹⁰⁵ forced to ever talk about race then derided for talking only about race. Charles “Johnson has just written me and roguishly suggested that I be more diplomatic. Damn—I detest this! Diplomacy has always been associated in my mind with sycophancy—particularly where the Negro race has been concerned.”¹⁰⁶ Unlike the YWCA women, Harris devoted himself primarily to ideas, rather than to relationships or pragmatic responses to oppression (like Mabel Byrd’s embrace of communists because of their positive actions toward black people). To him, pragmatic actions always involved accepting oppression, which he was not willing to do. Gustavus Stewart teased Frazier about rejecting a “pragmatic” approach to the racial environment, just after he had published his controversial article, “The Pathology of Race Prejudice.”¹⁰⁷

Have seen your article in The Nation. Like it very much. Am sure Dr. Moton and the school which he follows will not like it. You certainly are not helping yourself to get back into the uplift and the good graces of the philanthropic trust. I really don’t know what will become of you. Why don’t you give up and conform and be comfortable? I see that your good friend, John Hope, has been given another one of those jaunts to Europe. The good nigger is always rewarded, I hope you see. While bad niggers like E. Franklin Frazier are simply kicked out of their jobs. It serves them right, too. They should do the proper amount of bootlicking, no matter by what elegant term described, keep the good white folks believing that they are heaven-sent guardians of creation and the best friend of American Negroes, simply making the utmost sacrifices to bring them up to the level of human beings, and then they wouldn’t have to resign their jobs, and chew their fingernails in resentment. Now if you would just follow John

¹⁰⁵ Harris to Goetz, March 25, 1925.

¹⁰⁶ Harris to Goetz, April 6, 1925.

¹⁰⁷ See Chapter 4 for a full discussion.

Hope, or J. A. Thomas, or Eugene Kinckle Jones, you would find your path blooming with roses, and free trips to Europe thrown in occasionally. What would happen to you inside, however, would be a pestilence, but even that can be endured for the sake of ease and change and flattery and trips to Europe.¹⁰⁸

When the YWCA women talked and wrote about the state of society, it seemed like they had a group of people surrounding them, spurring them on. They certainly encountered frustrations with other black and white women, but at the same time their organizations encouraged their efforts (even if, at times, also moderating them). In contrast, when men like Frazier and Harris critiqued society, they felt isolated and alone, except for the few other young intellectuals who felt like they did. That persistence sense of isolation was one of the things that made this era different from the Civil Rights Movement.

When Calverton suggested—in the blithe way of someone who had never experienced persecution from inside the veil—that Harris simply ignore race and approach all situations “objectively,” Harris was conflicted. He ardently desired to be taken seriously as an intellectual and was convinced that the “maturing habit of academic objectivity” was a major step along this path.¹⁰⁹ When Calverton also urged him to be more diplomatic, Harris admitted that his link of diplomacy with sycophancy “is an emotional reaction—and since your letter came I have decided to play the game a while longer.”¹¹⁰ Yet, Calverton suffered from a fundamental oversight that Harris was not quite sure how to handle. Calverton defined objectivity from an absence of knowledge about black people—his “objective” perspective was rooted in Euro-American culture

¹⁰⁸ Gustavus A. Steward to E. Franklin Frazier, July 31, 1927, 131 Box 15 Folder 21, Frazier Papers, MSRC.

¹⁰⁹ Abram L. Harris, “Economic Foundations of American Race Division,” *Social Forces* 5, no. 3 (March 1927): 478.

¹¹⁰ Harris to Goetz, April 6, 1925.

and failed to acknowledge that ideas having to do with race could be the essential problem of the twentieth century (as Du Bois had argued in *Souls*). If African Americans did not study black people and culture, who would? Harris captured the paradox of living as a black man who hungered for intellectual things and relationships in a society that did not value the intelligence of black men:

George it is strange my dear that you have never known the world behind the veil—W.E. B. Du Bois calls it. That's the damned thing I hate so implacably about race separation; it makes strangers of people who by nature and education ought to associate and become endeared to each other. You recall that you spoke last time of not letting the race problem absorb so much of our energy so that we may be able to do bigger things. But Gosh, some one has to tell you and others equally as ignorant of the Negro's cultural and artistic efforts.¹¹¹

Despite this entirely reasonable argument, Harris conceded that Calverton's point was "a perfectly justifiable one" and as such, he would "undertake a piece of work having little to do with the Negro. If the Negro comes in he will be only incidentally considered."¹¹²

Harris pleaded with Calverton again to keep him in touch with the wider intellectual world beyond the "somnolent environment at Institute": "Write and Don't forget Opportunity and the other books—particularly Schlesinger's New Viewpoints in American History."¹¹³ Harris did not at this point join with other New Negro thinkers in arguing that studying African American situations did indeed constitute a "bigger thing."

Chapel attendance characterized yet another arena of conflict between Harris and the rest of the Institute. On his draft card in 1918, Harris had declared his major as Theology. At some point between then and his time at WCVI, he had made an

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Harris to Goetz, April 6, 1925; Harris to Goetz, June 18, 1925.

incontrovertible break with religion. Though a state school, WCVI required chapel attendance every day. By October, school officials signed Harris up for a turn at the podium, “and I’ll be damned if I know what to do.”¹¹⁴ Finally, he refused “to take chapel attendance and I suppose this means that I have balked the machinery.”¹¹⁵ Like Du Bois had done after a similar refusal to engage in public religion at his first teaching job at Wilberforce College, Harris began to look for other work in the spring. He was tired of Institute and it was tired of him, but begged Calverton not to mention that fact to Callie Starks. She had become his fiancé by the end of the spring semester. He did not want his prospect of unemployment to prevent their plans for marriage in August. Deciding to write to his old friend Charles Johnson, Harris asked Calverton to put in a good word for him, written “plainly and carefully.”¹¹⁶

In the midst of teaching his final classes in Institute and writing a review of Calverton’s book *Sex Expression in Literature*, Harris drove northeast about 150 miles in May and June to report on the United Mine Workers Strike, which had started April 2 and was then at an impasse.¹¹⁷ He spent a week arguing “with coal operators and officials of the United Mine Workers.”¹¹⁸ T. Edward Hill, Director of the West Virginia Bureau of Negro Welfare and Statistics, used Harris’ research to report on what

¹¹⁴ Harris to Goetz, October 3, 1924.

¹¹⁵ Harris to Goetz, n.d.

¹¹⁶ Harris to Goetz, n.d.

¹¹⁷ “West Virginia Miners Begin General Strike,” *New York Times*, April 2, 1925.

¹¹⁸ Harris to Goetz, June 18, 1925.

Opportunity editors called a “freakish situation.”¹¹⁹ The editors were surprised to find African Americans at the heart of the controversy. Both sides of the strike tried to sway new black migrants toward their side, to be either “scabs or uncompromising unionists.”

¹²⁰ African Americans were new to the mining ranks; the coal operators said this was because they had never before asked for jobs, while the union said it was because the mines “had a policy against using Negroes.”¹²¹ According to Harris, the mine operators said they feared retaliation by union members for hiring African Americans, even though members could be suspended for protesting and the unions offered examples of when the non-union mines had discriminated against blacks. This unusual experience of unions supporting black workers lent credence to Harris’ belief expressed almost a decade later at Amenia that blacks and whites should work together to fight economic discrimination, offering a real situation in which a mostly white union protested the treatment of black workers.

After reporting on the strike, Harris stopped in Baltimore to visit his fiancée, Callie Starks. When Calverton later berated him for not visiting enough while in town, Harris told him that his fiancée always preempted all other social engagements. He warned Calverton not to raise concerns about his objectivity; “This was true with you before you married I am sure. I have the same spell. Yes I am human as hell. I am not the least objective about my intended wife—nor are you about your wife, damn you.”¹²² At their one get together with wife and fiancé, Calverton and Harris shared their favorite

¹¹⁹ Editors, “Negro Miners in the Coal Strike,” *Opportunity*, July 1925, 195.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Harris to Goetz, June 18, 1925.

drink until “the very labyrinths of my viscera revolted against a further deluge of schnapps.”¹²³ Harris delighted to finally share this “throat moistener” with his friend, the promise of which had closed many of his letters the previous spring. Calverton, “in a schnapping mood,” began to praise Harris, saying his speech “loiter[ed] about [his] lips as though [he were] more anxious to kiss the communicate” than speak to him.¹²⁴ Harris dismissed this praise by telling Calverton that he talked “like a woman.” But he was roughly pleased that someone such as this man would act so towards him; “Damn you are affectionate.”¹²⁵ Without letters to his wife or descriptions of their interactions, it is difficult to know how he spoke to her. It seemed, though, like he had higher regard for his friend of the mind than he did for the woman of his heart and body. The summer of 1925 was in many ways the peak of their affection towards one another. As they moved forward, Calverton could move ever more forcibly within the circles of the New York Intellectuals, suiting his own outsized ego, while Harris’s ambitions, equally strong, were continually constrained by what an African American could achieve in the country of his birth.

When scholars debate Harris’ most famous expression—“God damn the Negro”—they neglect to consider that it was written in a letter to Calverton. That phrase will be analyzed subsequently when he wrote it in Minneapolis, but it is important to note here that Harris used Calverton as an outlet for all kinds of frustrations and affections that he could not write to another black person for the sake of “diplomacy.” Harris could also

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

use a different kind of language with Calverton, littered with epithets that would not have suited middle class persons interested in proving their respectability. He used “damn” for a range of purposes—from expressing excitement to consternation, frustration, and anger. He used it too because he *could*, not being bound by the rules of religious orthodoxy. In one humorous missive, he thanked Calverton for finally sending a copy of *Opportunity* he had been requesting for several weeks. Harris told Calverton, “You have a damned good soul which by heavens must not be sold to hell. The reason I stick so near to see that you do these things thus avoiding unintentional lies on your part is because I don’t want to see your damned good soul damned by one angry Jahweh. The devil and I are good friends but Jahweh and I are better friends. I’ll introduce you some day to him.”¹²⁶ Harris played with religious concepts for humor because he rebelled against them and because humor requires a certain boundary crossing to be effective.

In the summer of 1925, Charles Johnson came through with a job offer for Abram Harris—running the Minneapolis Urban League. This gave Harris the financial wherewithal to marry Callie Starks in August, but required him to leave her in Baltimore soon after for his new position. Following the wedding, Harris traveled to Minnesota by way of Institute and Chicago to prepare a home for his new bride and adjust to the new position. Starks Harris stayed in Baltimore for several months before joining her husband. Harris arrived in Minneapolis to find a very different world, which initially pleased him. While African American migrants from the South had begun to find their way to land of 10,000 lakes (necessitating Harris’ position at the Urban League), the black community

¹²⁶ Abram L. Harris to George Goetz, n.d , Box 7, Calverton Papers, NYPL.

was still small. Harris found white and black people polite and lacking the keen sense of race prejudice he had come to expect “in the east—even including New York, the most cosmopolitan center of civilized urban life.” He told Calverton that “frankly I like it here, perhaps this will be the end of the east for me”¹²⁷ These positive perceptions would not last.

Harris faced many challenges in leading the Urban League, in increasing its programs for new migrants, and in conducting an extensive survey of the black population, according to a portrait of Minnesota that native Minnesotan Roy Wilkins published in the *Messenger* in 1924. Future NAACP secretary and Amenia delegate, Wilkins had recently graduated from the University of Minnesota and was editor of the *Kansas City Call* in Kansas City, Missouri when he published this portrait of his home town. He claimed that the fundamental attribute of African American Minnesotans was apathy—they were content to consider how far away the south was and not fight against encroaching discrimination. Though some were successful businessmen, and many tended well kept houses in diverse neighborhoods, according to Wilkins they largely ignored the education that was open to them without discrimination and let their civil rights organizations languish. They voted Republican automatically and “despite the fact that they were laboring under many of the adverse conditions agitating the farmer-laborites, they swallowed the ‘red’ talk of the newspapers.” This was not a good omen for the success of Harris, a committed Marxist. Wilkins identified this automatic behavior in African American voters’ refusal to think through the issues; “Intelligent voting, unfortunately, requires thought, and the Minnesota Negro, not unlike voters everywhere,

¹²⁷ Abram Harris to George Goetz, July 2, 1925, Box 7, Calverton Papers, NYPL.

does not care to think.” Black Minnesotans did not participate in civil rights organizations in part because of how spread out they were; they did not live in concentrated neighborhoods, nor did black-owned businesses serve an exclusively black clientele. Because of this distance and because of strong personality traits, “as problems appear that demand thought, initiative and group action, he [“the Negro”] is helpless because he is a contented isolationist.” Even black churches, according to Wilkins, did little because “first, the Negro here is an individualist, unwilling to work in groups. ... Secondly, no amount of ‘soul-stirring’ preaching has succeeded in making congregations forget that coal is eighteen dollars a ton and winter is seven months long.”¹²⁸

Harris began immediately to be inundated with work and speaking engagements. His frustrations quickly mounted again. The new setting was not the renewal he had yearned for. He was again socializing with middle class blacks whom he did not consider his intellectual peers; he missed Starks Harris; he was overworked; he had little time for writing; and race prejudice was alive and well in Minnesota, if not as blatant as in other places.

Two main activities filled Harris’ life in Minneapolis. Upon first arrival, he set about gathering accurate sociological data about African Americans in Minnesota. If he was going to work in a social work organization, he was going to make it as scholarly as possible. In his new position as head of the Urban League, with all his credentials, he also swiftly became an object of interest and was invited to speak by myriad black and white groups. Throughout Minneapolis, different groups volubly debated economic politics. The Farmer-Labor Party was a major force in local elections. Just a year before Harris

¹²⁸ Roy Wilkins, “These ‘Colored’ United States No. 13, Minnesota: Seat of Satisfaction,” *Messenger*, May 1924.

arrived, the Communist Party had opened a spacious new headquarters with a radical bookstore. Young people flocked to meetings of the Communist Sunday Schools and Young Workers' League meetings. Even evolution, so disconcerting to William Jennings Bryant and the state of Tennessee, was being taught on college campuses.¹²⁹

The survey motivated him when all his other interactions frustrated him. As in every other place he had lived so far, he studied the local conditions—black laborers in Pittsburgh, miners in West Virginia, black migrants in Minneapolis.¹³⁰ The survey demanded a large commitment of time—“I am still bound hand and foot by this Survey of the Negro population”—but it kept him tied to his life’s work. Even so, he wrote about it to Calverton with his characteristic self-critique, couched in his desire for greatness. “This is to be a little book called the Negro in Minneapolis—nothing great, however. Just a social text for the agencies that deal with the Negro’s social problems.”¹³¹ Pure statistical data, of the form Charles Johnson and the Urban League specialized in, failed to satisfy his desire to write something with lasting significance.

Harris did not entirely agree with Wilkins’ comment that civil rights organizations were nonexistent; rather he found them existent, but mired in an ineffectual uplift philosophy. “Geo, I am tired as hell,” he wrote Calverton after one meeting. “These damned “Confab” with uplifters and superficial goody-goodies make me sicker ‘en hell. I’ve just been to another of these social workers talk. The speaker was a bourgeois intellectual of musical voice who spoke on “What is Social Work.” Hell I am going to

¹²⁹ William Millikan, *Union Against Unions: The Minneapolis Citizens Alliance and Its Fight Against Organized Labor, 1903-1947* (Minneapolis: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2003), 220.

¹³⁰ Darity, “Introduction.”

¹³¹ Abram Harris to George Goetz, December 8, 1925, Box 7, Calverton Papers, NYPL.

bed.”¹³² The culture he was mired in exhausted him. Though it was in part an exhaustion of over work (in one letter he told Calverton that “This is lunch hour and by damn I am taking it for a change”), it was more that the environment drained his intellect and his emotions. Any silence from Calverton seemed to cut Harris off from that intellectual life he longed for. After telling Calverton he “was indeed happy to get” two letters at a time, he wrote

I am supposed to speak again at 8 this evening (but I don’t think I can go). I am tired and worn and am now in that beginning stage of stupor which is always a consequence of a serious fit of devitalizing morbidity. Yes I know I need change, but my desire for it is more fundamental than yours. I want not a temporary change of physical scenery—I want a change in [fortune] of life, a change in occupation, in cultural surroundings and so forth. You donot desire such a basic change. I must have such or I’ll perish.”¹³³

In his exile in Minnesota, Harris missed being at the heart of the New Negro movement, then enlivening city centers like Harlem, Washington DC, and Chicago. His loneliness and isolation from intellectual networks was especially palpable before Starks Harris arrived. He began to develop an inferiority complex about his own abilities, which at first he was loathe to admit; “Ye Gawds who told you that I have an inferiority complex? Cant one recognize his defects without becoming ‘inferiority-complexed’”¹³⁴

Loren Miller, a student at Kansas University, captured the way many educated African Americans struggled with an inferiority complex in his 1926 prize winning essay in the *Crisis*. He found it too difficult to simply fit in with other African Americans. “For the most part they are engaged in a mad effort to conform, to be collegiate. Underneath

¹³² Harris to Goetz, n.d. but different than above [Fall 1925], Box 7, Calverton papers. This is before Callie arrives, after comment on Sex in Literature article.

¹³³ Abram Harris to George Goetz, 1925, Box 7, Calverton Papers, NYPL.

¹³⁴ Harris to Goetz, n.d. [Fall 1925], Box 7, Calverton papers. [before Callie arrives]

this outward show you find them cynical enough. They give public lip service to success and Democracy, but they sneer at it privately. However they are in the grip of a terrible inferiority complex and hope for a chance to be allowed to achieve a small success. That's all they ask." Then, Miller discovered poetry and philosophy, opening "a magnificent world of the arts, Poetry, painting, Music, Sculpture." In order to embrace this new world, he had to rid himself of "old prejudices and values," even God himself. He regretted the loss of God, "He was such a convenient old chap on which to blame everything, but he must go." That left Miller in a lonely no-man's zone. "The race above refusing you; your own race below unable to help you and you, caught between them. The one thrusting you down, the other helpless to shove you up." Perhaps, just perhaps there was a way up; "Now if your inferiority complex would let you go, you might rise, but it won't; it grips you more tightly." With no where to turn, and no God to offer consolation, "Then, because it is the path of least resistance, you hate and curse. You curse yourself, your race, all races, the Gods, all things."¹³⁵ Harris would soon echo Miller's curse.

Harris' isolation became particularly poignant when Alain Locke invited every major person in the New Negro movement to contribute to his anthology but Harris.¹³⁶ Calverton, who had been assigned to review the book for *The Nation* and *Opportunity*, jumped to his friend's defense. In private letters sent to Alain Locke, he complained about Harris' absence. In his December 30, 1925 *Nation* review, he placed Harris in the

¹³⁵ Loren Miller, "College," *Crisis*, January 1927, 138-140.

¹³⁶ Locke later recognized this omission in a letter to Calverton: "One short-coming you will not fail to notice—an adequate study of economic tendencies. Abram Harris should have been asked to do this. If there is a second edition I will see to its going in—a hurried study of this sort would have been worse than none—you will agree." Alain Locke to V. F. Calverton, October 16, 1925, Box 10, Calverton Papers, NYPL.

pantheon of black leaders. Before even addressing the book, he outlined the stages of African American development since Emancipation; two prior stages were marked first by Booker T. Washington and then W. E. B. Du Bois, “while Charles Johnson (editor of *Opportunity*), Alain Locke, and Abram L. Harris, Jr., with their plea for an objective approach to the entire race problem and an equally impartial study of things Negro and white, represent the third stage.”¹³⁷ In his February 1926 *Opportunity* review, Calverton was more pointed: “It is highly unfortunate that nothing of the work of Abram L. Harris Jr. is included in the book, because in approach his sociological studies are closely akin to those of Johnson and in substance scarcely less significant. Harris is one of the most subtle and scintillating sociologists in the Negro movement of today. Certainly ‘The Newer Negro’ cannot afford his exclusion.” After discussing those actually present in the book, naming Walter White’s essay the most “vivid and touching” and naming Countee Cullen the best poet, he concluded, “During the coming years we shall wait impatiently for the appearance of *The Newer Negro*.”¹³⁸

When Harris picked up his copy of *The Nation*, he immediately grabbed his pen and paper and wrote Calverton:

Damn your hide! There is one thing you must stop doing. Man you must not attempt to compare me with Du Bois, Johnson, Locke, Miller et al. Frankly, I must confess to being possessed of an inferiority-complex when I measure my intellectual cloth against theirs. Those fellows don’t see life as I see it. This may be yes is due to the fact that my neurological combinations are different to theirs. Were you to hold me up before any

¹³⁷ ✓ F. Calverton, “‘The Latest Negro’ review of *The New Negro*,” *The Nation*, December 30, 1925, 761.

¹³⁸ ✓ F. Calverton, “Advance of the Negro,” *Opportunity*, February 1926, 54-55.

group of evaluators of Negro origin, in the way you have in your letter,
you'd be stoned for blasphemy.¹³⁹

He would not allow himself to be placed in that group for two reasons—first, he was not sure he belonged and, second, he was not sure he even wanted to be a part of that group, because of their sentimental methods and conclusions.

To explain the first reason, why he felt he did not belong, it is important to analyze Harris' letters to the older generation. Harris had written congratulatory letters to many of the older generation, including Du Bois, Locke, and Johnson, because they modeled being a black intellectual and he needed them in his career journey. The previous spring, he had written to Du Bois that he was very pleased to see the editor's byline in the "best metropolitan magazines." Du Bois' articles "rank with those of highest intellectual tone and in the past year have been unusually unique in content and prolific in number. To my mind such work apart from your editing the *Crisis*, evidences the fact that Dr. W. E. B. Du Bois still leads Negro intellectuals."¹⁴⁰ Yet, a month later they exchanged two very awkward letters. Du Bois had criticized Harris' *Modern Quarterly* article on the "Negro and Economic Radicalism" in his column in the *Crisis* for neglecting the NAACP's stance on interracial labor cooperation. Harris wrote a letter in response to James Weldon Johnson (then secretary of the institution) explaining his position, to which Du Bois responded snidely and passive-aggressively.¹⁴¹ They

¹³⁹

Harris to Goetz, n.d. but different than above [Fall 1925], Box 7, Calverton papers. [before Callie arrives, after comment on Sex in Literature article] If and when Goetz did praise him publicly, he asked only that it be with a true measure of his abilities, not out of loyalty to their friendship.

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Abram Harris to W. E. B. Du Bois, March 25, 1925, Reel 17, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

¹⁴¹

Abram Harris to James Weldon Johnson, April 22, 1925, Reel 17, Du Bois Papers microfilm; W. E. B. Du Bois to Abram Harris, May 14, 1925, Reel 17, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

managed to overcome the subsequent silence and “correspond[ed] quite freely” in 1926, though none of these letters survive.¹⁴²

With relief, Harris thanked Locke around the same time for praising his article in the *Modern Quarterly*. “This article has caused some adverse criticism; and little favorable comment. The [result] of trying to be objective in one’s analysis! You can understand, therefore, my hearty acceptance of your congratulatory remark. Thanks for the encouragement!”¹⁴³ The next summer, Harris praised Locke during his forced absence from Howard (while he was in conflict with white president Stanley Durkee over adding a race relations class to the curriculum), “There may be other professors whose names are more often called by the populace than yours, but I do not recall a single one actually engaged in University work whose academic standing is more highly accepted—unquestionably—than is yours by outstanding college professors and liberals in the white group.”¹⁴⁴ Harris then suggested that they abandon the too narrow, too materialistic black colleges to form their own “New School for Social Research or something like it for Negroes!”¹⁴⁵ He knew Charles Johnson would be interested. Yet, when Locke failed to invite him to contribute to *The New Negro*, in its *Survey Graphic* nor its book form, he sent Calverton criticism of the philosophy professor. Why did he so fiercely criticize Locke’s brand of sentimentality only months after praising his intellect and position? Was it simply because he had been left out? Was Harris more honest when writing the

¹⁴² At least none on microfilm. Abram Harris to George Goetz, March 15, 1926, Box 7, Calverton Papers, NYPL.

¹⁴³ Abram Harris to Alain Locke, Spring 1925, 164-34-2, Locke Papers MSRC.

¹⁴⁴ Abram Harris to Alain Locke, June 29, 1925, 164-34-2, Locke Papers MSRC.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

white Calverton, who held opinions, age, and ambition in common, or to the older black intellectuals, with whom he shared a common oppression?¹⁴⁶

In subsequent letters to Calverton ruminating on the *New Negro* situation, Harris wondered whether his type of work would have fit into such a “sentimental” book anyway. Harris suggested that Locke, by omitting him or someone like him, missed an important trend among young black intellectuals; “Any objective treatment of the phenomena related to the new intellectual geist among the young black intelligentsia ought to give an adequate economic background of the present conflict between universalism and racialism in the Negro group.”¹⁴⁷ The book was entirely too focused on art and culture rather than social science, in both Harris’ and Calverton’s private opinions. Locke felt that conflict between universalism and racialism within himself. He was a confirmed cosmopolitan who urged artists like Lois Mailou Jones to explore her African roots for inspiration.¹⁴⁸ It was this urge to return to Africa that Harris viewed as sentimental and bordering dangerously near the “race psychology” he so roundly rejected the year before in West Virginia.

At his height of frustration, overworked, missing his new bride, and dismissed by the *New Negro* intellectuals, he recognized his conflicting desire to both criticize and protect his black elders:

If you view the fact that I pay a lip-service which I despise in my heart to W.E.B. Du Bois and the rest of his sentimental ilk, I suppose the damn

¹⁴⁶ Alain Locke to E. Franklin Frazier, n.d., 131 Box 12 Folder 23, Frazier Papers, MSRC.

¹⁴⁷ Harris to Goetz, n.d. [Fall 1925], Box 7, Calverton papers. [before Callie arrives]

¹⁴⁸ Ruth Edmonds Hill, ed., “Lois Mailou Jones,” in *The Black Women Oral History Project: From the Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America, Radcliffe College*, vol. 10, 10 vols., Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America (Westport, CT: Meckler, 1991).

habit of thinking they're really great is slowly crystallizing. So you can at once stand under my emotional reaction to your criticism of friend W.E.B. and the rest. Intellectually, I feel that with time and study, I could clean the whole bunch if we were simultaneously employed with a job that demanded, clear cut objective and philosophic thinking. They have met on these lyrical rhapsodies of racially-inflated ebullience. Sometime I wish I could get on the Woolworth building and say God-damn the Negro and his problems so loud that the pronunciation would ring in the ears of a universal audience.¹⁴⁹

He later explained his frustration with Du Bois—he was “a perennial whiner over the race question” and a “sentimental lyricist,” a “master militant-phrase-monger whose caustic tongue is so much given to the utterance of bellicosity that his poor little neurological system suffers paralysis when he attempts to loosen himself from racial subjectivism.”¹⁵⁰

To understand this ringing denouncement of “the Negro and his problems,” the aching curse Loren Miller had predicted, consider a letter Harris wrote that same fall to Calverton. Criticizing Calverton’s review of the *New Negro*, Harris pointed out that in many ways Countee Cullen, though more aesthetically pleasing to him, was also more of a propagandist than Langston Hughes. “Cullen’s themes are the bitter wailings of the Du Bois school.”¹⁵¹ Rather than focusing on African Americans in all their complexity, Cullen echoed Du Bois’s “hymns of hate in Dark Water or in Souls of Black Folk.”¹⁵² On the other hand, Hughes “not only forgets or should say abandons the stilted forms of poetry and rhythm, but sings of the down-most Negro just as he is and without any

¹⁴⁹ Harris to Goetz, n.d. but different than above [Fall 1925], Box 7, Calverton papers.

¹⁵⁰ Harris to Goetz, n.d.

¹⁵¹ Harris to Goetz, n.d. Box 7 Calverton papers.

¹⁵² Ibid. It is hard to imagine another black intellectual so describing one of the foundational books in African American history, Du Bois’s *Souls*.

necessary reference to his plight as a member of a submerged group. Cullen has not done this in any one of his poems.”¹⁵³ Cullen could focus only on the plight “the ‘body of this death’ with which racial circumstances has fathered him,” while “Hughes doesn’t give a damn.”¹⁵⁴

In his famous phrase “God-damn the Negro and his problems,” Harris was not in fact abandoning African Americans or his affiliation with them. Rather, he was expressing all his frustration with the limitations that fighting for the cause placed on his future. He wanted to investigate the lives of African Americans, but he did not want to be forced to do so because no other avenues were open to him. He appreciated Hughes’ poetry for finding a kind of universal humanity in the particular circumstances of black lives. In many ways, Harris’ cry of frustration to Calverton foreshadowed the mission statement of *Fire!!* penned by Hughes the following year:

We younger Negro artists who create now intend to express our individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame. If white people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, it doesn't matter. We know we are beautiful. And ugly, too. The tom-tom cries and the tom-tom laughs. If colored people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, their displeasure doesn't matter either. We build our temples for tomorrow, strong as we know how, and we stand on top of the mountain, free within ourselves.

Hughes and the other founders of *Fire!!* criticized the elder Harlem Renaissance luminaries, like Du Bois, for forcing them to use their art as propaganda by focusing only on the positive aspects of black life—those aspects that would overcome stereotypes and improve black people’s position in the United States.¹⁵⁵

153

Ibid.

154

Ibid.

155

Holloway explains this letter in the following way: “Calverton had struck a nerve. As Harris had already articulated his disgust for sycophants and race romantics, one can easily imagine the bile that rose

Hughes diverged from Harris when it came to Harris' continued emphasis on a "universality" that seemed to align neatly with white culture. Hughes characterized this kind of universality as a rejection of one's race. As explanation, he often told this story,

One of the most promising of the young Negro poets said to me once, 'I want to be a poet—not a Negro poet,' meaning, I believe, 'I want to write like a white poet'; meaning subconsciously, 'I would like to be a white poet'; meaning behind that, 'I would like to be white.' And I was sorry the young man said that, for no great poet has ever been afraid of being himself. And I doubted then that, with his desire to run away spiritually from his race, this boy would ever be a great poet.¹⁵⁶

If Hughes and Harris had ever discussed this, Hughes would probably have suggested that Harris was trying "to pour racial individuality into the mold of American standardization, and to be as little Negro and as much American as possible," though with "scholarly" and "objective" replacing "American." They would have met again in their criticism of "the Nordicized Negro intelligentsia" as Hughes described middle and upper class blacks. The difference was that Hughes could actually hang out with "'low-down folks' who nip liquor and aren't 'too learned to watch the lazy world go round,'" while Harris studied the same group through a distant, scholarly eye, never releasing his desire for intellectual communion.¹⁵⁷

Like he did not want to be forced into certain subjects of study, Harris also did not want to be forced into responsibility. Unlike the YWCA women, who were raised with

in his throat as he kowtowed to the older race leaders. Harris was not one for self-loathing, but he could not hide or deny his frustration. Harris never hated being black, he simply was disgusted by the fact that others considered his blackness to be his distinguishing characteristic. If nothing else, Harris, along with other black intellectuals of his generation, though respectable work ought to go beyond the boundaries of race in terms of subject matter and audience." Jonathan Scott Holloway, *Confronting the Veil: Abram Harris, Jr., E. Franklin Frazier, and Ralph Bunche, 1919-1941* (Chapel Hill [N.C.]: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 116.

¹⁵⁶ Hughes, "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain."

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

the mantle of responsibility and earnestly took it up in their adult lives, Harris rejected the whole idea of being responsible to “his people.” In a later letter to Calverton (who was still obsessing over Harris being left out of the *New Negro*), “Say you were damned frank in your criticisms apropos Bro. Locke and myself. I have no comment to make other than this ‘you are damned correct when you say that I’ll never lead my people.’ I have no desire to do it, either. Damn my people, if I must confess to having a people.”¹⁵⁸ How many other African Americans who had been sat down by white mentors and asked how they were going to serve “their people” (like Frances Williams, Anna Arnold Hedgeman, Du Bois, and many others) felt that kind of anger at being so pigeon-holed, but did not express it? Arnold Hedgeman did not express her anger at the time, but it came back to her a few years later. How many who accepted their responsibility to other blacks still felt angry at whites’ presumption that they should have such a responsibility? As mentioned before, Harris uses “damn” to motivate a wide range of emotions. Here, one can see flippancy, anger, frustration, and a desire to move on to new territories of analysis. He also recognized his inadequate charisma.

Though he had no desire to be a “race man,” Harris did take up positions of leadership. In addition to his research program, which took him into a variety of situations and neighborhoods, Harris acted as a mentor to “a group of Negroes who are trying to become intellectual.” When he first arrived in Minnesota he sought out other like minded thinkers, and ended up at the Modern Book Store, which hosted (primarily white) radical thinkers. The first group “wanted to meet I.W.W.’s and similar groups” but Harris hesitated to bring the two groups together, because of the level of knowledge of

158

Harris to Goetz, n.d.

the African American group. They did not have “the faintest notion as to what these movements aspire to or the social philosophy underlying them,” so he spoke to them about “Radical Social Movements and Theories” and gave them “a little drilling and indoctrination with radical philosophy.” When Harris suggested this course of education to them, they “happily, took [his] advice.” Harris feared embarrassment because, as always, their ignorance would become his own through racial stereotyping; “I did not want them to appear before the revolutionaries without the faintest idea of an interesting topic for discussion.”¹⁵⁹

His first Christmas season as a married man offered little in the way of respite. Though Starks Harris had joined him in Minnesota, on the day itself Harris wrote a thoroughly work related letter to Calverton, in their breezy friendship style. He continued to prepare articles for publication and gave several lectures that week, including ones on “The Sources of Racial Myth” to the white YWCA and on the “Negro in the American Labor Movement” to the department of economics at the University of Minnesota. A few days before these he addressed the Cosmopolitan Club in the Radisson Hotel during a luncheon. Of the many groups Harris associated with in Minnesota, one of those he least favored was “Nordic Babbity,” the middle class businessman focused on profits and staying just ahead of his neighbor. Kindred souls of Sinclair Lewis’ protagonist, George F. Babbit, filled the hall on this occasion. As per his usual style, he did not adopt a diplomatic tone or change his ideas for his conservative audience. “My candour won some friends and made a few enemies. The questioning which followed my discussion resulted in my laying bare my opinion on the race question,” which, of course, became a

¹⁵⁹ Harris to Goetz, December 8, 1925.

question of “social equality.” Harris responded to one man’s questioning by telling him “that I saw no reason why an intellectual Negro and an intellectual white should not have more in common than an intellectual Negro and a non-intellectual Negro. This I said would hold good irrespective of sex differences.”¹⁶⁰ Again, Harris situated friendship within common interests rather than in common skin color or heritage. Unlike Hughes, Brown, and Locke, who felt they needed to return to African roots to find a true spiritual connection for their art, Harris felt no such compunction, desiring instead a meeting of minds.

Tired of being in out of the way places, Harris spent the spring with alternative career choices always at the back of his mind, like he had in West Virginia the previous year. He contacted several black colleges, including Howard and Morehouse, to see if he could rejoin the teaching world. In January, President Durkee of Howard informed Harris that his name had passed his desk as the best person to teach economics. No other news came from Howard over subsequent months. Harris began to worry that he had been too frank with Durkee over his salary needs and his academic capabilities. He began to suspect “that Durkee was looking for a teacher of finance and business who has knowledge of economic theory and philosophy.”¹⁶¹ Harris did not specialize in business economics; his “field of economic teaching comprises economic philosophy, history, industrial society, labor problems and trade unionism. [...] What in the hell would I look like trying to teach real estate, commerce, and insurance? [...] Oh God damn it why

¹⁶⁰ Harris to Goetz, 1925.

¹⁶¹ Harris to Goetz, [1926], Box 7, Calverton Papers, NYPL.

worry about it? If I must stay here I stay until I am offered something better.”¹⁶² He hoped Calverton might be able to reintroduce his name to Howard’s administrators. E. Franklin Frazier tried to woo him to Morehouse (Frazier was then working at the affiliated Atlanta School of Social Work), but Harris did not think he could take a \$700 a year pay cut to join their faculty.¹⁶³ Regardless, as the spring progressed, Harris became “damned sick of the West. I long for the East, hopelessly, perhaps, for I must first secure a position there.”¹⁶⁴ Later, he threw even that much caution to the wind; “One of these days, I’ll get so damned sick of rampant individualism and all of its psychological concomitants that I’ll just pack my trunk, sojourn east and demand a position of some one.”¹⁶⁵

A few months later found the Harrises back in New York City, relieved to have returned to that intellectual and cultural environment. He started a Ph.D. program in economics at Columbia University. To pay for himself, he contacted a friend from his previous New York City sojourn, Melville Herskovits, who was an adjunct at Columbia after finishing his own PhD in 1923. Some suggest that Herskovits did not find a tenure track job right away due to anti-Semitism in hiring. Harris and Herskovits first met when Herskovits started to make contacts within Harlem for his dissertation research. He talked extensively to Sadie Peterson, a librarian in the 135th St branch of the New York Public

¹⁶² Harris to Goetz, [1926], Box 7, Calverton Papers, NYPL.

¹⁶³ Abram Harris to E. Franklin Frazier, July 30, 1926, 131-10-14.

¹⁶⁴ Harris to Goetz, [1926], Box 7, Calverton Papers, NYPL.

¹⁶⁵ Harris to Goetz, [1926], Box 7, Calverton Papers, NYPL.

Library, and she suggested that Herskovits talk to Abram Harris, among others.¹⁶⁶ In September 1926, Harris asked Herskovits if he could find him a fellowship to work with Herskovits or Boaz.¹⁶⁷ Herskovits assured Harris that “I have watched your progress with a great deal of interest” and suggested that Harris come work for himself and Franz Boas, processing data that Herskovits had accumulated the year before.¹⁶⁸

Harris processed Herskovits’ data from Howard University and Harlem during his year at Columbia. Herskovits’ research set out to disprove the then common assumption that African Americans composed a physically discrete category of people, who could be proven to be biologically inferior by measurements of various body parts (anthropometry). In contrast, internationally regarded anthropologist Franz Boas, Herskovits’ mentor at Columbia, believed that culture and environment shaped personality. A German-born Jew, Boas directed the nation’s first anthropology department at Columbia. Herskovits decided to disprove the theories about inferiority using their own methods—physical measurements and genealogy. Zora Neale Hurston and Harris collaborated on Herskovits’ research project. While Harris sat in an office crunching numbers, Hurston stood on Harlem street corners, sweetly talking passers-by into having their heads measured.¹⁶⁹ Herskovits ended up proving that African Americans ranged in skin type to such an extent that the number of mixed race

¹⁶⁶ Gershenhorn, *Melville J. Herskovits and the Racial Politics of Knowledge*, 32.

¹⁶⁷ Abram Harris to Melville Herskovits, September 2, 1926, Box 9 Folder 12, Herskovits Papers, Northwestern.

¹⁶⁸ Melville Herskovits to Abram Harris, September 7, 1926, Box 9 Folder 12, Herskovits Papers, Northwestern.

¹⁶⁹ Langston Hughes, *The Big Sea: An Autobiography* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993); Gershenhorn, *Melville J. Herskovits and the Racial Politics of Knowledge*.

individuals was much higher than the 10% listed in the census (more like 40%), in part because his data pool came from areas with a high population of people with mixed race heritage. Clearly, also, mixed race individuals could procreate (some scientists and lay folk thought mixed race children were barren, like mules). He also proved, to his surprise, that the rest of the physical features of those in his study were remarkably similar; he suggested that the United States environment—from the frequent, usually forced, mixing during slavery to the stark separation after emancipation—had created a new type of people.¹⁷⁰ When his book came out in 1928, Frazier criticized it for its small pool of subjects.¹⁷¹ Du Bois praised it; Woodson criticized the methodology.

Harris sincerely appreciated all the efforts Herskovits made on his behalf, both academically and personally. In 1933, he wrote a short note to Herskovits and his wife, Francis expressing all that he felt about those days. “Sometimes I wonder how in the hell can I demonstrate to you and Fran my appreciation of your friendship. I remember those trying days (pre-Ph.D.) at Columbia University. I had no money other than that you had gotten Boas to pay me and besides this it seemed that every man's hand was against me. In those days your friendship was genuine and I am glad that it has continued.”¹⁷² Harris and Herskovits relationship was not at the same emotional level as that with Calverton or later with Ben Stolberg. When Harris tried to introduce the different quandaries he was struggling with, Herskovits tended to send aphorisms in return. Steadily the relationship became more about exchanging scholarship, though they still enjoyed each others

¹⁷⁰ Gershenhorn, *Melville J. Herskovits and the Racial Politics of Knowledge*.

¹⁷¹ E. Franklin Frazier, “Review: The American Negro: A Study in Racial Crossing by Melville Herskovits,” *The American Journal of Sociology* 33, no. 6 (May 1928): 1010-1012.

¹⁷² Abram Harris to Melville Herskovits, October 13, 1933, Box 9 Folder 12, Herskovits Papers, Northwestern.

company, as did their wives. Harris found several other part time gigs in “Gotham,” as he called it. He was “a statistical assistant on the New York money market study at Columbia’s Department of Banking,” an assistant to Charles Johnson at the Urban League, and an editor at the *Messenger*.¹⁷³ He and Callie lived in Apt 66 at 666 St. Nicholas Ave., an address that probably brought joy to his atheist heart every time he wrote it down, in the middle of Harlem’s energetic vibe.

Harris’ friendship with Calverton cooled significantly in subsequent months. Harris no longer saw Calverton as his intellectual lifeline. Calverton, on the other hand, was beginning to achieve the success they had both dreamed of. And with that success, he began to drift away from prior friends. In 1927, Calverton debated Howard professor Kelly Miller over the topic “Is orthodox religion a handicap to the Negro’s progress?” in an event organized by Harris, Charles Johnson, and *The Messenger*. When Harris responded to Calverton’s role in the debate, the extent of their break became evident. Harris tried to subsume his personal feelings within an “objective” analysis of the debate. “Your main speech was excellent. But your rebuttal was not as good.” Calverton offered no data to counteract Miller’s eloquence. “Why did you not hold Miller up as an example of the Negro whose whole welt-anshauung has been obfuscated by religiosity. More than that you could have referred to some of your experience in Negro schools and could have analyzed the Negro church schools that Miller eulogized so eloquently.”

The real purpose of his letter came out a paragraph later. Harris wanted to check the validity of a heart-rending report he had been mulling over. At a Baltimore Forum evaluating black intellectuals, Calverton had evidently “lambasted Negro intellectuals

¹⁷³ Darity, “Introduction,” 10; Harris to Goetz, n.d .

without exception.” Harris’ friend in the audience “said that she took you to task when the discussion were opened, and that you admitted (in your conclusion) that there were a few exceptions to the things you had said.” From 1924-1926, when black intellectuals did not recognize Harris’ potential, he had depended on “my dear George” for the encouragement to continue. Furthermore, within the safety of their relationship, Harris had expressed his frustration with the narrow-mindedness of other blacks. He was an individual to Calverton, with an individual’s perceptions and opinions. Now, suddenly Calverton cast him into an undistinguished pool of “Negro intellectuals.” He criticized all black intellectuals as being inferior. In the past he might have made the statement, but always with a caveat about Harris and perhaps a few others. This used to be something that Harris and Calverton could sympathize on, but suddenly instead of criticizing together, Calverton turned his back on his friend and lumped Harris back in with all black intellectuals—precisely the thing that so frustrated him. This effectively ended the vibrant friendship between Calverton and Harris, though surprisingly Calverton’s betrayal did not end Harris’ attempts to befriend white intellectuals.¹⁷⁴ Harris chose to continue to distinguish among white intellectuals, even when Calverton decided to go to the easy place and speak of all black Americans as the same. Indeed, Calverton’s absence opened up space in Harris’ life for Herskovits and then for Ben Stolberg.

Stolberg and Harris ran with the same crowd in New York. When he first applied to Herskovits for a position on his research team in 1926, he listed Stolberg as a

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In a 1928 letter, the rift between them is clearly evident in the tone and content of a rare letter, “Dear George: Do you owe me a letter? There is a debt some where. Perhaps it is on my side. So here it is. When I started this letter I had in my mind to say My dear Helen. Then I recalled that it was not to Helen that I should be addressing a letter but to you. I attributed my error to the fact that I have become habituated to writing her instead of you. Something perhaps the scientific urge makes me confess that I prefer writing her. How is she by the way?” Harris to Goetz, August 5, 1928.

reference.¹⁷⁵ In 1927, they both appeared on the list of speakers at the Brookwood's Symposium on Negro Labor, which Harris then wrote up for the *Crisis*. A.J. Muste, director of Brookwood, presided over the meeting, which also included Charles Johnson, E. Franklin Frazier, Robert Bagnall of the NAACP, Norman Thomas of the Socialist Party, A. Philip Randolph of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, and Eva A. Frank, "that ubiquitous spirit in American liberalism."¹⁷⁶ Harris valued the idea of the conference—"And labor, particularly in America, or when confronted with matters of race, needs intellectual guidance, despite its reliance on pragmatic business unionism and its traditional 'steering clear of theories of social development'"—but disliked the ignorance about African Americans displayed by many in the gathering.¹⁷⁷ Or perhaps he disliked the way the speakers over emphasized the historical reasons for African American attitudes toward unions. After repeating these reasons, he wrote, "If they did not already know these things they were told of them more and more....There, you have the gist of what happened. Judge for yourself the momentousness of the conference."¹⁷⁸

Harris did begin to find a stronger place within black communities in New York. The black leadership recognized his talents and he joined a cohort of professors at Howard University. Finally, he found a cohort of black professors, whom he respected intellectually. That cohort fashioned themselves as the Young Turks.

¹⁷⁵ Harris to Herskovits, September 2, 1926.. Also, Harris wrote Herskovits in 1927 when he heard the news about Stolberg's new baby.

¹⁷⁶ Abram Harris, "Brookwood's Symposium on Negro Labor," *Crisis*, September 1927.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

Abram Harris spent two terrifying years away from a major metropolitan area, during which he continually probed the substance of his own worth and identity. Could he make it as an intellectual? Did his scholarship stand up to the best Americans were producing? Would race prejudice forever dictate his future paths? In West Virginia, he found the professors stultified and the students unwilling to learn. In Minneapolis, which might as well have been Sinclair Lewis's Zenith, Harris interacted with black businessmen who seemed happy to pursue small aims within the small, racially conscious community. Returning to New York did and did not make things better. He was back to work in a scholastic environment where he could work with concrete statistics and develop his own research program. Yet, his closest friend betrayed him by pulling the race card and lumping Harris in with all other black leaders. When Mordecai Johnson, the new black president of Howard University, invited him to become a professor, he could only hope that things would be better at the "Capstone of Negro Education."

Sterling Brown never suffered the same level of self-doubt or frustrations that Harris muddled through daily. He had the blessed ability to make friends wherever he went, and to see the beauty and interest that a homeless, wandering preacher, or old farmhand full of stories, offered. He did not long to live only in New York, because each day brought a new story to ferret out or a new student to meet. His struggle was to write poetry that captured what he saw and heard on a daily basis. While Langston Hughes and others were transforming black arts in Harlem, Brown had yet to get a poem published in the major black or white magazines. Would he let his driving perfectionism stop his career before it started?

Chapter 7

The Education of the Young Turks

Howard University, 1927-1931

And Ben [Stolberg], old timer, I am a new man. You and I must work like hell for the next ten years. Something will happen. I am going to write, write, study, study and work. work. work. You are going to do likewise. You must, Ben. People are reading your stuff, god bless you. Sterling Brown walked into my office this morning and showed me your article. He said that it should be placed on the bulletin board at Howard University. For heavens sake, Ben, keep at that work. Don't stop. (You must never marry)."

--Abram Harris¹

¹ Abram Harris to Benjamin Stolberg, "I got your letter this morning," 1931, Folder 3 Box 4b, Ben Stolberg Correspondence, Columbia University Special Collections.

The first of the Young Turks, Abram Harris, joined Howard University in 1927. He spent the first year lonely and despaired that he would ever find a cohort of African American scholars passionate about the life of the mind like he was. Slowly, other young professors influenced by Marx and objective scholarship began to join him at Howard. They did not immediately bond. The process was slow and difficult to record with precision. Over the course of four years, Howard University began to transform from a small school, subject to the whims of Congress, to an accredited university with an impressive array of professors. These professors brought baggage with them to the school, bruised and strong egos, difficult and happy marriages, tense and successful relationships with advisors, and high ambitions. Almost immediately, they began to build new departments, new organizations, and new friendships at Howard.

Howard University was founded in the immediate aftermath of the Civil War by the Freedmen's Bureau working with a group of parishioners at the First Congregational Church in DC. During a prayer meeting at the church on November 20, 1866, members decided to found a school that would train African Americans to become preachers. They decided to name it after General O. Howard, the head of the Freedmen's Bureau. By the time the school was commissioned on March 2, 1867, the vision had expanded to include five divisions: a normal school and academy, theology, medicine, law, and collegiate. With an initial grant of \$150,000 and annual stipends, the Freedmen's Bureau supported the new university until the bureau was discontinued in 1872. Financial crisis faced the school until the federal government decided to continue the funding in 1879. Every year,

administrators had to petition Congress to renew the grant. It is one of only three institutions of higher learning, other than the military academies, who are funded primarily by the federal government. From 1867-1919, nine white men served as president; all were ministers.²

Some presidents were more successful than others. Rayford Logan, in his 1963 history of Howard University, postulated that their success depended on the level of interaction they had had with African Americans before taking up the post.³ In 1919, the Board called another minister from England, Stanley Durkee, to serve as president. The school he inherited was not yet the “Capstone of Negro Education.” It would take growth and modernization to earn that moniker.

Durkee arrived at Howard University at an auspicious time. World War I had just concluded, and the Red Summer of 1919 was upon the country. The red in that phrase could refer to the hounding of communists by Attorney General Alexander Palmer or the red blood spilled in race riots. African American soldiers returned home with greater reason to resist; they met the implacable hatred of Southern whites who feared the changes portended by a soldiers’ confident stride and immaculate uniform. Throughout that summer, whites and blacks fought on northern and southern city streets, often at the instigation of whites, but with blacks fully willing to defend themselves. One of the worst

² Richard I. McKinney, *Mordecai The Man and His Message: The Story of Mordecai Wyatt Johnson* (Washington DC: Howard University Press, 1997), 53-54.

³ Rayford Whittingham Logan, *Howard University: The First Hundred Years, 1867-1967* (New York: New York University Press, 1969), 188.

“riots” was in Washington DC. A Howard University teacher, William Stuart Nelson, donned his cousin’s uniform and led the battle against marauding white men.⁴

Durkee had very limited experience with African Americans before he assumed the presidency of Howard. Born in Nova Scotia in 1866, he lived the majority of his life in New England. He received an A.B. from Bates College in Maine in 1897, an MA from Bates in 1905, and a Ph.D. from Boston University in 1906. For ten years, he served as a Baptist preacher before being called to the South Congregational Church in Boston in 1909. When the Howard Board of Trustees selected him as president, conferring \$7000 a year and the President’s house, they followed the long national tradition of appointing white ministers to lead black colleges.⁵ Though Howard was in the minority of black colleges in that it was not founded, nor supported, by a missionary society, it still had a strong religious presence. For instance, students were required to attend daily, compulsory chapel. As indicated previously with Sterling Brown’s experiences at Williams, such a requirement was not limited to black colleges. However, many white institutions had begun abolishing compulsory chapel decades before, starting with Harvard in the 1880s.⁶

From the day he arrived in a city still reeling from the aftermath of the riot to the day of his resignation in 1926, Durkee faced constant conflict. This was in part because he was determined to make some fundamental changes at the university. Logan

⁴ Ibid., 188-189.

⁵ Ibid., 184, 187.

⁶ “The Compulsory Chapel,” *The Harvard Crimson*, March 10, 1931, <http://www.thecrimson.com/article.aspx?ref=260026>; Kay Peterson Hall, “Phillips Brooks, Brief Life of a Boston Minister: 1835-1893,” *Harvard Magazine*, 1996, <http://harvardmagazine.com/1996/05/vita.html>; Anna Kendrick, “Harvard’s Secularization,” *The Harvard Crimson*, March 8, 2006, <http://www.thecrimson.com/article.aspx?ref=511919>.

emphasized that Durkee was the first president to focus the attention of the school specifically on black students.⁷ Under his presidency, the student body began to grow significantly with men and women. He also began to hire a significant number of black faculty—a change usually placed on Mordecai Johnson’s record. He and the Board of Trustees could do bring in black faculty because there was a significant pool of well qualified black applicants; a pool that grew ever larger over the 1920s. (Many of those qualified before Durkee’s era were hired by Dunbar High School rather than Howard.) William Leo Hansberry, African Historian and Lorraine’s uncle, Stewart R. Cooper, chemist, and Carter G. Woodson all joined the faculty at this time. Woodson’s tenure as Dean of the School of Liberal Arts and Head of the Graduate faculty was short-lived because of conflict with the President.⁸

One of the black faculty members he hired was Lucy Slowe, the first Dean of Women at Howard and friend of Juliette Derricotte and Marion Cuthbert. She had received her Bachelors degree from Howard in 1908 and an A.M. from Columbia in 1915, both in English. According to her Howard teachers, she was “instinctively a feminist.”⁹ Between her graduation from Howard and joining the faculty, she taught at various junior high and high schools in Baltimore and DC.¹⁰ After a conversation with the President to discuss the terms of her employment, Slowe sent him a letter detailing

⁷ This may have been because Logan was particularly frustrated by race-conscious principles then in the air (he never did accept “black” as a monogram to describe himself, preferring the less shade specific “Negro”).

⁸ McKinney, *Mordecai The Man and His Message*, 208.

⁹ Karen Anderson and Lucy Diggs Slower, “From “Brickbats and Roses”: Lucy Diggs Slowe, 1883-1937,” *Women’s Studies Quarterly* 22, no. 1/2 (Spring - Summer 1994): 135.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 134-35.

exactly what they had discussed so that there would be no surprises or failures to live up to their verbal agreement. The terms included

1. It is agreed that I be appointed to the position of Professor of English in the School of Education with the administrative duties of Dean of Women.
2. It is agreed that the salary for the two positions shall not be less than \$3200.
3. It is agreed that I be permitted to name a confidential Clerk whose entire time will be spent in my office.
4. It is agreed that the suite of rooms now used by the Acting Dean of Women be placed at my disposal, but that I shall not be required to live on the campus.
5. It is agreed that all women in charge of girls in the University shall be directly responsible to me in all matters affecting the girls in their care.
6. It is agreed that all policies pertaining to the women in the University shall emanate from my office with the approval of the President.¹¹

These terms are interesting for a couple of reasons. Slowe wanted to ensure that she would be considered a professor first, and only second an administrator for female students. She wanted to be paid a suitable salary for filling two positions, particularly considering that the faculty were even then trying to negotiate pay increases. This salary was at the high end of faculty salaries; the Director and Professor in the School of Music made \$1,820; the Dean of the School of Education made \$2,460.¹² The difference between these salaries and the Presidents (at \$7000) is marked. Slowe wanted to protect her life from becoming consumed by this job, so she firmly requested a clerk to help her and ensured that she would not have to live on campus. Most Deans of Women lived with the female students and closely supervised their behavior. Some even had to chaperone their students whenever they wanted to leave campus. Slowe believed that at a college the

¹¹ Logan, *Howard University*, 211.

¹² Ibid.

size of Howard, she should oversee many chaperones, not be the sole one herself. “Under such conditions as these,” she assured Durkee, “I shall be happy to work with you in building up a fine morale among the women in the University.”¹³ The board elected her Dean of Women and Associate Professor of English on June 6, 1922.¹⁴

Durkee began taking important steps toward a more scholarly faculty. In his first proposal to the Board of Trustees, he emphasized how important it was for faculty to be able to take a sabbatical at half-pay to further their scholarship and their education. He also started Howard on its path to graduate education, approving A.M. degrees for the first time. Furthermore, he eliminated previous vestiges of a more nineteenth-century approach to education—the High School Academy linked to Howard graduated its last students in 1920, the Normal School evaporated when the School of Education took its place, and a scholarly press took up residence on campus. Finally, he contributed to the improvement of the physical plant, building a green house for the botany professors, a dining hall, and a gymnasium, and renovating the Law building.

All of these advancements, however, were couched in Durkee’s condescending and disdainful attitude to the faculty. Like Fayette McKenzie at Fisk, he did not know how to interact with black faculty as peers. In particular, he fought with two major personalities on campus—Kelly Miller and Alain Locke. Long a presence at Howard, Miller was head of the Sociology department and Dean of the College of Liberal Arts. He declared in black newspapers in July 1925 that Durkee had called him a “contemptible

¹³ Anderson and Slower, “From “Brickbats and Roses,”” 136.

¹⁴ Logan, *Howard University*, 199. For more about Slowe, see Chapter 2. Treva Lindsey of Duke University is working on Lucy Slowe and other women at Howard University. Lindsey, “Climbing the Hilltop: New Negro Womanhood at Howard University, 1900-1935” Association for the Study of African American Life and History, Cincinnati, OH, October 2, 2009.

cur” during one of their conversations. (Durkee later admitted he had called Miller a “pup” but that he had been provoked by Miller threatening to wring his neck). Locke clashed with Durkee on another ground. He wanted to start a black history course at Howard, but the president refused to accept the course.

The conflict on campus expanded throughout the spring semester of 1925 with repeated student demonstrations and a full blown strike in May. Howard students explained why these demonstrations represented their coming of age as mature, serious students when they sent their support for the Fisk strike¹⁵ in the pages of the *Afro-American* in February. They explained their own recent rebellions and offered their support for Fisk students to have a say in their government:

There are three main factors to be considered in college government: (1) the president, trustees, faculty, comprising what is known as the college administration; (2) the students; (3) the alumni.

No one of these three factors can with safety usurp the rights of the other two. Where the administration rules with an iron hand as at Fisk University, student strikes, aided by sympathetic alumni, are bound to follow.

Wherever there have been student disturbances they may be traced to efforts of students and alumni to win a larger measure of participation in college control.

Howard University students on three occasions recently rebelled against rules making chapel attendance compulsory, against singing folk songs, against rules forbidding smoking, against faculty interference in outside class activities.

These are privileges according intelligent, well-balanced students in most sane American colleges. Two decades ago, it was possible for many colleges of the race to insist upon strict military discipline. Then education came largely thru philanthropy, the teachers in many instances giving their services free.

Today the college student pays his way. He has grown to the stature where he knows the blessings of self-government and academic freedom and demands them. If rebuffed, he resorts to the strike method.

The very appearance of a student strike in an American college may be taken as an evidence of growth in intelligence and independence.

¹⁵ See Chapter 2 Part 3.

It accounts for the reason why Howard students sent a resolution of sympathy to their brethren at Fisk.¹⁶

Like the discussions surrounding the Fisk uprising, Howard students discussed their concerns with heavy emphasis upon manliness. The strike finally burst onto the scene when the faculty imposed an ex-post-facto rule that 20 absences in the mandatory ROTC and physical education, combined, would result in dismissal from the university.¹⁷

When six students were dismissed, 1200 students met on May 5 in the Rankin Memorial Chapel to discuss steps forward. The recent events at Fisk weighed heavily on their minds and they called for a general strike of the campus, unless the students were reinstated and the rule abolished. Once the strike started, simply reinstating the students was not enough to quell student anger. Students carried placards around campus reading, "Autocracy must go" "Don't be a Sanhedrin" "Don't be an Uncle Tom Negro" "Is Howard to be an Army or a University" "We Will Die Fighting and be buried in our graves rather than submit to autocracy."¹⁸ The alumni joined the student protests, and began to call for Durkee's resignation.¹⁹ Unlike at Fisk, Howard students had a Student Council representing them in discussions with the faculty and administration. However, the faculty refused to discuss any of the student demands when they were in an "attitude of

¹⁶ "Why A Student 'Strike'," *Afro-American*, February 28, 1925, 11.

¹⁷ One of the reasons students objected to the mandatory ROTC was that they were being trained only as privates, not as officers or specialists. "2,000 Students Stage Strike at Howard Univ.," *Philadelphia Tribune*, May 16, 1925; "Howard Students On Strike, Durkee 500 Miles Away," *Afro-American*, May 16, 1925; "Howard Students Strike," *Afro-American*, May 16, 1925; "Howard Univ. Students Go On Strike," *Chicago Defender*, May 16, 1925; "School Strikes," *Norfolk New Journal and Guide*, May 16, 1925.

¹⁸ "2,000 Students Stage Strike at Howard Univ.," 1-2.

¹⁹ Neval H. Thomas, "President Durkee, Head Of Howard Univ. Attacked After Strike Of Students," *Pittsburgh Courier*, May 16, 1925.

revolt.” By Friday, May 16, students returned to classes, just before they would be penalized for missing too many classes.²⁰

In the following weeks, several of the professors who had supported the student strike were targeted by the administration. Just after the Fisk protests had resulted in McKenzie’s resignation, a budget committee suggested reorganizing the faculty in order to make up some budget shortfalls. As part of its reorganization, based upon recommendations of an expert from Columbia, it suggested firing five professors, including Alain Locke and Dean Kelly Miller. This stirred up a massive cry of indignation in the black press.²¹ Locke was then most famous for fostering black talent in the new outpouring of literature among the younger generation, dubbed the New Negro Renaissance or the Harlem Renaissance. The previous March, he had published his foundational survey of this rebirth in a special issue of the *Survey Graphic* (March 1925) as “Harlem: Mecca of the New Negro.” Throughout his confrontation with Durkee and the Howard Board of Trustees, Locke was arranging for the publication of an expanded version of the *New Negro*, which arrived on store shelves just in time for Christmas.²²

Miller and Locke’s ousting from the University caused great controversy in the black press, under massive front page headlines screaming, for instance, “Kelly Miller Ousted.”²³ Alumni representatives wrote in the Baltimore Afro-American that “Dr. Alain Locke, the only Rhodes Scholar of the race, means more to Howard than a whole faculty

²⁰ “Howard Strike Brought to a Close,” *New York Amsterdam News*, May 20, 1925, 1-2.

²¹ A cry strangely absent from Rayford Logan’s text. Throughout his recounting of the event, he downplays community protests, student protests, and Locke’s role. Logan, *Howard University*.

²² Dorothy Scarborough, “From Cotton Field and Levee to the Streets of Harlem,” *New York Times*, December 20, 1925.

²³ “Kelly Miller Ousted,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, June 13, 1925.

of Durkees. It takes just such a scholarly Negro professor as Dr. Locke to inspire a class of Negro students to laudable achievements. Surely, no Negro-hating white president can render his service. Howard University needs scholars, not henchmen.”²⁴ They directly confronted the rumors about Locke’s effeminacy and facts about his height by declaring that “What Dr. Locke lacks in stature he makes up in manliness,” and that ousting him was effectively declaring that “thoroughly trained Negro scholars” were not welcome at Howard.²⁵ Harris wrote to Locke en route to Minnesota to say “There may be other Negro professors whose names are more often called by the populace than yours, but I do not recall a single one actually engaged in University work whose academic standing is more highly accepted—unquestionably—than is yours by outstanding college professors and liberals in the white group.” This was high praise coming from a young man who found few mentors he respected among black college professors. He also took the opportunity to suggest that they form a “New School for Social Research” for African Americans. He had recently quit the academic scene (after a year at West Virginia Collegiate Institute) because he was fed up with the capitalist backing of education. Even so, he urged Locke to stay in academia; “The new birth which intellectual America is about to experience is a thing of which the old Negro college professor knows nothing. In fact few Negroes know little of the big social issues that engaged the attention of white liberals, and some of the most intellectually advanced Negroes. If for no other reason than to assist in emancipating the Negro’s mind, you ought by all means stick to the cap

²⁴ “Favoritism is Ascribed to H.U. Prexy,” *Afro-American*, June 27, 1925.

²⁵ Ibid.

and gown life.”²⁶ Locke did not seriously consider Harris’ suggestion of a New School, but did remain in academia. He spent a year as a visiting professor at the newly quieted Fisk University.

The disaffected professors, angry alumni, Durkee, and the board met on December 13, 1925 to put Durkee on trial. The faculty, led by Kelly Miller, brought eight different charges before the board. In particular, they highlighted Durkee’s failure to protect academic freedom. In 1920, he had worked assiduously to cultivate a Utah senator’s favor, after that senator had threatened to withdraw Congressional support. The senator objected to a book about Communism that was residing in the Howard library. Durkee not only removed the book, but praised the senator repeatedly for bringing the book to his attention. In 1924, another congressman threatened Howard’s financial support when Reverend Francis J. Grimke criticized a federation of white churches for being less than Christian by laying “greater emphasis upon the color of a man’s skin than upon his Christian character.”²⁷ Again, Durkee supported the congressman rather than his faculty member, despite the fact that no other congressman continued the discussions.

Durkee flouted his refusal to understand the opinions of African Americans when he took a concurrent presidency at Curry School of Expression in Boston for the year 1924-1925. Not only did he think so little of his Howard duties that he was willing to take on another position 450 miles away, but he accepted the role knowing that Curry did not admit black students. “Dr. Durkee’s influence at the University has been irreparably destroyed by his open affront and insult to race pride and self-respect in his acceptance of

²⁶ Abram Harris to Alain Locke, June 29, 1925, 164-34-2, Locke Papers MSRC.

²⁷ Logan, *Howard University*, 191.

the Presidency of the Curry School of Expression in Boston from which Negroes are excluded,” Miller and others explained, “and by holding these two offices concurrently for the academic year 1924-1925 just finished.”²⁸

The Board unanimously exonerated Durkee at the December trial. Even so, they took the time to poll the faculty in groups of six as to their opinion of Durkee.

Overwhelmingly, the professors did not agree with the criticism voiced. Only four spoke at some length about their opposition, including Miller and History professor Charles Wesley. Faced with a dour group of board members all staring at him, Wesley explained why, perhaps, so few were willing to speak up.

I object to being asked to testify with reference to the qualifications of a superior. The superior is not actually on trial. It would appear this is not quite a trial, but to find out the attitude of the faculty, possibly for other than mere purposes of information that may be used. I have known of cases where words have been carried to the office of the President and have been used much against the man who spoke them. I am very much afraid that men who spoke their minds here, that ultimately it would get to the ears of those in power and do some damage, as in the past. With that qualifying statement, and also with some lack of fearlessness, I would like to say I regard Dr. Durkee as more qualified for the pulpit than for Howard University. ... I say this unqualifiedly, with some experience in education.²⁹

Despite the Board’s unanimous support, Durkee tendered his resignation three months later in March 1926. Perhaps he recognized that he could no longer provide direction to the school.³⁰

Many members of the Board suggested that they should look for a black man to replace Durkee as president. Dr. Jesse Moorland, a black minister who worked for the

²⁸ Ibid., 234-35.

²⁹ Ibid., 237.

³⁰ Ibid., 231.

national YMCA, said that ten years previously he would have preferred a white man, but now “Negroes had developed such a strong racial consciousness, as indicated notably by the appointment of Negro staff members of the NAACP, that he did not ‘know that any white man can get at all the interests and difficulties that the colored people are dealing with.’”³¹ Others feared that a black man would be less likely to annually convince the Congress to continue its support. Teddy Roosevelt, Jr. dismissed these fears, saying that Congressmen were too interested in votes to worry over the color of the president of Howard (presumably he was thinking about sympathetic whites, since blacks still had little power in the ballot box, as Logan points out). In some ways the two sides compromised by calling Mordecai Johnson to the presidency. White in appearance, Johnson was a “voluntary Negro,” someone like Walter White who self-identified as a member of the black race because he had been born and raised in a black community to a family that considered itself black. Not all men and women born thus chose this path; some slipped into white communities, necessarily leaving behind many family and friends.

The man who replaced Durkee was also a pastor. Mordecai Johnson was born in 1890 in Paris, Tennessee (making him only a decade or so older than most of the Young Turks) to Reverend Wyatt and Carolyn Freeman Johnson. After a thorough elementary education, he went to Atlanta Baptist College (now Morehouse) for high school and then college in 1905. After graduating in 1911, he stayed on campus to teach English, History, and Economics, which meant he was present for the induction of John Hope—the most prominent African American college president until Johnson himself took over at

³¹ Ibid., 240.

Howard. The three affiliated colleges—Morehouse, Spellman, and Atlanta College—were perennially underfunded because the significant presence of African Americans in the administration and on the faculty scared away the wealthy white donors that contributed to Tuskegee's endowment. In 1913, Johnson pursued a second A.B. degree at the University of Chicago, followed by a Bachelor of Divinity at Rochester Theological Seminary (1921) and an S.T.M. degree from Harvard (1922). Rochester Theological Seminary was also the alma mater of Walter Rauschenbusch; he first started to conceive of the social gospel there as a student and then finalized his book *Christianity and a Social Crisis* while a professor. Rauschenbusch died in 1916, probably just before Johnson became a student at Rochester, but his legacy would have still emanated throughout the school.³²

Johnson became an ordained Baptist minister in 1916 and took up a position at the First Baptist Church in Charleston, West Virginia in 1917.³³ His school friend from Morehouse, John W. Davis, was president of West Virginia Collegiate Institute just 10 miles down the road.³⁴ There, Johnson continued to hone his talent for oratory and debate. Rayford Logan remembered, "Few persons who heard him were left unmoved, although many listeners had later reservations about the intellectual content of some of his public addresses."³⁵ He was a tall, imposing man with stiff bearing.

³² Donovan Ebersole Smucker, *The Origins of Walter Rauschenbusch's Social Ethics* (Quebec: McGill-Queen's Press, 1994).

³³ Logan, *Howard University*, 245-49.

³⁴ McKinney, *Mordecai The Man and His Message*, 40.

³⁵ Logan, *Howard University*, 250.

Howard University was by far the largest black college when Johnson took over at the helm, though all black colleges had experienced a significant growth in enrollment over the past five years (see Appendix 3). Johnson described the school in his 1927 inaugural address: Howard had an excellent faculty with black and white members. To counteract the perception that whites taught at black colleges because they could not succeed at white colleges, Johnson assured his audience, “the white members of [the faculty] constitute some of the most distinguished men engaged in educational work in the United States.” Working alongside the white faculty, African American professors “represent the largest body of competent colored scholars engaged in an educational enterprise anywhere to be found in the civilized world.” The campus’s buildings and grounds were “valued at three millions of dollars.” All of this was overseen by “a bi-racial board of trustees composed of some of the ablest white citizens of the country, functioning without condescension and in harmony with graduates of Howard University and other educated Negroes.”³⁶ The final statement was more a wish than it was yet true on a campus struggling to recover from Durkee’s presidency. Johnson would not receive a reprieve from close scrutiny just by being the first black president of Howard. Nor did his presence immediately ameliorate the frustrations of students and alumni with the Board.

Howard is set high on a hill, less than a mile from the center of black Washington—U Street and Cardozo, and three miles north of the Mall. Washington DC had an established black civil society dating back to before the Civil War. The city only became officially segregated during Woodrow Wilson’s administration. By the time

³⁶ Mordecai Johnson, “The Far Horizon: Howard,” *Crisis*, August 1927, 201.

Mordecai Johnson arrived, two entirely separate commercial, social, and economic spheres existed.³⁷ The *Crisis* described the business center of the “Secret City:” “There are three gift shops, and several tea shops, private kindergartens, and dancing schools, and among the druggists are William H. Davis, W. L. Board, Benjamin H. Hunter and Vincent Thomas. There is a Reid's Music Corner and Maxwell's Publishing and Supply Company. One eats at Thurston's.”³⁸

Blacks and whites rubbed elbows rarely—in the political sphere, where the white controlled Congress oversaw city policy and a few African Americans found employment, and sometimes in Howard’s own halls, when whites came to speak. Students arriving on trains from all across the country disembarked at Union Station, catching a bus up Georgia Avenue, which ran along the side of Howard’s hill. At Howard Place, students stepped off the bus and turned east, climbing one last block before they passed through finely wrought metal gates. On their immediate right was the chapel, and next to it the Main Building, three stories tall with a basement of granite and walls of white brick (this building was demolished in the 1930s to make way for the Founders Library, home now to the Moorland Spingarn Research Center). To their left was a vast spread of grass and paths known as the Yard, center of casual socializing for all the years the university sat on top of its hill. The university also had dormitories, a medical building, Freedmen’s Hospital, and a football field. On one side was the Miners Teacher College, then a separate institution.

³⁷ Jonathan Scott Holloway, *Confronting the Veil: Abram Harris, Jr., E. Franklin Frazier, and Ralph Bunche, 1919-1941* (Chapel Hill [N.C.]: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 35.

³⁸ “The Secret City: An Impression of Colored Washington,” *Crisis*, June 1932.

Johnson started his administration with several major plans for transformation, all bent towards creating a “national educational center to develop a series of studies for the purpose of discovering for the Negro and for the country what the actual situation of the Negro is in general, where he is going, what is in the way of him getting there and how he may get there with the good will of the rest of the community.”³⁹ This denoted quite a change from just a few years previously, when Locke was banned from teaching black history. After his year at Fisk, Locke had rejoined Howard, even though many institutions would have liked to hire him.

At his first meeting with the Board, February 1, 1927, Johnson raised four matters, all financial—providing the Medical School with an endowment, particularly by matching the grant offered by the General Education Board; raising an endowment and building fund for the School of Religion; retiring the University’s deficit; increasing the University’s income to both raise teachers’ salaries and hire more teachers. He began to immediately lobby the US Congress for an automatic annual appropriation for Howard. The president, then, would be free from coming to the Congress each year, hat in hand. Furthermore, this assured income would provide a measure of academic freedom, because administrators and faculty would not fear that their words, or a stray library book, could cause an immediate cessation in funding. The Congress passed the law for automatic appropriations on December 13, 1928.⁴⁰ As the Young Turks learned, however, this ensured appropriation did not remove the Congress’ watchful eyes from their activities.

³⁹ Johnson, “The Far Horizon: Howard,” 201.

⁴⁰ Logan, *Howard University*, 258.

In addition to his financial plans, Johnson began reorganizing the faculty and increasing their numbers. One of his primary goals was to develop a substantive Social Sciences Department. From 1927-1935, Johnson hired fourteen professors in the Liberal Arts College alone. This meant that there were eighty-seven total professors—sixteen were full professors, fifteen associate professors, twenty-three assistant professors, twenty-six instructors, and seven assistants.⁴¹ When he arrived at Howard in 1926, Johnson remembered the sharp-tongued young professor from WVCI that he had counseled and confronted two years before; Abram Harris joined the faculty of the premier black college in the fall of 1927.

1927-1928 School Year

When Harris arrived at the school, the majority of the faculty was still part of an older generation from whom he had felt alienated in West Virginia and Minnesota. He missed his New York friends and the vibrancy of culture there. Harris was lonelier at Howard his first year than he had expected.⁴² Continuing his epistolary trend, Harris turned to Melville Herskovits, who had been his friend and advisor in New York City. Herskovits urged him to talk with Alain Locke and the great biologist Ernest Everett Just, the two professors he had liked the most during his own stay at Howard two years before.

⁴¹ Ibid., 269.

⁴² He did seem to have one friend on the faculty—Dr. Valaurez Spratlin, Spanish professor and Chair of Romance Languages at Howard from 1927-1961. He wrote the first biography of Juan Latino, the "Ethiopian Humanist." Spratlin visited Harris in New York City before departing for Madrid the summer of 1927. Abram Harris to Melville Herskovits, June 30, 1927, Box 9 Folder 12, Herskovits Papers, Northwestern; Jose Ferrer Canales, "Valaurez Burwell Spratlin (1897-1961)," *Hispania* 45, no. 3 (September 1962): 446-450; Henry Louis Gates and Maria Wolff, "An Overview of Sources on the Life and Work of Juan Latino, the 'Ethiopian Humanist'," *Research in African Literatures* 29, no. 4 (Winter 1998): 14-51; Robin D. G. Kelley, "'But a Local Phase of a World Problem': Black History's Global Vision, 1883-1950," *The Journal of American History* 86, no. 3 (December 1999): 1045-1077.

When many in the community were legitimately concerned that Herskovits wanted to measure their bodies, Locke and Just explained the need for his research.⁴³

When Herskovits inquired if he had met Just, Harris wrote him that “Yes I Have met Dr. Just. Have not talked with him. These people here are quite sequestered you know! Washington intellectuals I am beginning to believe are much different from my New York friends. The former lead lives of contemplation and have no time to talk inconsequential pish-posh.”⁴⁴ The famed biologist in particular tended to lead a secluded life, interested more in his research than in developing friendships with other professors. He was in high demand as an example of a black man who could succeed in a “white” field; he was the first to win the Spingarn medal for achievement.⁴⁵ For a man always interested in rugged academic talk, Harris was perhaps surprised to find himself wishing for the jokes and jibes lacing chats in New York.

Though Harris had not found a cohort among the Howard professors, he was still reluctant to search out companions within the community surrounding Howard. Harris complained to Herskovits that the black middle class in DC was more interested in football games than academics. This complaint arose because the main event of fall 1927, his first quarter there, was a football strike. Johnson decided when he was hired that he would decrease the school’s emphasis upon football in favor of academics, so the administration had decided to stop paying the players’ room and board. So the players

⁴³ Jerry Gershenhorn, *Melville J. Herskovits and the Racial Politics of Knowledge* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004).

⁴⁴ Abram Harris to Melville Herskovits, November 10, 1927, Box 9 Folder 12, Herskovits Papers, Northwestern.

⁴⁵ Kenneth R Manning, *Black Apollo of Science: The Life of Ernest Everett Just* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983).

stopped playing. This decision aroused a lot of ire among students, alumni, and the community. Though the administration did not back down, the alumni rallied around and raised enough money to pay for the players' living expenses.⁴⁶ In a swift reverse from his previous letter, longing for some inconsequential banter, Harris told Herskovits that "These black folk of the middle class are more determined to have football games and the imoral [sic] display which accompanies them than they are to have serious academic life. I think the situation hopeless. As an amateur educator, I feel that the journey I have decided on traveling is a thorny one. God help the Negro who would be intellectual in a clime like Washington."⁴⁷

In reply, Herskovits tried to soothe his worries. Just was temperamental (but worth getting to know) and Locke was enthusiastic about Harris—Harris was reasonably happy and that was all anyone could ask for, in Herskovits' opinion. He suggested that Harris do like Herskovits himself had done at his own new position at Northwestern—stop "bemoaning" the football team and simply get season tickets.⁴⁸ Herskovits seemed unable to understand the serious critique of the bourgeoisie that Harris was making. This is an example of Herskovits' condescension and inability to access Harris' emotions in the same way that Ben Stolberg or Calverton did—and why their relationship never

⁴⁶ Logan, *Howard University*, 277.

⁴⁷ Abram Harris to Melville Herskovits, October 22, 1927, Box 9 Folder 12, Herskovits Papers, Northwestern.

⁴⁸ Melville Herskovits to Abram Harris, November 16, 1927, Box 9 Folder 12, Herskovits Papers, Northwestern.. Just knew a lot more than the biology that had made him famous. During his undergrad days "at Dartmouth College during four years [he] took all courses in history offered. Since [his] graduation in 1907 [he had] done a great deal of reading in history and have kept up with the better works especially European History." EE Just to Mr. Lewis Gannett of the New York Herald-Tribune (Du Bois Prize), March 2, 1933 Reel 39 Du Bois Papers.

developed to the same extent, becoming more about exchanging scholarship than anything else.⁴⁹

Harris did not cease his scholarship upon moving to Howard. His frustration with the community had given him renewed vigor to start the article on the “The Prospects of Black Bourgeoisie.” He raised this article with Herskovits, hoping that Boaz’s protégé could put in a good word with H.L. Mencken, editor of the *American Mercury*. He hoped that this article would be the one that would get further than the reader’s desk, where all his other submissions to Mencken had landed.⁵⁰ Herskovits eagerly agreed to champion Harris’ article with Mencken.⁵¹ Thanks to this intervention, Mencken agreed to read the article. Communicating his sincere thanks to his “worthy friend!”, Harris also recognized the older man’s suggestions regarding Just and Locke. He knew they were valuable to Howard University, “But, Mel, I suppose that I am a least bit indifferent to people and will not make many close contacts, particularly with people whose lives are always out of whack.”⁵² By out of whack, Harris referenced the rumors that flew about both men’s sexual liaisons (Just with women other than his wife, Locke with younger men). Harris’ closest intellectual friends had thus far been white; it was hard for him to imagine finding others like himself, even at the “capstone” of black education. What a disheartening beginning.

⁴⁹ It is important to note, however, that only in Herskovits’ case do we have both sides of the correspondence, because he kept carbon copies. While Stolberg and Calverton preserved Harris’ letters and bequeathed them with their papers to Columbia University, they did not have copies of their own letters. There is no collection for Harris’ papers, nor has anyone stepped forward with them.

⁵⁰ Harris to Herskovits, October 22, 1927.

⁵¹ Melville Herskovits to Abram Harris, October 26, 1927, Box 9 Folder 12, Herskovits Papers, Northwestern.

⁵² Abram Harris to Melville Herskovits, January 7, 1928, Box 9 Folder 12, Herskovits Papers, Northwestern.

After the autumn leaves had finally abandoned their perches, Callie had an attack of appendicitis, her second, and had an operation on December 3. She slowly recovered, but before she resumed her household duties, Harris was “cook, bottle-washer, laundress, nurse, husband, teacher in the day school and teacher in the evening school,” he informed Herskovits. “It seems that trouble does last always. Yet it could be worse, for at one time we thought Callie would ‘pass over Jordan.’” Despite being rather indignant at having to take up such feminine duties, Harris proudly proclaimed that he had made “a delicious currie of turkey” for Sterling Spero when he visited during the annual meeting of the American Economic Association over the winter break. He even taught Spero how to prepare it himself.⁵³ Spero was a white friend and classmate from Columbia University. Harris had been worrying just the month before to Herskovits that he had lost contact with Spero. He was happy to attend AEA sessions and “gossip in the interim” with Spero.⁵⁴

Within the next few months, Spero and Harris began to collaborate on a research project sponsored by Columbia University Council for Research in the Social Sciences, which had also funded Herskovits, on African American workers.⁵⁵ Professors Franz Boas and Wesley C. Mitchell arranged for the grant.⁵⁶ This research eventually resulted in *The Black Worker*, published within weeks of Harris receiving his doctorate. Both

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Abram Harris to W.E.B. Du Bois, June 11, 1930, Reel 33, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

⁵⁶ Sterling D Spero and Abram Lincoln Harris, *The Black Worker: The Negro and the Labor Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931), vii.

Spero, in political science, and Harris, in economics, used their contributions to the book as the thesis portion of their doctoral requirements.⁵⁷

That winter meeting reinvigorated their partnership, particularly around the issue of the black miners in West Virginia.⁵⁸ Harris had written the article about the West Virginian miners strike at the end of his WCVI tenure a year and a half prior, but had not returned to the topic of miners. Charles Wesley, history professor at Howard, had recently been funded to complete a study on black miners that Spero had not finished. Between this, and Carter Woodson asking for his “New Negro Worker in Pittsburgh,” Harris felt stymied. “My experience of last year has taught me to be damned wary of these professional researchers,” he opined to Herskovits. “I do not know what Wesley is going to do -- and as a matter of fact, I care a god-damn little about what any of them will do. It seems to me that the Research Council could have selected a better qualified person to head up such an undertaking as the Negro in Industry.”⁵⁹ Harris had good reason to feel cautious about sending his work to Woodson, who had a reputation for stealing work from younger scholars.⁶⁰

Herskovits prodded Harris to do the research instead of Wesley. At one point in the fall, it even looked like Wesley might try to employ Harris, but Harris was unsure of the older man’s intentions and abilities and did not further the partnership (even though at

⁵⁷ Spero and Harris, *The Black Worker: The Negro and the Labor Movement*.

⁵⁸ Melville Herskovits to Abram Harris, October 19, 1927, Box 9 Folder 12, Herskovits Papers, Northwestern.

⁵⁹ Abram Harris to Melville Herskovits, November 19, 1927, Box 9 Folder 12, Herskovits Papers, Northwestern.

⁶⁰ He more frequently did this to researchers who worked for him, like Lorenzo Johnston Greene and Rayford Logan. See Pero Gaglio Dagbovie, *The Early Black History Movement, Carter G. Woodson, and Lorenzo Johnston Greene* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007).

that point he had not heard from Spero since leaving New York).⁶¹ Herskovits was exceedingly pleased and interested to run into Spero in New York in February and “learn that your project seems to have come to life again and that Wesley's did not go so well.”⁶²

After he had talked to Herskovits about the article on Black Bourgeoisie for Mencken, Harris wanted someone to give him careful feedback. Without anyone at Howard he yet trusted, Harris sent the article to Charles S. Johnson for critique. Harris was horrified when Johnson, rather than providing that critique, went ahead and published it without permission in *Opportunity's* anthology *Ebony and Topaz*.⁶³ Johnson edited it without Harris' approval and without sending him a final draft.⁶⁴ Harris explained this when Herskovits asked why he did not use the entrée he had established to Mencken, but assured him that he would use the opening for a new article.⁶⁵ Someone he called a “Black Bourgeois” had recently written him asking for an apology “for Negro middle-class strivings--etc...There! I shall do so but brother Bourgeois will not see it in

⁶¹ Melville Herskovits to Abram Harris, November 30, 1927, Box 9 Folder 12, Herskovits Papers, Northwestern.

⁶² Melville Herskovits to Abram Harris, February 29, 1928, Box 9 Folder 12, Herskovits Papers, Northwestern.

⁶³ Charles Spurgeon Johnson, *Ebony and Topaz, a Collectanea* (New York: Opportunity, National urban league, 1927).

⁶⁴ Harris to Herskovits, January 7, 1928.

⁶⁵ Melville Herskovits to Abram Harris, January 11, 1928, Box 9 Folder 12, Herskovits Papers, Northwestern.

letter form.” One can almost see Harris rubbing his hands, preparing for the fight and trouncing to follow.⁶⁶

Frustrations about Howard’s resources arose again and again. The offices had no phone service. When Dean Slowe and Professor Brady requested telephones in February, 1925, under the Durkee administration, the request was denied.⁶⁷ When Herskovits tried to call Harris on a quick trip to DC for a conference, he could not get through and jokingly? rudely? inquired, “What is the matter with Howard, don't they have telephone service?”⁶⁸ Harris finally decided to install a telephone in his office after his friend came to visit Howard and wandered the halls looking for Harris. Herskovits ran into Just and the two of them continued to search for Harris but never did find him.⁶⁹ In 1936, Ralph Bunche complained to Dean Davis that the Political Science Department had no typewriters, no secretaries, and no research assistants, even though they served 200 students.⁷⁰

Harris spent his first year at Howard in much the same mental zone as his previous years, except his brief stints in Manhattan. He felt alienated and under appreciated, and poured all his feelings of frustration into his scholarly work. With great disappointment, Harris wondered if DC would make as incomplete a home as Institute

⁶⁶ Abram Harris to Melville Herskovits, January 20, 1928, Box 9 Folder 12, Herskovits Papers, Northwestern.

⁶⁷ Logan, *Howard University*, 200.

⁶⁸ Herskovits to Harris, February 29, 1928.

⁶⁹ Abram Harris to Melville Herskovits, November 25, 1930, Box 9 Folder 12, Herskovits Papers, Northwestern.

⁷⁰ Charles P Henry, *Ralph Bunche: Model Negro or American Other?* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 36.

and Minneapolis had. Would he ever meet African Americans his age with whom he could converse like he had with Calverton, Stolberg and, briefly, with Herskovits?

1928-1929 School Year

While Harris was settling into Howard, Mordecai Johnson continued to ponder his proposed expansion of the social sciences. Johnson asked Locke on several different occasions to suggest individuals who would be good to hire. Locke complied with enthusiasm, because he was able to suggest men he trusted to be brilliant (if not always polite). He did not want to seem too much like he was setting up his friends, so he told Johnson that he sent the suggestions for multiple disciplines only because Johnson had asked for them; on his own he would have submitted suggestions only in philosophy, his own department. Locke advocated not only for the expansion of social science research at the university, but also for the development of a department of African Studies. Echoing Johnson's own words in his 1926 inaugural address, but pushing it global, Locke wrote Johnson in June 1928 that "some center of American Negro education must eventually give special attention to the race problem in its international aspects and become the clearing house in America for information and counsel about the Negro people and their situation in the world."⁷¹ Locke hoped Johnson would hire more teaching assistants, particularly to free himself to promote "without and within the race group a more intelligent understanding of our cultural past and its present-day possibilities."⁷² Locke

⁷¹ Alain Locke to Mordecai Johnson, June 9, 1928, 164 Box 41 Folder 1, Locke Papers MSRC.

⁷² Ibid.

wanted his extensive trip to Africa, in the works for fifteen years, to finally come to fruition. However, the African Studies Center at Howard had to wait till 1953 for its birth and Locke had to wait many years to travel to Africa.⁷³

In August 1928, Locke sent “a memorandum on promising younger men (and women for that matter)” to Johnson, urging him to recognize that “we need another calibre of scholarship at Howard” because, in his opinion, “the bulk of the teaching force at Howard has been recruited from competent but untalented students, with no liberal or humane outlook on life and little teaching personality.” Locke urged “creative talent and insight, even at the expense, as it must often be—of temperament and slight eccentricity.” He introduced Johnson to his talented friends and protégés, including a former student studying political science at Columbia, Arthur Fauset (Jessie’s brother), who had received an A.M. in Anthropology from the University of Pennsylvania. He also suggested Albert Dunham (Katherine’s brother) and Arthur Davis, both extremely promising students of philosophy, and Zora Neale Hurston, another former student whom Locke suggested for her work with anthropology professor Franz Boas (not for her as-yet-unwritten novels).

For the important field of Political Science and Government, Locke suggested Ralph Bunche based purely on his record as an honor graduate from UCLA and as a PhD student at Harvard.⁷⁴ Percy Julian, a world-renowned chemistry professor at Howard, also urged Johnson to hire Bunche.⁷⁵ For the English department, Locke brought up

⁷³ [http://wwwFOUNDERS.howard.edu/African history.html](http://wwwFOUNDERS.howard.edu/African%20history.html)

⁷⁴ Alain Locke to Mordecai Johnson, August 3, 1928, 164 Box 41 Folder 1, Locke Papers MSRC.

⁷⁵ Brian Urquhart, *Ralph Bunche: An American Life*, 1st ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1993), 44.

Sterling Brown's name yet again. He had already mentioned him several times, because "the department needs several men who are creative writers, and Brown is one of the few combining academic competence with creative ability and interest."⁷⁶ Brown and Bunche were the only individuals in this group eventually hired. Strangely, Locke did not mention E. Franklin Frazier, who had been a favorite student of his at Howard from 1912-1916 and who provided one of the few social science essays for *The New Negro*.⁷⁷ Perhaps this was because Frazier had just gone through the white hot flames of Southern anger in Atlanta, and Locke either knew he would be reluctant to return South so soon, wished to see him finish his degree at the University of Chicago, or was reluctant to bring such a flame-thrower to Howard (the last seems least likely, given Locke's willingness to face conflict).

Locke lobbied hard on the behalf of Rayford Logan. In December, Locke urged Johnson to develop "the field of government and political science[, which] is manifestly important." For other positions in this department, Locke suggested "Mr. Rayford Logan, now teaching at Virginia Union University, Richmond, Va." Locke summarized Logan's many experiences over the past decade since he had graduated from Dunbar High School and Williams College—serving in France, translating for the Pan-African Congresses, and finishing his Masters Degree at Williams. His research on "problems of colonial

⁷⁶ Locke to Johnson, August 3, 1928.

⁷⁷ E. Franklin Frazier to Alain Locke, June 12, 1916, 164 Box 30 Folder 27, Locke Papers MSRC; E. Franklin Frazier to Alain Locke, June 10, 1918, 164 Box 30 Folder 27, Locke Papers MSRC; E. Franklin Frazier to Alain Locke, August 22, 1920, 164 Box 30 Folder 27, Locke Papers MSRC; E. Franklin Frazier to Alain Locke, 1925, 164 Box 30 Folder 27, Locke Papers MSRC; E. Franklin Frazier to Alain Locke, May 31, 1925, 164 Box 30 Folder 27, Locke Papers MSRC.

government and administration” had already included “a visit of enquiry to Haiti.”⁷⁸

Logan’s life history and interests spoke deeply to Locke, cosmopolitan to his bone and increasingly interested in African based cultures abroad.

Locke imagined that Logan, then deep enmeshed in a study of Haitian history and politics, would join the African Studies Center he was trying to build. Locke became particularly excited about Logan after he published an article on the Mandates System in the *Journal of Negro History*.⁷⁹ Locke had himself been struggling for a year and a half to write just such an article. In the summer of 1927, he was sponsored by the Foreign Policy Association (FPA) to make a study of the Mandates system of the League of Nations in Geneva, with the expectation that he would write a full report upon his return. The FPA (an organization that many of the Young Turks associated with) was formed in 1919 to promote Wilsonian democracy worldwide and to educate the American public, ostensibly in a nonpartisan way, about foreign affairs. Winston Churchill was among the founding members, along with several editors of major news magazines like the *Nation* and the *New Republic*, and Eleanor Roosevelt served on its Board of Directors in 1928. Raymond Buell was hired in 1927 as the director of research. He developed a close relationship with Ralph Bunche and Rayford Logan, as well as a nodding acquaintance with Locke and Du Bois.

⁷⁸ Alain Locke to Mordecai Johnson, December 6, 1928, 164 Box 41 Folder 1, Locke Papers MSRC.

⁷⁹ Rayford W. Logan, “The Operation of the Mandate System in Africa,” *The Journal of Negro History* 13, no. 4 (October 1928): 423-477.

Buell was a Princeton educated political scientist, who had published widely since joining the Harvard faculty in 1922.⁸⁰ He had also spent two years travelling throughout Africa, 1925-1927, where he studied how Africans lived under different colonial systems. Before his trip, he sought out Du Bois for advice on traveling in Africa. In 1928, he published a book based on this research called *The Native Problem in Africa*.⁸¹ In his *Crisis* review, Du Bois wrote of the book that "the spirit of the author, while not altogether satisfactory, is good. He means to be fair, and while he does not see that political power and economic reform are the only solutions for the problems of Africa as they are for those of Europe and America, yet he does realize that the present attitude of the white world toward the black world is hastening a crisis."⁸²

The FPA sponsored Locke to go to Geneva to study the Mandate system. Locke particularly sought support for a trip to Africa to study conditions first hand, but was thwarted by the Association's fear. Buell wrote another member that "I have seen Mr. Locke and have been well impressed. Assuming that this project is to be carried out, I

⁸⁰ Raymond L. Buell, "Alsace-Lorraine and "Economic Imperialism"," *The North American Review* 207, no. 746 (January 1918): 156-158; Raymond L. Buell, "Political and Social Reconstruction in France," *The American Political Science Review* 15, no. 1 (February 1921): 27-51; Raymond L. Buell, "France and the Vatican," *Political Science Quarterly* 36, no. 1 (March 1921): 30-50; Raymond L. Buell, "The Washington conference" (Princeton University, 1922); Raymond L. Buell, "The Development of the Anti-Japanese Agitation in the United States," *Political Science Quarterly* 37, no. 4 (December 1922): 605-638; Raymond L. Buell, "Some Legal Aspects of the Japanese Question," *The American Journal of International Law* 17, no. 1 (January 1923): 29-49; Raymond L. Buell, "The Development of Anti-Japanese Agitation in the United States," *Political Science Quarterly* 38, no. 1 (March 1923): 57-81; Raymond L. Buell, "Again the Yellow Peril," *Foreign Affairs* 2, no. 2 (December 15, 1923): 295-309; Raymond L. Buell, "The Opium Conferences," *Foreign Affairs* 3, no. 4 (July 1925): 567-583; Raymond L. Buell, "The Struggle in Africa," *Foreign Affairs* 6, no. 1 (October 1927): 22-40; Raymond L. Buell, "The Destiny of East Africa," *Foreign Affairs* 6, no. 3 (April 1928): 408-426; Raymond Leslie Buell, "The Intervention Policy of the United States," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 138 (July 1928): 69-73; Raymond L. Buell, "Foreign Policy," *The American Journal of Sociology* 34, no. 1 (July 1928): 62-74; Raymond L. Buell, "Black and White in South Africa," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 140 (November 1928): 299-305.

⁸¹ Raymond Leslie Buell, *The Native Problem in Africa* (New York: Macmillan, 1928).

⁸² W.E.B. Du Bois, "The Browsing Reader," *Crisis*, February 1929, 48.

believe that he is the best man available to do it.” He could see the value “in utilizing a negro to interpret the League to the negro population of America.” Yet, Buell could not support Locke’s proposed trip to Africa, because “I can see a good many dangers in sponsoring the trip of a negro into Africa for the purpose of making an investigation of conditions. You are already aware of the feeling of European governments toward the entrance of negro missionaries from the United States.”⁸³ It is important to note that despite being a specialist in African history, Buell did not capitalize “Negro.” A few years later, when Buell was advising Bunche on how to enter Africa, they would encounter these same difficulties of the colonial powers worrying about African Americans teaching Africa about their human rights. By then, Buell had changed his opinion about African Americans researching in Africa and was instrumental in helping Bunche obtain the necessary visas and connections.

Though he returned to Howard filled with ideas about the Mandate System, and surprisingly more positive about the League than he had expected, Locke could not write the promised article. (He poked around in the internal affairs of the International Labor Organization’s Committee on Native Labor right before that body hired Mabel Byrd; he may have been important in gaining her her position). He hemmed and hawed for a year and a half, traveling again to Geneva on his own expense, before Buell finally demanded a document. He provided what he called an “albatross” and what Buell deemed unsuitable for publication “from either a literary standpoint or from the standpoint of

⁸³ Raymond Buell to Dr. A. L. Warnshuis, June 2, 1927, Micro 48 Reel 1, P91-2000, FPA Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society.

material.”⁸⁴ Locke explained to Paul Kellogg, a member of the *Survey Graphic* editorial board who had first introduced him to the organization, that he was simply not good at writing a technical report, and besides “Buell had himself milked that cow.”⁸⁵ He was not surprised when Buell ripped his report to shreds, though he thanked Kellogg for his kind support. Instead, he offered a precise, “Buellesque report” written by the “brilliant young chap,” Rayford Logan, teaching at Virginia Union University.⁸⁶ Locke told Kellogg, he had his eye on Logan for his planned African Studies Center; “plans are maturing for what to me was the real outcome of the trip—the African Studies program at Howard. President Johnson is keenly interested—and he is almost in sight of the money. The Rosenwald Foundation has just given \$80,000 for research in Biology--\$15,000 annually for a period of five years. Logan is one of the men we have in view when the time comes.”⁸⁷ The money did not come through and Logan, international traveler and historian, waited ten more years to join Howard’s faculty.

Only one more of the Young Turks joined Harris in 1928—Ralph Bunche—though several new faculty members joined the university. Among those particularly heralded by the *Afro-American* and *Chicago Defender* was linguist and professor of German Dr. Eva B. Dykes, who moved to Howard from Dunbar High School. She had

⁸⁴ Alain Locke to Paul [Kellogg], 1928, 166 Box 15 Folder 15, Logan Papers MSRC; “Meeting of the Board of Directors” (Colonial Yacht Club, NYC, November 14, 1928), Micro 48 Reel 1, P91-2000, FPA Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society.

⁸⁵ Locke to [Kellogg], 1928.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

been one of three women to receive the Ph.D. in 1921.⁸⁸ Two other PhDs joined the faculty, as well as many who were pursuing the degree.

Bunche and Harris had little in common at first and seemed to take several years to warm up to each other. It is difficult to pinpoint just when they became friends. Harris does not mention Bunche in any of his many letters until after the Amenia conference; warm, friendly letters between the two of them are not saved by Bunche until 1935, while Harris visited New York.⁸⁹ But then, they would not have needed to exchange letters while on the same campus. Bunche was outgoing where Harris was an introvert. Bunche was conciliatory where Harris thrived on conflict. Bunche loved athletics, while Harris sneered at them for taking over intellectual thought. Harris left rich, undulating letters of a deep inner life; Bunche, even in extensive diaries, wrote about the people and events around him, not about the shape of his own psyche.⁹⁰ Bunche was intrigued by the personal politics and arguments at Howard; Harris found them frustrating and a distraction from his work. Harris was five years older than Bunche, a significant gap when they both joined Howard (Harris at 29 and Bunche at 24). Harris had had many frustrating years between leaving Virginia Union University and joining Howard, while Bunche seemed to have an academic golden ticket from UCLA to Harvard to Howard.

Yet they shared some important commonalities. Both astounded their professors at premier northern institutions and were intensely competitive. Both had had genuine, fruitful friendships across the color line. Also, neither was a member of a black fraternity,

⁸⁸ "Changes in H.U. Faculty," *Afro-American*, October 6, 1928; "Howard Gets New Scholars to Improve School's Rating," *Chicago Defender*, October 27, 1928.

⁸⁹ Harris does invite Bunche to meet with Herskovits at his home while Bunche was planning his trip to Africa. More on that in the next section

⁹⁰ See his 1937-1938 diaries in Box 62, Bunche Papers, UCLA.

unlike almost every other educated man of their acquaintance. They both critiqued the black middle class for its focus on small matters, supported an economic approach to racial conflict, criticized racial nationalists, and edged away / ran away from the pervasive religion of their upbringing (Harris more vocally than Bunche). Each had a healthy ego that -- no matter how frustrating to close associates -- drove them to their individual heights of achievement.

Bunche decided to join Howard's promising faculty, not because he needed the money (he had a scholarship to continue in residence at Harvard), but because he had been offered the chance to craft his own political science department. Most of his peers had waited many years after their undergraduate graduation to be hired by the capstone of black higher education. Bunche arrived at Howard unpublished and only one year out of UCLA. Bunche decided that he could teach at Howard and pursue his Ph.D.

simultaneously, so he declined the Thayer Fellowship that had been offered to him.⁹¹ He took two leaves of absence during the next five years, once to complete his residency requirements for the degree and once to complete his research abroad. Bunche spent his first year getting acquainted with Howard and DC, and his second in residence in Massachusetts. During his first year at Howard, he received word in November that his grandmother had died. "Her last words were in a letter he received six days before her death: 'Will you be finished at Harvard this year?'"⁹² His last tie to the west coast was severed, and though he would visit, he would never again live in the beautiful LA basin

⁹¹ According to Charles Henry, "the temptation to move to Washington, D.C., and to establish the first political science department at the foremost Black University in the nation proved irresistible." Henry, *Ralph Bunche*, 31.

⁹² Ibid.

that he loved. When his first daughter was born in 1931, he wrote a friend in California that he wished she could “be in California to benefit by the bounteousness of that Nature which only California can boast.”⁹³

Bunche threw himself into planning the political science curriculum and into the Howard social scene, as was his wont. On one October evening that first year, Robert Weaver’s brother, Mortimer, took Bunche to a house where a group of young women were informally gathered. Talk turned to the upcoming dance and who was taking who. Mortimer already had a date with the beautiful woman of the house named Ruth Ethel Harris (no relation to Abram), a teacher and night-school student at Howard. One of her friends had no date and it was suggested that Bunche take her, but “he announced firmly but politely that he was going to take ‘that quiet little girl sitting back there on the piano bench’”—Ruth. Mortimer let it go, and Harris and Bunche became an item. Harris had been raised in Montgomery, Alabama, the daughter of an Oberlin and Howard educated man who was head mail clerk. Her father spent most of his income educating his ten children. The whole family moved to DC soon after Ruth graduated from Alabama State Normal to support her teaching career.

From that first meeting, Ruth and Ralph were tightly bound together. The strength of that bond was tested the next year when Ralph returned to Cambridge for his year of residency at Harvard.

Bunche swiftly made up for any time he had lost developing a place within black national culture by growing up in the West instead of the East. He published in the *Opportunity*, joining the future Young Turks, who had frequently appeared in those pages

⁹³ Ralph Bunche to Victor Harding, April 20, 1932, Box 1 Folder 6, Bunche Papers UCLA.

over the course of the 1920s. That year, Allison Davis published poetry and criticized “Our Negro ‘Intellectuals,’” Ira Reid became Research Director of the Urban League (replacing Charles Johnson), Sam Dorsey reviewed a book by Haitian diplomat Dantes Bellegarde, Brown and Logan reviewed several books each, and Frazier discussed the “Mind of the American Negro” and described his new town—Chicago.⁹⁴ Juliette Derricotte, Mabel Byrd, and Marion Cuthbert also graced the pages of *Opportunity* and the *Crisis*.⁹⁵ Unlike Abram Harris, who rarely appeared in the society pages, Ralph Bunche began to appear regularly, particularly in the company of Ruth Harris. They attended dinner parties with a different social set than the Howard professors.⁹⁶ They went to the beach during the summer with a big party.⁹⁷ Bunche also developed the Political Science Club at Howard. After Oscar DePreist was elected to Congress from Chicago, the first black man to be elected since the Reconstruction era, Bunche brought him to campus. The club sponsored a Friday afternoon luncheon. In addition to the

⁹⁴ Allison Davis, “Fighters,” *Opportunity*, June 1928; Sterling Brown, “Review: Gordon Casselty, Dwellers in the Jungle,” *Opportunity*, April 1928; Sterling Brown, “Review: Roark Bradford, Ol’ Man Adam and His Chillen,” *Opportunity*, July 1928; Allison Davis, “Gospel for Those Who Must,” *Crisis*, July 1928; Allison Davis, “Our Negro ‘Intellectuals,’” *Crisis*, August 1928; E. Franklin Frazier, “The Mind of the American Negro,” *Opportunity*, September 1928; “Editorial--Ira Reid,” *Opportunity*, November 1928; Sterling Brown, “Review: DuBose Heward, Mamba’s Daughters,” *Opportunity*, May 1929; Ira Reid, “Albany, New York—American Cities,” *Opportunity*, June 1929; Emmett E. Dorsey, “Review: Dantes Belgarde, L’Occupation Americaine D’Haiti,” *Opportunity*, October 1929.

⁹⁵ Marion Cuthbert, “Black Flute,” *Opportunity*, May 1928; Mabel Byrd, “The League of Nations and the Negro Peoples,” *Crisis*, July 1928; Juliette Derricotte, “The Student Conference at Mysore, India,” *Crisis*, August 1929.

⁹⁶ “Washington Society,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, May 11, 1929; “D.C. Society,” *Afro-American*, July 6, 1929.

⁹⁷ “D.C. Society,” *Afro-American*, July 13, 1929.

students from the club and the student council, President Johnson, Judge James A. Cobb, Alice Dunbar Nelson, Lucy Slowe, Locke, and many others all attended.⁹⁸

1929-1930 School Year

During the 1929-1930 school year the group of young professors at Howard grew and Washington DC became a center for black political and economic thought. While the artistic renaissance two hundred miles northeast began to fade a bit as the Depression took hold, black leadership turned to DC to discuss the political and economic changes that needed to be made. At this point, the Young Turks were at the edges, moving toward the center, of these discussions. Within a few years they would be the organizing and commanding presence at such conferences.

Mordecai Johnson lived up to his promise to fund professional development. Harris and Bunche were both able to work on their PhDs in residence at Columbia and Harvard, respectively. Bunche stretched himself to his physical limits, but succeeded remarkably. Harris began to be viewed as a significant intellectual by Du Bois during this year. At the same time, Brown and Dorsey settled into Howard life, founded undergraduate clubs, and participated in conferences.

With 60,000 more dollars in the Federal appropriation, many new faculty members arrived at Howard in October 1929.⁹⁹ The new school year brought two more Young Turks to Howard—Sterling “Dutch” Brown and Emmett “Sam” Dorsey, even as Ralph Bunche headed to Cambridge and Abram Harris to Columbia to work on their

⁹⁸ “Washington Society,” *Afro-American*, March 9, 1929, 3.

⁹⁹ “Howard Announces Faculty Members,” *New York Times*, October 9, 1929; “New Professors at Howard Uni.,” *Afro-American*, October 12, 1929.

PhDs. One of the last things Brown did at Fisk was to give several talks. The first, in March, was to a meeting of the Omega Psi Phi fraternity, of which he was a member. He emphasized the responsibility of the youth to the destiny of African Americans, telling his audience that “there can be no arm chair solutions to the problems peculiar to the Negro, the solutions must rest upon organized intelligence which is the embodiment of scholarship, manhood, perseverance and uplift.”¹⁰⁰ The second was a large gathering of prominent blacks called the Durham Fact-Finding Conference. Allison Davis, a school chum from Dunbar High School, wrote an extended article about it in the *Norfolk New Journal and Guide*. Davis stressed the “breadth and universality” that this conference tried to achieve.

If we can be convinced intellectually of the need for a many-sided development of Negro life, we may stop fighting one another over trivial disagreements. We can see the need for economic organizations, for both industrial and cultural education, for church and business, for everything at once, we may prevent a great deal of criminal internal strife, and jealousy,—we may move forward not only with unified vision, but at length with unified purpose and action.

The conference did not achieve this, but it gave Davis hope that it could be achieved.

Brown’s talk was the best received of the weekend, according to Davis. Brown weighed in on the current discussions in Harlem about the proper way black authors should approach their work—do they fight stereotypes, recognizing as Du Bois put it that “all art is propaganda” or do they believe art is for art’s sake alone? Or build their own philosophy somewhere in between? Brown “brought a new vision of the dignity and power of the literature of the Negro, and demonstrated remarkable insight and sympathy with regard to the humble life concerning which much of our literature has been written.”

¹⁰⁰ “Prof. Sterling Brown Addresses Omega Frat,” *Chicago Defender*, March 16, 1929.

He sided with Langston Hughes and other young writers by rejecting “our current idea that Negro literature must deal with the highest, social strata of Negroes” as immature and instead “insisted that we did not desire books which romanticize or moralize our life.” Brown could speak thus, Davis assured his audience, because he “is himself a poet, and will prove a great poet, I am convinced. He has opened our eyes to the beauty and truth of Negro life, and to the fact that literature alone can preserve the struggles and sacrifices of our fathers who have died without recompense. We shall expect to hear more from a man of such rare and distinctive feeling and vision.”¹⁰¹

Dutch and Daisy Sterling left Fisk University just as E. Franklin and Marie Frazier arrived. In fact, they swapped the same house. Dutch and Daisy, Frank and Marie shared “quite a ceremony of the transferral of the key” and “made a photograph of the scene” on the front lawn.¹⁰² Brown remembered later, “I need no photograph to bring it back; it is a vivid memory today, pleasant to recall.”¹⁰³

The Browns moved into Dutch’s childhood home on the edge of the Howard campus (roughly where the School of Business building is today, next to the Miners Teachers College). Sterling Brown Sr. had always wanted to see his son join Howard’s faculty, though only after he had experienced other campuses. He knew that his son was finally coming home, but did not live to see him take up his faculty post. Dutch and Daisy filled the old house with their own personality, stacking their carefully acquired

¹⁰¹ Allison Davis, “Durham Conference Inspires Hope,” *Norfolk New Journal and Guide*, April 27, 1929.

¹⁰² Sterling Brown, “Frazier Memoriam,” 1962, 166 Box 50 Folder 3, Logan Papers MSRC..

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 2.

LPs next to their many books—Jean Toomer next to Louis Armstrong; Carl Sandburg next to Claude McKay; Chaucer next to W. C. Handy.

While Brown took up a secure position in the Department of English under chair Charles Burch (a Daniel Defoe scholar), Sam Dorsey signed a one year contract as an assistant in the History Department (which then also included political scientists). Of all the Young Turks, Dorsey is the most obscured in the historical record. Despite some stops and starts in his early years at Howard, Dorsey spent his entire career there, so he has not attracted the same kind of attention as Harris, who became the first black economist hired by the University of Chicago, or Ralph Bunche, who became the most famous of the Young Turks through his long UN career. And unlike Rayford Logan or E. Franklin Frazier, who also spent the majority of their career at the DC campus, Dorsey never had a major book published. Nor has he had much scholarly attention in the recent years, when more people have begun to consider the interwar period.¹⁰⁴ Dorsey, at least in his early years, had an air of the rogue about him. As much as the others were intellectual rebels, they conformed in dress and manner of speaking to bourgeois norms. Dorsey tended to offend ladies, spend more than he earned (then beseech his cash-strapped colleagues to get him out of the jam), throw himself into the role of Communist intellectual, and make inappropriate comments around the wealthy.¹⁰⁵ He was also the only Young Turk to get arrested during a protest. The others alternatively loved and chided him.

¹⁰⁴ A few works that mention Dorsey include Clifford L. Jr. Muse, "Howard University and U.S. Foreign Affairs During the Franklin D. Roosevelt Administration, 1933-1945," *Journal of African American History* 87, no. 4 (Fall 2002): 403-415; C Alvin Hughes, "Grand Council of the Best Minds and the Economic Crisis of the Negro in the 1930s," *Griot* 25, no. 1 (Spring 2006): 29-42; Jonathan Scott Holloway, *Confronting the veil*, 2002.

¹⁰⁵ These examples will be extrapolated upon, and cited, as they arise in this and subsequent chapters.

Dorsey was probably born in October 1894 and grew up in Sumter, Georgia, because the only black Emmett Dorsey in the 1900 US census grew up there, son of Oliver and Katie Emmett, with three siblings (Luther, Arthur, and Hattie). Dorsey graduated from Oberlin College and started a Masters at Columbia before joining Howard's campus.

Brown and Dorsey brought spunk and camaraderie to the campus, pulling Abram Harris out of his self-imposed exile. Brown's house was on the edge of campus, always open to guests, and filled with music. Dorsey tended to have grand adventures and loved to share the stories.

Brown and Dorsey each brought different qualities to the slowly forming Young Turk cohort. Brown, unlike the others, was fascinated by and attracted to the South and did not care for Harlem. He suffered threats of violence and personal discomfort willingly in his desire to track down stories.¹⁰⁶ While he was the only one in the group pursuing a creative discipline, he also held onto objectivity as a primary personal value. Brown and Dorsey were outgoing like Bunche. Brown and Bunche tended to compete for the limelight in telling "lies"—as Brown liked to call his stories and tales. Dorsey had the most frenetic energy of any in the group. Brown was the least politically active and Dorsey the most in the group. Dorsey spent a lot of his time dabbling in the socialist causes (he became more committed as the decade wore on). Brown probably spent the most time with people from the black lower class than any of them. They were all ambitious, but Brown's extroversion drove him to constantly seek out new people and new relationships, not to spend long, dedicated hours in the library or the lab. Neither

¹⁰⁶

See Sterling Allen Brown, *Sterling A. Brown's A Negro Looks at the South* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

Brown nor Dorsey ever produced the extensive studies that Bunche and Harris did. They all praised objectivity and denigrated sentimentality. Brown is often left out of discussions of the Young Turks because he was not in the social sciences, yet it is important to include him. Not only was he a social node, but he believed in many of the same aims as the others, translating them from statistics into personal poetry.

Daisy and Dutch were the best matched pair out of any of the Young Turks. Unlike the women discussed previously, all of the Young Turks married, though only the Bunches had children. The Browns shared the same values. In each of the married couples, the husband urged the wife to give up attachments to bourgeois opinions. Harris praised his wife to Stolberg for divesting “herself of a lot of bourgeois attachments, but her notions of fair dealings are still conservative, especially in money transactions. But she has come a long way from the daughter of a Baptist clergyman of the New England school.”¹⁰⁷ Daisy did not need to be urged; according to Gabbin, “she was the first to applaud her husband’s rejection of the typically bourgeois stance with its contempt for the lower classes and its evasion of ‘life.’”¹⁰⁸ She, like her husband, loved to have people over, and had a quick sense of humor that drew them back. She also shared with her husband a “keen poetic sense” that allowed her to probe the depths of his poetry, critiquing it where it needed and providing just praise. Dutch would have given up many of his projects to the arms of perfectionism were it not for her patience encouragement.

¹⁰⁷ Abram Harris to Benjamin Stolberg, Letter, August 3, 1931, Folder 3 Box 4b, Ben Stolberg Correspondence, Columbia University Special Collections.

¹⁰⁸ Joanne V Gabbin, *Sterling A. Brown: Building the Black Aesthetic Tradition* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1985), 38.

His most prolific work appeared in the first decades of their marriage, 1930s and 1940s.¹⁰⁹

Ralph loved Ruth deeply and was faithful to her even on a year long trip around the world (with many temptations), but he tended to treat her like a child and to put his own work first. For Abram, his relationship with Callie was complicated by his own internal battles, like with so many other things in his life. Several times in his letters (or letters of her own), she confirms that she tried to keep up with his intellectual life. She read the same articles that he did (by Stolberg, for example) and discussed them with the authors. Yet, when Abram planned a dinner party for Du Bois in 1931, he left all women off the invitation list because they were “too complicated.” Women distracted him from the hard task of intellectual work. And when asked for women who might attend the Amenia list, he refused to provide suggestions because he did not know any suitable women who could keep up with them. Harris also developed sexual relationships with women other than Callie during his many trips to New York City, even while constantly warning Stolberg about the dangers of emotional attachments. Such attachments, including those to one’s spouse, dragged one away from the serious business of scholarship and journalism.

Not yet wed, Ruth and Ralph spent their second year of courtship sending letters back and forth between DC and Massachusetts, many filled with their new love and just as many with their new lives.¹¹⁰ Ralph got a Goodwin Memorial Fellowship to attend Harvard that year. Even at this stage, he was used as proof of what African Americans

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ These letters are still closed to the public, but Bunche’s friend and biographer Brian Urquhart saw them before he wrote his biography. Urquhart, *Ralph Bunche*.

could do if they put their mind to it. The headline for the *Afro-American* article that announced his fellowship was "'Po' Little Orphan Worked His Way Through 3 Colleges."¹¹¹ The year quickly introduced Ruth to many of the recurring trials she would suffer during their relationship. Despite Ralph's early claims that this would be the last time they would be separated at such a distance and have to depend on epistles to communicate, he went on extended international trips throughout their marriage. Serious health issues troubled Ralph in Cambridge, brought on by his ambition and stress. He told Ruth that he could not bear the thought of any white men, one or two in particular, beating him in his classes or on exams. He would rather pass out first. During that year, he suffered from head-, tooth-, and stomachaches. He also took up smoking and soon found it more difficult to breathe. In May, at the end of his year at Harvard, "he entered Stillman Infirmary for a tonsillectomy, an operation on his sinuses, and a serum injection for the blood clot in his left leg."¹¹² Ralph also began to exhibit his private trait of treating Ruth like his inferior, calling her his "little schoolgirl." It infuriated her, but she lived with it her whole life. At least he rarely showed this side in public.¹¹³

In contrast to UCLA, where for the most part Bunche got along with white classmates, he feared what white society was doing to him at Harvard. He wrote Ruth that "I sometimes wonder if I am too broad for my age, or in advance of it, or whether I have misinterpreted what I have thought to be the moral standards of my fellow-men, as I have seen them portrayed by my fellow class-men. It may be that my experiences and

¹¹¹ "'Po" Little Orphan Worked His Way Through 3 Colleges," *Afro-American*, April 13, 1929, 7.

¹¹² Henry, *Ralph Bunche*, 35.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

contacts at white schools have injured my moral fibers.” With the Bunches’ letters still closed to researchers (other than one biographer, who was a family friend, and extracted this quote), it is hard to tell exactly what he meant by this remark. Is it that being at white schools in California made him expect better treatment at Harvard? Or perhaps that he desired black classmates to act more in accord with a cosmopolitan world view? Or that he wished white classmates would stop closing themselves off from experiences broader than the Ivies? Regardless, it is a rare glimpse of Bunche agonizing over his role in the world as a thinker.

In the classroom, Bunche remained close to his previous professors Rupert Emerson and John Sly. At some point during his Ph.D. studies he chose Arthur Holcombe as his advisor, perhaps because Holcombe was one of the few men in the department working on a part of the world beyond the West and one touched by Communism. He was then putting the finishing touches on *The Spirit of the Chinese Revolution*, in part by giving a series of public lectures through the Lowell Institute.¹¹⁴ Bunche began to read extensively in communist literature, including Marx’s *Das Kapital* (not terribly impressed), Bukharin’s *Historical Materialism* (nice economic approach to history), and Max Eastman’s *Marx to Lenin* (good criticism of that economic approach). He also thought it was best to start with Harold Laski’s for an in depth, yet understandable introduction to socialist thought.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ Arthur Norman Holcombe, *The Chinese Revolution; a Phase in the Regeneration of a World Power* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard university press, 1930); Arthur Norman Holcombe, *The Spirit of the Chinese Revolution; Lowell Institute Lectures, 1930* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1930).

¹¹⁵ Henry, *Ralph Bunche*, 36.

At Howard, some of the Young Turks began to get involved in campus activities. In November 1929, Dorsey met with two members of the English Department, Charles Burch, chair, and Emil Holley, assistant professor, about expanding the debating program. Back in Frank Frazier's undergraduate days, the debating team had frequently won the title. Recently, it had started to consistently lose. These three hoped they could revive the program and reinstate the Kappa Sigma key, given to everyone on the varsity team.¹¹⁶ They discussed this in November and, according to the *Baltimore Afro-American*, their first match was in April against Oberlin, rather than the many black schools who had expressed initial eagerness to challenge them. Dorsey had used his connections at Oberlin, where he had been a varsity debater, to set up the match and bring the opposing team from Ohio to the Andrew Rankin Chapel. They debated the proposition, "Resolved: That it is an Unsound Policy to Provide a Liberal Arts College Education for the Average Secondary School Graduate," with the Howard team taking the affirmative and Oberlin the negative. Charles Wesley acted as master of ceremonies while the teams debated themselves to a standstill. "The sentiment of the audience seemed to be that while the Oberlin representatives had superior poise and finesse in the art of debating, the Howard representatives deserved commendation for their mastery of their subject."¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ "At Howard 'U'," *Afro-American*, November 16, 1929.

¹¹⁷ "Howard and Oberlin Debate: No Decision," *Afro-American*, April 12, 1930.

Brown joined the local chapter of the Omega Psi Phi Fraternity. Among his frat brothers were Howard professors Montague Cobb and W. Alphaeus Hunton, and future founders of the Joint Committee on National Recovery, John P. Davis and Robert Weaver.¹¹⁸ Brown and Mercer Cook spent a weekend in New York City before Brown joined his wife in Laurel, Maryland for the summer. The Browns had long had a family farm there that Sterling had visited as a young boy. He frequently opened the home to guests from DC hoping for a bit of breeze in the countryside.¹¹⁹

Not all the Young Turks were so willing to get involved in Howard activities. Harris did not start undergraduate clubs and only rarely participated in DC events.¹²⁰ He got involved when the issue was national in scope. The first real sign that Harris had been truly accepted as a major intellectual force came in 1930 when Du Bois turned to Harris during the first of many financial crises Du Bois' magazine faced during the Depression. Subscriptions fell momentarily and the magazine employed an inept business manager. For the first time since the beginning days of the magazine, the *Crisis* had to turn to the NAACP office across the hall for financial support. This reopened all sorts of questions about whether or not the *Crisis* was appropriately expressing the core ideals of the association. It also began the more serious conflict between Du Bois and Acting Secretary Walter White, two very different men. In April, Du Bois wrote Harris, "I should like to talk to you, and confidentially to some of the younger liberal minded

¹¹⁸ "D.C. Society," *Afro-American*, August 9, 1930, 2.

¹¹⁹ "Washington, D. C.," *Chicago Defender*, August 30, 1930.

¹²⁰ At least as far as we can tell from a search of the black newspaper society columns, which were meticulous in reporting parties attended by a certain social set.

leaders concerning The Crisis and its future. First I should like to talk to you alone.”¹²¹

During their discussions, they decided it might be appropriate to have some kind of conference with a select few men to discuss the future of the *Crisis*. Du Bois talked to journalist and labor economist Ben Stolberg, minister, socialist, and labor activist A.J. Muste, and Roger Baldwin of the ACLU about the idea. Du Bois respected Stolberg’s opinions and knowledge about African American workers, asking him for contributions to the *Crisis*.¹²² Muste served as a financial adviser to the Crisis, and Baldwin had connections to myriad liberal groups.

During the same time, it seemed like the association had come into a financial windfall. Charles Garland, son of a millionaire, decided to shed his unearned wealth, bestowing it upon people who needed it more. He set up the Garland Fund and walked away. During a consultation with Muste, Du Bois discovered that James Weldon Johnson did not plan to include the *Crisis* in the proposal submitted to the fund (they ended up using the funds to set up the Legal Defense Fund). This meant that Du Bois could not submit a separate proposal, because he agreed with Muste in May that “it would not be wise to let divided counsels appear.”¹²³ Du Bois was not sure where else to turn for funds, and therefore thought there was no longer a reason to call a conference to discuss

¹²¹ W.E.B. Du Bois to Abram Harris, April 10, 1930, Reel 34, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

¹²² W.E.B. Du Bois to Benjamin Stolberg, February 6, 1930, Reel 34, Du Bois Papers microfilm; Benjamin Stolberg to W.E.B. Du Bois, May 21, 1930, Reel 34, Du Bois Papers microfilm; W.E.B. Du Bois to Benjamin Stolberg, May 22, 1930, Reel 34, Du Bois Papers microfilm; W.E.B. Du Bois to Benjamin Stolberg, July 8, 1930, Reel 34, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

¹²³ Du Bois to Stolberg, May 22, 1930.

funding proposals. He told Stolberg, "meantime, I suppose we will have to let the matter of the conference rest until more auspicious occasion."¹²⁴

That occasion would not arrive until three years later with the Amenia conference, but Stolberg would not be among the invited guests. Stolberg tried to rally Du Bois' spirits, suggesting that while the conference they had in mind would no longer work—"it would be a very tenuous, and therefore quite an abortive thing, and bad psychologically for ourselves"—there was nothing to keep Du Bois, Muste, Harris, Stolberg, and maybe George Schuyler of the *Messenger* from talking things over. "For those who more or less agree must know their mutual minds pretty much before they can do much. Therefore, if this little group could get together, for lunch or preferably on some evening, early in June -- before Harris goes back to Washington --it might be a good idea."¹²⁵ Stolberg closed his letter with good news. "By the way, Harris, according to Beager, Seligman and Mitchell, just passed his doctoral examination, making one of the most 'brilliant records in the history of the Departments'."¹²⁶

Harris spent the summer in New York City to wrap up requirements for his doctoral degree.¹²⁷ He and Spero had finished the manuscript, passed their exams, and

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Benjamin Stolberg to W.E.B. Du Bois, May 23, 1930, Reel 34, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ "Howard University Fall Term Opening Sees Sixty-three New Faculty Members," *New York Amsterdam News*, October 8, 1930.

had the dissertation accepted in manuscript form. The day he received Stolberg's letter, Du Bois wrote Harris demanding information for a big spread in the *Crisis*. The Economics department would not confer the Ph.D. degree on Harris "until the dissertation has actually been published," Harris explained to Du Bois.¹²⁸ The book would be about 400 pages with 21 chapters; Spero had written ten. Du Bois had seen and commented on the chapters about coal. Harris was at that moment "rushing to get the manuscript to the Columbia University Press by next Monday" and asked that Du Bois hold off on publicity until everything was official.¹²⁹ Du Bois continued to send periodic letters over the next few months checking up on the status of Harris' degree. Harris promised that as soon as the paperwork was signed, "I will let you tell the world what a rascal the Editor of the *Crisis* thinks I am." After so many years of worried anxiety about becoming a full fledged intellectual, Harris was finally on the cusp of formal accolades. A bit of self-directed humor seemed appropriate.

1930-1931 School Year

Harris' sweeping success with the publication of his dissertation marked the 1930-1931 school year. He finally had the confidence to take on the older leaders and intellectuals he had long critiqued privately. When *Opportunity* published his poem "Strong Men," Brown began to be quoted far and wide. The magazine also gave him a monthly column to discuss books and ideas. Howard University became embroiled another battle in its war with Congress over academic freedom, but Mordecai Johnson

¹²⁸ W.E.B. Du Bois to Abram Harris, June 9, 1930, Reel 33, Du Bois Papers microfilm; Harris to Du Bois, June 11, 1930.

¹²⁹ Harris to Du Bois, June 11, 1930.

responded markedly differently than his predecessor. Howard continued to welcome new faculty members, including Gus Auzenne, who was hired as assistant professor of finance and commerce. He held an MBA from the University of Pennsylvania. Bunche's Harvard friend William Hastie joined Charles Hamilton Houston in the Law School.¹³⁰ Theater professor Randolph Edmonds and artist Lois Jones joined the school as instructors. Jones stayed the rest of her career, while Edmonds moved on, looking for more a permanent position. Edmonds published fairly regularly in the *Crisis* and *Opportunity* and was one of the men Du Bois thought about off the top of his head for the Second America Conference.

Bunche returned to Howard flush with the happiness of a new marriage. On a Monday morning in June, he and Ruth married in a small ceremony at Ruth's family home. Though the celebration was purposefully small, with only family and close friends present, the *Afro-American* called it "a wedding of more than usual interest."¹³¹ Bunche, in a way unlike any of the other Young Turks, had immediately been accepted as a prominent society figure, perhaps by courting one of DC's belles, or perhaps through his own charisma. After the wedding, they returned to Massachusetts where Ralph took summer courses and Ruth studied at Radcliffe.¹³²

After news of the ceremony appeared in "the Black Dispatch," as he called it, Locke dashed off his congratulations while staying at a German spa. "Do forgive me for not seeing you and giving you a dutch Uncle Talk at the end of your celibacy—and do

¹³⁰ "Howard University Fall Term Opening Sees Sixty-three New Faculty Members."

¹³¹ "D.C. Society," *Afro-American*, June 28, 1930.

¹³² Sara Pelham, "D.C. Society," *Afro-American*, July 5, 1930.

sincerely believe that I am all for the new venture.”¹³³ He eagerly anticipated Bunche’s return to Howard in the fall. Finally, with William Hastie hired by the Law School, they would have “enough Harvardians now to make a real group, if we will.” Locke kept trying to become the center of the young faculty on campus, and while they mostly respected him (Harris less than some of the others), they made their own social plans without consulting him.

The Bunches moved into a house on campus. Ralph played tennis and basketball with students and joined Dorsey as a debating team coach.¹³⁴ Bunche met a formidable tennis opponent in Brown, who started to play in the Washington tournaments. The next July, Brown played Tally Holmes, the “old master” and “former national champion,” in the District of Columbia championship. Brown and Holmes had often met on the clay, with Holmes winning every match. Brown stayed on the baseline while Holmes rushed the net. Brown ran with “dashing speed” and shot past Holmes’ net game. They battled closely through the first two sets, which Brown won 8-6 and 6-4. Holmes caught Brown in a rare moment of weakness and rushed through the next set at 0-6. Brown charged back in the final set and won 6-4 over his opponent for the first time in a battle of wills stretching across the previous decade. Bunche watched the game with fascination. He was later portrayed in the Norfolk New Journal and Guide as an expert outside observer from the University of Southern California, who had “witnessed many matches of America’s best.” Bunche “declared that he had never seen such a driving game among Negro tennis players as that exhibited by Brown, in which the player in his tremendous

¹³³ Alain Locke and Ralph Bunche, 1930, Box 1 Folder 4, Bunche Papers UCLA.

¹³⁴ Henry, *Ralph Bunche*, 36.

force, high bounding service and passing shots resembled Frank Shields, member of the United States Davis cup team.”¹³⁵

Along with putting his personal house in order, Bunche began to plan the political science department. One of the first things he did as acting chair of the new department was to rehire Sam Dorsey as well as R. J. Webster.¹³⁶ Over the next few years Bunche instituted a wide range of classes within the new department, including

Constitutional Law	American Constitutional Law
Advanced Constitutional Law	Contemporary Political Thought
American Political Thought	History of Political Theory
Freedom of Speech	Popular Government in the United States
Municipal Administration	Governments of Europe
International Law	Leading Decisions of International Tribunals
Feudalism and the Feudal State	Imperialism and the World Today
Colonial Policy	Status of Dependencies ¹³⁷

There was no class specifically designed to discuss African American political thinkers or the place African Americans have had in American politics. Such classes were not common before the Black Studies movement of the 1960s and 1970s, but even if they had been, Bunche would have shied away from separating black experiences from the politics of the rest of the United States. Bunche used textbooks in his classes from his Harvard professors.¹³⁸

The Young Turks began to appear more regularly before DC clubs. In October 1930, Bunche gave a talk at the premier club in black Washington, the Mu-So-Lit club.

¹³⁵ “Sterling Brown Bests Tally Holmes,” *Norfolk New Journal and Guide*, July 18, 1931; “Sterling Brown Stops Old Master on Howard Campus,” *New York Amsterdam News*, July 15, 1931; “Howard U. Debating Dates Announced,” *Afro-American*, February 14, 1931.

¹³⁶ Henry, *Ralph Bunche*, 36.

¹³⁷ Henry, *Ralph Bunche*.

¹³⁸ Ralph Bunche to Ben N. Azikiwe, November 10, 1931, Box 1 Folder 5, Bunche Papers UCLA.

The evening was devoted to discussing the political situation, particularly in light of worsening economic conditions. Speakers questioned African Americans' historic allegiance to the Republican Party, particularly in light of Hoover's poor responses to the initial trauma of the Depression.¹³⁹

Harris defended his dissertation Friday October 10th at 4:30; he celebrated with a tête-à-tête with Du Bois the next day and by getting his picture taken for the news flurry sure to ensue.¹⁴⁰ The Columbia University Press promised to released the book no later than November 1st under the title "The Black Proletariat--A Study of the Negro Worker and the Labor Movement, by Abram L. Harris and Sterling D. Spero." By the time it got to market it had become *The Black Worker: The Negro and the Labor Movement* by Sterling D. Spero and Abram L. Harris. Du Bois read one of the page proofs, along with several other "outstanding people" the press sought out.

Spero and Harris opened the preface with a direct assault on the way race relations had been thus far discussed.

This book is neither a good will tract on race relations nor an attempt to offer a program for the solution of a vexing problem. It is an effort to set forth descriptively and analytically the results of a study of the American labor movement in one of its most important aspects, namely, the relation of the dominant section of the working class to the segregated, circumscribed, and restricted Negro minority.¹⁴¹

¹³⁹ "Anti-Hoover Tide Rising," *Afro-American*, October 18, 1930.

¹⁴⁰ Abram Harris to W.E.B. Du Bois, September 26, 1930, Reel 33, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

¹⁴¹ Spero and Harris, *The Black Worker: The Negro and the Labor Movement*, vii.

They thanked Columbia University for its grant, but more so for “the generous spirit in which it encouraged us to carry on our work without accounting, without supervision, without unsought advice or interference.”¹⁴² They also explained their collaboration—“This work is in every essential respect the joint product of both of us,” although Spero was the lead writer on ten of the chapters and Harris on eleven. Spero took a few more of the case studies, like the “Negro Longshoreman,” “The Negro in the Stockyards,” and “The Negro in the Railroads.” Harris wrote a few more of the synthesis chapters, like “The ‘New’ Negro and Post-War Unrest,” “Socialism, Communism, and the Negro,” and “The Negro Community and the Labor Movement.”

Within days of Harris’ defense, a column appeared in the Sunday *New York Times* that a “former Pullman porter” had become the first African American to receive a Ph.D. in economics. Immediately Dr. Sadie Alexander and her husband Raymond Pace Alexander complained to several individuals that she was in fact the first African American to earn the Ph.D. in economics almost a decade before in 1921. The complaint reached Harris and he suggested to Du Bois that they leave out any similar statement in the *Crisis* write up. Du Bois’ response was strange. He explained that a fact checker from the *New York Times* had called him to confirm the “first” statement. Despite the fact that Du Bois was then very close friends with Virginia Alexander, Raymond Pace’s sister, he said that while he did think there might be another other Economics Ph.D., he would have to check his files to be sure.¹⁴³ The fact checker evidently took that as enough leeway to publish the article the way it was written.

¹⁴² Ibid., vii-viii.

¹⁴³ W.E.B. Du Bois to Abram L. Harris, October 21, 1930, Reel 33, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

Harris did not rest after returning to the District. He sought out other young professors with which to discuss his recent conversation with Du Bois. He wrote the older man that indeed, "I think there is considerable unrest. The two men who seem most interested are Sterling Brown and Samuel Dorsey [sic]." All three agreed that "there should be a re-valuation of social philosophy as it relates to Negro problems." Unfortunately, though, "they are a little hazy on what should be done." Harris suggested that they plan for these men, along with Ira Reid, to gather for an "informal discussion during spring vacation[.] That would give us ample time for sounding out other people. It would also give us time in which to clarify our own views."¹⁴⁴ Du Bois agreed with these individuals, and suggested they meet in New York, "prepared to give up the larger part of time for a week to a very careful inquiry of social and economic problems."¹⁴⁵ It is strange that neither suggested Stolberg, as he had been in the center of a similar discussion the prior spring. Neither suggested Bunche.

Harris began to see immediate changes after finishing his degree. Mordecai Johnson called him into his office one morning soon after the Sol Blum article on Harris receiving his Ph.D. appeared. Johnson was holding a copy of the article that Jacob Billikopf of the Howard Trustee Board had sent him. Billikopf had asked Johnson to tell Harris "to be sure to see that Columbia University Press sends him a copy of the book." Johnson also apologized that Harris' salary was not what he had requested, but promised to bring Harris' work to the attention of the Trustee Board. Johnson told Harris, "'Now do not pay attention to any other offers that may come to you. The sky is your limit at

¹⁴⁴ Abram Harris to W.E.B. Du Bois, October 18, 1930, Reel 33, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

¹⁴⁵ Du Bois to Harris, October 21, 1930.

Howard University.”” Dean Davis had also sent him a congratulatory note. He was promoted to Associate Professor. “All of which makes me feel a little more secure,” he scribbled to Stolberg.

And Ben, old timer, I am a new man. You and I must work like hell for the next ten years. Something will happen. I am going to write, write, study, study and work. work. work. You are going to do likewise. You must, Ben. People are reading your stuff, god bless you. Sterling Brown walked into my office this morning and showed me your article. He said that it should be placed on the bulletin board at Howard University. For heavens sake, Ben, keep at that work. Don’t stop. (You must never marry).¹⁴⁶

Stolberg showed equal pride in Harris’ work. While writing his review of *The Black Women*, he wrote Locke that the book was “a magnificent job—better than I thought could be done, almost.”¹⁴⁷

One of the major conferences Harris and Bunche spoke at in the fall was the national Interracial Conference. This annual meeting had started two years previously with the intention of gathering representatives from all the organizations nationwide interested in interracial work. Sixteen organizations sponsored the meeting, including American Friends Service Committee, Interracial Section, American Social Hygiene Association, Commission on Interracial Cooperation, Council of Women for Home Missions, Federal Council of Churches, Commission on Race Relations, Fellowship of Reconciliation, Home Mission Council, The Inquiry, NAACP, National Board YWCA, National Catholic Welfare Conference, National Council YMCA, National Federation of Settlements, National Urban League, Phelps Stokes Fund, Protestant Episcopal Church,

¹⁴⁶ Harris to Stolberg, “I got your letter this morning.”

¹⁴⁷ Benjamin Stolberg to Alain Locke, January 29, 1931, 164 Box 87 Folder 25, Locke Papers MSRC.

and the Department of Christian Social Service. Thirty-seven organizations actually sent representatives.

In his review of this first meeting in the *Crisis*, Du Bois called the conference valuable for bringing so many different organizations together for the first time, but ultimately unsuccessful because it covered too many broad topics without sufficient depth. "The net result often was almost like spoon feeding of children lest they mentally overeat."¹⁴⁸ The greatest depth came from an extensive document shared by Charles Johnson, head of the research committee, detailing in 250 pages "a reasonably faithful contemporary picture of Negro life and the status of race relations as revealed in recent social studies and in official statistics."¹⁴⁹ Du Bois believed it had been compiled "with unusual completeness and fairness."¹⁵⁰ Among the speakers were W. A. Robinson, Mabel Carney of the Columbia University, Forrester Washington (Frazier's replacement at the Atlanta School of Social Work), and George Haynes, a sociologist and minister representing the Federal Council of Churches.¹⁵¹ The theme of the first conference was "Race Problems in the United States in the Light of Social Research."¹⁵² Though this topic was immediately relevant to Bunche and Harris (the two Young Turks at Howard that year), they did not appear on the speakers list. Both were prominent on the 1930 program. Frazier, then at Chicago finishing up his PhD, was left out of each program.

¹⁴⁸ W.E.B. Du Bois, "National Interracial Conference," *Crisis*, February 1929, 47.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ For more about Haynes, see Francille Rusan Wilson, *The Segregated Scholars: Black Social Scientists and the Creation of Black Labor Studies, 1890-1950* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006).

¹⁵² Du Bois, "National Interracial Conference," 47.

After the first interracial conference, Charles Johnson and George Haynes, a sociologist and minister representing the Federal Council of Churches, collaborated on extensive research project, *The Negro in American Civilization*, with the Social Science Research Council and the Sage Foundation. According to Francille Wilson, it was the first time black social scientists were acknowledged by whites.¹⁵³ Locke believed that never before “had the entire gamut of social thought and programs connected with the race problem been spanned” as it had been in the conference organized around the book’s release.¹⁵⁴ In his review of the book in the *Herald Tribune*, Stolberg disapproved of Johnson’s methods and his lack of analysis of the data. He called the book, “‘the most competent example of a very bad book,’ asserting that its dearth of critical analysis meant that readers would learn no more from the book about black life ‘than you would know about American society after you have read the Almanac.’”¹⁵⁵ Du Bois wrote Stolberg after the review appeared that he completely agreed and would take the same approach in his own review.

In 1930, Harris used his platform at the Second Interracial Conference to attack the current status of black leadership, including those who had left him out of important conversations. He would develop his critiques with building steam till his coup de grace at Amenias. His later triumphant report to Stolberg about the evening—he had “raised a hornet’s nest!”—not only highlights the confidence he had gained from the accolades

¹⁵³ Wilson, *The Segregated Scholars*, 161.

¹⁵⁴ As quoted in *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

Interracial conferences were usually dominated by individuals attempting to find common ground and accord. Harris stripped away all the artifice he loathed in this kind of talk, and directed his barbs at the heart of the problems.

During the next part of his speech, Harris debated with George Haynes' earlier statements.¹⁵⁹ Harris crowed to Stolberg that "When I finished with Haynes I had him proving that the Negro church and leaders like himself had been the employers' greatest friend and the Negro workers worst enemy."¹⁶⁰ During the question and answer portion, "President Johnson asked me to elaborate more fully on the prospects of petty capitalism within the race."¹⁶¹ Harris then took on white philanthropists for encouraging "the Booker T. Washington philosophy" while "Anson Phelps-Stokes, lover of black humanity and peace, sat beside" Harris on the platform. Phelps-Stokes "frown[ed] and squirm[ed]" while Harris excoriated the philosophy of the Negro Business League for its desire for philanthropy—"I said 'evidently these Negroes believe that Negro business should take its place alongside Urban Leagues, YMCA's and day nurseries as another worthy charity.'"¹⁶² Could not the audience see the irony of African American businessmen seeking financial support to start a chain of retail stores from Mr. Rosenwald, the chief executive of Sears-Roebuck?

¹⁵⁹ Wilson, *The Segregated Scholars*.

¹⁶⁰ Harris to Stolberg, November 12, 1930.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ibid.

The room reacted to his speech as to “a thunderbolt. Herring had asked me to raise hell. I think he got more than he bargained for.”¹⁶³ After the banquet, “the race leaders—Emmett Scott, Nannie Burroughs, president of a Negro girls home, and none of the big boys said a word to me.”¹⁶⁴ He had enough admirers without them. Locke and Mordecai Johnson praised the way Harris handled himself. “Locke told me that he had never seen such a scrap before. Mordecai W. Johnson told me that he did not know that I could take such good care of myself in the give and take of debate.”¹⁶⁵ After taking on all the major black leaders, with most of them in the room with him, Harris breathed out his excitement to his friend, “I did not know that I could be so good.”¹⁶⁶

Charles Johnson, though, sought out his protégé and asked if they could talk further. Harris was intrigued and agreed. He had avoided the dinner given in Johnson’s honor the night before, but would not refuse an individual discussion with the man he had known and respected for almost a decade. The Whitelaw Hotel was about three quarters of a mile down T Street from Harris’ house. He invited Charles Johnson to walk home with him. Mordecai Johnson accompanied them as well. “When the three of us got to my house, I invited them to come in for tea. President Johnson said that he had to rush home. Charlie said that he would come in for awhile.”¹⁶⁷

Johnson and Harris began to pull apart the conflict between them, starting with the “whole question of research and scientific method.” Where Harris believed Johnson

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

failed to analyze, Johnson claimed that Harris, while doing good work, too often fit “my philosophy into the facts that come under my observation.” In reaction, Harris

asked what in the hell was science anyway and did a mere presentation of fact mean that the writer was as much of a scientist as the one who actually interpreted the facts? I also asked if he did not think that the man who actually perceived certain valid conclusions in his facts and refused to draw them was not only dishonest but an intellectual hypocrite.¹⁶⁸

Neither would budge on their opinions. When Harris “told him that the foundations paid liberally for his stuff because he refused to draw conclusions and refused to finance my work because I do draw conclusions he said that I had a persecution complex.” Johnson also brought up Stolberg’s recent critique of his work, acknowledging that Harris and Stolberg shared the same critique; “And while he did not agree with that statement made by Stolberg, he did agree with the statement that the book gives no picture of Negro life or offers social criticism.” While they stood on the porch about to turn their different directions, Johnson attempted to reach a truce, telling Harris that “there is room for both kinds of work, your work and mine.” Harris noted with satisfaction how this showed Johnson, one of the pillars of the Harlem Renaissance that had so ignored Harris contributions and now the progenitor of a social science department at Fisk, on the defensive.¹⁶⁹

Harris was much more satisfied with a conference at Northwestern University in December. The *Chicago Daily Tribune* carried the speeches given at the Saturday luncheon by Harris and Rabbi Goldman. Harris stayed with the Herskovitses, enjoying Fran’s hospitality and watching the antics of their baby girl. Du Bois came up frequently

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

in their conversation. Later, Harris suggested that Du Bois publish a report of the conference in the *Crisis* by Caroline Sachs, who presided at the lunch. Du Bois agreed. On his way back to Howard, Harris stopped off in New York for the Brookwood Labor Conference, where he met up with Du Bois, Stolberg, and A. J. Muste.¹⁷⁰

Following their winter break confab, Du Bois approached Harris about becoming a member of the *Crisis* editorial board. He was struggling with Walter White over control of the *Crisis*. The NAACP Board of Directors had placed an editorial Board in charge of the *Crisis* the previous summer, composed of James Weldon Johnson, White, Herbert Seligmann (NAACP director of publicity) and Du Bois.¹⁷¹ When Johnson resigned, Du Bois found the composition intolerable; “Seligmann is quite all right, but after all White is his superior officer, and White is impossible.” As Secretary of the Association, it only made sense that White would be on the board, but Du Bois needed someone he could trust to round out the editors. He turned to Harris, with the approval of the NAACP Committee of Management. The only problem was money—how would the *Crisis*, already in dire financial straights, manage to pay for Harris to travel to New York once a month? Du Bois wondered if perhaps Harris came regularly to New York by himself or could even swing the bill. “I need not point out to you how important this matter is,” Du Bois wrote with vehemence. “We have got to inject into the veins of this organization some young radical blood and it is a difficult process. But unless it is done, we are done for.”¹⁷² Du Bois asked for an immediate reply.

¹⁷⁰ Abram Harris to W.E.B. Du Bois, December 9, 1930, Reel 33, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

¹⁷¹ David L. Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: The Fight for Equality and the American Century, 1919-1963* (New York: Henry Holt, 2000), 281.

¹⁷² W.E.B. Du Bois to Abram Harris, January 27, 1931, Reel 36, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

When Harris received the letter, he was sick in bed with influenza. Nevertheless, he grabbed his pen immediately and wrote back. "Your letter caused me to begin running another temperature," he opened. "Nothing would please me more than serving with you on the new Board of Editors," but indeed, the greatest problem was money. He did run to New York upon occasion, but never in a planned way. When he found the time and money to go, he went, but it was always a problem to find those. Harris suggested that Du Bois apply to "some liberal or radical" for a small stipend to make the trips north possible. He suggested a classmate of his from Columbia, George Marshall. "I think if you were to explain to George the whole situation this item of a mere \$300 would be assuredly taken care of. ... His radicalism has not been affected by his wealth. ... Rest assured that I am with you."¹⁷³ Du Bois did not respond to this suggestion. After an inquiry from Harris in April (prompted by Du Bois' review of *The Black Worker* in *The Nation*), Du Bois replied that the expense had made it impossible to bring Harris onto the board. Instead, he brought in Rachel Davis Du Bois, a white Quaker from Philadelphia who traveled to the city every week to go to Columbia.¹⁷⁴

Though Harris was supportive of Du Bois in every way about the future of the *Crisis*, he had not yet come to the same opinion of White as Du Bois. He wrote Stolberg in February about various reviews of the *Black Worker* that had begun to appear. In particular, he liked Stolberg's review, which was "even better than the book." He had seen White that week while he was in Washington. White told him he would be doing the review for *The World*. "I don't know so much about that," he wrote Stolberg, "although I

¹⁷³ Abram Harris to W.E.B. Du Bois, January 28, 1931, Reel 36, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

¹⁷⁴ Abram Harris to W.E.B. Du Bois, April 4, 1931, Reel 36, Du Bois Papers microfilm; W.E.B. Du Bois to Abram Harris, April 9, 1931, Reel 36, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

am very fond of Walter. I would prefer having Adamic do it for the World, but in view of the contemplated reorganization nothing can be done perhaps.” Adamic was a Marxist author and journalist from Yugoslavia who ran in the same circles as Stolberg. The latter was working on a review of Adamic’s novel *Dynamite*.¹⁷⁵ Stolberg had been criticizing the New Negro Movement since 1929 at least, when he published an article critiquing it for its acceptance of a certain kind of segregation. Harris wrote him in this same letter that “Your strictures on the New Negro are all right I think. They fit in very well with the whole analysis. Let me know when you are coming down. I shall try to get to New York some time in March.”¹⁷⁶

Not all the reviews were positive. The administrators in the National Urban League headquarters reacted badly to Harris’ criticism of their antiunion practices, like setting up black workers with scab jobs. They were so upset that they expunged Harris from every list of fellows printed subsequently. The criticism was nothing new, but it came from someone who had been a fellow and the executive secretary of a branch. Their reaction confirmed Harris’ opinion of bourgeois race organizations unwilling to consider long term economic strategies.¹⁷⁷

Bunche renewed his involvement with the Political Science Club that year and invited several prominent speakers to campus throughout the spring. In March, he invited Roy Nash to speak to the Political Science Club. Nash, previously executive secretary of

¹⁷⁵ Benjamin Stolberg, “Review: *Dynamite* by Louis Adamic,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 155 (May 1931): 248-249.. Also appeared in the *Tribune* in the same issue as Stolberg’s review of the *Black Worker*. Abram Harris to Benjamin Stolberg, February 27, 1931, Folder 3 Box 4b, Ben Stolberg Correspondence, Columbia University Special Collections.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Holloway, *Confronting the Veil*, 97.

the NAACP, was an authority on Brazil. He had authored *The Conquest of Brazil* in 1926 and contributed articles on that country to the *Crisis*. He spoke about race relations in Brazil to the Howard social science students.¹⁷⁸ Bunche was then trying to decide if his dissertation would be about Brazil, so he was as eager as any of the students to hear Nash's talk. Bunche also invited his Harvard professors, Arthur Holcombe, John Sly, H. H. Miller, and Dean Roscoe Pound to speak to the Political Science students, as well as two faculty members of the Howard Law School.

As the end of the term approached, Harris longed for Stolberg to come visit. "Don't get me excited over your coming to Washington and then disappoint me. The last time that you said you were coming I told several people and all of us were much disappointed when you did not make the trip." Harris waited to make plans to visit Baltimore till he heard about Stolberg's trip. He urged him not to think of the cost. "You seem to think that the trip to Washington is a very expensive one. All you need is your railroad fare. Your board and keep cost neither you nor myself anything." He wanted to talk about a new conviction slowly creeping over him; "The more I live and think the more convinced I am that there is nothing to be done in these United States save analyse, study, think, and write. No new movement is as yet possible. The only way that one can be forced into existence is by social criticism and analysis. That is why we ought to have your magazine going by next year this time." He needed Stolberg to discuss these things, because Washington society did not suit. The previous Saturday he had attended a gathering hosted by Louis Lorwin and attended by Jack Shohan, Frank Tannenbaum, and

¹⁷⁸

Ralph Bunche to Dean E. P. Davis, March 9, 1931, Box 24 Folder 8, Bunche Papers Schomburg; Roy Nash, "Brazil: Illustrated," *Crisis*, April 1927; Roy Nash, "The Origin of Negro Slavery in Brazil," *Crisis*, October 1923; Roy Nash, "Is Race Prejudice on Increase in Brazil?," *Crisis*, April 1951; Roy Nash, *The Conquest of Brazil* (New York: Biblo and Tannen, 1968).

Joseph Schlossberg, old time radicals who seemed “very pathetic and defeated.” They discussed Tannenbaum’s theory that democratic institutions acted as “escape-valves for possible revolutionary ardor.” Harris “got pretty tired of the discussion and of Tannenbaum too. I think he is a genial cynic, impressionistic, guilty of wishful thinking. he thinks that he is realistic but he is actually a defeated man, like so many of our intellectuals who think that something must be done in a period of economic and social transition. Well, I am not going to write a dissertation. Come along, we are expecting you.”¹⁷⁹ Harris did not quite know how to adapt to a world where his ideas became the vogue, because of the economic pressure cook that was the Depression.

To keep his position at Howard, a position much sought after by other young, educated black men, Dorsey needed a graduate education. Dorsey was an excellent teacher--“Sam has that personal down-to-earth touch and students adore him. His are among the few lectures at Howard without back-row sleepers”—but Howard could no longer afford to keep a professor with only a BA.¹⁸⁰ Dorsey had been going to Columbia for the past few summers already to work on his Masters.¹⁸¹ When his contract was not renewed for the 1931-32 school year, Dorsey decided to spend a full year at Columbia. Unlike his friends Harris and Bunche, he did not receive partial pay while on sabbatical to finish his degree. So in addition to preparing to go back to school full time, Dorsey

¹⁷⁹ Abram Harris to Benjamin Stolberg, May 12, 1931, Folder 3 Box 4b, Ben Stolberg Correspondence, Columbia University Special Collections.

¹⁸⁰ “National Grapevine,” *Chicago Defender*, April 23, 1949, 6.

¹⁸¹ In summer 1930, he met Merze Tate, who was also continuing her education in political science while teaching at Bennett College for Women in North Carolina. Tate would be his colleague at Howard in the 1940s after she received a B.Litt from Oxford and a Ph.D. from Radcliffe. For information on Merze Tate, see her paper collections at the University Archives, Western Michigan University, and at the Moorland Spingarn Research Center, Howard University. See also her oral history, taken as part of the Black Women’s Oral History Project sponsored by the Schlesinger Library. Her interview was not published with the others and is still held by the Schlesinger.

started to look for a job. Harris thought he might have found him one when he received a letter from Du Bois.

In May, Du Bois started to seek out someone to help him with his research into the Reconstruction. He inquired first of Carter Woodson whether the history knew of anyone trained in bibliography and research.¹⁸² Woodson suggested Myra Callis Colson, a trained economist who three years later hosted Mabel Byrd during her interview with the National Recovery Administration. Harris also developed something of a rivalry with Colson while they both taught in the Workers Education Program later in the 1930s. In 1931, however, Callie Harris offered the only way Du Bois knew about how to get in touch with Colson. Du Bois sent a letter to Colson, care of Callie Harris. When it did not arrive as soon as expected, Abram Harris took the opportunity to suggest a different individual for the post—Emmett Dorsey. Harris assured Du Bois that Dorsey was “an able person and I can take great pleasure in recommending him to you.” Harris jotted a last minute postscript with the news that they had found the letter and Colson would be getting in touch with Du Bois immediately. He sent his letter as composed, though, hoping Du Bois would offer Dorsey the job instead.

Dorsey then sent his own letter of application, with a less than stellar personal recommendation of his talents. He told Du Bois that he had three reasons for being considered for the job, “firstly, because I could do the work. I have some sources that have not been tapped. Secondly, I would be intensely interested in such a study and thirdly, I need a job for the summer.”¹⁸³ For further recommendations of his abilities, he

¹⁸² W.E.B. Du Bois to Carter Woodson, May 19, 1931, Reel 35, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

¹⁸³ Emmett E. Dorsey to W.E.B. Du Bois, June 1931, Reel 34, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

suggested Du Bois apply to Charles Wesley, head of the history department. Dorsey still taught in the history department, even as he worked with Bunche to develop the political science department. Harris' word was likely enough for Du Bois and he hired Dorsey for at least a few weeks of research.¹⁸⁴ Dorsey continued to be involved in Du Bois' *Black Reconstruction* project until it finally came out in book form in 1935.¹⁸⁵

During the summer of 1931, the Young Turks tried to flee the heat of the city. Harris escaped to New York as often as he could. Dorsey moved there entirely. The Bunches visited the beach and the Browns rested in the cool green of their country home.¹⁸⁶ Each processed the changes a few years at Howard had brought. Washington DC had become a center of black thought to challenge Harlem. Harris was now an accepted national leader, without having had to give up his critiques or his scholarly approach. Brown had soared straight into many black Americans' hearts with his stirring, oft repeated poem "Strong Men." Bunche was still in transition, adjusting to a new marriage, building a new political science department, and struggling to research his dissertation while teaching. Dorsey hoped to return.

The Young Turks' relationships were never as stable as some scholars insist when they describe the glory days of Howard University's social science department. They did not arrive at Howard at the same time and they frequently left to further their education, go to conferences, and travel internationally. Their interactions are hard to capture

¹⁸⁴ W.E.B. Du Bois to Emmett E. Dorsey, July 7, 1931, Reel 34, Du Bois Papers microfilm; W.E.B. Du Bois to Abram Harris, July 14, 1931, Reel 34, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

¹⁸⁵ Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: The Fight for Equality*, 362-363.

¹⁸⁶ "D.C. Society," *Afro-American*, June 27, 1931.

through letters and newspapers. Yet the relationships sustained each member. Harris had, for the first time, other black scholars around him burning with ambition and committed to the idea of scholarly objectivity. For the first time, he could talk about the interactions of race and class without being shunned by blacks for focusing too much on class and by whites for focusing too much on race. Gender did not occur to him as a valid means of analysis, nor did he accept women as intellectual equals. Harris and Bunche together began to formulate economic and political theories that explained race as a function of social processes, not as the end point for scholarship or activism.

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UNTRAMMELED THINKING
THE PROMISE AND PERIL OF THE SECOND AMENIA CONFERENCE, 1920-1940

VOLUME III

By

Lauren L. Kientz

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
Michigan State University
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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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Chapter 8

The Education of the Young Turks

Howard University, 1931-1933

I have images of you in the jungle, [...], elephants or whathaveyou; in African skinny 'breakdowns', wielding a wicked high, (Oh, Mordecai, how would's't thou yearn after thy lost sheep); in French jails, or councils of state, trying to preserve your equanimity, and boats wise (most of all), in poker games and black jacks 'lessons' (I'm sure of it) with African kings,--teaching the lost children of Africa their ancestral but forgotten ritual of *les craps*. [...] (By the way, don't publish this in the Afro—I think Carl Murphy dislikes craps and spirituals.)

--Allison Davis to Ralph Bunche¹

¹ Allison Davis to Ralph Bunche, n.d., Box 1 Folder 6, Bunche Papers UCLA.

By 1931, the Young Turks had begun to take over leadership of Washington DC's social science surge. They invited white and black scholars and intellectuals from around the country to come to Howard's campus and discuss how to improve African Americans' political and economic situation, the political situation in Africa and Brazil, and many other topics. Harris became much in demand as a leading voice of the younger generation focused on an economic solution. Unlike his earlier years when he had to contain many of his criticisms to letters to V.F. Calverton, by the thirties he began to challenge other black leaders face to face at the many different conferences that came to Washington DC. This included a couple poignant moments with W.E.B. Du Bois, whom he admired greatly and yet opposed intellectually. In almost every letter to Ben Stolberg, Harris reassessed the *Crisis* editor's new ideas and proposals.

Even as they developed Howard's intellectual environment, the Young Turks continued to move constantly. Summer took them all over the country and the world. School years took them sometimes to graduate school, often to conferences, and sometimes abroad. Ralph Bunche accessed a network of activists and scholars who had been to Europe and Africa to provide him with letters of introduction to important people across the Atlantic for his dissertation research, after spending a year as an administrative assistant to Mordecai Johnson.

Sterling Brown began to study at Harvard University for a Ph.D., about which he was less than enthusiastic. Where Harris would do almost anything to escape the south, Brown missed the vibrancy of the black community there. As he prepared his first book length manuscript of poetry for publication, he began to think about who his audience was. Was he trying to write poetry for the "masses" as Langston Hughes seemed to do?

Or for well-educated people like himself? He wrote to Hughes, wondering if the other poet was wasting his talents by making his poetry too simplistic. Complicated thinkers like “so-called” intellectuals needed their poets, too. Brown had embarked on an identity crisis that would reemerge more strongly after WWII and follow him for many years. Bunche had laid his identity crisis to rest when he went to UCLA and never again seemed to suffer questions about who he was. Harris was in the midst of settling those questions now that he was being taken seriously by black and white leadership (though he still wondered what the right environment was for him, since Howard increasingly did not seem like the correct place).

Unlike the 1920s, when education was the preeminent concern, and the Civil Rights Era to come, when everyone focused on protest, black leadership during the Depression focused largely on social science questions about economics and education. They questioned what the best way was to ameliorate African Americans’ difficult economic plight. Should blacks strengthen the boundaries of their own communities and forget about any kind of push for political, economic, or social integration? Should blacks try to ally with white workers in order to demand rights for all the working class? Should African American leaders focus first on race or treat racial problems as symptoms of underlying economic fissures? Over and again, the Young Turks were asked for their opinions on these questions and they gladly offered them.

1931-1932 School Year

Two more of the Young Turks left Howard for the 1931-1932 school year to pursue graduate degrees; Dorsey was at Columbia working on his masters while Sterling

Brown began doctoral studies in English at Harvard.² Callie Harris also spent the year at **the** Columbia Teachers College. Brown was never as enthusiastic about graduate **education** as Bunche or Harris, finding the three letters Ph.D. more a false marker of “**success**” than a true understanding of someone’s soul. Brown never bothered to finish **the** degree, though it did not prevent him from spending his whole teaching career at **Howard**. He was always touchy when anyone addressed him as “Dr.” and careful to **correct** the mistake. At the same time, Brown continued to write the poetry that would **appear** in his first anthology—*Southern Road*.

Their colleagues left at Howard went through major political controversies within **the** university, including a Congressional threat to investigate the university for **Communist** influences. Bunche was at the heart of these controversies in his new position as assistant to the president, while Harris attempted to avoid them as much as possible. **Bunche** postponed the Rosenwald grant he received to travel abroad for his doctoral research a year to take on the new post, because his wife was expecting their first child, he wanted the higher salary, and he wanted to test out the feel of college administration. After that one year in the administrative hot house, he decided he never again wanted that kind of role or responsibility.

At the end of July, Du Bois wrote Harris that he would be in Washington DC to pay a visit to Howard and Highland Beach. Harris planned an evening of “consultation,” with dinner for just the two of them, first to “clarify our views, that is, if I have any by that time,” followed by “a little diversion in the company of a few friends whom I might invite if you approve.” He suggested Charles Wesley, Sam Dorsey, Sterling Brown, and

² “Howard Began 68th Session Thursday.” *Afro-American*, October 10, 1931.

Dr. Leon Shereshefsky, but not Bunche. He was quite excited; “Social politics are so **confused** that get togethers of the kind I have in mind are highly desirable,” he justified **the** plan to Du Bois. Some of the greatest misunderstandings came from female presence. “**You** see I have asked no women. Their presence adds to confusion.”³ Harris preferred to **discuss** ideas without hormones flooding his system. As far as the record shows, this year **was** when he started to step out on Callie. Du Bois, in contrast, loved to mix political **conversations** with his hormones. The women he slept with, other than his wife, tended to **be** highly intelligent and excellent conversationalists. This preference never rubbed off on **his** younger friend.

Du Bois agreed to the plan and on a Friday night around 9 o’clock five of them gathered at Harris’ new apartment at 1903 Fifteenth Street N.W. Brown was not there, probably because he and his wife had already left for their country house, where they spent hot summer weekends. And it was hot that week. Harris reported to Stolberg that it had been 102 several days in a row, with humidity to match. Despite his hopes for the evening, Harris was characteristically annoyed with the actual outcome. Du Bois, at least, “was grand.” They sat around their circle of chairs in the living room, with surreptitiously acquired drink in hand. Du Bois expounded on his ideas about Reconstruction that Dorsey had helped him research that summer. Harris was glad to realize that Du Bois and he “mostly agreed on an interpretation of the reconstruction. He will have his own way

³ Abram Harris to W.E.B. Du Bois, July 24, 1931, Reel 34, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

no matter who gives him money or pats him on the back. I hear he is a little weary of fighting.”⁴

As he thought about Reconstruction, Harris’ mind naturally turned to the economics of the period. He advocated the idea that the penetration of slave labor into every industry had suppressed the growth of a large group of free white laborers in the South. When Wesley contradicted this idea, Harris pointed out that in Wesley’s “book on Negro labor [he had explained] that there were (according to the census of 1865) 100,000 Negro artisans to 20,000 whites.” When Wesley denied ever making the statement, Harris jumped from the table, ran to his bookcase, drew down the book, and “showed it to him on page 142.” Perhaps if it had been a lapse of memory on numbers or figures, Harris could have forgiven it, but Wesley’s attitude exhibited only “interpretative stupidity. Why one with the slightest knowledge of economic history knows that slave labor underbids free and the two cannot exist side by side.” Harris could not respect Stolberg’s “friend” Wesley, for he was “no scholar, by that I mean he is neither a good academician nor an incisive mind” though he was “alright for academic politics.”⁵ He gave the specific anecdote to prove his opinion of the man.

To Harris’ astonishment, Dorsey sided with Wesley. “If you could have heard that bastard praise Wesley’s fact-gathering propensity and the undigested information in his Negro Labor,” he spewed to Stolberg, “you would not have taken Sam for the same fellow we have always considered him.”⁶ Harris believed this praise came out of

⁴ Abram Harris to Benjamin Stolberg, Letter, August 3, 1931, Folder 3 Box 4b, Ben Stolberg Correspondence, Columbia University Special Collections.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

Dorsey's self-consciousness; "I fear that his overweening desire to be considered an intellectual makes him flap before any one who has written a book or gotten a Ph.D. degree."⁷ One wonders what Harris' own conversation with his elders sounded like when he had that same desire half a decade ago. In his letters to Calverton then, he criticized Du Bois, but in his letters to the man himself, he was invariably polite and full of praise.

In the same letter reporting on this evening, Harris talked about his resolution to "forget the Norman Thomases' and the Brookwoodites." The past winter, Stolberg had resigned from the New York Chairmanship of Norman Thomas' League for Industrial Democracy. He complained to Thomas that the organization was "increasingly becoming a purely liberal organization." Thomas disagreed, pointing particularly to the successful work that Stolberg had started in New York that had grown during Reinhold Niebuhr's presidency.⁸ Regardless, Stolberg left the organization, seeking more radical spaces for his energies, but Harris was still obliged to write a pamphlet for the organization, for which he had been given a \$300 advance. He was tempted to just give up the agreement, but had to either repay the LID or write the pamphlet in order to appease Callie. "Poor kid she has divested herself of a lot of bourgeois attachments, but her notions of fair dealings are still conservative, especially in money transactions."⁹

Harris told Stolberg that he was going to try to keep his head down the next year. "Howard politics I shall steer clear of" and academic politics would have to "carry on without me." As to labor politics, "the labor movement has my 'humanitarian'

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Norman Thomas to Benjamin Stolberg, January 6, 1931, Catalogued, Ben Stolberg Correspondence, Columbia University Special Collections.

⁹ Harris to Stolberg, August 3, 1931.

sympathy,” but he had yet to find anyone or any organization to follow. “I’ll get on the **band** wagon when I see a ‘good band’ and an excellent drum-major. I am sick of ‘drum **and** fife’ corps. There is nothing to be done in this confusion but to think how confused **and** stupid we all are.” For example, George Schuyler of the *Messenger* had been “**fooling** with the cooperative people. He thinks that it is an anti-dote to the Negro **Business League’s** propaganda. There is more confusion!” Harris did not know what was **happening** to the leaders he had followed. After all, “Du Bois is right when he says that **the** Negro mass is an economic proletariat, but is psychologically bourgeois.”¹⁰ Yet, even **Du Bois** was starting to advocate a cooperative approach similar to Schuyler’s for solving **the** economic problem, an approach too small scale and too bourgeois for Harris.

Harris had just suffered through a perfect “exhibition” of this psychology “of **inanity** in the past month (August 1931)—the convention of the National Association of **Teachers in Colored schools.**” Here he was surrounded by “well educated M.A.s and **Ph.D.’s** from Harvard, Chicago, etc.” who were “quite content on building a black economy within the white world. Negro schools, Negro churches, Negro hospitals, Negro streets, Negro businesses, Negro poets, Negro books—in short a little Negro world devoid of critical leadership.” This world walled itself off from whites yet was “maintained by white philanthropy and led by those whose values are the reflected virtues of the best white people.” Among this educated group, in Harris’ view, “there’s slight understanding of what is happening in the world at large.” How, then would they ever begin “radicalizing the Negro masses!” Building a black cooperative economy, like

¹⁰ Ibid.

Du Bois and Schuyler advocated, “wont have any more success than the communists who **are** on the other extreme of confusion and insanity.”¹¹

The President of the National Association of Teachers in Colored Schools was W. A. Robinson, also Supervisor of Negro Schools in North Carolina. When Frazier was **hounded** out of Atlanta, Robinson wrote him a warm letter full of personal regard that he **could** use as a letter of recommendation. Robinson had also gathered extensive data on **black** high schools in sixteen states for 1925-26. By giving specific statistics about the **number** of high schools per pupil and the funding of them, Robinson showed not only “that injustice is done the Negro children but to emphasize the unsoundness of the **general** public policy with regard to Negro schools.” Robinson concluded that the lack of **educational** facilities for blacks was “creating in the South a vast, defenseless, exploitable **group**; a social cesspool of ignorance, disease and crime, and social problems of all **kinds**.” Public officials should be motivated to establish schools because “such a group is a **tremendous** liability to the South socially and economically, raising the unfavorable statistics and lowering the per capita wealth, both because they do not either produce or consume as much as they would if given more favorable opportunities for efficient training and further because such a group is a constant drain upon the funds of the State for corrective and punitive measures and the objects of public welfare and charity programs.”¹² This conclusion proved some of the “bourgeois” inclinations that so distressed Harris, who would never have called black workers a “social cesspool.” At the same time, Robinson identified a structural problem that the South as a whole should

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² W.E.B. Du Bois, “High Schools, Postscript by Du Bois,” *Crisis*, August 1927, 203.

solve by creating more high schools serving black students. Robinson, at least, was not as **ignorant** of economic processes as Harris felt he was based on his weekend with the **group**.

In answer to his friend's persistent frustration with Howard, Ben Stolberg urged **Harris** to find a position in New York, and made several suggestions for possible jobs, **offering** to put in a good word. Harris loved New York. His weekly letters to Stolberg **often** included plans to get to New York and away from DC. Harris had a greater **intellectual** home there than in Washington DC; he was excited to talk to Stolberg and his **ilk**. New York did not represent the same demands on his time by things he found **inconsequential**—students without promise, university politics, committees, and **colleagues** who did not seem to understand him (beyond his immediate circle). New York **represented** admission into a world of social scientists that were not so new to the **discipline** as Howard's inchoate efforts.

And more than anything, New York was not in the South. "I want to tell you what a hell the South is," he wrote Stolberg after visiting his family in Richmond. "My God, those sweet benevolent vestiges of the planter aristocracy sent me to bed with a raving headache."¹³ He thought the intensity of his emotions was over grief for his father, but then realized instead that he felt consumed "with madness" and anger towards the racial situations and the way his family reacted to such situations. All those he had grown up with flocked to see him. "These people think that Richmond is just about the grandest heaven on earth that human mind can visualize. One had better not criticize schools, segregation on street cars, ill kept streets in the Negro section, the general backwardness

¹³ Abram Harris to Benjamin Stolberg, n.d 1932, Folder 3 Box 4b, Ben Stolberg Correspondence, Columbia University Special Collections.

of the South. To do so is to raise the hell that I did.” Harris thought at first that it must be that his old friends and family did not want to be treated as humans, but then realized that they did “yet know what things should be demanded by one who wants to be treated as a human being.” It was not enough for the NAACP to fight for civil rights. Rather “the Negro”

needs an internal bath. Nothing will be done with him or for him until the Negro intellectual brings about an transformation within the ghetto. I mean a transformation of values, of course. Like a fool I tried to achieve such a transformation within my own family on Saturday and Sunday of a week ago. I realized after much damning and swearing that I was ridiculous, that I expected them to accept my standards of expenditure and of taste just because I said so. There was nothing in them to which I could appeal. They were acting as they had always acted. The result was that I made myself sick, and that was all accomplished. No that was not all: I proved what they had always suspected that I was alien to them.¹⁴

Harris recognized what Franz Fanon would later call “colonization of the mind” in *Black Skins, White Masks*. Carter G. Woodson blamed this condition on the education African Americans received in the United States. He was airing these views in the essays for black newspapers that he turned into *The Mis-Education of the Negro*, published two years later. Harris did not respect Woodson’s writings because they focused on black history rather than economics.

Harris returned to Howard frustrated as always and turned back to his work and to his New York friend as balm and boon. He was then trying to complete an essay on Marx and Veblen, in addition to finishing up a book on the black bourgeoisie.¹⁵

Though he longed to leave the South, Harris could not find a position in New York that would suit him or have him. It seemed that the only thing open was a position

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

with the NAACP or the Urban League, not a position with a university. The philosophy **and** policy of the NAACP suited him much more than the Urban League's, which he **hated**. Joining the NAACP was impossible, though. Harris declared "I would rather stay **here** **then** thousand times than go into that outfit" because of what it had done to Du Bois. "**Any** organization that is responsible for reducing a man like Du Bois to a mere shadow **of his** former stature is not worth a tinkers damn. Walter is nothing but an extreme **expression** of the most vulgar and cheapest of social climbing, which Du Bois hates." He **resolved** to "simply stay here and turn out as much stuff as I can."¹⁶

Harris' poor opinion of the NAACP grew after having breakfast with Du Bois **during** a trip to New York over the winter break, 1931-1932. Du Bois described his **conflict** with Walter White over control of the *Crisis* and the future of the NAACP. He **feared** he was losing out to the bureaucrats. Harris had no respect for the court cases that **White** pursued. They were not indicative of the NAACP's initial militancy. Rather, "[t]hese so-called battles are nothing more than sham battles behind which Walter White **conducts** a personal campaign (newspaper publicity; and popular esteem for his valor) for **cheap** self-aggrandizement." Harris brought up "the withdrawal of the NAACP from **Scottsboro**" to prove that the NAACP's reliance "upon court battles as a justification for its **existence** is a dubious expedient."¹⁷

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Abram Harris to Benjamin Stolberg, December 9, 1931, Folder 3 Box 4b, Ben Stolberg Correspondence, Columbia University Special Collections.

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Abram Harris to Benjamin Stolberg, January 1932, Folder 3 Box 4b, Ben Stolberg Correspondence, Columbia University Special Collections.

In December 1931, a rumor began that Democrats in Congress were agitating for **a congressional inquiry** into the running of Howard because they disagreed with **Mordecai Johnson's** policies (particularly those concerning the freedom of the faculty to **write** and say what they would, not constrained by the fear of appearing communist). The **faculty** began to split into groups for and against Johnson. The camp against him was led by **Kelly Miller**. Du Bois stood up on the side of Johnson in a controversial *Crisis* **editorial** that landed him in the midst of a libel lawsuit stretching into the next fall. Du **Bois** ultimately apologized for the statements when he learned that Johnson had not seen, **let alone** approved, the manuscript of the editorial beforehand. He had been counseled by **Arthur Spingarn**, George Crawford and Howard University law dean Charles Houston.¹⁸

Through the faculty grapevine, Harris heard that Johnson “liked me very much **but** understood that I was opposed to him, or rather that I was lining up against him. Of **course** I am doing nothing of the sort” he assured Stolberg. “As a matter of fact I have **consistently** refused to do so. All I have done is simply to declare opposition to specific **matters** of university policy that affect my department and my own welfare as a member of **this** faculty. That’s where I have always stood and always will stand.”¹⁹ The pressure of **these** politics drove Harris almost to his breaking point. “I’ve lost interest in this place, **and** **don’t** give a damn what happens around me. [...] The faculty is so damned weak that

¹⁸ V.D. Johnston to W.E.B. Du Bois, March 1, 1932, Reel 38, Du Bois Papers microfilm; Mordecai Johnson to W.E.B. Du Bois, April 11, 1932, Reel 38, Du Bois Papers microfilm; W.E.B. Du Bois to V.D. Johnston, June 15, 1932, Reel 38, Du Bois Papers microfilm; V.D. Johnston to W.E.B. Du Bois, June 18, 1932, Reel 38, Du Bois Papers microfilm; V.D. Johnston to W.E.B. Du Bois, June 20, 1932, Reel 38, Du Bois Papers microfilm; W.E.B. Du Bois to Mordecai Johnson, personal, October 3, 1932, Reel 38, Du Bois Papers microfilm; W.E.B. Du Bois to Mordecai Johnson, Personal, October 14, 1932, Reel 38, Du Bois Papers microfilm; W.E.B. Du Bois to Mordecai Johnson, November 28, 1932, Reel 38, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

¹⁹ Harris to Stolberg, December 9, 1931.

it is wholly unreliable. Just is away. The only persons of strength left are Wesley and **Locke**. I must see them.”²⁰ Dorsey and Brown were far away in the north and Bunche **was** tied up in the middle of these politics. In fact, Harris wrote rather snidely to Stolberg **that** he hoped “your little affair with Bunche turns out to your liking.”²¹

Bunche was in the midst of planning a social science conference hosted at **Howard** in late April.²² Unlike Harris, who seemed to complain and retreat into his own **research**, Bunche tried to improve the status of the university. He invited social scientists **he knew** had a special interest in African Americans and a personal relationship with him **to come** speak. Out of town speakers along with Stolberg were Du Bois and Raymond **Buell** of the Foreign Policy Association. Bunche’s relationship with Buell had begun at **Harvard**, but developed when Bunche began to seek out information about his trip to **Africa**. Bunche planned the conference around Buell’s convenience: “Dr. Locke, Dr. **Harris** of our economics department and myself are very anxious to have you come here **and** talk to a group of social science students any time this spring that would suit your **convenience**.”²³

²⁰ Abram Harris to Benjamin Stolberg, Mch 1932, Folder 3 Box 4b, Ben Stolberg Correspondence, Columbia University Special Collections.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ralph Bunche to Benjamin Stolberg, April 9, 1932, Catalogued, Ben Stolberg Correspondence, Columbia University Special Collections; Ralph Bunche to Benjamin Stolberg, May 4, 1932, Catalogued, Ben Stolberg Correspondence, Columbia University Special Collections.

²³ Ralph Bunche to Raymond Buell, March 25, 1931, Box 126, Bunche Papers UCLA.

Ralph Bunche began to plan for his first excursion abroad long before he got on a **boat**, employing a large network of support that included people he knew—black scholars **and** white Harvardians—and developing a new one through letters. He had finally chosen a **dissertation** topic after much careful consideration of the political situation in Brazil, **Africa**, and the United States. With the encouragement of his advisor, Arthur Holcombe, he **planned** to study race relations in Brazil. During a January 1931 dinner with George **Benson**, a fellow Harvard Ph.D. Candidate who was visiting DC, he realized how much he **liked** the Brazilian topic. Comparing his progress with Benson, he realized how little **work** he was getting done on his dissertation while teaching, so he decided to take the **next year** off.²⁴ He had also solicited advice from Mordecai Johnson, who urged him to **study** African Americans relationship to the US political system. He subtly suggested that the **Brazilian** topic was a derivative of Holcombe's work, while the US topic was **innovative** and necessary.²⁵ Despite the many ways that choosing the US would be easier (**funding**, travel, sources), Bunche chose Brazil. He explained to Holcombe that

There seems to be little doubt that I could get encouraging support for a study of the Negro in West Virginia politics, or the like. But I am determined now to avoid at all costs the narrow provincialism which characterizes such a study. I am fully persuaded that the Negro of all scholars must first develop a broad and international background if his contributions to the solution of our own peculiar domestic problem are to make much impress.²⁶

This was quite a different choice than Harris and Brown. On one level Harris agreed that **focusing** only on black Americans was too narrow. He avoided this by studying Marxist

²⁴ Ralph Bunche to Gladys E. Campbell, January 21, 1931, Box 24 Folder 6, Bunche Papers Schomburg.

²⁵ Mordecai Johnson to Ralph Bunche, August 25, 1930, Box 126 Folder 4, Bunche Papers UCLA.

²⁶ Ralph Bunche to Arthur Holcombe, February 28, 1931, Box 126, Bunche Papers UCLA.

theory and the larger context of the United States. He did not show much interest in **international** questions, however. Also, in all the various ways he felt trapped by his **situation**, he did not seem to begrudge studying African Americans, at least during his **earlier** years. He turned increasingly to theoretical questions as his career wore on. **Brown**, in utter contrast, thrived on the “provincialism” of the individual stories of rural **blacks**. Uniting all three was a belief in objectivity. Even Brown, a poet rather than a **social** scientist, believed that his work and his perspective achieved a distance that gave **him** objectivity on the experiences on African Americans.

Bunche could not find any funding to travel to Brazil. Holcombe suggested **making** a special request to the Rosenwald Grant. When they turned him down, he always **assumed** then (and often told the story) that Edwin Embree of the Rosenwald Foundation **was** reluctant to fund an exploration into Brazil. Perhaps the fund was afraid what a black **exposed** to Brazil would bring back to the United States; the Young Turks thought the **Brazilian** topic might seem “much more ‘dangerous’ in its implications to the situation in **this** country.”²⁷ Brazil had a much looser, more gradual racial hierarchy than the blunt **black/white** dichotomy of the United States.²⁸ Foundations in the 1920s tended to fund **projects** that maintained the status quo; the Depression urged them to make some **changes**, but they continue to seek societal stability.²⁹ After Bunche had become a **success** and repeated this story to a younger scholar interested in going to Brazil, Embree

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Jonathan Scott Holloway, *Confronting the veil*, 2002, 163.

²⁹ Jerry Gershenhorn, *Melville J. Herskovits and the Racial Politics of Knowledge* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 131.

insisted that he could not remember making such a statement.³⁰ The Rosenwald tended to **fund** very safe projects, including industrial schools long into the 1930s, far past the time **when** many black intellectuals had denounced Booker T. Washington's educational **theories**. Despite the Fund's conservative bent, and initial focus solely on elementary **education** for blacks, it was amenable to the changes Embree brought. In particular, he **began** to funnel a lot more of the fund's cash towards graduate education for blacks.³¹ A **vast majority** of those blacks who received Ph.D.s in the 1930s, or who traveled abroad **for education**, had a Rosenwald grant in their past. The Fund's ability to provide **resources**, especially during the Depression, greatly contributed to the flowering of **graduate** education among African Americans. Bunche's experience proves that this **funding** did not come without cost.

As a second choice, Bunche decided on a comparison of colonial and mandate **governance** of two different West African regions—Togoland and Dahomey. Holcombe **and Bunche** agreed that this choice was probably more diplomatic. "The African topic **appears** to involve less possibility of offending certain sensibilities than the other," **Bunche** wrote his advisor. But that was not the only reason he chose it. "There are also **certain** other advantages which the African study might afford. The experience acquired **in that** direction should begin to equip me to offer at some later time a course on some **aspect** of the African political situation which the department here must certainly

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"I still do not understand how I could have said the things I appear to have said. I have long been interested in the racial situation in Brazil and have thought it had very interesting suggestions as a strikingly different method of handling race relations. However, the question of comments of ten years ago are probably less important than actions in the future. As you know, several of the Fund's Fellows, both white and Negro, have been in Brazil recently. I hope this stream may continue." Edwin Embree to Ralph Bunche, July 9, 1941, Box 126, Bunche Papers UCLA.

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Edwin Rogers Embree, *Investment in People; the Story of the Julius Rosenwald Fund*, 1st ed. (New York: Harper, 1949).

eventually boast.” And though he would never agree with Herskovits on the level of Africanism in African American culture, he did recognize that “It is probably true, also, that a better acquaintance with Africa would furnish a richer background for the study [of] the Negro either here or in Brazil.”³² He thanked Holcombe profusely for his help; “Will I bore you by repeating that my appreciation for all the trouble you put yourself to in my behalf is as deep as your help is priceless?”³³

Bunche turned to Raymond Buell for help in preparing his Rosenwald and Carnegie applications for the African project. He had already mined Buell’s book for an introduction to African political systems, but Buell himself provided specific, practical suggestions. When Bunche went to visit Buell in his Foreign Policy Association office in New York City, the older scholar suggested that Bunche divide his time between Geneva, Paris, and Africa to fully explore the primary sources. He broke down the cost of African travel so that Bunche could request an exact amount from the funding agencies. Buell estimated it would cost \$2000 to fund Bunche for nine total months, four of them spent in Africa. Buell also wrote many of the scholars in his circle, introducing and recommending Bunche as “one of the few American Negroes who has a scientific interest in international and inter-racial affairs. He is taking his doctor’s degree from Harvard and I feel will make a real contribution to political science and to inter-racial understanding.”³⁴

³² Bunche to Holcombe, February 28, 1931.

³³ Ralph Bunche to Arthur Holcombe, July 20, 1931, Box 126, Bunche Papers UCLA.

³⁴ Raymond Buell to James Grafton Rogers, May 12, 1932, Box 62, Bunche Papers UCLA.

Bunche's Rosenwald application distinctly stated the continuing necessity for colonial governments and Bunche's desire only to study successful colonial governments in action. Perhaps it was his belief, as he asserted, "that experiments in colonial administration are still vital to the entire world; certainly they have contributed much to the solution of problems in political theory." Or perhaps he did not want a repeat of his inability to get funds the year before for the more "radical" (in terms of its potential to enlighten race relations in the United States) Brazilian project. To explain his support for colonial governments, he explained that it was his "sincere belief that European withdrawal from Africa is neither possible nor desirable within a long period of years to come — it could only result in chaos and anarchy." This meant that specific study of colonial administration was "important not only to Africa, but to the world at large which will share in the fair and proper use of Africa's vast resources." He picked Dahomey, a French protectorate in West Africa, and Togoland, a French mandate, in order to compare these two different systems of governance in several areas: "organization; administration of justice; governmental subsidy policy; educational administration; taxation systems; presentations; language policy; requisitions land policy; military policy; tariff policy; public health, etc." He concluded his application with a classic Young Turk statement—"I propose to make the study as objective and scientific as humanly possible, for only in this sense will the results be of value."³⁵

Even though most of the documents he needed on the colonial and mandate governments were in Europe, he was determined to go to Africa in order to learn the

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Ralph Bunche to Edwin Embree, April 8, 1931, Box 126, Bunche Papers UCLA.

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perspectives of Africans under colonial powers.³⁶ He made the project more than an *apology* for colonial power by focusing the dissertation on African experiences. John Sly, *one* of his mentors from Harvard who had moved to West Virginia University, *encouraged* this approach; “‘The standpoint of the native’ is the right approach,--at least it *seems* to me to be a fundamental one. It is difficult to know what is good for the other *fellow*, and programs always tend to bear the stamp of our own aspirations, but I guess it *will be* part of your job to untangle the two and see the thing frankly through native eyes *with* the native background.”³⁷ When Bunche and his professors thought about the “*native* viewpoint,” they thought first about bureaucrats of African descent. It was not *until* Bunche’s second trip that he sought out a greater range of opinion.

Bunche received a Rosenwald Scholarship for \$2000 with this application, for the *year* 1931-32, but he delayed it a year when Mordecai Johnson asked him to become his *assistant*. Bunche accepted the post because he was intrigued to try out an administrative *post*, but also because he wanted to be in the United States for the birth of his first child, *and* knew that the increased salary that came with the post would allow him to save *money* for the trip ahead.³⁸

Harris was as excited by Stolberg’s visit to Howard, as part of Bunche’s social *science* conference, as he had been by Calverton’s to West Virginia Collegiate Institute

³⁶ Alain Locke to Ralph Bunche, July 25, 1932, Box 1 Folder 6, Bunche Papers UCLA.

³⁷ John Sly to Ralph Bunche, September 19, 1932, Box 1 Folder 6, Bunche Papers UCLA.

³⁸ Ralph Bunche to Joe Blum, April 19, 1932, Box 1 Folder 6, Bunche Papers UCLA.

years before, and had some of the same expectations of what Stolberg could accomplish *in* transforming the university. He started bugging Bunche about bringing Stolberg to **campus** in September and did not let up until Stolberg arrived in May.³⁹ Then he sent his **advice** wafting northward on the mail train; “Listen, I want you to be as good as hell. You **are going** to draw a big crowd. Begin to get your stuff together right away.” Again he **wrote**, “Now I want you to handle your topic fearlessly, and in your usually critical **manner**. Don’t soft pedal anything because you think it might hurt somebody.” Stolberg **would** stay with Harris, and--though this would normally mean a gab fest late into the **evening**--“Wednesday night you will go to bed early, there will be no talking until you **have delivered** that speech.”⁴⁰

Along with the out of town social scientists, Wesley, Harris, and Dorsey **attended**.⁴¹ Frazier told Harris that he had been disappointed not to be invited. Harris was **horrified** at the oversight and assured him, “next time no such error will be made; for, let **us hope** that you will then be a member of our faculty.” He also told Frazier that several **of Callie’s** professors at the Columbia Teachers College had praised his book on the **black** family; one even inquired of the students whether anyone knew Frazier. Harris and **Frazier** exchanged compliments on their respective works.⁴²

³⁹ Harris to Stolberg, September 28, 1931. November 20, 1931, February 18, 1932, April 7, 32

⁴⁰ Harris to Stolberg, April 7, 32

⁴¹ “Among Our Schools and Colleges,” *Chicago Defender*, April 30, 1932, 4; W.E.B. Du Bois to Abram Harris, April 26, 1932, Reel 38, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

⁴² Harris also agreed with Frazier’s “criticism that we dealt rather gently with certain intellectual groups.” Abram Harris to E. Franklin Frazier, May 25, 1932, 131 Box 17 Folder 23, Frazier Papers, MSRC; Abram Harris to E. Franklin Frazier, June 4, 1932, 131 Box 17 Folder 22, Frazier Papers, MSRC..

Harris' desire for Stolberg's critical exposition was peaked by "the enclosed piece of nonsense by Dr. Carter G. Woodson, Negro Historian and graduate of Harvard. Can you imagine an intelligent man making such asinine statements? If the Negro does not *learn* about the economic world he is living in he is going to be in a hell of a fix. ... But *read* the article for your self. I am sure that you ought to bring in a criticism of Dr. Woodson's learnedness. He ought to stick to Negro chronology." Harris was preparing his *own* criticism of Woodson for his speech to the NAACP two weeks after the social *science* conference. "When I deliver my NAACP speech, I am going to crack the hell out of *him*. So please don't lose the clipping."⁴³

On May 17, 1932, Harris shared the platform with Senator Buckley from Ohio and **Du** Bois. Rising first, Harris excoriated the existing leadership. The depression had *brought* to light "the general confusion and sterility of ideas [...] among old leadership." His *speech*

showed that planning and so called smoothing out the business cycle by mechanical procedures, instead of by a progressive release of purchasing power was farcical. Then I pointed out that a progressive release of purchasing power necessary to maintain production and consumption of even keel could only be obtained under a democratically controlled and owned industrial system. This requires the united organization of black and white laborers.

Workers tended to "think their problems distinct" but only "a fool can fail to observe the *identity* of economic interest between white and black proletarians." African Americans *did have* "special racial difficulties" but they were intimately "connected with the general *economic* problem." Yet all the existing programs "that aim at Negro economic welfare *overlook* this relation." Harris explained the problems with "the Urban League, Du Bois'

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Abram Harris to Benjamin Stolberg, "Critique of Woodson," May 1932, Folder 3 Box 4b, Ben Stolberg Correspondence, Columbia University Special Collections.

and Schuyler's Consumers' Co-operation, The Negro Business League, and the Back to the Farm notions of Kelly Miller." He was careful about how he formulated his critique of Du Bois' cooperative plan—he did "not want it said that I am not fighting Du Bois."⁴⁴

If Du Bois and Schuyler would give their plan economic limitations, then it "might be used to relieve acute economic necessity among a small number of Negroes in the large communities." Furthermore, it might be "made the basis for support an intellectual leadership which will align Negro and white workers on the industrial and political front." Only in these conditions should it be supported. "But if it is to serve as the basis of a black petty bourgeoisie or of a black economy in which Negro workers are segregated from whites etc. it must not only be opposed but actually fought."⁴⁵

Later, others in the room told Harris that Du Bois "sat writhing in his chair as I spoke." Du Bois justified his plan for cooperation in the speech he gave, but Harris called it only "a faint effort." Du Bois charged Harris with impractical idealism. "He said that I painted a most beautiful and scientific picture of the economic difficulties of the present and the position of the Negro workers, but that I seem to think that all we have to do is paint that picture and wait for the white and black workers to get together." Harris did not understand that "white and black workers just are not getting together." Du Bois had spoken of a similar coalition between black and white workers many times over the years in the *Crisis*. He knew how easy it was to advocate such a system and how difficult it was to realize it.

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Abram Harris to Benjamin Stolberg, May 18, 1932, Folder 3 Box 4b, Ben Stolberg Correspondence, Columbia University Special Collections.

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Abram Harris to Benjamin Stolberg, "critique of Du Bois's cooperative plan," May 1932, Folder 3 Box 4b, Ben Stolberg Correspondence, Columbia University Special Collections.

Du Bois then introduced his new approach to the problems facing African Americans. The man who became famous for excoriating Booker T. Washington for his acceptance of segregation declared that until something changed, “the Negro has to make a *living* ‘within the color line.’” In recognition of this essential fact, the NAACP had to “*change* its tactics” by going “to the masses with an economic program” and working to “*unite* the colored races of the world,--the black of Africa, the West Indies and so forth.”⁴⁶

In this last “plea for racial solidarity,” Du Bois “touched” Harris. Harris could not agree with many of Du Bois’s plans nor believe in their “efficacy,” but he also could not escape his fundamental “love for Du Bois.”⁴⁷ Du Bois’s history and his present willingness to change commanded respect: “Here is a man who has fought an excellent fight (one in which a person like myself would have been licked from the outset) but who suddenly realizes that he is living in a new world with new problems for which he does not possess an answer.”⁴⁸ In previous meetings, he had been charmed by Du Bois’s independence; “he will have his own way no matter who gives him money or pats him on the back.”⁴⁹ Harris respected Du Bois for the tenacity of his spirit, his ability to grow and develop as he aged, and his independence of opinion. He was also emotionally moved by Du Bois’ eloquent description of African Americans binding together to face down the difficulties of the Depression as a community.

⁴⁶ Harris to Stolberg, May 18, 1932.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Harris to Stolberg, August 3, 1931.

Yet, to Harris, Du Bois could not escape the problem that he was trying “to put new wine into old bottles:

Let us, says he, accept segregation not because we like it but because we have to. And within the walls of segregation we will go as far as we can with a black economy which will avoid the class antagonisms that exist in the white world. We will build on a co-operative basis uniting our economic efforts in this country with Africa and the West Indies.⁵⁰

Despite being touched, Harris was not convinced by his mentor’s plea.

He admired “Du Bois for what he has done in the past but I think the ideas which I **hav**e sketched above must be fought.” He did not like to think that he was hurting Du **Bois** with his opposition, but he felt compelled to do so, in part, because Du Bois was “**gett**ing more and more reactionary every day” and because he could not see the NAACP “**chang**ing its program” because “Walter White is in the saddle.” And to Harris, White was **only** “a cheap little climber.” A year and a half earlier, Harris had told Stolberg that he **was** “very fond of Walter.” But many conversations with Du Bois and watching White at **the** helm of the NAACP had changed his opinion of the executive secretary **complet**ely.⁵¹ That very day had given him an example. Before his speech White had **spoke**n to him about his enthusiasm for class solidarity as espoused by Sterling Spero and Jay **L**ovestone. An enthusiasm, Harris believed stretched only to private conversations. **White** would “agree with anyone whom he thinks a celebrity if it enhances his social **popu**larity. I am just ‘little Abram Harris’ to him.” Harris’ critique of the leadership arose **from** his ideas about things, but also from his ego. Langston Hughes agreed with Harris’ **assess**ment of the NAACP secretary. In an article for a Russian magazine, Harris

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Harris to Stolberg, May 18, 1932.

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Abram Harris to Benjamin Stolberg, February 27, 1931, Folder 3 Box 4b, Ben Stolberg Correspondence, Columbia University Special Collections.

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described White's early successes as a journalist and his recent downfall into red-baiting for the "Nationalistic Association for the Advancement of Colored People." Using his journalist skills, White "and the rest of his once liberal confreres in this Negro reformist organization have joined hands with the American capitalist reaction.... He is well paid for his activities, of course—and does what his job calls for. No young man would like to lose a nice apartment in a near skyscraper, his room full of books and pictures, his good food and comfortable living. ... But Walter White has lost a lot of his former prestige with the young intellectuals, both black and white. What the class-conscious workers think of him, I will not repeat here. It would be too obscene."⁵²

After Harris spoke, clearly challenging black leadership, none of the NAACP members in the audience engaged his critiques. "They just ignored me as if nothing had been said. I was not looking for praise but I was disgusted with White's cheap avoidance of me after the speech. Well the issues have been drawn. They all know where I stand, and I feel that much stronger." At least his fellow Young Turk had been there to support him; Dorsey "said that the speech was better than the one I delivered at Howard's student conference."⁵³ After the conference, Du Bois telegraphed Harris to rush him a copy of the speech and told him "sorry not to have seen more of you."⁵⁴ Harris rushed the speech, but tweaked his critique of Du Bois. Just as he did not want it said that he did not

⁵² Hughes told White that he was writing this article, and then sent him a copy of it and of his essay about Countee Cullen. White then passed them on to the Spingarns. He no doubt knew that Amy and Hughes had once been close friends. Walter White to Amy and J.E. Spingarn, August 3, , Reel 16, NAACP Papers 2a.

⁵³ Harris to Stolberg, May 18, 1932.

⁵⁴ W.E.B. Du Bois to Abram Harris, telegram, May 26, 1932, Reel 38, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

[illegible]

critique Du Bois, he also did not want it said that he was now fighting him.⁵⁵ He suggested that if Du Bois and Schuyler recognized their plan's "economic limitations" then "we need not fight it because of its palliative character. It might be used to relieve acute economic necessity among a small number of Negroes in the large communities." Indeed, an intellectual leadership could build off of it to "align Negro and white workers on **the** industrial and political front. [...] But if it is to serve as the basis of a black petty bourgeoisie or of a black economy in which Negro workers are segregated from whites etc. **it** must not only be opposed but actually fought."⁵⁶ He sent this change in his **thinking** to Stolberg and asked "if I made too much of a concession? If I did you wont fail to **tell** me, I am sure."⁵⁷

Throughout his year at Cambridge, struggling against formalized classes and yearning to be back in the field, Sterling Brown published his poetry. He gained his first great success when "Strong Men" appeared in *The Opportunity* in 1931. This poem gained an immediate foothold with African American audiences. Reports about public declamations of the poem began to appear throughout black newspapers. As discussed previously, Anna Arnold read the poem at an International Student Services conference at Mt. Holyoke in 1931, where it touched many people of color in the audience. The poem

⁵⁵ Harris to Stolberg, "critique of Du Bois's cooperative plan."

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

had a clear, gripping message about incipient power and longing. It also captured blacks' existing masculine strength and their desire for ever more.

Brown worked actively to unite "intellectuals" and "masses" through his poetry and folklore collections. He was reluctant to identify himself as an intellectual because of **what** it connoted. Writing to Langston Hughes in 1931 about his recent move to Harvard for a PhD, Brown moaned, "I'm getting to feel right old. I'm back up here, partly for reasons of expediency—our colleges being afflicted with the P.h.Disease—and partly because I wanted a great deal to step out of a grind that I haven't let up on for nine years."⁵⁸ (The "P.h.Disease" was caused when the General Education Board began requiring that black colleges have a certain number of PhDs and MAs within the faculty in order to be accredited.⁵⁹)

Brown criticized Hughes' poetry in a way that represented the difficulties he had with the term intellectual—on the one hand, it was the best thing to describe him and his friends in academia, on the other hand a "bourgeois intellectual" conjured up all the degrees of separation from black folk that Brown did not agree with. He told Hughes he was not satisfied with the other man's recent booklet of poetry. In confessing his dissatisfaction, he hoped he would not "descend even lower in the ranks of the "bourgeois intellectuals" in Hughes' eyes.⁶⁰ He recognized Hughes' desire to give "poetry to those of the masses —(as distinguished from the "intellectuals")—who don't have their own in Bessie Smith, Blind Lemon Jefferson, etc." and believed he had

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Sterling Allen Brown to Langston Hughes, December 7, 1931, Box 36 Folder 623, Hughes Papers, Beinecke.

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Juliette Derricotte to Max Yergan, July 24, 1929, RG 58, Box 13, Folder 191, Yale Divinity Library Special Collections.

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Brown to Hughes, December 7, 1931.

“estimable motives.”⁶¹ But what Brown could not understand was why it had to be

Hughes doing this:

That is, I believe that they are readers of your poetry who cannot all be contemptuously discarded as quotation marks intellectuals. They too have their needs. And I believe that reaching them is as important as reaching Sunday Schools—high schools, clubs, etc. – That is, a poet of your caliber can get more results from matured minds than from this other popularization.⁶²

In **his** own poetry, Brown built in multiple layers of meaning so that they could resonate with many different audiences. After his first volume of poetry, *Southern Road*, was published in 1932, he defended it from the suggestion that he simply copied stories he had heard, explaining that it took great skill to transform patches of words and stories into language with meter, rhythm and flow.⁶³

While in Cambridge, Brown wrote to Harris that he submitted his poetry collection to a Harcourt, Brace for consideration. Harris enlisted Stolberg’s help in getting the book published; “While I do not know the nature of the manuscript I think his literary work should be pushed. If you have no objection, talk with Alfred Harcourt about it.”⁶⁴

The book hit the shelves heaped with praise. Bunche wrote Brown in Cambridge, “I want you to know how happy we are down here at your fine success. We are all elated at the good send off they have given you in ‘The Times’ last Sunday and we feel that

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ James Weldon Johnson to Sterling Allen Brown, February 22, 1932, Folder 66, Box 4, JWJ MSS Johnson collection at Yale.

⁶⁴ Abram Harris to Benjamin Stolberg, November 20, 1931, Folder 3 Box 4b, Ben Stolberg Correspondence, Columbia University Special Collections.

there will be many more of an even finer nature. Go on boy!” Bunche gave his copy of the book to President Johnson, who had already seen “‘The Times’ review with much satisfaction and will probably write you about it when he gets a spare moment.”⁶⁵ Also, something about the book. Brown when reading poetry; had “a voice with o much of earth and sky and sunlight and dark clouds about it; a voice unafraid, an instrument Blues-tinged.”⁶⁶

Bunche “wished like the mischief” that Brown had been with him and Ruth on a recent trip to the circus. “There was much out there that should be expressed poetically. I spent about half an hour following a gang of unadulterated Negroes around the outside of the tent as they fastened down the ropes. There were twelve of them and one black that did nothing but chant. He stood up and yelled the signals at the top of his voice while the other boys did the dirty work.”⁶⁷ One can sense the teenage Bunche in these words, sensing he was not the fully “authentic” black man that others were. Yet there is not the unfulfilled longing here that there was in the younger man.

Before the new school year commenced, the Browns returned to the family country home in Laurel, Maryland on weekends. Harris, Stolberg, and Calverton planned to motor out there one weekend “for a good time. Make it next week,” Harris commanded Stolberg in July, “as I am getting nervous (as you will note from my writing)

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Ralph Bunche to Sterling Brown, May 1932, Box 1 Folder 6, Bunche Papers UCLA.

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Sterling Allen Brown, *The Collected Poems of Sterling A. Brown*, 1st ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1980), 3.

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Bunche to Brown, May 1932.

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and bilious as hell!”⁶⁸ Harris tried to get the money that Stolberg owed him, by explaining that he has only five dollars to his name. He wanted the cash for a trip to New York in July. When he did get to town, Harris met with J. E. Spingarn a few times that summer, discussing how to raise money for the Social Science department and making suggestions about the first, aborted plans for a Second Amenian Conference.⁶⁹

After serving for several months as administrative assistant, Bunche was ready to start planning for his trip abroad again. He wrote to Buell that “I have gained a great deal of experience in my new administrative position this year but I am more certain now than ever that it is not the career which I would choose to follow permanently.”⁷⁰

Bunche’s friends rallied around his decision. Sterling Brown invited Bunche and Charles Johnson to his house in the spring and summer of 1932 so that Johnson could discuss with Bunche his recent trip to Africa. Bunche then used that connection later to request specific advice from Johnson about “the best place abroad to buy necessary supplies, a list of supplies necessary and desirable, the approximate cost of the same, the best means of travel, etc.” In May, Johnson sent him the safari helmet, mosquito boots, and net he had used on his own journey.⁷¹

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Abram Harris to Benjamin Stolberg, July 7, 1932, Folder 3 Box 4b, Ben Stolberg Correspondence, Columbia University Special Collections.

69

Ibid.

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Ralph Bunche to Arthur Holcombe, March 25, 1932, Box 62, Bunche Papers UCLA.

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Charles S. Johnson to Ralph Bunche, May 18, 1932, Box 62, Bunche Papers UCLA.

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Abram Harris hosted Bunche and Melville Herskovits one afternoon in his home for a similar discussion. Herskovits, professor of anthropology at Northwestern, had just returned from eight months in Dahomey. They discussed different French boats to take and which ports to disembark at. Herskovits also offered several suggestions about food, but soon after he left, Bunche realized that he had not mentioned meat. "I am deeply indebted to you for the very helpful suggestions which you gave me in your conversation the afternoon we spent at Abe's, and Bunche was grateful for the practical suggestions, so, trusting he did not presume "too much upon your good disposition in asking your further advice," he inquired about what kinds of meat to eat or avoid.⁷² He also asked about acquiring a letter of introduction from Ambassador Edge. Herskovits' reply shows that he did not have to worry about proving himself in the same way a black American did— "As far as the state department is concerned, I have always found that you can expect very little cooperation from them, and I have never carried any official documents of any kind. As a matter of fact, I would consider well before using any such recommendations, because I feel that if one's affiliations are only scholarly and not governmental, it goes far in allaying the suspicions that one might be ferreting out information that might be used by foreign governments."⁷³

Bunche's fears were not allayed by Herskovits' statement and he tried other avenues to get his letters; he told Johnson that "I have gotten a letter of introduction to Ambassador Edge through Dr. Billikopf and Dr. Buell is attempting to obtain the same

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Ralph Bunche to Melville Herskovits, May 7, 1932, Box 62, Bunche Papers UCLA.

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Melville Herskovits to Ralph Bunche, May 24, 1932, Box 62, Bunche Papers UCLA. [first and only correspondence till renewed in 1935 about working with him under the auspices of the SSRC grant— though he would have known of him through *The New Negro* and Herskovits's frequent appearances— need to think through his relationship with the Young Turks.]

for me through the State Department so my worries in that direction are somewhat **allayed**. I am going to follow your advice and through Dr. Locke contact Mr. **Magnuson**.”⁷⁴

Locke, already immersed in European culture, eagerly anticipated Bunche’s **arrival** in Europe in the summer of 1932. Of all the young faculty members to have **recently** joined Howard, Locke seemed to especially appreciate Bunche and his **conversation**. Visiting Germany on the brink of Nazism the previous summer for a health **retreat**, he exclaimed how he wished Bunche was with him for “How I should like to **have** someone along with whom to discuss it [German political situation]; intelligently **and safely**.” He was fascinated to observe the Nazis; one of his own physicians at the **health** spa was a Nazi. Locke suggested again that perhaps they could develop a formal **conversation** group when he returned to Howard. He suggested “Charley [Houston], **yourself**, Hastie and a very limited few. Wish I could suggest Abe, but really argument is **not** what we would be after, I take it. Certainly I’d like to exchange impressions and **opinions** in a really decent intellectual atmosphere. I can have a better discussion with **almost** any European waiter than with most of our colleagues.”⁷⁵

Locke kept trying to formally organize the Young Turks, but they preferred **informal** organizations and their own choice of friends. Brown was friends with Locke **and** learned from him, but “we differed on many things. And we differed on those books [they edited together]. He would change many things that I said, and I would change **them** right back.” Brown particularly objected to Locke finding Africanisms that Brown

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Ralph Bunche to Charles S. Johnson, May 23, 1932, Box 62, Bunche Papers UCLA.

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Alain Locke to Ralph Bunche, July 30, 1931, Box 1 Folder 6, Bunche Papers UCLA.

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did not see. "It would have been a relationship to Africa, but the first relationship [for **Locke**] certainly wasn't to the old Negro preacher in the South. I think that this sort of **jumping** over that tradition to get back to Africa is not as sound as first finding our own **tradition** here and getting that true tradition and then finding out how African it is."⁷⁶

Brown also argued with Locke's understanding of black music, because it was all **intellectual**; "Now Locke did not know jazz, and he did not know the blues, but **intellectually** he knew their importance. He was at first trying to stress them. His book on **the Negro** in music was not a good one. It's full of errors. He just doesn't dig blues. For **Locke**, if Stravinsky liked it, it had to be good. And that's bad. Locke did know the **importance** of jazz on the world scene, but he could not hear jazz and he did not see jazz **in its** own terms."⁷⁷ Du Bois was the same way; he did not have a feeling for music, even **when** he recognized intellectual its importance.⁷⁸

The Young Turks also never quite accepted the lawyers Houston and Hastie **among** them. Even though Bunche had been friends with Hastie at Harvard (and Brown **childhood** friends with him at Dunbar), they would diverge dramatically when Hastie **formed** in the National Negro Association in a few years. Harris and Bunche did not **agree** with the self-segregation and division among the working class that the NNA's "Don't Buy Where You Can't Work" campaigns encouraged.

⁷⁶ Charles H. Rowell and Sterling Allen Brown, "'Let Me Be wid Ole Jazzbo': An Interview with Sterling A. Brown," *Callaloo* 21, no. 4 (1998): 798.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 799.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* The one exception in Brown's estimation was Du Bois's essay on the sorrow songs. "DuBois did **one of** the greatest essays in the world on sorrow songs. Zora [Neale Hurston] has an essay in which she **denies** that the spiritual is a sorrow song. You've got to listen to her, too. But for a core, for a central kind of **theme**, DuBois' essay is great. That needs to be understood. DuBois recognized intellectually the **importance** of these."

Locke advised Bunche on who to talk to in Europe and what events he should attend. He had been traveling to Europe every summer since the early 1920s originally to do his own research on African art (he always hoped the European trip would morph into an African one) but then simply to escape the headaches he found at Howard. He suggested Bunche attend the School of International Studies at Geneva and travel to Paris for the Colonial Exposition because “they have made a special feature of the Togo Cameroon Exhibit,” which Locke had seen the day before. They would be able to “tell you here how to get to the Cameroons most cheaply and of course they will be crazy to help you if they think they can get some publicity and indication.” Finally, he suggested that Bunche “attend the meeting of the International Institute for African Languages and Cultures—held in Paris Oct 14-18th.” Locke wished he could stay for it, but unfortunately he had to be back at Howard by that time. He thought Howard should be represented at the meeting—he was still trying to establish an African Studies Center at the school—and thought maybe they would give Bunche an additional travel allowance for attending.⁷⁹

In addition to Harris and Brown, Bunche sought out advice from H. A. Poindexter Assistant Professor of Bacteriology at Howard and probably from William Leo Hansberry, Brown’s frat brother and resident African expert.⁸⁰ Poindexter gave Bunche a list as long as his arm of health risks to watch out for in Africa. Some Bunche paid attention to, but others became standing jokes among his friends, particularly that “one

⁷⁹ Locke to Bunche, July 25, 1932.

⁸⁰ By 1937, Bunche had no respect for Hansberry, so perhaps he did not seek out his advice, though given how many white professors he did not agree with that he contacted it seems like he was contacting everyone who might be able to help. See Chapter 6.

should wear a hood with mosquito net over the face” at all times.⁸¹ Many of Bunche’s **friends** jovially warned him not to “go native” on the trip.⁸²

Bunche also requested letters of introduction and the names of people to seek **out**.⁸³ Because so few scholars, even those ostensibly studying Africa, had actually **traveled** there, Bunche had to search far and wide for practical suggestions. It was **particularly** difficult for African Americans to travel to colonial Africa because the **colonial** powers were afraid that they would spread messages of liberation and freedom. **One** of his most useful contacts was Benjamin Nnamdi Azikiwe, an Ibo Nigerian who **had** come to the United States, only nineteen years old, in 1925 for his education. **Azikiwe** later became the first president of an independent Nigeria. He came from **northern** Nigeria, where he felt at odds as a Christian in a Muslim culture, and the son of **a black** civil servant among the British. As a child, he attended several schools that **trained** children in English, Hausa, and Yoruba languages, finally arriving at the **Methodist** Boys High School in Lagos in 1920. Dr. James Aggrey, a preacher from the **Gold Coast** touring Africa at the behest of the Phelps Stokes Fund, visited the school. He **did too** things to encourage the seventeen year old Azikiwe to pursue higher education in **the United States**. First, he said that “Nothing but the best is good enough for the **African**” and then he gave the student a copy of *Negro Education: A Study of the Private and Higher Schools for Coloured People in the United States* by Thomas Jesse Jones of

81

82 H. A. Poindexter to Ralph Bunche, May 10, 1932, Box 62, Bunche Papers UCLA.

83 William Hastie to Ralph Bunche, September 25, 1932, Box 1 Folder 6, Bunche Papers UCLA.

Ralph Bunche to Charles S. Johnson, March 22, 1932, Box 62 Folder 1, Bunche Papers UCLA.

the Phelps Stokes Fund.⁸⁴ As he thought about the first comment, Azikiwe determined to excel at his career for Africa's sake; as he thumbed through the book, he found a way to do just that. He made the "supreme and irrevocable decision [to] proceed abroad for higher education ere I die."⁸⁵

He had to first complete some secondary school before he matriculated to Howard University. There, he became one of Bunche's first students; Bunche described him as "undoubtedly the outstanding student" in his class on Political Theory.⁸⁶ They also bonded over athletics. Each was a superb athlete in a variety of sports (though Azikiwe leaned more towards the individual sports like track and swimming, while Bunche excelled at team sports). After graduating he went to Columbia for graduate work.

For financial reasons, Azikiwe had to pause between his MA and his PhD in 1931 and become an Instructor in political science at Lincoln University in Pennsylvania. He spoke to Locke about continuing his graduate degree through Howard's Department of Political Science, "and so be among the pioneer Ph.D.s from the school." (This was two years before Bunche had finished his own degree). His primary research interest was

⁸⁴ This book was roundly criticized by Du Bois, Carter Woodson, Melville Herskovits, and others for suggesting that the African American system of education be brought wholesale to Africa, yet brought the future leader of an independent Nigeria to the United States for schooling. And he came to the United States determined to do the best thing for Africa. As with everything, there is a more complicated story here than one would receive focusing only on Du Bois' critiques. See Gershenhorn, *Melville J. Herskovits and the Racial Politics of Knowledge*, 207.

⁸⁵ K. A. B. Jones-Quartey, "The Moulding of Azikiwe," *Transition*, no. 15 (1964): 50-53.

⁸⁶ Ralph Bunche to Ben N. Azikiwe, November 10, 1931, Box 1 Folder 5, Bunche Papers UCLA.. Azikiwe dropped the Benjamin from the front of his name in 1934 when he returned to British West Africa and was not allowed to compete in the British Empire Games, supposedly because Nigeria did not have a team. Azikiwe placed the event at the feet of discrimination and declared, "Why should I bear a so-called 'Christian' name [...] in the face of such un-Christian behavior on the part of those who gave it to me." Professionally, he became Nnamdi Azikiwe, and personally he went by "Zik," a nickname he picked up in America. Later, as a major personality and politician, Nigerians knew him as "Zik." Jones-Quartey, "The Moulding of Azikiwe," 52.

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“colonial imperialism in West Africa, including the social and political development of Liberia since 1847.” After telling Azikiwe that “I confess I would like to see, perhaps for sentimental reasons, the first doctorate dissertation on African political institutions appear under the Howard imprint,” Locke encouraged him to talk to Bunche about the plan, since this field was under his jurisdiction. Bunche and he had had several meetings to discuss the possibility. According to Locke, Bunche was “much interested” and “would be glad to have a graduate student of [Azikiwe’s] caliber and zeal,” but in his own letter to his student, Bunche tempered his enthusiasm with misgivings about whether the department had the personnel to support a colonial dissertation. Locke also suggested that there might be financial support should Azikiwe choose Howard. He advised Azikiwe to contact Harris, then in charge of research projects, to see if there were any open positions. In the end, though, it would have been better for Azikiwe to take his MA from Howard and his PhD from Columbia. The school was not yet ready to support a PhD program, however, and Azikiwe continued to struggle to balance his graduate work and his position at Lincoln.⁸⁷ He ended up receiving his MA from the University of Pennsylvania in 1933 and became a journalist in Ghana before returning to Nigeria to develop educational institutions there.⁸⁸

87

Alain Locke to Ben N. Azikiwe, January 17, 1931, Box 24 Folder 1, Bunche Papers Schomburg; Ben N. Azikiwe to Ralph Bunche, January 26, 1931, Box 1 Folder 5, Bunche Papers UCLA; Ralph Bunche to Ben N. Azikiwe, February 13, 1931, Box 24 Folder 1, Bunche Papers Schomburg; Bunche to Azikiwe, November 10, 1931; Ben N. Azikiwe to Ralph Bunche, July 15, 1932, Box 24 Folder 1; Ben N. Azikiwe, letter requesting support for African education, March 28, 1933, Box 24 Folder 1, Bunche Papers Schomburg; Ben N. Azikiwe to Ralph Bunche, March 28, 1933, Box 24 Folder 1, Bunche Papers Schomburg.

88

Azikiwe, March 28, 1933. Alain Locke to Ben N. Azikiwe, November 7, 1945, 164 Box 11 Folder 42, Locke Papers MSRC.

When Bunche wrote Azikiwe for advice and contacts in Nigeria, Azikiwe put him **into** contact with a school mate of his, Ishola Phillips, a surveyor. As a low-level **government** employer, Phillips would have been just the type of person Bunche wanted to **know**. During his second trip to Africa in 1937-38, Bunche employed an even wider **network** of African students and classmates to connect him with many levels of African **cultures**. For instance, he spent several weeks with a Kikuyu chief in Kenya, the father of **Akiki** Nyabongo, a friend from the London School of Economics.⁸⁹

In addition to Azikiwe, Bunche requested letters from a variety of scholarly and **government** sources that he could carry that would “set forth the strictly scholarly **character** of [his] mission.”⁹⁰ In 1932 and again in 1937, Bunche would spend several **months** in London and Paris waiting for the appropriate visas to travel to Africa. Bunche **also** inquired about a letter from the French ambassador (again to assure the French **officials** that he was on a purely scholarly mission). Bunche brought up the possibility of **acquiring** such a letter with almost everyone he wrote concerning the trip.⁹¹ Bunche set **up** telephone appointments with a couple fellow students from Harvard then working for

⁸⁹ Azikiwe to Bunche, July 15, 1932.

⁹⁰ Ralph Bunche to George R. Arthur, Julius Rosenwald Fund, March 24, 1932, Box 62, Bunche Papers UCLA; Bunche to Holcombe, March 25, 1932.

⁹¹ Those Bunche contacted included C.T. Loram of Yale University, Mr. Edward Herbert Samuels at the International House in New York City, Dr. Jacob Billikopf, a Howard University trustee and NAACP board member, George Grafton Wilson, Harvard Professor of International Law Harvard University, Ellsworth Faris, Department of Sociology at the University of Chicago, [...] Loram was a friend of Mabel Carney's. He was a native white South African with views similar to BTW's. "Loram held that limited practical training in the "Industrial and Household Arts" provided the best opportunities for "Native advancement," in a context of benign segregation, with whites like himself, who "knew the native best," serving as intermediaries along with traditional African leaders ("tribal" chiefs). For Loram, the best environment for gradual cultural development was the Tribal Reserve.(FN17) Like his Welsh-born friend, and director of the Phelps-Stokes Fund, Thomas Jesse Jones (a Columbia University alumnus), Loram believed that extensive liberal arts training for 'underdeveloped' peoples encouraged 'Natives' to think prematurely in terms of equality with 'Europeans.'" Richard Glotzer, "The Career of Mabel Carney: The Study of Race and Rural Development in the United States and South Africa," *International Journal of African History Studies* 29, no. 2 (1996): 309-36.. He had arrived at Yale in 1932 from South Africa.

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the federal government.⁹² Buell set up an appointment with James Grafton Rogers, **Assistant** Secretary of State, for Bunche in June, just days before he was to leave.⁹³ Buell **assured** Rogers about the quality of Bunche's work, urging him to contact Mordecai **Johnson** or Abraham Flexner if he needed "further assurances as to the objectivity of his **work**."⁹⁴

In April 1932, Buell spoke to the political science students at Howard. Bunche **invited** him because he felt Buell could address "any aspect of the interracial situation as **a world problem**" that would "be a contribution which no one else present at the **conference** will be qualified to make."⁹⁵ Buell decided to speak on "the general problem **of the** relation between advanced peoples and undeveloped peoples with particular **reference** to the policy of the United States, pointing out that this question is not **necessarily** a racial problem. That is, the Japanese can injure the Chinese as much as the **Anglo-Saxons**. The Liberian officials can impose slavery upon the natives in the bush to **as great** an extent as the Portuguese in West Africa. The problem is of reconciling **conflicting** cultures and conflicting ideals and wants. This problem is much more than **merely** an inter-racial problem."⁹⁶ The political science students, who would also be **presenting papers**, were excited about Buell's visit because of the excellent talk he had **given** the year before.

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Ralph Bunche to George Grafton Wilson, May 11, 1932, Box 62, Bunche Papers UCLA.

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James Grafton Rogers to Raymond Buell, June 6, 1932, Box 62, Bunche Papers UCLA.

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Buell to Rogers, May 12, 1932.

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Ralph Bunche to Raymond Buell, April 26, 1932, Box 1 Folder 6, Bunche Papers UCLA.

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Raymond Buell to Ralph Bunche, April 28, 1932, Box 1 Folder 6, Bunche Papers UCLA.

By the summer of 1932, Bunche was ready to turn his back on administration and face more exciting adventures abroad. He had used his diplomatic skills, honed in New Mexico's and California's interracial arenas, to make significant contacts among black and white professors in the United States and abroad. He also had a few leads as to individuals in Dahomey and Togoland he could speak to. Despite preparing as well as he could, he was still entering the unknown, with a wife and young baby daughter to care for as well.

Harris had begun to tire of Howard, still seeking escape through his New York friends. Brown was uncomfortably settled in Cambridge, but thrilled to see his immensely well-received book published. Despite their varying levels of emotional attachment to Howard and ambitions for the future, they had begun to rely upon each other as friends and colleagues. They contacted each other to help plan conferences and simply discuss the day's events. No doubt a fly on the corridors of Howard would have caught many more subtle conversations, challenges, and messages of support.

1932-1933 School Year

In June 1932, an ocean liner departing New York City for Europe carried many representatives of the Harlem Renaissance and the new prominent social science turn centered on Howard University. Artists seasoned by European travel were off to the Soviet Union for the first time to experience and then depict class unity. Social Scientists wanted to test the reality of the supposed class and racial equality in the new communist republic. A philosophy professor desired his annual respite from the United States race

war. A Harvard Ph.D. student was off for his first trip abroad to consult archives and experts in London, Paris, and Africa for his dissertation research.

Ralph Bunche left for Paris on the *Bremen* June 15, 1932 (his wife and daughter joined him later). Locke joined him in first class for his annual trek to the continent.

Down in third class, Langston Hughes prepared to enter the Soviet Union with a band of artists to make a film about African American life. Ira Reid and John Hope, on a separate trip to investigate conditions in the Soviet Union, were also on board the *Bremen*.

Bunche, in his usual diplomatic way, moved between the various decks, even while Hughes' group avoided Locke at all costs, and Locke stayed ensconced in first class, where he did not have to encounter the "wild crowd of young Negroes."⁹⁷ (He also did not want to lose himself in his Hughes' charisma, what he called "Langston eclipses," since the poet had firmly refused his advances.) Hughes remembered that "the boat was full of young people, and when I did wake up, the voyage was fun. I practiced German, studied Russian, played deck games, and danced."⁹⁸

After getting settled in their flat at 4 Rue du Parc Montsouris, Bunche spent his first weeks in Paris becoming acquainted with frustrating French libraries and with individuals also interested in Africa.⁹⁹ He made several connections, like that with Mr. C.A. LeNeveu, Director General of the Union Coloniale Francaise and George Padmore, Secretary of *The International Negro Workers Review*, Organ of the International Trade

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Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Defying Dixie: The Radical Roots of Civil Rights, 1919-1950* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2008), 133, 137, 141.

⁹⁸ Langston Hughes, "I Wonder as I Wander," in *The Collected Works of Langston Hughes*, ed. Arnold Rampersad and Dolan Hubbard (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2001), 96.

⁹⁹ Ralph Bunche to Dr. Scott, August 16, 1932, Box 62, Bunche Papers UCLA.

Union Committee of Negro Workers.¹⁰⁰ Claude Barnett of the Associated Negro Press wrote him, hoping that Bunche would act as a foreign correspondent for the news service, particularly about colonial governments. He suggested that this would allow Bunche to focus attention on his work, though he also suggested leaving critical pieces unsigned. He admonished, “Take care of yourself and don’t let the enchantment of Paris lure your mind too far from the Colonial and Primitive.”¹⁰¹ Again, there is this persistent sense among Bunche’s black associates that Africa was “primitive” and “native.” African Americans traveling abroad frequently received requests like this. Bunche chose not to send articles back to the states, perhaps because he wanted to focus on academic questions or perhaps because he found he did not have the time.¹⁰² When Barnett realized this, he asked if Bunche would not seek out someone else who could act as foreign correspondent.¹⁰³

While in Paris, Bunche requested that Emmett Scott, secretary of the university, forward him the \$500 he had been promised by the university before he went into Africa, where he was not sure if he would be able to receive mail.

After Paris, Bunche traveled to London and Geneva to visit the colonial and mandate offices, respectively. In London, he briefly stayed with Allison Davis in October, before a longer stay the next February. In Geneva, he got in contact with Rosamond Tirana, a journalist covering the League of Nations. Essie Robeson had connected them. Tirana was eager to offer any help she could to a friend of Robeson’s but had to delay the meeting a bit because of her recent marriage; “Evidently Essie sent

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George Padmore to Ralph Bunche, September 26, 1932, Box 62, Bunche Papers UCLA.

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Claude Barnett to Ralph Bunche, June 21, 1932, Box 1 Folder 6, Bunche Papers UCLA.

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Ibid.

¹⁰³

Claude Barnett to Ralph Bunche, July 25, 1932, Box 1 Folder 6, Bunche Papers UCLA.

you to me before she'd heard of my marriage – to another friend of hers, an Albanian boy in the Financial Section of the League, Rifat Tirana.”¹⁰⁴ Bunche also received help, particularly detailed reports about the mandates, from a Ray Shaw working at the League.¹⁰⁵

Bunche had had a hard time persuading Ruth to join him in Paris. He wanted his wife and baby daughter to travel with him on the journey, at least for the months in London, Paris, and Geneva. Ruth, though, was concerned about being a new mother in a foreign city, especially when Bunche would leave for Africa. Would she stay behind in Europe till he rejoined his family? Or take the boat home by herself? Bunche tried many different avenues of persuasion, but finally a copy of the Baltimore *Afro-American* arrived that helped his side immensely. In its pages he read that Flap (Allison Davis) was going to be in London at the same time as him, also on a Rosenwald Fellowship. Bunche wrote to Davis, hoping to hear that his wife Liddie would be joining her husband on the excursion, for that would induce Ruth to join Bunche.¹⁰⁶ Davis was then studying at Harvard and able to frequently see Sterling Brown, his boyhood and college friend, in Cambridge.¹⁰⁷ Bunche passed congratulations on Brown's book of poetry, *The Southern Road*, through Flap to Dutch.

Ruth finally decided to uproot herself and baby Joan and go with Bunche to Europe. After they had settled in Paris, she decided to stay there while Bunche traveled

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Rosamond Tirana to Ralph Bunche, October 3, 1932, Box 62, Bunche Papers UCLA.

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Ralph Bunche to Ray Shaw, October 24, 1932, Box 62, Bunche Papers UCLA; Ralph Bunche to Ray Shaw, January 24, 1933, Box 62, Bunche Papers UCLA.

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Ralph Bunche to Allison Davis, May 13, 1932, Box 1 Folder 6, Bunche Papers UCLA.

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Brown to Hughes, December 7, 1931.

south. Davis was sorry that they had not planned the timing better, because Ruth could have lived with him and Liddie in London while Bunche was away. He suggested that both women will “go ‘nerts’ this winter without some woman to gossip with or about.” Flap knew that Bunche was torn between the excitement of visiting Africa for the first time and leaving his wife and baby, appreciating “deeply your surging desires to return to Afree-ka, and likewise, although only vicariously, your utter devotion to your daughter—and her diapers.” After his own “psychiatric analysis, however, I feel it quite fortunate that you must leave that poor defenseless child to its physical mother, and save it from one of the most outrageous ‘Electra’ complexes ever designed by a tyrannous father. [...] So I send thee to Africa with the blessings of a clean psychiatric conscience.”¹⁰⁸

The Bunches and Davis’s worked out one way to soothe Ruth’s loneliness in **Paris**. Ruth Bunche would host Christmas at her apartment. Davis in London wrote to **Ralph Bunche** in Africa of their plans, at the same time illustrating the complicated **relationship** these black Americans had to Africa, which seemed an exotic and foreign **continent** rather than an ancestral home. To catch the nuances of Davis’ words (whose **first** ambitions had been, after all, poetry and literature, not anthropology), it is worth **quoting** his letter at length.

Be ye lost, brother?

I have images of you in the jungle, [...], elephants or whathaveyou; in African skinny ‘breakdowns’, wielding a wicked high, (Oh, Mordecai, how would’st thou yearn after they lost sheep); in French jails, or councils of state, trying to preserve your equanimity, and boats wise (most of all), in poker games and black jacks ‘lessons’ (I’m sure of it) with African kings,—teaching the lost children of Africa their ancestral but forgotten ritual of *les craps*. [...] (By the way, don’t publish this in the Afro—I think Carl Murphy dislikes craps and spirituals.)

Brother—how are you, how swelters thy body and spirit in terra meridemalis? Let me extend you the hand of communication and the evolving touch of fellowship; London climate is a damned site worse than that of the God [or Gold?] Coast (to return to the vernacular). In the whole month of November, the weather-bureau (or whatever they call it here) recorded only 25 hours of sunshine. Consider that in your hotter moments. There has been less sunshine here this year than ever for forty hears. And I came over on the worst trip in five years! I should go to Africa.

Your studies are of the least importance, to return to my images—whatever you don't do, you must write up a full account of lies about your explorations, your lini-throtling, your dancing with deliciously naked black girls in a rumba-charleston [...] (to a fare-theewell). Write a daily diary of lies, and we shall have material for bull-sessions until our hair is grey and Joan is endowing you with beautiful grandchildren. Do it, I charge you, Horatio. And let there be the proper spice of danger, the fig[?]-adventure, and the noble pageantry and background of the last kingdoms of Bornu and Tir[?]

By the way, have you taken to wearing a saucepan or a silk 'topper' on your head? I infinitely prefer saucepans, nay even double-boilers, with a fireless cooker a-heating of your dinner, and a whistle to let off steam. Are you draped in a blanket of mosquito-netting which encloses your 'haid,' or do you drape it about you like a Roman senator?¹⁰⁹

This last perhaps played on a joke bandied about since Bunche had received a letter from **Prof H. A. Poindexter** before he left. Poindexter, an assistant professor of bacteriology at **Howard** suggested to Bunche that "one should wear a hood with mosquito net over the **face**" at all times.¹¹⁰ It is easy to imagine Bunche joking about wandering around fully **netted** for the next few months. Davis continued.

Liddie, whose mind is always on truly vital and, I may say, slightly bawdy subjects, says that you are not to go near the country of the Masai (in Kenya!) or even the upper Sudan,--they do things to men there,--if they are foreigners. Your hair would turn silken, and your walk be like that of a gazelle or even a blithesome fairy. You'd better buy a 'Guard the vital zone'!

We were on the point of calling you things, in fact we had, when your 'sailing letter' came. We had set our minds on a reunion in London. Your letter soothed our rage; we wanted to wire you, but the ship was

109

110 Ibid.

H. A. Poindexter to Bunche, May 10, 1932.

leaving when we got your card. Even now, I doubt whether this will ever reach you. I think I'll send it to Ruth, to forward to you. Hope you get it by Christmas, because then we'll be in your quarters, communing at the shrine of Joan, and telling her about the time her father tried to starve her, just one year ago! I'll never forget the faces of those four women—Ruth, Aileen, Mrs. Harris, and Liddie—especially when you'd come in the room and catch them scrimming [?] to feed the baby. Did you know they set the clocks ahead? Ah, you'll have to be a-gitting hup early to boss the wimmen-folks.

Ruth has invited us over for Christmas, and we're living in hope. It'll be strange to have a real Xmas 'family diner' over here. Think of you, when I say it. Courage, enfant. They must have some little Joans in Africa, upon whom you can lavish your Christmas spirits. We'll have one in London for you, when you come back—Put your health first, lo—and hurry back. Will write you from Paris.¹¹¹

Davis wrote about Africa as an exciting and potentially scary place, where anything could happen. He wrote about wives as women to be wrangled with, convinced, loved, and criticized. They knew more about babies than men would ever know, but were also rather innocent about the way the world worked.

Bunche finally arrived in Africa in November and dashed off a letter to Buell about entering Togoland. Buell responded with excitement and encouragement to visit Monrovia, Liberia, "as a very difficult situation exists there upon which we need all the light we can obtain."¹¹² Throughout his journey to Togoland, Dahomey, Nigeria and the Gold Coast, he was aided by the agents of the Societe Commerciale de L'Ouest Africain and the Compagnie Francaise De L' Afrique Occidentale. He had met the presidents of these organizations in Europe. They then instructed their agents to offer Bunche kindness and hospitality.¹¹³

¹¹¹ Davis to Bunche, n.d.

¹¹² Raymond Buell to Ralph Bunche, December 16, 1932, Box 62, Bunche Papers UCLA.

¹¹³ Ralph Bunche to The President of the Societe Commerciale de L'Ouest Africain, June 13, 1933, Box 62, Bunche Papers UCLA.

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Bunche spent his final month abroad in London with Davis before returning in March to teach in the spring quarter at Howard. He again visited several different associations, including John Harris of the International Institute of African Languages and Culture and the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society,¹¹⁴ the Methodist Missionary Society,¹¹⁵ and the Negro Welfare Association. A representative from the latter group attended a gathering at Davis' house and wrote Bunche later about how much he enjoyed just listening to the conversation between Bunche, Allison Davis, and Liddie Davis. He invited Bunche to speak to their group at the *Labour Monthly* offices, 7 John Street W.C.1 of Theoballs Rd.¹¹⁶ Walter White appeared on the same stage as John Harris in 1928, during his year abroad on a Guggenheim Fellowship for creative writing. He remembered that "Harris was earnest and eloquent, but addicted to nationalist clichés similar to those which Americans are accustomed to hear at Fourth of July celebrations."¹¹⁷ After Harris asserted that nothing like lynching could ever occur where the Union Jack flew, White abandoned his notes and took him on as "a 'one hundred percent American,'" mentioning Britain's support of the South during the Civil War and the wealth it derived from slavery and the slave trade. He was surprised by an ovation at the end of his talk and by the many audience members who expressed "agreement with what I had said and admiration that I had pulled no punches."¹¹⁸

¹¹⁴ John H. Harris to Ralph Bunche, February 2, 1933, Box 62, Bunche Papers UCLA.

¹¹⁵ Rev. E. W. Thompson to Ralph Bunche, February 3, 1933, Box 62, Bunche Papers UCLA.

¹¹⁶ Al Ward to Ralph Bunche, February 5, 1933, Box 62, Bunche Papers UCLA.

¹¹⁷ Walter Francis White, *A Man Called White, the Autobiography of Walter White* (New York: Viking Press, 1948), 96-97.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 96.

The academic community in England interested in Africa also welcomed Bunche; he arranged lunches with Dr. J.H. Oldham of the African Society, and Margery Perham of Oxford University, among others.¹¹⁹ He spent a weekend at Oxford with E.M. Hugh-Jones, who suggested lunching with colleagues Friday, attending an annual Labor Party festivity Saturday evening, and relaxing Sunday.¹²⁰ Hugh-Jones became an important resource for Bunche over the next few years, particularly during his second trip to England in 1937.

Two classes and a bowling night with Hastie awaited Bunche's return to the states. Bunche returned more adamant than ever that he was researching modern political situations in Africa and the United States. Groups large and small throughout DC and the surrounding area wanted to hear about his trip. Few African Americans had the means or opportunity to travel to their ancestral continent. And though interest was by no means as strong as it would be decades later during the Black Power era, Bunche was asked by groups large and small throughout the DC area to discuss his impressions of Africa. In particular, his audiences wished him to link African American culture with African cultures. Bunche refused to discuss any cultural connections, though he would compare African Americans' position within United States "democracy" with Africans under European colonialism.¹²¹

Bunche was still on research leave, so his teaching load was lighter than normal. Even so, he found it difficult to process his materials until the summer when he returned

¹¹⁹ D.G. Bracket to Ralph Bunche, February 6, 1933, February 14; J.H. Oldham to Ralph Bunche, February 6, 1933; Box 62, Bunche Papers UCLA.

¹²⁰ E.M. Hugh-Jones to Ralph Bunche, May 24, 1931, Box 10 Folder 14, Bunche Papers Schomburg.

¹²¹ See Folders 6-10, Box 43, Bunche Papers UCLA.

to Cambridge full time to write the dissertation.¹²² He hoped it would only take his three months to finish the thesis, but he did not defend his dissertation until almost a year after returning from Africa (still a remarkable feat).¹²³ As his defense approached, scheduled for the end of January, 1934, he began to pick the brains of fellow students for suggestions on the different professors who would grill him. He also anxiously awaited news about his dissertation. His Cambridge friend, George Benson telegraphed him in DC that he had personally witnessed Holcombe and Emerson reading the “opus.” On January 29, Bunche passed his exam, held in Emerson’s office with professors Holcombe (chair) and Wilson also in attendance. He received high commendations on his dissertation, though Holcombe did not urge him to turn it into a book. Rather, his advisor suggested writing “a short book for publication dealing with your observations and impressions in Africa. ... The thesis has served your purpose and I think it would be better to make the materials, together with other material in your possession, the foundation of separate articles for the learned periodicals rather than to try to make a book out of it. I think the book which you should try to write ought to be addressed to a wider public.”¹²⁴ Bunche did publish a few articles based on the thesis, but never wrote a popular book about his journey, and emphatically declined to turn his many discussions of his research into a “travelogue.”¹²⁵

¹²² Ralph Bunche to Arthur Holcombe, June 13, 1933, Box 62, Bunche Papers UCLA.

¹²³ Ralph Bunche to George Arthur, March 23, 1933, Box 62, Bunche Papers UCLA.

¹²⁴ Arthur Holcombe to Ralph Bunche, February 10, 1934, Box 62, Bunche Papers UCLA.

¹²⁵ Ralph Bunche to Dorothy Porter, January 31, 1939, Box 43, Bunche Papers UCLA.. Wrote Harvard Professor Rupert Emerson in 1934 that “I have been trying to do something with Professor Holcombe’s suggestion about “popularizing” my thesis for publication but find it rather slow going and much more difficult to work from old material in this way than to make a complete new study. I have not given it up,

As the Depression ground forward, more and more intellectuals and reformers turned to the promises and proscriptions aired by Marx half a century before. White intellectuals and authors caught up in the questions of American identity and the questions raised by modernity and sexual freedom turned to the questions of workers. In the 1920s, art for art's sake had been preeminent; now writers found they needed an ear bent to hear the sufferings of poverty and laborers to satisfy their own conscience.¹²⁶ Where the *Crisis* had once run series of poetry and plays, in 1933, it ran a series letting black editors express their opinions about Communism. [...] Harris felt duly snide about the "erstwhile liberal literati" that had so recently "turned Communist without having gone through the necessary discipline."¹²⁷ These types had tried to convince Stolberg to resign his weekly column at the *Evening Post* because he was cooperating with the bourgeois machine. A letter from a similar source had recently called Harris "the most reactionary young economist in America." Though such abuse annoyed him, he wrote Stolberg that "I am not going to change my views for a few people who at the age of thirty-five have just read the Communist Manifesto." He suggested that the following quote from Marx's *Klassenkämpfe in Frankreich* was very "applicable to our radical Peter Pans."

however." Ralph Bunche to Rupert Emerson, November 12, 1934, Box 24 Folder 8, Bunche Papers Schomburg. Emerson had given him more encouragement towards publication than Holcombe. "It seems to me that you have a mass of very valuable material and conclusions which I, at least, found of the highest interest. I am confident that its publication would be a real addition to our always somewhat scanty colonial literature." Emerson to Bunche, Feb 20, 1934.

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Radical Visions and American Dreams, Richard Pells.

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Abram Harris to Benjamin Stolberg, August 1, 1932, Folder 3 Box 4b, Ben Stolberg Correspondence, Columbia University Special Collections.

Whereas we draw the [American] worker's attention to the undeveloped condition of the proletariat, you grossly flatter the national sentiment and the class prejudices of the [American] handicraftsman, which is, of course, far more popular. Just as the democrats have sanctified the word 'people' so you sanctify the word 'proletariat.' Like the democrat, you subordinate revolutionary development to revolutionary phrase-making.

Despite the new tenor of American intellectualism that seemed finally to be walking side-by-side with Harris, he still felt like he had "hold his tongue in his cheek, if one wants to be consistently true to his inner convictions." Though Stolberg shared this problem in journalism, it was not as bad there as it was in the academic journals. Scientific editors seemed to reject Harris' papers whether he offered an interpretation or not. He had begun to realize that scientific journals required a much greater level of documentation and carefully set out arguments. He could not simply make startling pronouncements, like authors could in news magazines. "What the leaders of the fraternity in which I am working want is analysis. And I suppose that is what I'll have to give, if I am going to get any place." Usually this would have spurred him to try harder. Yet in the fall of 1932, when his shadow fell a great distance throughout black America, he felt strangely dejected. "Perhaps its not much use trying to get "some place" after all."¹²⁸

Perhaps that dejection arose from how little his life had changed in the wake of finally being recognized by the black intellectual leaders and of getting a foothold among white academics. In October he wrote to Stolberg that "it seems that I have one million things to do. Part of my time is devoted to damning a few thoughts into the heads of people who just don't want to know, the other part I devote to a completion of that

¹²⁸ Abram Harris to Benjamin Stolberg, September 1932, Folder 3 Box 4b, Ben Stolberg Correspondence, Columbia University Special Collections.

second essay.” His persistent complaints about his students, begun several years before at the West Virginia Collegiate Institute seemingly conflict with strong reports that he was an excellent teacher and, as his colleague Harold Lewis called him, a “brilliant lecturer.”¹²⁹ Harris wanted his students to be as enthusiastic about his topics as he was. Moreover, he had high expectations for their preparation and attention. When his students found their hormones leading them astray, or found that their previous education had not prepared them as well as it should have, Harris lost his patience. Yet it is strange that for such a seemingly inspiring teacher, Harris never talked about the classroom or his students in his verbose letters except with this persistent note of impatience. Bunche felt a very similar kind of frustration with the way the classroom distracted him from his research, and that he had to shove information into reluctant students. He also confessed years after leaving Howard that “I always felt rather inadequate to the task and have never been sure that I had much success at it.”¹³⁰ Yet he developed close enough bonds that his students sought him out in the future for a further relationship.

Future prominent sociologist St. Clair Drake, a student of Allison Davis’ at Hampton Institute, reacted to criticisms of black students like those Bunche and Harris

¹²⁹ Darity, “Introduction,” 10-11. “His career as a professor at Howard was extraordinary in many respects. All of his former students whom I was able to contact remember him as a marvelous teacher. Naylor Fitzhugh, who did an undergraduate degree in biochemical sciences at Harvard in 1926 completing a senior thesis on insulin and who could have walked into any medical school if he had so desired, ended up choosing a career in business instead. Along the way he was absorbed in the study of economics. He took a couple of courses with Harris, who he describes as ‘the greatest economist he ever studied with’—and Fitzhugh studied with John Maurice Clark, Milton Friedman, as well as the economic historian Philip Hauser. John Aubrey Davis also remembers Howard’s students characterizing Harris as an inspirational teacher and remembers Harris as an excellent colleague, despite their intense disagreement over the New Negro Alliance, of which Davis was a founder. Harris’ colleague, Harold Lewis, says flatly that Harris was a ‘brilliant lecturer,’ who always assumed his students were able and had done the collateral reading for each class session.”

¹³⁰ Ralph Bunche, “Howard University Installation of Phi Beta Kappa, Gamma Chapter of the District of Columbia,” Speech, April 8, 1953, 166 Box 49 Folder 18, Logan Papers MSRC.

expressed in the annual education edition of the *Crisis*. He wrote the following explanation to Du Bois, asking for less criticism and more understanding.

If it were a case of sheer laziness and indolence we should attempt no explanation, but the Negro student is caught in an endless chain of circumstances that can only be broken by patient endeavor on the part of Northern Negroes and a superhuman effort on the part of their southern brothers. We don't want sympathy, but we want understanding. We want the best; we want it thrown around us everywhere and we will respond. Someday there may be a grand mutation in this evolutionary scheme, and if not, the species will gradually vary. Either method will take time.¹³¹

Besides teachings and the joys and frustrations with research, Harris felt increasingly alienated at Howard because of the political and economic struggles of the Howard faculty. The faculty across the board had been required to take an 8 1/3% cut in their salary. Harris, always cash strapped, did not appreciate this, but understood its necessity. The administration hired Abraham Flexner to help them modernize and economize. Harris developed an intense fascination with the founder and director of the Princeton Institute of Advanced Study (1930-1939). When he saw that Flexner had brought Albert Einstein from Germany to the Institute, he wondered aloud to Stolberg, "I wonder if I could get on the staff as an assistant professor? I am sick of this place."¹³² He so wanted a place and a salary that would leave him "time for study and scholarly production and I would be perfectly satisfied. At least I could do my work with a contented mind, with no red tape and the persistent delaying of recommendations and the thwarting of my ambitions."¹³³ If he could make these conditions at Howard, he would

¹³¹ St. Clair Drake to W.E.B. Du Bois, August 10, 1930, Reel 33, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

¹³² Abram Harris to Benjamin Stolberg, October 11, 1932, Folder 3 Box 4b, Ben Stolberg Correspondence, Columbia University Special Collections.

¹³³ Abram Harris to Benjamin Stolberg, October 15, 1932, Folder 3 Box 4b, Ben Stolberg Correspondence, Columbia University Special Collections.

rather stay there, but he had lost hope that this would ever happen. As the semester progressed, Harris began to realize how conservative Flexner was in the arena of race relations. He became particularly disturbed when he realized “from [Flexner’s] recent acts he does not propose to pursue in this connection the policy which he has laid down elsewhere.” Harris realized how unlikely it was that he would be hired by Princeton, one of the northern schools most known for its discrimination against African American Students. Flexner tried to implement educational reforms at Howard without corresponding reforms in “social politics”—a combination Harris thought impossible. Harris knew Stolberg would soon be speaking with Flexner; he hoped he could discover if Harris’ suppositions were true.¹³⁴

Harris began to worry more and more about “emotional entanglements” in 1933. In part, he worried that his friend would become so involved with a woman that he would cease to write that great work that seemed ever to be on the horizon. It was even easier for this to be a worry that year because Stolberg had started a weekly column. Harris worried that he would put his best work into the column and cease writing anything else. Or write the column and then allow women to take up the rest of his time. On one evening with Stolberg and his friends, Harris started to verbally attack Stolberg’s paramour, Margaret. “She seemed momentarily to have symbolized a frustration or better a paralysis in creative effort which was so damned subtle that I felt like doing away with

¹³⁴ Abram Harris to Benjamin Stolberg, November 1, 1932, Folder 3 Box 4b, Ben Stolberg Correspondence, Columbia University Special Collections.

her if her destruction would have meant limbering you up-free from the devil's power."¹³⁵

His own emotions troubled Harris' peace of mind. He wrote Stolberg in March, "once you get brutal about certain of your relationships you will get down to work and turn out stuff that will knock this country cockeyed. I faced the music for one month and I think it was good for me. Neither you nor I should become emotionally tied up."¹³⁶ Callie had discovered that Harris was having an affair, something she would not stand for (Harris seemed to think this was part of her continued bourgeois hang-ups) and they spent a tense month talking about what they should do. In February, they finally agreed on certain arrangements and to stay married.¹³⁷ Harris told Stolberg that he felt the same complex stew of emotions for Margaret "as I did some time ago [for] Callie. Whatever emotional entanglements I may get into in the future it is going to be very hard for me to separate myself from Callie. God, I almost went crazy when I saw tears running down her face, tenderly like a wounded dove whimpering in self-abnegation."

Despite the bitter emotions, Harris had not given up other women. Stolberg scolded him for letting those attachments get in the way of his own work. "The Brooklyn business, so irritating to you, is turning out to be a purely occasional affair not exactly platonic however. I hope to God that this satisfies you. This does not mean that I am

¹³⁵ Abram Harris to Benjamin Stolberg, April 4, 1933, Folder 3 Box 4b, Ben Stolberg Correspondence, Columbia University Special Collections.

¹³⁶ Abram Harris to Benjamin Stolberg, March 27, 1933, Folder 3 Box 4b, Ben Stolberg Correspondence, Columbia University Special Collections.

¹³⁷ Abram Harris to Benjamin Stolberg, February 1933, Folder 3 Box 4b, Ben Stolberg Correspondence, Columbia University Special Collections.

going to stop seeing her. Whenever I come to New York and have the urge I will see her. Nothing wrong with that, I hope. She and no else I hope will cause me to hurt Callie.”¹³⁸

Throughout the year, Howard University and Mordecai Johnson continued to suffer through close congressional scrutiny and severe financial difficulties. Harris wrote Stolberg that the news on campus was that “Johnson is using the retrenchment, which of course just must be made in light of the University’s financial condition, as a means of getting rid of his alleged or fancied enemies and not as a means of economy.” Harris was dismayed to note that Flexner, who he hoped would transform the university into a more rigorous institution, “has acquiesced in Johnson’s procedure. What is the true state of affairs I really don’t know. For although it has been four days since the Trustees met, no report has been made to the faculty of their plans. All I have gotten is rumor a part of which is that twenty persons have been dismissed by the Board of Trustees.”¹³⁹

By June, Johnson came under personal scrutiny by Congress. Again Harris updated Stolberg, “I think that there is a 50-50 chance that Mordecai Johnson will wiggle out of his present difficulty. Still I understand from responsible persons in D.C. that a congressional investigation is inevitable.” Such an investigation, particularly into the “radical” side of Howard would surely turn up Harris’ many pro-Marx writings, and shine light on them in a way that captured no nuance. The inquiry was “just what I don’t want; and that’s why I am for Mordecai in spite of his silly religiosity. But that dirty-

¹³⁸ Harris to Stolberg, April 4, 1933.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

yellow journal, the Afro, mostly shows how low the culture tone is in the Negro Community.” Harris, again, was confounded by communism used as an indelicate tool. “The Afro, by the way, is for ‘Communism,’—that is for the Negro using it as a political whip. At the same time it is for using the red flag of communism as the means of gathering its political enemy, Johnson, out of Howard.” Harris feared what would happen if Johnson were removed by Congress, but Congress continued to support Howard financially. He predicted, “you can bet your boots that practically the whole Negro community will line up with the southerners. These seven years at Howard have revealed to me how reactionary and vulgar the Negro community is in its political sympathies. Tammany Hall is a damned sight cleverer. Of course you will argue that there is no difference, but these weeks of close observation would prove that you are wrong.”

Harris could figure out no way to straighten out the “mess.” “People, like Sterling Spero whose heart is in the right place, ought to stop saying that they know the Negro problem, internally, until they have had a few weeks of non-investigational contact.” He recognized that it was still important to “fight for Negro rights etc.....but that’s only half of the job. Something has to be done within the Negro community; and since the Negro must in the main follow the dominant race, I don’t see how much of an internal transformation can be achieved without a parallel external transformation. Both I am satisfied will be vexatiously slow.”¹⁴⁰

Harris was eager to leave the whole mess behind for a summer devote to scholarship. His health and his finances drove him to the country, rather than finding a spot in New York City. Like Bunche, he suffered from several stress induced maladies,

¹⁴⁰ Harris to Stolberg, Jun 28, 1933, Stolberg papers NYPL.

including a suspected case of tuberculosis. His doctor recommended rest, daily glasses of milk, and cod-liver oil. He also sternly advised Harris to cut down on his work level.¹⁴¹

The Harrises had difficulty finding a nice house in a New Jersey town because of discriminatory renting. They found a place in Engelwood, New Jersey through Elmer Carter, editor of the *Opportunity*. They wanted a place about fifty miles from the city, close enough to run in, but far enough away that Harris would be forced to relax.

The process of self-educating and formally educating the Young Turks culminated in a polished set of professional scholars. Their time was demanded by myriad responsibilities to family, friends, the community, students, and the academy. Howard University needed their careful attention to build up the division of Social Sciences. Their students had had few lucky turns in their lives and needed to be alternatively challenged and encouraged. They used their academic connections to bring major social scientists to campus, who then contributed to Washington DC's major new social science and political scene north of the Mall.

They alternatively rejoiced in the leadership required of them in black communities and felt frustrated that they had so far to go and so few human resources to work with. The Young Turks turned to each for camaraderie to beat back the cold winds of heavy burdens and racial antagonism. They were each quite different, but shared a love for "gab-fests" and good stories. They agreed that "objective" social science, or "objective" poetry, was the best means to fight racial persecution, yet did not allow

¹⁴¹ Harris to Stolberg, Apr 4, 1933, Stolberg papers NYPL.

themselves to become so “disinterested” that they left the fight up to others (as Melville Herskovits did).

They walked onto Troutbeck’s grounds in Amenia New York fully confident in their intellectual abilities and position. Would they be able to sway the older generation over to their ideas? How would they confront the Christian interracialism of Marion Cuthbert and Frances Williams? Would they respect the social science and international achievements of Mabel Byrd?

Part 4

A Journey “Not too Lonely or Impossible” The Second Amenia Conference, August 1933

“The young Negro, I think, inclined to sophistication on the surface, misses much today because he is so busy proving to himself and the world at large that he needs nothing. In fact, he is very much in need.

Amenia seemed to me to furnish some of the basic things he needs and has little chance to provide for himself, namely, leisure in which to think and talk with others of his day and generation, a sense of a past from which he has come and a future into which he is going, a sense of fellowship with others so the journey seems not too lonely or impossible.”

Frances Williams¹

¹ Frances Williams to J.E. Spingarn, 23 Aug 1933, Box 95-12 Folder 494, Spingarn Papers MSRC.

Introduction

IN 1933, W. E. B. DU BOIS HAD A VISION OF THE FUTURE. For the first time in his long career, he began to believe that his dream of a Talented Tenth could become a reality. For thirty years, Du Bois had championed a highly-educated leadership as the necessary means to transform the image and experiences of African Americans. The dramatic increase in higher education among African Americans in the 1920s finally made this dream possible. Yet, at the very moment that he could see his dream realized, he also witnessed black intellectuals turning wholesale from the NAACP, the organization he had molded from its inception. Indeed, Du Bois felt the turn inside himself.

The NAACP was in trouble. The Depression had drained its coffers.² Communists threatened to steal away supporters through their championing of the Scottsboro cause. The cultural sails of the New Negro Renaissance, supported on the pages of the *Crisis*, had begun to lose their wind. Du Bois and Walter White fought for control of the association. To capture a renewed spirit for the organization and to catch the attention of a younger generation of leaders, Joel Spingarn, now NAACP president and chairman of the board, proposed a second Amenia Conference.

The stakes were fundamentally different in 1933 than in 1916. In the earlier era, the NAACP seemed new and radical. Its goal to fight for African Americans' equal rights under the law seemed entirely appropriate as each season Southern courts and legislatures

² The NAACP was dependent upon its mostly black membership as its primary support. African Americans were hit particularly hard by the Depression, suffering unemployment rates double that of whites. Furthermore, the stocks of the philanthropic funds who had promised grants to the association plummeted. Patricia Sullivan, *Lift Every Voice: The NAACP and the Making of the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: New Press, 2009), 151.

invented new ways to deny those rights under the Jim Crow system. In 1933, in comparison, the NAACP had been preeminent for a generation. For those young intellectuals Spingarn sought to woo, the NAACP had existed their whole lifetime. They did not consider it radical nor did they see its sole emphasis on legal rights in era of starvation and unemployment as appropriate. The Depression, which had hit African American communities first and hardest, forced black leaders to reconsider their fundamental aims.

In August 1933, the NAACP gathered a group of 32 young black professionals to discuss the future of the race at Spingarn's estate for a Second Amenia conference. They designed the weekend to be a free space for discussion to learn what motivated this cohort of professionals and intellectuals. The free space was essential; white employers and teachers punished any whiff of "radicalism." The Second Amenia Conference not only had to provide free space, it also had to attract individuals who could take advantage of it. Ira Reid, research director for the Urban League and a member of the younger generation, recognized this problem when he wrote Du Bois that the NAACP must pick attendees who could "give some untrammelled thinking on our problems."³ In order to create a safe and open intellectual environment, the NAACP leadership hosted the Amenia Conference in a rural setting, kept no notes, dictated no agendas, and forced no

³ Ira Reid to W.E.B. Du Bois, March 18, 1933, Reel 40, Du Bois Papers microfilm.. Victor Daly, in a similar letter to Du Bois, explained why such thinking was a great asset. "Unfortunately, most of our young folks upon leaving college are immediately absorbed into one school system or another, and forever thereafter they must hold their tongues to hold their jobs. That is a point that I hope the conference will discuss at length." Victor Daley to W.E.B. Du Bois, April 3, 1933, Reel 40, Du Bois Papers microfilm.. Theater scholar Randolph Edmonds hoped "the conference will be very successful. I hope, also that the widest opportunity for free discussion will be given to those who come. I observe that this was not given to those who attended the last Crisis Literary Dinner, even after many had gone to the trouble and expense to attend." Sheppard Randolph Edmonds to W.E.B. Du Bois, June 21, 1933, Reel 39, Du Bois Papers microfilm..

ideology. Not even the presumptive goal of Spingarn—to develop a new program for the NAACP which could energize the younger generation—was required discussion material. Within the space created at Troutbeck for “untrammelled thinking,” debate moved in many directions, yet two arenas stood out within the desire to end racial persecution: what was the proper role for new black intellectuals and how could racial and economic injustices best be identified and solved?

The Second Amenia conference was one of the most important conferences of young African American intellectuals held between the decline of the Booker T. Washington generation and the Civil Rights generation of post-WWII because it reorganized a new generation of leaders. By choosing only a select few to attend, Du Bois and Spingarn validated the conferees’ talents and leadership abilities, even while the younger generation made the conference a platform for their own ideas.⁴ Within the space created at Amenia and among others of like abilities, if not like-mindedness, young intellectuals opened fully into their role. While no concrete programs were decided upon at the conference, the open space for conversation brought forth ideas essential to life as a responsible African American leader.⁵ At the conference, relief workers who had seen

⁴ With the Niagara Conference and the First Amenia Conference.

⁵ The importance of Amenia has been viewed through a lens of generational conflict between gradualist race-men and a more radical younger group focused on economics. Jonathan Scott Holloway, *Confronting the Veil: Abram Harris, Jr., E. Franklin Frazier, and Ralph Bunche, 1919-1941* (Chapel Hill [N.C.]: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 9.. See also Beth Tompkins Bates, “A New Crowd Challenges the Agenda of the Old Guard in the NAACP, 1933-1941,” *American Historical Review* 102, no. 2 (April 1997): 340-377; David L. Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: The Fight for Equality and the American Century, 1919-1963* (New York: Henry Holt, 2000); James O. Young, *Black Writers of the Thirties* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1973).. A more accurate view recognizes the younger people at Amenia who embraced the NAACP’s focus—Walter White, Roy Wilkins, and Charles Hamilton Houston led the NAACP toward an ever greater focus on politics and legal strategies and Baltimore civil rights activist Juanita Jackson, just 22 when she attended the Amenia conference, spent several years with the NAACP attracting young people to the organization. This more accurate view also considers that the epitome of the older generation—Du Bois himself—broke with the NAACP just a few months after Amenia because he

the worst of the depression conferred with scholars who offered structural solutions. They debated whether nationalism was fundamental to a healthy racial identity or disastrous for progress. They considered whether an interracial workers alliance was possible, and if possible, whether it could attack American problems more successfully than the NAACP's approach had. Individuals compared experiences with white power structures and considered how they could defy white paternalism. All those at Amenia developed an intricate web of contacts that sustained them through the next ten years of the fight.

wanted the organization to refocus its efforts towards economics and self-segregation, away from political and legal integration. Rather than a generational conflict, the Second Amenia conference and its aftermath represented a wholesale shift within African American leadership toward an economic focus emphasizing interracial socialism (not a return to Booker T. Washington's self-segregated capitalism). The ideas espoused in the 1920s by a small group, including A. Philip Randolph, Hubert Harrison, William Pickens, and the African Blood Brotherhood, became widespread in the 1930s. This intellectual transition pivoted around the Amenia Conference.

Chapter 9

The Second Amenia Conference, August 1933 A Journey “Not too Lonely or Impossible”

The Summer Before

“She pictured a group of both races patiently and thoroughly studying together under the best teachers that could be secured, and in the light of the best scientific knowledge that could be gathered, the reasons why there are conflicts between races, and ways of preventing such conflicts.”¹

--Ethel Potts about Crystal Bird Fauset

¹ Ethel R. Potts, “The Growth of an Idea,” 1933, Box 9 Race Relations Institute Collection, Swarthmore College Friends Historical Library.

In large and small venues throughout the country, African American leaders met in the summer of 1933 to try to figure out what could be done to help blacks suffering in the middle of the worst economic crises the country had seen. Franklin Delano Roosevelt, newly elected, promised that he was working out a solution, but African Americans could not wait for his aid. The federal government had a terrible record of aiding African Americans. Many possible solutions came under scrutiny that summer, some that had seemed to work in the past and some that were designed for a new future. Communists and capitalists raised ideas about collective action for workers rights. Those who had spent their life devoted to interracial understanding had to reassess if their strategies of communication and education would work in this new world.

Three conferences were particularly important—the 1933 NAACP Annual Convention in Chicago, the Swarthmore Race Relations Institute in Pennsylvania, and the Second Amenia Conference in New York state. Different representatives of the same cohorts we have been discussing participated in each. Some, like Lillian Alexander and Marion Cuthbert, participated in all three. The NAACP annual conference was focused on developing new ways for the NAACP to fight racial discrimination and alleviate economic deprivation. Under Walter White's leadership, it ended up reasserting the primacy of legislation and litigation.

The Institute provides several interesting contrasts to the other important conference that summer, the Second Amenia Conference. The one took a month, the other a weekend. The former had a mixture of black and white students and teachers, the latter set up no one as teacher and whites only attended as day guests. The first arose out of the interracial ethos of the Friends, the latter out of the activist bent of the NAACP.

The Institute organizers initially wanted to develop practical programs for activists to follow, but became an academic pursuit. American planners wanted a renewing vision to develop out of their weekend, but it too went towards discussion of large-scale problems and solutions rather than a pragmatic plan or vision.

This chapter considers the differences between interracial interaction promoted or disparaged by black men and by black women. Too much attention on the staunch intellectual independence exhibited by men like Woodson and Du Bois tends to neglect the very real opinions of black women, which led to real interracial interaction between black and white women. The women discussed in this chapter emphasized intelligent collaboration in favor of protest, in part because they believed it worked and in part because they saw it as part of living their Christianity. Throughout the summer of 1933, and particularly at the Second American Conference, they would have to decide whether collaboration was still the best method in light of international and local turmoil.

Swarthmore Race Relations Institute

In 1933, Swarthmore College hosted the first Swarthmore Race Relations Institute, a month long summer school for advanced students, professors and activists to study race relations with a range of experts. Many of the future Americans attended, including Marion Cuthbert, Virginia Alexander, Lillian Alexander, W.E.B. Du Bois, E. Franklin Frazier, Abram Harris, and James Weldon Johnson (and others in subsequent Institutes). It was the brainchild of Crystal Bird Fauset, black YWCA secretary and future congresswoman. She worked with Helen Bryan and the Committee on Race Relations of the Arch and Race Street Yearly Meetings of the Society of Friends to move the idea of

the school into reality. It was directed by Charles S. Johnson; a decade later he moved the Institute to Fisk University, where it became an important training ground for civil rights activists. Martin Luther King Jr. and many others spoke before its gathered students.² (Often scholars miss the connection between Johnson's institute and this one begun by the Quakers—thus severing the female initiation of this significant program.³)

The Quaker committee's approach to most things was that of peacemaker. Decisions within the committee needed to be arrived at unanimously, which meant they moved slowly. When Helen Bryan, the paid administrator of the Race Relations Committee, introduced the idea of bringing in black members to the committee and to their "meetings" (the Quaker equivalent of the Sunday worship service), it took months of discussion to accept even "co-opted members."⁴ In May 1930, they held a two day Conference on Race Relations to discuss the subject. W.E.B. Du Bois's white friend Rachel DuBois (no relation) attended and advocated immediate action, rather than endless discussion, because her own Meeting had spent fifteen years in discussion before deciding not to admit a black member. Another white member at the conference urged the group to accept black members by "explaining the loss she feels we suffer from their absence. For one thing, they have succeeded in exemplifying pacifism. She feels that the

² This iteration lasted until 1969. It looks like someone at Fisk attempted to resurrect the Institute in 2007, but the website does not record any subsequent activity. "Race Relations Institute," 2007, <http://www.fisk.edu/rri/index.htm>.

³ John Egerton, *Speak Now Against the Day: The Generation Before the Civil Rights Movement in the South*, 1st ed. (New York: Knopf, 1994).

⁴ A typical entry might be that on May 31, 1929: "The desirability of inviting colored guests to participate in our meetings as associate members was discussed at length without definite decision being reached." Anna D. White, Secretary. Arch Street Committee on Race Relations, "Minutes," May 31, 1929, Box 2 Race Relations Institute Collection, Swarthmore College Friends Historical Library

argument that they demand a different form of worship does not satisfy.”⁵ Another explained why their policy had worked in the past, but how it was no longer functional:

when we working for the Negro it was not unnatural that we should have none in our meetings, but now that we are working with him, the situation is changed. Many Friends have not yet adjusted their attitudes toward this change and that may make it more difficult for us to achieve what now is a normal situation. The absence of Negroes from our meetings has made our situation different from that of all other churches; up to the present it has been a help, giving us freedom to clarify our thought unembarrassed, but now the time is fully ripe for us to share in worship, as in other phases of life. The acquisition of Negro members must come about as a perfectly natural thing and should follow social and intellectual contacts with colored kindred spirits. This is the most important thing right ahead of us now.⁶

Other members advocated keeping committees all white because then members would still feel free to express their true opinions, but they recognized that “there are certain colored individuals in the city, whose help and advice we very much need.”⁷ There was a tragic earnestness about these discussions, over and again emphasizing patience, that could not help but alienate men like Woodson and Du Bois. And yet Du Bois’s most significant paramour since Jessie Fauset—Dr. Virginia M. Alexander—was the most consistent, long-term black “member” that the Philadelphia Meetings had.⁸

⁵ Arch Street Committee on Race Relations, “Conference on Race Relations,” Minutes, May 3, 1930, Box

² Race Relations Institute Collection, Swarthmore College Friends Historical Library.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ David Levering Lewis calls her “the true successor to Jessie Fauset in his life, the woman who might become the second Mrs. Du Bois and for whom he felt a special passion and admiration that would be memorialized in the dedication of his great book *Black Reconstruction in America*. [...] Nina’s growing invisibility combined with the general knowledge that she accepted Alexander as a friend and family pediatrician may have excused for many what proved to be one of Du Bois’s deepest and most enduring liaisons.” Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: The Fight for Equality and the American Century, 1919-1963*, 272-74.

The next September, Helen Bryan proposed Virginia Alexander as their first black committee member. Alexander and her brother Raymond Pace Alexander had grown up in the Philadelphia middle class.

Virginia Margaret Alexander was born on February 4, 1900, at the dawn of a new century. Throughout her childhood, her family stressed two key areas of development that would be important to her throughout her life: education and religion. Hilliard Alexander, her father and a freedman, would not let his children grow to be uneducated as he was and insisted that they pursue as much education as they could. Indeed, he educated himself using their textbooks.⁹ While Virginia was in high school, her father lost his business, a livery stable. She was so upset by her father working for another man instead of for himself that she offered to quit school, join the workforce, and earn enough money to buy back the business. In response he told her, “you’ll go back to school right quick ... and continue through high school and as long as you like after that. I lost my business because I was uneducated and you will not have that handicap.”¹⁰ She fully absorbed that message, because after graduating from high school in 1917 she won a scholarship to attend the University of Pennsylvania. However, the desire to take care of her father would not leave her. He resided with her during most of her adult life.

During childhood, Alexander participated in many church-related activities. Upon her death, one of the church members described her as a child: “she was always willing and ready to do whatever she could for the benefit of the school and church. She possessed an adorable personality and was almost idolized by her friends and members of

⁹ Helene Hano, “Red and Black Star: Under the Quaker Emblem Medical Women Find New Areas of Service,” *Medical Woman’s Journal*, July 1949, p 34.

¹⁰ Hano, 34.

her church.”¹¹ Her charismatic personality and eagerness to serve her community with all her talents would be manifested in many ways throughout her lifetime.

With a scholarship to the University of Pennsylvania, and a high school diploma, she departed her aunt’s house and moved in with a white family near the school in 1917. In exchange for her room and board, she performed time-consuming household tasks such as cleaning the floor and doing the laundry. She was under a considerable amount of strain, being away from home for the first time, working for a living, being one of the first women to attend U Penn and one of only a few black women students, and living and studying with white people. Despite this, she finished her bachelors of education in three years with a successful transcript. Although the University of Pennsylvania had accepted a few women students in the past, primarily in graduate programs, the opening of the School of Education in 1914 ushered in the first “modern, full-time, four-year, undergraduate, professional degree” for women.¹²

Despite a full school schedule, Virginia Alexander was involved in several activities. Her transcript shows that she took a full range of sciences, humanities and languages in addition to her education courses.¹³ She was also a member of the Women’s Undergraduate Association, a group that provided emotional and social support for the small cadre of women at the university. They also participated with the Y.W.C.A.,

¹¹ John H. Willis to the bereaved family of Dr. Virginia Alexander, undated (VMA, U Penn).

¹² “Timeline: 125 Years of Women at Penn,” University of Pennsylvania Archives website, <http://www.archives.upenn.edu/histy/features/women/chron4.html#a> (accessed November 29, 2003).

¹³ University of Pennsylvania, School of Education, Official Transcript of the Record of Virginia M. Alexander, August 21, 1934 (VMA, U Penn).

which Alexander would then be affiliated with for much of her career.¹⁴ Delta Sigma Theta, a black sorority, provided needed support to the even smaller cadre of black female students; the chapter had six members.¹⁵ It was probably through this group that she met Sadie Tanner Mossell, the first national president of the Deltas. Mossell, from a prestigious black family with old roots in Philadelphia, became her close friend and sister-in-law. Mossell graduated in 1918 with a Bachelors in Education and then entered the economics Ph.D. program. She was slightly older than Virginia, which seemed to give her a mothering attitude towards Virginia that would only increase with the years.

With this load of classes, activities, and a job as a waitress, she did not feel like she could participate fully at Zion Baptist Church. Indeed, the waitress job made it impossible to even attend the Baptist services, but she could attend Quaker meetings across the street. In an effort to describe her first visit, she later wrote, “I experienced an overwhelming sense of satisfaction, and I was convinced that this was worship at its best for it was quite like that that ‘Brother Moore’ had tried to achieve at Prayer Meetings in my Baptist Church.”¹⁶ She continued attending Quaker worship meetings off and on, including separate meetings to discuss Quaker theology.

As her graduation drew near, Virginia Alexander vacillated between two possible careers, teaching or medicine. As a woman in 1917, she could only enter the College of Education, yet she also felt an affinity for teaching spurred by her early educational experiences. In the summer of 1919, she worked at the Sleighton Farms in Darlington,

¹⁴ The Women’s Undergraduate Association Yearbook, 1919-1920, University of Pennsylvania, pp 7-8 (VMA, U Penn).

¹⁵ Ibid, p 57.

¹⁶ VMA to Germantown Month Meeting of Friends, August 29, 1944 (VMA, U Penn).

Pennsylvania as a probation officer and teacher in a reform school for girls, giving her real life experience in teaching within a tense atmosphere (and also allowed her to avoid the Philadelphia race riot).¹⁷ As her father had constantly reinforced the value of education during her childhood, she knew the power and influence a teacher could have to do good. It was also often a more open profession for an African American—after facing racism and closed doors in many professions, they began to teach their specialty in African American schools and colleges. However, she had also prepared herself for medicine by taking pre-med courses, i.e. sciences such as physics, chemistry. Perhaps she remembered the premature deaths of her mother and brother, perhaps she saw the terrible health within the black community and felt she could do even greater good as a medical doctor than as a teacher. Jacqueline Harrison Smith, an elderly white woman and wealthy philanthropist, wanted to facilitate the medical education at the Women's Medical College of Pennsylvania for a black woman. Initially, this scholarship was offered to Mossell, but she wished to pursue a doctorate of economics and so expedited its transfer to Virginia Alexander.¹⁸ The scholarship was enough to cover school expenses, but Alexander was usually short of funds for living expenses, necessitating applications for loans and continued menial work.¹⁹

Alexander maintained strong ties with the black community while in medical school, despite the school's neglect of and contempt for that community. The WMC was

¹⁷ VMA's "United States Civil Service Commission" application (VMA, U Penn).

¹⁸ Jacqueline Harrison Smith to Dr. Tracy, November 10, 1919; Dean of WMC to Mrs. Jacqueline Harrison Smith, November 14, 1919 (VMA, WMC).

¹⁹ Registrar of WMC to Mrs. Smith, November 24, 1920; Mrs. J. Harrison Smith to Mrs. [Broworth], November 28, 1920; Mrs. J. Harrison Smith to Dr. Potter, January 5, 1921; Dean to Miss Alexander, May 20, 1921 (VMA, WMC).

located in a black neighborhood until 1930; the administration had begun to think of moving the school as early as 1926 due to the “poor neighborhood.”²⁰ Alexander later described the other students’ opinion of the neighborhood: “when I was a student at the old site I heard too frequently, “we must get away from this nigger neighborhood.”²¹ At the time she was one of three African Americans at the school, among about 100 other students.²² In order to take advantage of the neighborhood, rather than disparage it like her classmates, Alexander developed relationships with neighbors around her boarding house, who would later become her clients.²³

She continued to attend Quaker meetings during medical school and the early years of her practice. Gradually her participation increased, as she explained, “by gradual steps, viz. such meetings as these, the Fireside Club, the Race Relations Committee (on which I became a coopted member), sincere and abiding friendships with individuals in both Meetings, and ultimately, through the Young Friends Association after I became a member of this Meeting, I began, through Quakerism, to learn to ‘wait on the way.’”²⁴ Like Cuthbert and Derricotte, she fully recognized the racial limitations on her white friends’ thinking (by pointing out that she was a coopted member rather than a full member) as well as embracing the friendships and theology that she learned within the group. Her life indicates another way African Americans lived in the period—her clinic

²⁰ Peitzman, p 156.

²¹ Virginia Alexander, George E. Simpson, “The Social, Economic, and Health Problems of North Philadelphia Negroes and Their Relation to a Proposed Interracial Public Health Demonstration Center,” Proposal to The Milbank Memorial Fund, Edgar Sydenstricker director, (October 14, 1935), p 114 (VMA, U Penn).

²² Peitzman, p 159.

²³ Hano, p 35.

²⁴ Ibid; She refers to “waiting on the way” to explain her attempt to be patient with her unmarried status.

was a significant improvement in the lives of African Americans, her words and actions changed white people's minds, she loved an intelligent race-proud man like Du Bois, and she participated enthusiastically in the "patient" mentality of the white Quakers. She lived fully within the working and middle class black Philadelphia communities as well as the Quaker meetings.

Alexander's medical career was almost stymied after graduation from WMC because of the seeming impossibility of finding a hospital that would take her on as a resident. A black man or a white woman had a challenging enough time; a black woman kept receiving dismissals. Finally WMC helped her find an internship at a black hospital in Missouri. Though she had no desire to go west or leave her home city, she spent two years there. Upon her return to Philadelphia in 1927, she setup a general health clinic in her home at 2104 Jefferson St. Her medical practice was devoted to black women, poor and middle class. She also started to treat persistent public health problems through education about birth control and venereal diseases. At the same time, she lectured at the Woman's Medical College and the University of Pennsylvania. She was also the Du Bois family's personal physician, which often brought her to New York and cast an air of respectability on her frequent meetings with Dr. Du Bois. Mrs. Du Bois accepted her as a family friend and the physician for her frequently ill daughter Yolande.²⁵

Alexander began attending the Race Relations Committee meetings in October 1931 and then attended and participated as regularly as any member for the next decade. For years she was still considered an "unofficial member representing her race" rather

²⁵ David L. Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: The Fight for Equality and the American Century, 1919-1963* (New York: Henry Holt, 2000).

than a full-fledged member.²⁶ Alexander served on committees and brought the medical needs of the black Philadelphia community to the attention of the group. She knew about these needs intimately through her medical practice in the city. After one such discussion, they formed a Committee on Hospitalization to pressure the mental institution to admit one of Alexander's patients who was previously barred. She explained,

Last summer a little child was burned very badly. His mother was out; a woman in a downstairs apartment took him to Barton Dispensary at 3:30 PM. They gave him excellent emergency care and referred the child to Lankenau Hospital. When the child was taken to the hospital they absolutely refused to admit him (said that he should have gone to the College Hospital). In fact, they would not even let him stay in the hospital until his mother came home from work. Somehow the woman managed until the mother came home and found the child acutely ill. I decided to take him to my health home to stay overnight where I could watch him and give adequate care. From day to day I felt I had to keep the child. I finally discharged him after he had stayed almost four weeks.

Subsequently I gave him office treatment ... for four weeks.²⁷

At another meeting, Alexander told the assembled group about the difficulties she faced as a female doctor and as a black doctor. One white woman in the audience Marjorie Peney remembered the way she told of her experiences "simply, and without rancor," because "That was an expensive evening for me. It cost me my peace of mind! That any creature, let alone one so gifted, should suffer so, made me deeply angry. I was so ashamed to speak to her at the close of the meeting. But in that shame and anger, I began" the Fellowship House Inc., a Laboratory in racial and religious understanding.²⁸

²⁶ Arch Street Committee on Race Relations, "Minutes," September 16, 1930, Box 2 Race Relations Institute Collection, Swarthmore College Friends Historical Library. There are also meeting attendance records for each year in Box 2.

²⁷ Alexander, Simpson, "The Social, Economic, and Health Problems of North Philadelphia Negroes," p 98 (VMA, U Penn).

²⁸ Marjorie Peney, Director of Fellowship House Inc., A Laboratory in Racial and Religious Understanding to Raymond and Sadie Alexander, undated (VMA, U Penn).

One of the Race Relations Committee's favorite topics of discussion was education at all levels. Once Thomas Elsa Jones left the area to take up the presidency of Fisk, he continued to return and give updates on the progress of black college education. At one such meeting he presented his concern that too many whites thought "that higher education for the Negro masses is unwise, that it will make trouble." Financial assistance went "to relieve destitution or to train for agriculture, but not for universities." Jones wanted to prove to these people the "reasonableness of natural assimilation through education" and suggested that "he and his wife meet groups among people of social influence and tell them something of their lives on the campus of Fisk. They are bringing up a family of children among high type members of both races absolutely without distinction of color, and are doing it without sacrifice of the finest cultural values."²⁹ It is important to note that Jones' insistence on assimilation as the positive way to achieve racial harmony, while anathema today, was common in the era among white liberals and those blacks influenced by the University of Chicago School of sociology who populated the Urban League.³⁰ Even Du Bois, who would not have wanted to abandon the unique attributes of African Americans in a sort of white washed assimilation, did share many of Jones' concerns about transmitting "the finest cultural values." were shared by Du Bois.

When confronting segregation in Philadelphia schools, the Race Relations Committee wanted to get both sides in a room and talk through it and not take any action unless it was a peaceful one (which meant they listened to the white side as much as the

²⁹ "Committee On Race Relations," Minutes, November 19, 1929, Box 9, Swarthmore College Friends Historical Library.

³⁰ Touré F Reed, *Not Alms but Opportunity: The Urban League & the Politics of Racial Uplift, 1910-1950* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008).

black). At least they did seek out black opinion. Lucy Slowe was a frequent guest at the meetings. Alain Locke attended one meeting and explained the negative repercussions on students and teachers of segregation. At the same meeting, Thomas Elsa Jones “stated that both his own experiences at Fisk and very careful studies on the subject showed Negroes from mixed schools were able to do better college work and had higher intelligence ratings than those from segregated systems.”³¹

It is easy to see why the Young Turks and other blacks working with the group would have been very frustrated. It was slow moving, counseled patience, listened to white men like Thomas Elsa Jones and Will Alexander as unabashed experts, and acted through moral suasion of already established chains of command that had white power at their center. Its emphasis on patience was not just a marker of white society, but a deeply engrained Quaker sensibility. For example, in the 1930 Annual Report, they acknowledged that though race relations in the city seemed to be improved, segregation of African Americans was increasing. “In housing and in recreation, in places of amusement and especially in restaurants, lines of distinction are being drawn contrary to equality of citizenship, humanity or Christian brotherhood. We counsel patience. We tell our friends of the other race that only through the slow but, we hope, sure process of education, can a happier day come. But meanwhile we feel a deep sense of shame that such conditions should prevail.”³² In other studies of this period, Du Bois’ frustration with this group might prevail. However, that ignores the leadership role that black

³¹ Arch Street Committee on Race Relations, “Minutes,” January 19, 1932, Box 2 Race Relations Institute Collection, Swarthmore College Friends Historical Library.

³² Arch Street Committee on Race Relations, “Annual Report,” 1930, Box 2 Race Relations Institute Collection, Swarthmore College Friends Historical Library.

women found in this group and their acceptance of the language of patience. They felt they inhabited their Christian values by both discussing and pushing better race relations through the Quaker group and education, as well as through their patience and Pauline contentment. Focusing only on Du Bois' frustration also ignores the complexity that his close relationship with a woman who thrived within the Quaker environment adds to this era.

Throughout 1931, Helen Bryan toured Africa to come to a deeper understanding of race relations internationally. When she returned, she held a tea at her house to decide how to achieve better race relations within her home country. At the tea, Bryan asked the gathered Friends to pray and meditate on their future actions. Afterwards a period of quiet and reflection, a few women shared the thoughts that had come to them. Crystal Bird Fauset hesitantly described an idea that had been on her heart for four years—an interracial graduate school in Philadelphia. “She pictured a group of both races patiently and thoroughly studying together under the best teachers that could be secured, and in the light of the best scientific knowledge that could be gathered, the reasons why there are conflicts between races, and ways of preventing such conflicts.”³³ A native Bostonian, Bird Fauset served first as a national YWCA field secretary for black girls and then spent several years as a touring lecturer on African American culture for the American Friends' Service Committee, a group founded in 1917 originally for conscientious objectors to aid war victims, but it soon widened into a more general social justice organization. She had graduated from Columbia University Teachers College in 1931, the same year she married Arthur Huff Fauset, a prominent black Philadelphia principal and Jessie Fauset's

³³ Ethel R. Potts, “The Growth of an Idea,” 1933, Box 9 Race Relations Institute Collection, Swarthmore College Friends Historical Library.

brother. She was chairman of the volunteers at the Philadelphia YWCA Black Branch.³⁴

When Anna Arnold became executive secretary of that branch in the fall of 1933, she greatly appreciated Bird Fauset's leadership. "Her ability to speak effectively and her complete awareness of the subtleties of the racial situation throughout the entire country," Arnold wrote, "proved extraordinary assets."³⁵

Bird Fauset's idea captivated Bryan, who immediately shared it with a few more Friends. The next month, Virginia Alexander suggested that the Committee elect a black coworker for Bryan. The expenses for the worker would be paid by a group of interested blacks, with whom she had already talked. The minutes explained, "Such a worker would help to interpret the present situation and present trends in Race Relations. Also to study existing Negro institutions and be in a position to give technical advice on new projects. The Committee felt very much in sympathy with this concern."³⁶ Bryan immediately suggested Bird Fauset, who was subsequently hired. The two women began to convince others that their race relations institute should go forward. In November, Bryan sought out Alain Locke's advice and Bird Fauset sought out Bruno Lasker in New York. Lasker

³⁴ There seems to be surprisingly little scholarship on Bird Fauset, especially considering that she went into politics during her work with the Institute, starting by building local support for the Democrats. This attracted national attention and she was appointed to the Federal Housing Advising Board, before running successfully for a seat in the Pennsylvania House. For some further information on Bird Fauset, see Thomas H. Coode and John F. Bauman, *People, Poverty, and Politics: Pennsylvanians during the Great Depression* (Bucknell University Press, 1981); Charles Pete T. Banner-Haley, *To Do Good and to Do Well: Middle Class Blacks and the Depression* (New York: Garland, 1993); "Historical Markers | Crystal Bird Fauset," *ExplorePAhistory.com*, 2009, <http://explorepahistory.com/hmarker.php?markerId=1061>; Philip Clark, "Lifting the Curtain: Crystal Bird Fauset," *American Friends Service Committee*, <http://www.afsc.org/ht/d/sp/i/16078/pid/16078>; Henry Louis Gates and Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *African American Lives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

³⁵ Anna Arnold Hedgeman, *The Trumpet Sounds: A Memoir of Negro Leadership* (New York: Holt, 1964), 65.

³⁶ Arch Street Committee on Race Relations, "Minutes," October 5, 1932, Box 2 Race Relations Institute Collection, Swarthmore College Friends Historical Library.

was involved in social work at the Henry Street Settlement and director of the Institute of Pacific Relations, as well as an active Quaker.³⁷ Both men provided abundant suggestions.

The women succeeded in urging the school forward because the men they sought out for advice heard the emphasis on social science in the proposal, not the religious or activist parts. Next, the women sent out a description of their plan for an “Interracial Summer School” to 50 leaders for feedback. Most were positive. W.E.B. Du Bois wrote that “Such a school would be of tremendous benefit.”³⁸ He warned them not to let it degenerate into a general talk fest of unsubstantiated conclusions. The primary questions should be: “This is a world filled with diverse human elements. They have got to live together. They are living nearer together today than in the past and are going to live much nearer in the future because of technique, commerce, industry, travel and culture. What is to be the basis of this living together and what are the known facts and knowable facts concerning it?”³⁹ The negative ones worried about money. How could they fund such an institute in the midst of the current economic troubles?

In January, they invited a group to become the Council of Advisors. Forrester Washington, the black man who took over directing the Atlanta School of Social Work from E. Franklin Frazier, responded with a dynamic critique of the nature of the Institute. He wrote that there are enough theorists already. What was needed instead was action. If the Quakers planned to gather a group of activists in the summer, then he would support

³⁷ “Bruno Lasker Papers [ca. 1923]-1951.,” *Columbia University Rare Book and Manuscript Library: Archival Collections*, http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/archival/collections/ldpd_4079009/index.html.

³⁸ Potts, “The Growth of an Idea.”

³⁹ W.E.B. Du Bois to Helen R. Bryan, December 9, 1932, Box 9 Race Relations Institute Collection, Swarthmore College Friends Historical Library.

it. He would not join a council to ask Foundations for money for more research in times such as these.⁴⁰

Despite their continued need for scarce resources and Washington's fears the women pressed on. Particularly exciting was Charles Johnson's enthusiasm for the Institute. He was almost immediately identified as the man to lead the Institute, though the Friends suggested that the directorship should be bi-racial, and suggested Will Alexander or Mary Kleed as co-directors. Some on the committee thought the Summer School would be best directed to undergraduates, but a comparison with the New York School of Social Work brought out a defining distinction: "The outstanding features of such an institution seemed ... to be: the gathering, by invitation, of an experienced group; their work together under an expert teacher; the pooling of their experiences and the employment of a common body of technique to make their work and their cooperation as effective as possible."⁴¹ They hoped to focus specifically on successful technique for race relations, in a scholarly atmosphere, and thus unite thought and action.

By March 1933, the idea had become the Swarthmore Institute for Race Relations. Swarthmore, a Quaker college which did not admit black students for the school, was yet happy to host the institute. To discuss the scholarly foundations of the institute, Bryan and Bird Fauset arranged for an intensive weekend meeting in Franz Boas' office. They had decided on the administration of the institute, Clarence E. Pickett (Secretary of the AFSC)—Director of Administration, Charles S. Johnson—Director of

⁴⁰ Forrester Washington to Helen R. Bryan, December 9, 1932, Box 9 Race Relations Institute Collection, Swarthmore College Friends Historical Library.

⁴¹ Arch Street Committee on Race Relations, "Minutes," December 27, 1932, Box 2 Race Relations Institute Collection, Swarthmore College Friends Historical Library.

Studies, Helen R. Bryan and Crystal Bird Fauset—Secretaries—and had appointed an executive committee (including Mabel Carney, Derricotte and Slowe’s connection at Columbia) but needed to decide its scope and funding. Already leading foundations like the Rockefeller had turned them down. In Boas’ office gathered thirty people, “some from such scattered places as Nashville, Tenn.; Baltimore, Md.; Chapel Hill, North Carolina; and Hanover, N.H. So great was their interest that, for just that one all-day meeting they all paid their own travelling expenses.” Sixty individuals ended up attending. Mabel Carney hosted a special lunch for a favored few, among them Abram Harris, who was particularly vocal about the institute. Following the March planning conference, Pearl Buck, James Weldon Johnson, and Howard Thurman all held meetings to build support for the institute.

Organizers discussed whether the content of the weeks should be international in focus. Some, like Mabel Carney argued that it would be too much to study world-wide problems as well as American. They could consider more particular concerns by just focusing on the United States. (She was personally fascinated with Africa, where she had lived for a few years, so this opinion did not arise out of a general antipathy towards internationalism.)⁴² Others, like Du Bois, suggested that they could not understand American problems without considering the world-wide context. He also suggested that they not limit discussion to only black/white issues, but rather discuss other minority/majority antagonism around the world. For this inaugural session, only the

⁴² She is a great example of the contradictions that whites who were interested in blacks often found themselves in. These contradictions (paternalism and belief in white superiority, coupled with genuine friendship and support) were furthered by an extended trip to South Africa 1926-27. Richard Glotzer, “The Career of Mabel Carney: The Study of Race and Rural Development in the United States and South Africa,” *International Journal of African History Studies* 29, no. 2 (1996): 309-36; Kathleen Weiler, “Mabel Carney at Teachers College: From Home Missionary to White Ally,” *Teachers College Record* 107, no. 12 (December 2005): 2599-633..

opening session focused on international issues. Afterwards, Bird Fauset and Bryan suggested making the meeting more international the following year by inviting faculty from around the globe.

The Institute was held all of July 1933. Students paid \$75 for tuition, room and board. Each week day brought three or four lectures, including one in the evening that was open to the community, for a total of eighty lectures over the course of the month. Most of the students stayed for the whole four weeks, while the faculty moved in and out depending on how long they could take away from their work and how many lectures they were scheduled for. "The Faculty Club was used as head-quarters, general dining room and for faculty guest rooms, Woolman House for the women's dormitory, the Miller House for the men's dormitory, and the tennis courts and swimming pool added greatly to the refreshment (recreation) of the group as a whole."⁴³ This was one of the first times that Swarthmore College had ever accommodated African Americans, because it did not accept black students, something many black newspapers pointed out afterwards.

The faculty included a range of black and white social scientists:

W. W. Alexander, Dillard University, and the Commission on Interracial Cooperation
Mabel Carney, Rural Education Department, Teachers College, Columbia University
W. E. B. Du Bois, Economics Department, Atlanta University
E. Franklin Frazier, Sociology Department, Fisk University
Abram Harris, Economics Department, Howard University
Jesse H. Holmes, Department of Philosophy, Swarthmore College
E. A. Hooton, Anthropology Department, Harvard University
Charles S. Johnson, Department of Social Science, Fisk University
James Weldon Johnson, Department of Creative Literature, Fisk University
Otto Klineberg, Psychology Department, Columbia University
Edouard Lindemann, New York School of Social Work

⁴³ Arch Street Committee on Race Relations, "Minutes," September 19, 1933, Box 2 Race Relations Institute Collection, Swarthmore College Friends Historical Library.

Herbert Adolphus Miller, Author of 'The Beginning of Tomorrow'
George Fort Milton, Author of 'The Age of Hate,' Editor of *The Chattanooga News*.

Broadus Mitchell, Economics Department, Johns Hopkins University
Howard W. Odum, Sociology Department, University of North Carolina
Ulrich B. Phillips, History Department, Yale University
E. B. Reuter, Sociology Department, University of Iowa
Charles H. Thompson, Department of Education, Howard University
Donald Young, Social Science Research Council⁴⁴

Lillian Alexander, Virginia Alexander, and Marion Cuthbert all attended as well, operating in a zone between student and lecturer. They were not on the official list of faculty, like that above, yet gave speeches and were present for the entire time (unlike some of those on the list). Melville Herskovits, Max Yergan, Rachel Davis Du Bois, and Walter White also delivered lectures.⁴⁵

The last few days of the institute witnessed a collision between Marion Cuthbert and W.E.B. Du Bois. The *Chicago Defender* described the overall *oeuvre* of the final sessions: "A curious mixture of hope and despair, restrained exultation at accomplishment and desperation at repeated failures, shot through with the realization that existing conditions range all the way from the very best to the worst imaginable."⁴⁶ According to the *Defender*, Cuthbert praised the YWCA for continuing to open up to the advancement of black secretaries in its ranks. For example, she noted,

Recently Florence Wilson was selected to represent the industrial group of the YWCA at a national conference. Thus, for the first time, a member of the Negro race has deserved and been awarded an important position of national scope in the Y [that was not directly related to African American concerns]. As they become fitted for the work, Negro workers will be

⁴⁴ "Pamphlet for Institute, File Copy," 1933, Box 9 Race Relations Institute Collection, Swarthmore College Friends Historical Library.

⁴⁵ Charles S. Johnson to Walter White, August 11, 1933, Reel 16, NAACP 2a Papers.

⁴⁶ "Institute at Swarthmore College Comes to Close," *Chicago Defender*, September 9, 1933.

given these important positions and it is only a question of time until there is a Negro on the national board of the YWCA.⁴⁷

With such a statement, she seemed to be advocating patience and waiting for things to change, even while working for the change. She also focused narrowly upon limited integration of one organization, not the transformation of society. As she had said in her NAACP speech earlier in the summer, discussed below, she was more willing to talk about the positive changes she witnessed rather than further rail against what was missing. Du Bois had no such desire.

In his speech, the final public one of the Institute, Du Bois “flayed organizations which preached recognition for the Negro and then allowed discrimination within its ranks,” like the YWCA. “I am tired of hoping and waiting,” he declared. “I must tell Negroes there are things to be done, or they must sink lower on the scale.”⁴⁸ He had started off describing the situation of two black secretaries who were forced out of the YMCA. The *Defender* explained his willingness to critique the Ys by explaining that “Dr. Du Bois is the recognized leader of the ‘progressive militants’ or so-called radicals of the Negro advancement group.”⁴⁹ Based upon her speech, Du Bois formed an exceedingly negative impression of Cuthbert; he told Lillian Alexander that she was a trimmer and had the “psychosis of a YWCA worker,” too eager to please her colleagues and audience.⁵⁰ He could not understand how careful analysis could be accompanied by such openness to gradualism or how any intelligent African American could praise the

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ W.E.B. Du Bois to J. E. Spingarn, October 25, 1933, Reel 40, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

era they were walking through. Nor did he understand Lillian Alexander's opinion, who had told him earlier that summer in her nomination of Cuthbert for the America Conference that Cuthbert was considered the "Du Bois" of the Youth Movement. Du Bois wanted to rip into Cuthbert as soon as she sat down, but instead "let her down easy, but if she had been a man explaining the doctrines of the YWCA, the results would not have been as pleasant."⁵¹

Marion Cuthbert was not new to the harsh attacks of black male intellectuals. The summer before Swarthmore, she had been publicly condemned by the acerbic pen of Carter G. Woodson in the national black press. Why was her work so targeted? Was she the panderer these men seemed to think she was?

Marion Cuthbert had moved through Harlem society during her many summers at Columbia University studying for her MA at the Teachers College, but she had never lived there. After Juliette Derricotte's tragic death, she swore off the South and started a PhD program at Columbia.⁵² She also left behind her position as Dean of Women at Talladega. After a year in the city, the YWCA hired her as a national secretary and "educational adviser of the leadership division" in 1932.⁵³ In that position, she oversaw a reorganization of the YWCA in the wake of Eva Bowles' departure. The national leadership of the YW decided that awareness of race was what led to racism. They thought that if they eliminated the group specifically oriented towards helping African

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Perkins, "Cuthbert, Marion Vera." She actually gave up her position at Talladega and started the Ph.D. program in the fall semester of 1931, a month or so before Derricotte's death. However, the tragedy sealed her departure into a life-long commitment, rather than an educational interlude. Derricotte wrote Slowe about her concerns at losing one of the most experienced Deans of Women in the field.

⁵³ "Leadership Division Led by Miss Marion Cuthbert," *Chicago Defender*, 28 May 1932, 6; "Miss Marion V. Cuthbert," *Chicago Defender*, 16 Jul 1932, 7.

1. The first part of the document is a list of names and their corresponding addresses. The names are listed in a column on the left, and the addresses are listed in a column on the right. The names are: John Doe, Jane Smith, Robert Brown, Mary White, and David Black. The addresses are: 123 Main St, 456 Elm St, 789 Oak St, 101 Pine St, and 202 Cedar St.

Americans, and instead integrated the staff throughout the YW, racism would be lessened. This had the unfortunate result that African Americans who had been in the sole position of leadership suddenly had to report to whites above them. Or, as Frances Williams experienced, white staffers ignored Williams and reported only to Katherine Lumpkin, her white colleague. Williams and Lumpkin had the same level of authority, but Lumpkin was consistently treated as the superior.⁵⁴ This reorganization was what had led to Eva Bowles resigning.

Eva Bowles' departure after a long tenure with the YWCA stirred up sustained controversy in the black newspapers. Carter G. Woodson used the occasion to critique black leaders who cooperated with segregation as part of his series of articles castigating black leadership that led to *The Mis-Education of the Negro*. His famous acerbity was in full swing as he denigrated Marion Cuthbert for taking on the new position. In particular, he attacked her as a woman, not as an intellectual or leader. Though he had never seen the dignified thirty-six year old, "I would say that she is a pretty good looking girl, and the boys will enjoy casting wistful eyes at her as she goes on her way working out our undoing for the mess of pottage offered."⁵⁵ He argued that she pursued the YWCA work only for the high salary offered—a salary that would compensate her and her assistants for "the unchristian work which they will perform in the further debasement of the

⁵⁴ Nancy Marie Robertson, *Christian Sisterhood, Race Relations, and the YWCA, 1906-1946* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 123.

⁵⁵ Carter G. Woodson, "And the Negro Loses His Soul," *Chicago Defender*, 25 Jun 1932, 14; Carter G. Woodson, "And the Negro Loses His Soul," *Atlanta Daily World*, 27 Jun 1932, 6; Carter G. Woodson, "Economic State Makes Negro Lose His Soul," *New York Amsterdam News*, 22 Jun 1932, 8.

Negroes through segregation.”⁵⁶ Woodson thought Cuthbert should be working for a group under African American leadership, like his organization, the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History. With Woodson, she could “try to stimulate the Negro women to independent thought and action [and] organize the women of the country to think and do for themselves rather than go through the back door of a Jim Crowing establishment to eat the crumbs from its table.”⁵⁷ For such useful work, she would receive little compensation except the dignity and pride of a “life of usefulness” rather than the pursuit of “the gewgaws and toys of life.”⁵⁸ Woodson presumed a lot about Cuthbert’s intentions in life without knowing anything about her other than that she worked for the YWCA, a cautious interracial organization that accepted some level of segregation.⁵⁹

Woodson justified his searing criticism of the work of the YWCA in another article by conflating the administrative structures of the YWCA and the YMCA, as well as criticizing the segregated branches in both organizations. He insisted that white leaders like Thomas Jesse Jones of the YM attempted to hire only black people who would

⁵⁶ Carter G. Woodson, “And the Negro Loses His Soul,” *Chicago Defender*, 25 Jun 1932, 14; Carter G. Woodson, “And the Negro Loses His Soul,” *Atlanta Daily World*, 27 Jun 1932, 6; Carter G. Woodson, “Economic State Makes Negro Lose His Soul,” *New York Amsterdam News*, 22 Jun 1932, 8.

⁵⁷ Carter G. Woodson, “And the Negro Loses His Soul,” *Chicago Defender*, 25 Jun 1932, 14; Carter G. Woodson, “And the Negro Loses His Soul,” *Atlanta Daily World*, 27 Jun 1932, 6; Carter G. Woodson, “Economic State Makes Negro Lose His Soul,” *New York Amsterdam News*, 22 Jun 1932, 8.

⁵⁸ Carter G. Woodson, “And the Negro Loses His Soul,” *Chicago Defender*, 25 Jun 1932, 14; Carter G. Woodson, “And the Negro Loses His Soul,” *Atlanta Daily World*, 27 Jun 1932, 6; Carter G. Woodson, “Economic State Makes Negro Lose His Soul,” *New York Amsterdam News*, 22 Jun 1932, 8.

⁵⁹ His angry denouncement of Cuthbert as a pretty girl who sought male attention and as a non-Christian who sought to destroy African Americans suggests that Du Bois’s criticism of him as misogynist has merit. Pero Dagbovie argues against Du Bois’s criticism by pointing out that Woodson’s relationship with women inside his organization was much more respectful. Pero Gaglo Dagbovie, *The Early Black History Movement, Carter G. Woodson, and Lorenzo Johnston Greene* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 83-105.

kowtow and accept unequal positions.⁶⁰ The leadership structure of the YMCA and the YWCA were quite different. The YMCA operated almost a completely segregated system of branches and leadership. Whites controlled the white branches, while blacks controlled an autonomous system of black branches. The YWCA integrated most of its local and national leadership, even while functionally most branches remained segregated. The national board of the YWCA purposively pursued “racial fellowship,” which the YMCA did not consider an important part of their efforts.⁶¹ Before her resignation, Eva Bowles defended this structure of leadership; she “argued that the interconnections, however limited, found in the YWCA permitted local black branches to influence local white associations and possibly the national body and greater society as well.”⁶² Certainly, though, the YWCA suffered from the power dynamics of the whole country that supported white power while forcing African Americans to fight diligently for each bit of power and influence they accumulated.

Woodson argued that both models of leadership the Ys espoused showed an acceptance of segregation. Segregation has arisen because black leadership accepted it and bought into it. Only by ridding themselves of such leadership could African Americans hope to prosper; “If the Negroes could chloroform about 99 percent of their superimposed leaders the Race might survive. Under them we are gaining one thing while losing the only thing that makes life worth while. ‘What shall it profit a man, if he shall

⁶⁰ Carter G. Woodson, “And So Miss Bowles Goes the Way of Moorland,” *New York Age*, 4 Jun 1932.

⁶¹ Robertson, *Christian Sisterhood, Race Relations, and the YWCA, 1906-1946*, 109.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 116.

gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"⁶³ He rejected even the possibility of cultural cooperation as espoused by the International Student Services organization.⁶⁴ "History does not show that an oppressed race has ever accomplished anything under the dictation of the race oppressing it. Why should we be so foolhardy as to undertake what experience has shown to be impossible?"⁶⁵

The 1933 NAACP annual convention in Chicago was White's show. Du Bois had declined to attend out of frustration and Spingarn out of fatigue. White, Wilkins, and Ovington arranged for a wide array of opinions to be represented at the conference, even though by the end White showed his preference for leaving things the way they were. The first night, Earl Dickerson of the host branch urged the NAACP to transform, to "become less reactive, less conservative, less legalistic."⁶⁶ A roundtable on "Shifting Lines of Attack to Meet the Day," included participants who pointedly condemned the NAACP for caring too much about "what its white friends would think of militant action" and others who thought that the NAACP's leadership was much better equipped to set up action plans than "ordinary people."⁶⁷ At the end, though, all the proposed changes and ideas were "smugly dismissed" by moderator Roy Wilkins, who claimed "No single speaker has proposed a concrete method by which a program could be carried to and

⁶³ Woodson, "And the Negro Loses His Soul."

⁶⁴ See Chapter 2 Part 2.

⁶⁵ Woodson, "And So Miss Bowles Goes the Way of Moorland."

⁶⁶ Kenneth Robert Janken, *White: The Biography of Walter White, Mr. NAACP* (New York: New Press, 2003), 177.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 178.

executed by the masses.”⁶⁸ Lawyer Charles Hamilton Houston, who had recently significantly increased his participation in NAACP legal cases, spoke for the “great undecided middle group,” which he aligned himself with. Though politically he leaned sharply left, he always made his decisions pragmatically. He did not want to see economic and political disputes among radicals and professionals degenerate into infighting rather than swell into action. He urged local branches to find ways for direct action on behalf of workers, such as the popular idea of “don’t buy where you can’t work boycotts,” then gaining momentum in Toledo and Detroit.⁶⁹

Marion Cuthbert spoke on the night that the NAACP presented the Spingarn Medal to Max Yergan, urging the audience to examine closely their interracial programs and economic prescriptions thus far. Mary White Ovington introduced them both. She had first met Cuthbert a year before at a luncheon given by Lucy Slowe, “one of the very finest of our colored women in the educational world.” Ovington sat opposite Cuthbert and she found she kept watching the younger woman. “She seemed so alive, so full of real, deep interest in everything about her. We were there with the girls of Howard in their dining room and it was a very happy time because I think there are few things pleasanter than to go right into a college and be among the students.”⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Stephanie J Shaw, *What a Woman Ought to Be and to Do: Black Professional Women Workers During the Jim Crow Era*, Women in culture and society (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

⁷⁰ Ovington concluded the introduction with a digression on the interworking of the YWCA. “I think the judgment that the Young Women's Christian Association shows in choosing its women is one of the most remarkable things I know of in connection with work among colored people.” She thought this “is partly because they are women who are choosing women. They are white women who are choosing women as well as colored women helping them. Because I do think it is the easiest thing in the world to take in the white man in relation to the colored man. We have been hearing today story after story of the way in which the white man does not talk to the person of the NAACP but to the wrong person and puts him over the NAACP. That is not the way it goes in the YWCA; so they get the finest spirits they can find to go about

In her speech, "Honesty in Race Relations," Cuthbert indicated that she understood Woodson's and Du Bois's critique of interracialism: "For some people the inter-racial experience has been one so inept, so futile and so sentimental," she explained, "that they have become nauseated and have refused to consider any such part of our American problem." She also knew some believed interracial dialogue was some kind of magical panacea, "For other people and other groups it has seemed some sort of magic device to appoint an interracial committee and a hoary peace has descended upon such groups once the committee has been appointed, in the true American fashion of taking care of our troubles by that device." Cuthbert managed to find a middle ground between these two powerful arguments. She desired to focus on "the work that has come to be called interracial, [which] has been a real insight into the most pressing of our present day social problems, that one of race."⁷¹ She felt genuine shock when she discovered that some believed the programs of racial advancement she was involved in was meant to be only for an elite few.

Cuthbert criticized black and white assumptions within interracial work that simply educating people will make them somehow more amenable to other people. "I know of nothing more fallacious than the idea that if the problem is pointed out, described, that problem will disappear." She believed that "once two groups of people considered the problem the problem would remain the same as before and the division would be greater" through the increased knowledge. Perhaps she had learned a hard

the country or in New York to do their work." Ovington did not know as much about the way black and white women interacted within the YWCA as she might have, but it is interesting that she raised the unique traits of women at a conference that still focused mostly upon the needs of black men. She also was praising the work of white women like herself, who had become involved in race relations.

⁷¹ Marion Cuthbert, "Honesty in Race Relations," Speech (Chicago, IL, July 1, 1933), Reel 9, NAACP 1 papers microfilm.

lesson from her years representing the YWCA, a body that prided itself for encouraging positive interracial relations through education. Cuthbert explained that education was at most a starting point, because “there is in human nature courage enough to do something about a problem that is understood and those of us of the minority group who can to ourselves and to other people tell what is wrong find that we are stimulated and encouraged to do something about it more than when we are working in some fake situation that is a troublous dream.” Furthermore, white people who “actually understand” then become inflamed with “a passion for justice” and “will gird themselves up to do something about it.” Simply slapping an “interracial” label on a group or discussion would not achieve this passion or these actions.⁷² Nor would the other extreme of dismissing interested whites or anything labeled interracial (like Woodson had done with her work).

After criticizing interracial groups’ sole dependence upon education, Cuthbert then challenged the idea that social science was the best way to solve race discrimination.⁷³ Rather than turning people into statistics, she argued that “There is no way for us to deal adequately with our race problem unless we sense it is composed of individuals, every one of them worth while, every one of them to be counted upon and in some way developed in this whole schema; no masses of any group with one remedy for all but the accepting of the mass as a mass composed of individuals.” Echoes of Derricotte can be heard in this line, since both she and Derricotte strove to see and to

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ When the Second Amenia Conference appears in the literature, the acceptance of social science is presented as unanimous. It is important to recognize Cuthbert’s dissenting voice, particularly because she worked in education for so many years and went on to get her Ph.D.

encourage others to see the full humanity of everyone around them. Cuthbert explained that individual human worth was first made clear by Christian teaching and then by modern clarification. Not only, though, was the attack on social sciences at the level of individual or statistic, it also lay in the unemotional logic that was meant to be applied to problems.

This is, again, for both sides of the issue, both for whites and black people, an emotional problem which must be accounted for in our personal lives. Many Negroes find it hard to trust individual white people, to feel that they are worth while; many whites find it just as difficult. Now, until we have such concepts of an actual, worth-while-ness of all people, not as a problem, not as an issue, not as a battle ground, but as human kind and human folk, we are going to make no progress whatsoever with our problem.⁷⁴

Cuthbert offered no suggestions for how to bring these concepts into reality, other than to acknowledge once again that the battle she (and Derricotte) had fought was at the individual level—each student they spoke to, each YW secretary they mentored, each international person they introduced to black culture, each white woman they befriended—it was those women and men who would push race relations forward. Though I emphasize Cuthbert's insistence on the role of emotion, it must be remembered that Cuthbert did not actually reject social sciences or education. She was even then pursuing her doctorate at Columbia University. Her thesis studied, with a mixture of modern social scientific methods, the way that black women reintegrated into their communities after earning a higher degree.⁷⁵ She also wrote a children's book introducing positive interactions between white and black students that one senator felt

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Marion V Cuthbert, *Education and Marginality: A Study of the Negro Woman College Graduate*, Educated women (New York: Garland, 1987).

was so insidious (why there are black children sitting next to white children, eating a meal!!) that it needed to be banned.⁷⁶ Cuthbert combined intellectual, logical study with an emphasis upon the illogical and emotional aspects of racism. I think this provided a needed corrective to the overemphasis upon objectivity introduced in the next chapter. It was not a corrective, though, that most black men could hear.

White listened to all the critiques over the long weekend, but did not hear the primary thing he was after—"a fully germinated alternative" to the current system of litigation, legislation, and lobbying. By the end session, he suggested that the NAACP had already been pursuing "mass action" for its entire career and that all the speakers had pointed this out over and over again. As Kenneth Janken points out, "White obscured the fact that these instances of direct action were not equivalent to the critics' demands for a program suited to the cataclysmic economic and political crisis shaking the country; he essentially thanked the delegates for their input and returned to business as usual."⁷⁷

What do we make of this conflict of personalities? Both Du Bois and Woodson, opposites in many ways, attacked Cuthbert's approach to race relations within a year of each other. Some might be willing to take Du Bois's or Woodson's criticism as accurate because of their historical prominence. Was Cuthbert an unwitting accomplice in the oppression of African Americans? Having read many of Cuthbert's writings (discussed

⁷⁶ Marion V. Cuthbert, *We Sing America*, (New York: Friendship Press, 1936); Charles Reagan Wilson, "The South's Torturous Search for the Good Books," *Publishing Research Quarterly* 9, no. 4 (December 1993): 3-16.

⁷⁷ Patricia Sullivan, *Lift Every Voice: The NAACP and the Making of the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: New Press, 2009), 179.

later), I think she attempted to unite logic and emotion. She could understand and promote economic analysis, and yet chose to focus on interracial friendship and gradual change. To Du Bois and Woodson that seemed soft; to Cuthbert it seemed like Christian strength. Was her approach appropriate, given the historical contingencies of the Depression and rising fascism? Was it still possible to act and plan as individuals when everything seemed to be operating on such massive scales? Cuthbert would have another opportunity to prove her points at the Second America Conference, encountering there aggressive and sympathetic black men and women who would again struggle to name exactly the problems and their solutions.

Marion Cuthbert suggested to the NAACP audience in 1933 why it was so difficult to discuss specific techniques. She started by disputing the idea that the young people, whom she had worked with for more than a decade, would offer some kind of panacea just through the business of being young:

Nothing could be finer than the contribution of the student movement and our young people, but we grown-ups must remember that in our leadership it is the young mind which is going to pull us out; and though that young mind should be in our young people, it does not need the young person, a new experience, but it is the older mind and older experience which is going to pull us out. And in this pulling out of ourselves from this great difficulty of living together in the United States, and for that matter, the whole world, because there is probably no problem in the world as big as the question of race today, we must remember that there are no peculiar techniques which somehow will be satisfactory for the race problem. I mean by that merely this: that when we get down to the heart of our problem there is nothing that the black man wants but work and a chance to express himself, nothing but the right to live in the world.⁷⁸

Though African Americans had always fought their oppression in different ways, from Sally Hemings' protection of her children, to slave revolts, to Floridians protecting

⁷⁸ Cuthbert, "Honesty in Race Relations."

imprisoned men from lynch mobs, they did not yet have the specific non-violent tools and techniques that was even then being developed across the ocean in Gandhi's ashram.⁷⁹

The educational and discussion oriented plans of the 1930s should not be dismissed because they did not achieve the same things their predecessors did. The Swarthmore Race Relations Institute became quite popular, repeating every summer throughout the Depression. The Young Turks remained engaged, mostly just for the summer income, because they became increasingly frustrated with the softer focus required by the interracial atmosphere and the Friends' support. Ralph Bunche directed it one summer. The Institute sponsors frequently invited different levels of black leadership to become involved, before black leaders took it over entirely when Charles Johnson moved it to Fisk University in 1942. Though a nuanced survey of the long-term effects of the Institute has not been done, it is clear that it was a markedly different organization than the kinds of schools with similar goals that would arise after WWII. In comparison to something like the Highlander Folk School, which very practically taught non-violent protest techniques, this group remained scholarly and abstract.⁸⁰ It wanted to develop specific ways to counteract persecution, but faculty did not seem to know what to suggest other than things that had been long pushing things slowly (rather too slowly, and not

⁷⁹ See Annette Gordon-Reed, *The Hemingses of Monticello* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2008); Robin D. G Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: Free Press, 1994); Paul Ortiz, *Emancipation Betrayed: The Hidden History of Black Organizing and White Violence in Florida from Reconstruction to the Bloody Election of 1920*, American crossroads 16 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

⁸⁰ There are many Civil Rights Movement histories that mention the Highlander Folk School. A few are Aimee Isgrig Horton, *The Highlander Folk School* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1971); Frank Adams and Myles Horton, *Unearthing Seeds of Fire* (John F. Blair, Publisher, 1975); Lynne Olson, *Freedom's Daughters* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001).

always positively, in many people's estimation)—things like education, legislation, and an interracial workers movement. Crystal Bird Fauset and Helen Bryan hoped that the Institute would discuss particular techniques for improving race relations, but by inviting the opinions of scholars, the institute became research oriented.

Chapter 10

The Second Amenia Conference, August 1933

A Journey “Not too Lonely or Impossible”

Set-Up and Arrival

“If there is anything that we need, this is it.”

--George Streater¹

¹ George Streater to Du Bois, 18 Mar 1933, Reel 40, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

A WHITE PRESIDENT OF A BLACK ORGANIZATION could not be a dictator and continue to command respect from black members. Spingarn knew this well; he had watched the organization transform from a largely white organization to one dominated and led by black members, James Weldon Johnson, and Walter White. He and Du Bois had managed to forge a collaboration that walked a fine line where each could air their opinions and trust the other would respect them. Still, they often frustrated each other. Throughout the 1920s, Spingarn watched the NAACP only from afar, too disabled by illness to be as involved as he had been (he continued to be treasurer). But he watched with pride as the group grew under the able leadership of James Weldon Johnson and Du Bois. He and his wife, Amy, also provided funds to encourage leadership—the Spingarn gold medal went every year (and still does) to the African American with the “highest and noblest achievement” in the previous year.² Amy Spingarn sponsored the *Crisis* awards in 1925 that are often considered a high point of the Harlem Renaissance.³ When Johnson stepped aside in 1929, without desiring the presidency, Spingarn decided he was again fit to lead as president to Walter White’s executive secretary.⁴

For a generation raised with the NAACP as a strong presence, the Depression made its legal, educational, and legislative focus seem out of place, as fighting only for the rights of a small middle class. Why was it not fighting for black people’s right to eat and work instead of the rights of a small minority to sit where they wished on a train?

² “Gold Medal for Afro-American Who Stops Lynching,” *Chicago Defender*, 1914, 4.

³ “Amy Spingarn Prizes Awarded,” *New York Amsterdam News*, August 26, 1925, 16.

⁴ “Negroes Divided on White Leader: Harlem Group against Spingarn as NAACP Head: Many for Johnson: Favor One of Own Race to Lead Equality Move,” *The World*, December 1930; “Spingarn Made New President of N.A.A.C.P.,” *Chicago Defender*, December 20, 1930; “Rumor-Mongers,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, January 3, 1931; “Deny Rumors of Split in N.A.A.C.P. Ranks,” *Chicago Defender*, January 3, 1931.

The Communist Party was ready to fill the void when it entered the scene and fought for nine representatives of the most downtrodden of African Americans—the nine teenagers wrongly accused of rape while riding the rails through Scottsboro, Alabama. Though the NAACP offered many explanations for why it had apparently ignored Scottsboro Nine, many accused the organizers that they thought themselves too good to fight for the lives of supposed rapists.⁵

Spingarn saw the tide of African American opinion turn away from the organization he had so lovingly served and he remembered that most successful conference held at his house sixteen years previously. He pointed out to the board of directors that “when we started in 1910 and for a considerable numbers of years thereafter, we had all the young colored intellectuals with us; now we have few or none with us.”⁶ The association needed revitalization. It needed a Second America Conference.

⁵ I have been unable to find anything in the NAACP Papers or in William Pickens' papers that would indicate this was the case. Walter White cautioned everyone to wait and see; Roger Bagnall blamed the local branch of NAACP for hesitating. Robin D. G. Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists During the Great Depression*, The Fred W. Morrison Series in Southern Studies (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 80. Du Bois blamed communists for drawing out the trial—if they had let NAACP do its work, the boys would have been released by now. W. E. B Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn, an Essay Toward an Autobiography of a Race Concept* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & co, 1940), 298.. Pickens sent encouragement and a small bank note to the Communists to continue in their legal defense (before being brought back to the NAACP line by White. Eugene Gordon to William Pickens, April 22, 1931, Reel 11, Pickens Papers (Additions), Schomburg. Langston Hughes, in his history of the NAACP, claimed that “the NAACP's initial efforts in behalf of the boys [were] nullified by the intervention of the Communists. The latter, seeking to exploit the matter for their own ideological purposes, misrepresented the NAACP as being in league with the ‘lyncher bosses.’” Langston Hughes, *Fight for Freedom; the Story of the NAACP* (New York: Norton, 1962), 87. However, the claim that the NAACP was too good for the Scottsboro Nine, continues to be continues to be proffered in some contemporary textbooks. See Darlene Clark Hine, William C. Hine, and Stanley Harrold, *The African-American Odyssey*, 2nd ed. (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 2002). In another textbook, Joe Trotter identifies only minimal cooperation between the CP and the NAACP in the Scottsboro case. Joe William Trotter Jr., “From a Raw Deal to a New Deal? 1929-1945,” in *To Make Our World Anew: A History of African Americans*, ed. Robin D. G. Kelley and Earl Lewis (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000). Patricia Sullivan writes that Mary White Ovington, then chair of the board, wanted more information because “the association ‘did not want to defend boys guilty of rape.’” Patricia Sullivan, *Lift Every Voice: The NAACP and the Making of the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: New Press, 2009), 146.

⁶ J.E. Spingarn, “Information for the Committee on Administration,” Box 4, Spingarn Papers, NYPL.

W. E. B. Du Bois could see the possibilities of a new America Conference when his old friend and sometimes adversary proposed it, but not necessarily to promote the NAACP among the younger generation of intellectuals.⁷ He was himself reconsidering the association's goals and its leadership. Walter White's autocratic manner and relentless attention to detail frustrated Du Bois. To him, the NAACP under White had no ideals, no vision. At the same time, the Depression had suddenly made the *Crisis*, self-supporting for decades, unable to pay for itself. The executive board threatened to take it over and make it more of an organ of the NAACP rather than the independent voice (dominated by Du Bois) that it had been since its inception. Furthermore, Du Bois was reconsidering a civil rights focus that was intent only on integration. He no longer had even a modicum of trust that the white power structure intended to give a fair chance to its citizenry of color; in response, he began to craft a theory that emphasized self-segregation and economic independence (in large part revisiting and revising many of his earlier criticisms of Booker T. Washington).

For new ideas, Spingarn and Du Bois turned to the groups described earlier—YWCA and YMCA workers, academics, and lawyers—and not the people who had made Harlem such a joyous place to live the past decade—artists, musicians, actors, numbers runners, businessmen and women, or cabaret owners. The chosen professions represented some of the few middle class employment options for African Americans. Though YWCA women were not Du Bois' favorite people, he accepted their presence because

⁷ David L. Lewis, *W.E.B. DuBois--Biography of a Race, 1868-1919*, 1st ed. (New York: H. Holt, 1993), 492-94; David L. Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: The Fight for Equality and the American Century, 1919-1963* (New York: Henry Holt, 2000), 289..

their nominators assured him that their choices were “not the usual ‘Y’ type.”⁸ Du Bois and Spingarn also looked to younger academics for leadership. As academics themselves, they both believed that careful social science coupled with publicity could change the racial hierarchy in the United States. As in the Ys, these faculty positions required a certain amount of judiciousness to maintain, particularly when they had to seek the approval of white philanthropists to fund their research, but the younger academics whom Du Bois and Spingarn identified were not as willing to moderate their opinions to fit external expectations. Intellectual integrity and race leadership mattered to these academics and social workers more than economic necessity.

A SPACE FOR “UNTRAMMELED THINKING.”⁹ The Second Amenia Conference offered just such a space. Safety was necessary to foster free discussion about “the present situation of the Negro race” in a world shaped by depression, imperialism, and racism. It was also necessary to inventively debate “just what ought to be done.”¹⁰ African American professionals carefully protected their true opinions because their jobs were usually overseen by cautious white school boards or white bosses; opinions considered too “radical” could result in a lost job or physical harm. From the first invitations, Spingarn assured conferees that there would be no publicity. Also, while the conference was held under the auspices of the NAACP, “no conferee will be assumed to be committed in any way to the programme of the Association by reason of attendance,

⁸ Arthur Davis to W.E.B. Du Bois, March 26, 1933, Reel 39, Du Bois Papers microfilm..

⁹ Ira Reid to W.E.B. Du Bois, March 18, 1933, Reel 40, Du Bois Papers microfilm..

¹⁰ W.E.B. Du Bois, “Request for Nominations Letter,” March 4, 1933, Reel 39, Du Bois Papers, microfilm..

nor will the Association determine the subjects of discussion or the programme formulated, which will be left entirely within the control of the Conference itself.”¹¹ Conference organizers recognized that “to be black and willing to challenge the intellectual and social status quo involved taking risks that would have been foreign to the everyday concerns of white intellectuals.”¹²

It took Spingarn a year and a half to finally realize his plan of a Second Amenia Conference. Spingarn brought up the idea throughout 1932, but with few concrete results and the conference was postponed until August 1933. Spingarn believed that an escape from the city’s heat and depression into the quiet and cool of the countryside was the perfect space for black intellectuals to embrace their activist forbearers and to dedicate themselves to the NAACP’s future.¹³ Like many white intellectuals of that time, he associated the countryside of the Hudson River Valley with artistic retreat and renewal.¹⁴ He had been frustrated for the prior year over NAACP’s lack of a specific program or vision that would capture the support of the black multitude, especially as he watched the Communist Party capture the “hearts and minds” of African American crowds through

¹¹ “Second Amenia Conference on a New Programme for the Negro,” January 9, 1933, Reel 9, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

¹² Jonathan Scott Holloway, *Confronting the Veil: Abram Harris, Jr., E. Franklin Frazier, and Ralph Bunche, 1919-1941* (Chapel Hill [N.C.]: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 127..

¹³ J.E. Spingarn to Walter White, June 7, 1932, NAACP Papers 1 microfilm.

¹⁴ Among other American writers in this period, James Agee and Malcolm Cowley sought the countryside to complete their manuscripts. Hudson River Valley artistic retreats Lawrence Bergreen, *James Agee: A Life* (New York: Dutton, 1984); Malcolm Cowley, *Exile's Return: A Literary Odyssey of the 1920s* (New York: Penguin Classics, 1994). One of the major artistic colonies, Yaddo, was north of Amenia on the Hudson River; Some of the other artistic retreats in New England included the original Chautauqua and the MacDowell Colony.

their prosecution of the Scottsboro case.¹⁵ The practical Walter White offered no plans or visions for the association other than individual court cases, unlike the visionary James Weldon Johnson. When Spingarn took over the presidency in December 1930, rumors flew that Johnson had left in disgust. Some black newspapers demanded to know why a white man was president of the leading civil rights organization instead of a black man like Johnson, while others tried to quell the rumors.¹⁶ Du Bois came out in support of his old friend, but he could not dissolve all the feelings Spingarn had had since he first took national leadership in the association during the teens.¹⁷ When he was the chairman of the board in the teens, he worried whether a black man would be more appropriate in leadership.¹⁸ If Spingarn could not himself be a black leader of the organization, he was determined to know exactly what the visions of a new generation of black leaders were.¹⁹ He hoped that within those visions would be a place for sympathetic whites like him.

Few in the NAACP office agreed with Spingarn's vision. Spingarn did not want to plan the day to day details, and White and Wilkins would not. The only result of 1932's planning was discussions over what kind of individuals to invite. Spingarn, Du Bois, executive secretary Walter White, Ovington and assistant secretary Roy Wilkins all

¹⁵ J.E. Spingarn to Mary White Ovington, March 28, 1933, Box 9 Folder 2, Spingarn Papers NYPL; Mark Naison, *Communists in Harlem During the Depression* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983), 62.

¹⁶ "Negroes Divided on White Leader: Harlem Group against Spingarn as NAACP Head: Many for Johnson: Favor One of Own Race to Lead Equality Move"; "Spingarn Made New President of N.A.A.C.P."; "Rumor-Mongers"; "Deny Rumors of Split in N.A.A.C.P. Ranks."

¹⁷ J.E. Spingarn to W.E.B. Du Bois, December 16, 1931, Reel 36, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

¹⁸ Mary White Ovington to J.E. Spingarn, December 20, 1915, Box 9, Spingarn Papers NYPL.

¹⁹ Barbara Joyce Ross, *J. E. Spingarn and the Rise of the NAACP, 1911-1939*, 1st ed., Studies in American Negro life NL 32 (New York: Atheneum, 1972), 169.

debated who to include. Should they include white and black interested persons? Male and Female? From a range of professions or from a select few?

One of Mary White Ovington's friends, "Beth," sent suggestions to Ovington. She then sent them to Spingarn, who forwarded them to White, with yet another prod to start planning the conference. Beth suggested mining YM and YWCAs for leaders, because "the YM and YW have kept their eyes very well on the colored youth of the South. I mean that when they saw a promising young person they steered him into Y work. Therefore I feel Y Secretaries and ex-Y secretaries are good material."²⁰ Among those she suggested were Benjamin Mays (future mentor of Martin Luther King, Jr.) and his wife, Sadie, Mrs. Frances McLemore (briefly Frances Williams' married name), Sue Bailey, and Howard Thurman. She was the only one to suggest that women attend the conference, even though women had had a significant presence at the 1916 Amenia conference.

When he ran into Abram Harris on the streets of New York, Walter White asked Harris who of his peers he would like to invite. As described previously, Harris had not been enough of a national figure in 1925 in Alain Locke's view to be invited to contribute to the preeminent work of the 1920s, *The New Negro*. But by 1932, Harris had received his PhD from Columbia, published his dissertation, been hired at Howard University, and proffered opinions respected far and wide among African American leaders.²¹

Throughout the thirties, Harris held in tension the desire to be an objective scientist and a committed activist. Out of this, he wrote prolifically on social justice issues for African

²⁰ J.E. Spingarn to Walter White, June 7, 1932, Reel 23, NAACP 1 papers microfilm.

²¹ William Jr. Darity, "Introduction," in *Race, Radicalism and Reform* (New Brunswick, NY: Transaction Publishers, 1989), 9.

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American magazines and journals and produced academic articles for other economic professionals. His two major monographs of the period, *The Black Worker* and *The Negro as Capitalist*, united the two impulses.²² He was most committed to proving the economic bases for racial injustice and bringing together black and white workers to fight in their common interests. In the summer of 1932, Harris sought Spingarn's advice about his research and "enjoyed the hospitality of [his] home."²³ Harris then helped shape the goals and member list for the conference.

Du Bois and Harris both suggested individuals for the conference. Du Bois's list was men only, almost entirely employed within the black colleges and universities, as lawyers, or in the midst of pursuing graduate degrees.²⁴ They were "over thirty and under forty," old enough to have formed opinions but not so old that their ideas were fixed. Like Du Bois's list, Harris's primarily had other male academics, including Sterling Brown and Sterling Spero.

The latter suggestion raised one of the more pressing concerns for those planning the conference—should young whites interested in American racial conflict be included? Roy Wilkins, the new assistant secretary of the NAACP, suggested to J. E. Spingarn that a conference to tap into and learn about young African Americans' plans for the race should not include white people.²⁵ He argued that "the gathering is for the purpose of

²² Sterling D Spero and Abram Lincoln Harris, *The Black Worker: The Negro and the Labor Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931); Abram L. Harris, *The Negro as Capitalist: A Study of Banking and Business among American Negroes* (Philadelphia: The American Academy of Political and Social Science, 1936).

²³ Abram L. Harris to J. E. Spingarn, June 17, 1932, Box 5 Folder 3, Spingarn Papers NYPL.

²⁴ W.E.B. Du Bois to Roy Wilkins, Memo, July 12, 1932, NAACP 11 Papers microfilm.

²⁵ Roy Wilkins to Walter White, Memo, June 16, 1932, Reel 18, NAACP 11 Papers microfilm.

determining the reactions of young colored people to world conditions and United States conditions. We want their reactions.”²⁶ The problem with white people’s reactions, according to Wilkins, was that “no matter how intelligent upon the Negro problem, [white people] offer their views in rather academic fashion.”²⁷ Walter White disagreed with Wilkins in a letter to Spingarn. White did not see why “no white person should be invited.”²⁸ He thought that “such a man as Benjamin Stolberg, for example, would have a great deal to contribute.”²⁹ Stolberg was a prominent journalist sympathetic to leftist causes, and Harris’s close friend.³⁰ Indeed all the Euro-Americans White suggested were on the far left side of the spectrum.

The final decision on white attendees came down to the white man who had suggested the conference in the first place. Spingarn desired that the conference should be driven and actualized through the goals of black, not white, people, including himself (he would find it difficult to live up to this desire when the conferees failed to address some of his pressing questions). When NAACP field secretary William Pickens asked when the 1932 conference was to be held, Spingarn replied that “the executives of the Assn. and the Crisis might make the decision, and (if there is to be a Conference) must assume the

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Walter White to J.E. Spingarn, June 29, 1932, Reel 18, NAACP 11 Papers microfilm.. White also desired “to see a young man like John Henry Hammond, Jr., at the conference. He is friendly but is also very sympathetic to the Communists’ point of view.” While White believed Hammond accepted too many things told to him without question, he yet argued that Hammond “has a good mind and the finest of instincts.”

²⁹ Ibid..

³⁰ Ibid..

initiative and do the work. All I offer this year is the idea, the site, and the hospitality.”³¹

In a letter to Roy Wilkins, Spingarn agreed with his policy of no white attendees because “the purpose of the conference is to ascertain the aspirations of colored youth.”³²

Spingarn did request that a few white people be invited to attend as day guests, in the same way that dignitaries had visited during the first conference.

This decision was essential to create a free space for discussion. Few of his peers were as comfortable giving unfettered opinions around white people as Harris was. The absence of white people meant conferees would be able to discuss how white patronage constrained their lives without worrying about maintaining the excessively polite exterior necessary for interracial relations. In the South, any black person who clearly articulated their opinions could be labeled “uppity.” Whites reacted to black people thus labeled with threats and physical violence, in order to force opinionated people back into grinning and scraping.³³ This decision meant that the Amenia conference would have a markedly different tone than the Swarthmore Race Relations Institute held a month prior. Participants could skip all the preliminary introductions to race that even savvy white people usually needed and begin immediately with their proposed solutions.

A few letters of invitation went out July 15, 1932, with some enthusiastic acceptances. Unlike the subsequent summer, this letter made the conference about the program of the NAACP, not a general discussion of the condition of African

³¹ “Hand-Written Reply from Spingarn to Pickens on a Letter from Pickens to Spingarn dated 20 Jun 1932,” Reel 18, NAACP 11 Papers microfilm.

³² J.E. Spingarn to Roy Wilkins, June 30, 1932, Reel 18, NAACP Papers 11 microfilm.

³³ Barack Obama faced this kind of pressure during his election campaign: southern representatives called him “uppity” and a “boy” for “presuming” that he could lead the free world. Brent Staples, “Barack Obama, John McCain and the Language of Race,” *New York Times*, September 21, 2008, http://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/22/opinion/22observer.html?_r=1&em&oref=slogin..

Americans.³⁴ Within a few days the office realized that this hastily planned conference would not produce the desired results, particularly when Harris wrote he could not attend, so finally Walter White sent out a letter that last minute administrative details and the economic burden of the Depression prevented the conference from happening that summer.³⁵ Spingarn negotiated with the executive board throughout the winter of 1932-1933 to resuscitate the idea.³⁶ Indeed, the reluctance to hold the conference became a symbol for him of the NAACP's general lack of vision (and their reluctance to enact his ideas).³⁷ When a board member or members told him in confidence that Walter White did not agree with holding another America conference, he officially resigned in March 1933.³⁸ He told Mary White Ovington it was because "I do not approve of the spirit that motives [the NAACP], and I do not feel like allowing my name to be used to represent that spirit."³⁹ His "every effort" to put "hope into our work by framing a programme has been ignored or thwarted by the Secretary or by the Board."⁴⁰ They seemed to think a program would be constricting, but he envisioned one that would be "an instrument of hope and enthusiasm."⁴¹

³⁴ Roy Wilkins to George Schulyer, July 15, 1932, Reel 18, NAACP Papers 11 microfilm.

³⁵ Director of Branches, "Letter Postponing the Conference," July 21, 1932, Reel 18, NAACP Papers 11 microfilm; Abram Harris to Roy Wilkins, July 15, 1932, Reel 18, NAACP Papers 11 microfilm; Roy Wilkins to J.E. Spingarn, July 15, 1932, Reel 18, NAACP Papers 11 microfilm.

³⁶ J.E. Spingarn to Walter White, December 30, 1932, Reel 23, NAACP 1 papers microfilm.

³⁷ Ross, *J. E. Spingarn and the Rise of the NAACP, 1911-1939*, 174.

³⁸ Walter White to James Weldon Johnson, April 1, 1933, Reel 25, NAACP Papers 1 microfilm.

³⁹ Spingarn to Ovington, March 28, 1933.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

Both Spingarn and Du Bois thought the winds were blowing toward economic solutions—Du Bois out of personal conviction and Spingarn because he was the white president of a black organization desperately attempting “to interpret blacks’ aspirations and then to translate them into a reality that would not compromise his own principles.”⁴² His principles included an ardent American patriotism, trust that African Americans only needed access to the already strong system of capitalism, and belief that “every race must have a body of trained leadership.”⁴³ At first, he was willing to listen to more socialistic ideas, despite his faith in capitalism. Yet the board members, black and white, were more deeply entrenched in a middle class worldview than Spingarn and Du Bois. They always saw “the attainment of full civil and political rights” coming before “economic uplift.”⁴⁴ These older members were supported by the younger men who filled the New York office—Walter White, Roy Wilkins, and Louis T. Wright.⁴⁵ Du Bois could not believe Spingarn had resigned, though he understood it, considering that

⁴² Ross, *J. E. Spingarn and the Rise of the NAACP, 1911-1939*, 169.

⁴³ J.E. Spingarn, “Detroit Speech Notes,” July 1, 1937, Box 17, Spingarn Papers NYPL.

⁴⁴ According to Ross, those most adamant were Isadore Martin, a real estate agent from Philadelphia, and Mary White Ovington. Ross, *J. E. Spingarn and the Rise of the NAACP*, 172. One of Ovington’s biographers disagrees. “By 1932 Ovington was repeatedly disappointed that most blacks who had attained some measure of economic security showed little interest in marching with the working class.” Ovington and Luker, *Black and White Sat Down Together*, 154. Ross explains that Ovington and several other NAACP founders were socialists who nevertheless built the NAACP to emphasize “the attainment of full civil and political rights under the existing socioeconomic system, to the virtual exclusion of a program of Black economic uplift.” Ross, *J. E. Spingarn and the Rise of the NAACP*, 18-19.

⁴⁵ This is according to Ross, *J.E. Spingarn and the Rise of the NAACP*, 173. Wilkins in his autobiography asserts that he had long realized the necessity of paying “less attention to brokers of power and more to its own people down where poverty and discrimination were the most severe.” Wilkins, *Standing Fast*, 150-151.

"you have had a tremendous amount of responsibility thrust upon you with frustration and lack of co-operation."⁴⁶

Spingarn's resignation sparked the board and the recalcitrant secretary into action.

In early April, Walter White invited Spingarn to the office to discuss his resignation.

They spoke all afternoon and Spingarn told White he would reconsider his plans only with an overwhelming show of support from the board and/or the membership. He also told White that White's professed reluctance to act on the Amenia conference had directly contributed to his resignation. White told Spingarn that the older man was the only one who could provide the "leadership and the fire" that the Association "must have." The next day, he wrote to Johnson to recruit his help in convincing Spingarn to stay. He also expressed frustration over the idea that he had been reluctant about Amenia; "where this idea got out I do not know. I have been so damned busy here at the office trying to keep our heads above water that I cannot for the life of me think of anything that I have said or done to give basis for such a notion."⁴⁷ White wanted to deal with each situation as it arose and take care of day to day matters, but that practical focus was exactly what Spingarn objected to. He did not believe the organization would be ultimately successful if it only kept its head above water; rather, it needed to reevaluate its mission and purpose to take on a new world scarred by economic depression.

The tenuous footing of the association could not withstand the reorganization that a new president and chairman would require, so the board approved the resolution to hold the conference and designated a committee of three, Du Bois (chair), Walter White, and

⁴⁶ Du Bois to Spingarn, March 17, 1933, Reel 40, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

⁴⁷ Walter White to James Weldon Johnson, 1 April 1933, Reel 25, NAACP Papers Part 1 microfilm.

Spingarn to plan the details of the conference.⁴⁸ As committee chair, Du Bois sent out a stack of letters in March to African American leaders throughout the country describing the idea behind the new Amenian conference and requesting that they send names of men or women who were “independent thinking Negroes of strong, honest character.”⁴⁹ He also specified the age range: “we have in mind, not men who have just finished school, but rather those who have been out a few years, and yet who are not fixed in their ideas.”⁵⁰

Unlike the year before, this list also included women. About the decision whether or not to include women, Du Bois wrote to Spingarn, “while we’ll have to be careful to keep the number down and the selection unusually careful, nevertheless, I think we cannot afford to draw an absolute sex line.”⁵¹ Among others, Du Bois could not afford Mary White Ovington’s displeasure. She had spent the past twenty years training male NAACP leaders to remember that they must include and respect women as decision makers. In 1920, during her first term as Chairman of the Board, she had sent a list of nominated board members in 1920 back to the committee because it had “no woman’s name;” she made certain Addie Hunton was hired as a field worker because “the next person we hire must be a woman.”⁵²

⁴⁸ Resolution Offered by Arthur Spingarn, Board Meeting, 13 Mar 1933, Reel 18, NAACP Papers Part 11 microfilm; Spingarn to Du Bois Telegram, 13 Mar 1933, Reel 40, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

⁴⁹ Du Bois to Wilkins, 14 Mar 1933, Reel 40, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

⁵⁰ Ibid. Du Bois highlighted independent thinkers, because he wanted “them to discuss in a perfectly frank way and without any publicity or limitations, the present situation of the American Negro and just what ought to be done.”

⁵¹ Du Bois to Spingarn, Mar 14, 1933.

⁵² Carolyn Wedin, *Inheritors of the Spirit: Mary White Ovington and the Founding of the NAACP* (New York: Wiley, 1998), 187.

Du Bois's statement reflects his ambivalence towards women. Publicly, his "empowering vision of historical black womanhood was central to, and greatly illuminated, his vision of race."⁵³ He frequently published women writers in *The Crisis*, wrote about their accomplishments, trusted a woman, Jessie Fauset, to be literary editor, and supported suffragism. Behind this public face, he held more private assumptions about the place of women. When he compiled a list the previous year for the conference, his first instinct had been to invite only men. A more careful consideration in 1933 helped him realize how necessary women were publicly to the status of African Americans in the United States. Perhaps more important, he also remembered the women he personally held in esteem, at least three of whom came to the conference (Virginia Alexander, Mabel Byrd, and Pauline Young). After Du Bois's marriage fell apart in the wake of their first child's death, Du Bois sought solace and intellectual engagement from a wide range of women other than his wife. His affairs, including that with Jessie Fauset and Virginia Alexander, were an unspoken reality in Harlem society.⁵⁴

Du Bois could suggest many more accomplished women than Harris could. When Harris sent in his list of names, he told Du Bois, "[y]ou will note I have not given the names of many women. I really don't know what females should be invited. You are by far the better judge."⁵⁵ Though Harris had worked with talented women—he and Zora Neale Hurston were Herskovits' research assistants in New York—Howard University had not yet begun to hire women faculty members in any significant way. Dean of

⁵³ Patricia Morton, *Disfigured Images: The Historical Assault on Afro-American Women* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991), 63.

⁵⁴ Lewis, W.E.B. *Du Bois: The Fight for Equality and the American Century, 1919-1963*, 49.

⁵⁵ Harris to Du Bois, 20 Mar 1933, Reel 40, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

Women Lucy Slowe was one of the few female faculty members. Artist Lois Jones and social scientist Merze Tate were hired later in the 1930s only after they had demonstrably proved themselves.⁵⁶ Even then, they were not treated as full faculty members.⁵⁷ Abram Harris, then, had limited interaction with women on a professional level, but even more he held little respect for women's ideas. Though his wife was intelligent and strove to interact within his intellectual spheres, he often shut her out. He also tended to be distracted by women's bodies rather than ready to listen to their words.

Sending letters across the country, from New York to Georgia, from DC to Colorado to California, Du Bois solicited names from a certain type of individual—professors at liberal and industrial colleges, lawyers, YMCA and YWCA directors, principals, Urban League officials, judge James Cobb, and Department of Interior education specialist Ambrose Caliver. Despite their collective influence in black communities, he applied to only one pastor, one medical man, and one director of an insurance company. Three important black leaders, men who subtly competed with Du Bois over the influence of the younger generation, did not receive letters. Du Bois did not ask for the opinion of Howard philosophy professor Alain Locke, Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters president A. Philip Randolph, or Association for the Study of Negro

⁵⁶ They each applied for several years before being hired. Merze Tate was hired with a B.Phil. from Oxford, 1933, and an award winning PhD from Radcliffe, 1941 and Lois Jones with Alain Locke's personal recommendation and a year in France, capped by an award winning personal show. In comparison, Emmett Dorsey was hired in the political science department before he had received a BA. Merze Tate did a study in the 1950s on the income discrimination between male and female faculty members at Howard. See Merze Tate oral history, Black Women's Oral History Project papers, personal possession of Ruth Hill, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe; Lois Mailou Jones Papers, MSRC; Tritobia Hayes Benjamin, "The Life and Art of Lois Mailou Jones, American Artist" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Maryland, 1991).

⁵⁷ Men in their departments took a very strong dislike to both Tate and Jones. Rayford Logan and Tate battled throughout their respective tenures in the history department. James A. Porter made sure that Jones only ever taught the less prestigious classes, like water colors, and restricted Jones' pay, even though they had entered the university at the same time.

Life and History founder Carter Woodson (Twelfth Spingarn Medalist). Two months prior, Woodson had collected two years of newspaper opinion pieces into the *Miseducation of the Negro*, in which he criticized the black middle class for failing to meet the needs of the “masses.” This book gave him a strong influence over the younger generation; Du Bois’ failure to write to him represented a precursor to their later explosive conflict over an African American encyclopedia.⁵⁸ And despite desiring the presence of women, Du Bois did not request names from Mary Church Terrell or Mary McLeod Bethune, then the leaders of the black women’s club movement.⁵⁹ Despite Spingarn’s and Du Bois’s purported desire to create a space for “untrammelled thinking” they still controlled that space through whom they did or did not invite.

Within a week of Du Bois’s March 15 letter, replies poured in. Each one reiterated that this moment needed just such a conference and many gave careful attention to Du Bois’s phrase “independent thinkers.”⁶⁰ George Streater, leader of the Fisk strike and teaching at the Bennett College for Women wrote that “If there is anything that we need, this is it.”⁶¹ Juanita Saddler of the YWCA expressed her interest in the conference because “the time is peculiarly right.”⁶² Ira Reid wrote Du Bois that the NAACP must pick attendees who could “give some untrammelled thinking on our

⁵⁸ Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: The Fight for Equality and the American Century, 1919-1963*, 427-30; Carter G. Woodson, “Carter Woodson to Publish Book of Opinion; Explains Why He Has Written So Much About Race ‘Miseducation’,” *Chicago Defender*, 14 Jan 1933, 8.

⁵⁹ Addresses, Reel 39, Du Bois Papers, microfilm.

⁶⁰ Du Bois to Spingarn, 28 Mar 1933, Reel 40, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

⁶¹ George Streater to Du Bois, 18 Mar 1933, Reel 40, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

⁶² Juanita Saddler to Du Bois, 11 Apr 1933, Reel 40, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

problems.”⁶³ Victor Daly, in a similar letter to Du Bois, explained why such thinking was a great asset. “Unfortunately, most of our young folks upon leaving college are immediately absorbed into one school system or another, and forever thereafter they must hold their tongues to hold their jobs. That is a point that I hope the conference will discuss at length.”⁶⁴ Ralph Bunche also recognized the value of independence. He exhorted a graduating junior high class at commencement a couple years previously, “More than aught else, the Negro race needs men of courage, independent thinkers, minds that cannot be bought at any price, young minds, trained minds, brave minds!”⁶⁵

After sending this letter and collecting the names, Du Bois forwarded the list with his highlights to the New York Office.⁶⁶ On the afternoon of April 7, Wilkins, White, and J. E. Spingarn met at Arthur Spingarn’s apartment to cull the 579 names gathered from the responses to Du Bois’ letter.⁶⁷ They narrowed the list down to 41 (planning for 32 to attend) with a discussion and a vote. White championed his poker buddies, and successful professors, Sterling Brown, E. Franklin Frazier, and Charles Houston.⁶⁸ The men kept a careful eye on the number of women invited, because each tent could only

⁶³ Ira Reid to Du Bois, 18 Mar 1933, Reel 40, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

⁶⁴ Victor Daley to Du Bois, 3 Apr 1933, Reel 40, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

⁶⁵ Ralph Bunche, “Courageousness of the Commonplace” Commencement Address at Randall Junior High School, 18 Jun 1929, Box 43, Bunche Papers, UCLA.

⁶⁶ “The Amenia Conference” Description; Spingarn to Du Bois, 7 Apr 1933, Reel 40, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

⁶⁷ W. E. B. Du Bois, Memorandum Regarding Amenia Conference, Reel 39, Du Bois Papers microfilm; Spingarn to Du Bois, 7 Apr 1933, Reel 40, Du Bois Papers microfilm; White to Du Bois, 8 Apr 1933, Reel 40, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

⁶⁸ Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: The Fight for Equality and the American Century, 1919-1963*, 334.

accommodate four beds.⁶⁹ When they forwarded the culled list to Du Bois in Atlanta, he approved of their selection, though noted that Wilkins and *Opportunity* editor Elmer Carter could be removed from the list “without the slightest hurt to intelligent discussion” (they were not).⁷⁰ He had already tacitly made his preferences known when he sent the letters requesting names. Out of the original 579 and the selected 41, eleven had received the original letters.⁷¹

With a finalized list, Spingarn sent out the invitations on his personal letterhead to emphasize the separation between the conference and the NAACP (though it was the Association office that prepared the letters for his signature).⁷² He explained that all expenses for the weekend would be covered, except travel. The financial difficulties all suffered during the Depression meant that few could come from far away; J. Max Bond, who was pursuing his doctorate at the University of Southern California, had to decline for that reason. The conference was set for August 18-21, 1933, after the conclusion of Columbia University’s summer school, where many African Americans received graduate degrees, and before teaching duties resumed.⁷³ Because the Troutbeck house could house only 15 individuals, conferees would be housed outside in tents around Troutbeck Lake.⁷⁴

⁶⁹ White to Du Bois, 8 Apr 1933, Reel 40, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

⁷⁰ Du Bois to Spingarn, 10 Apr 1933, Reel 40, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

⁷¹ Virginia Alexander, Ira Reid, Ralph Bunche, Mabel Byrd, E. Franklin Frazier, Abram Harris, Rayford Logan, Emmett Dorsey, Pauline Young, Thelma-Louise Taylor, Frank Wilson; *Amenia Conference*, Names Suggested by, Reel 39, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

⁷² Spingarn to White, 11 Apr 1933, Reel 18, NAACP Papers Part 11 microfilm.

⁷³ Du Bois to Spingarn, 17 Mar 1933, Reel 40, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

⁷⁴ “*Amenia Conference*” Description, Reel 18, NAACP Papers Part 11 microfilm.

Spingarn sent invitations to a diverse list of potential attendees, united by their professional excellence and exclusion from “whitestream” professional opportunities.⁷⁵ Many letter writers had suggested black scholars like Rayford Logan, a protégé of Woodson’s and Du Bois’ assistant at the Pan-African Congresses, Abram Harris and Ralph Bunche as emerging leaders and careful thinkers. That so many older black leaders acknowledged these young scholars reflected the tremendous growth in higher education among African Americans in the 1920s and 1930s. Most of the 316 African Americans who received Ph.D.s in the years between 1930 and 1943 had received masters and were in the midst of their doctoral work when black leaders sent in their suggestions for Amenia.⁷⁶ Everyone at Amenia had a bachelor’s degree, in a year when only 6.7% of African Americans attended high school and only 6000 African Americans in the country had a bachelor’s degree.⁷⁷ Many even had MAs, others were studying for their PhD and a few had received it.

Two professions were markedly absent among those invited, particularly considering their influence in African American communities. The list that Spingarn, White, and Du Bois approved had only a single slot for a “representative of the Church.”⁷⁸ They passed up Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., later Congressman from Harlem, for Wallace Thurman. Thurman taught theology at Howard University and was as much

⁷⁵ I use “whitestream” as a preferred alternative to “mainstream” based upon Pero Dagbovie’s example in his work Pero Gaglo Dagbovie, *The Early Black History Movement, Carter G. Woodson, and Lorenzo Johnston Greene* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007).

⁷⁶ Harry Washington Greene, *Holders of Doctorates among American Negroes: an Educational and Social Study of Negroes Who Have Earned Doctoral Degrees in Course, 1876-1943* (Boston: Meador Publishing Company, 1946), 26.

⁷⁷ Ambrose Caliver, “Certain Significant Developments in the Education of Negroes During the Past Generation,” *Journal of Negro History* 35, no. 2 (1950): 115, 18.

⁷⁸ White to Du Bois, 8 Apr 1933, Reel 40, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

scholar as pastor.⁷⁹ (He and his future wife Sue Bailey were unable to attend the conference). Furthermore, the only representative of the Harlem Renaissance to make it to Amenias was also as much scholar as poet—Sterling Brown, English professor at Howard and folk poet. The other author to be invited, Langston Hughes (a personal friend of Amy Spingarn) was spending the summer writing in California and did not care to journey east.⁸⁰ Those not invited were Du Bois's ex-son-in-law, Countee Cullen, or folklorist and novelist Zora Neale Hurston or any of the many others prominent during the Harlem Renaissance. Paul and Essie Robeson, close friends of many at Amenias, might have been invited if they had been in the states. Virginia Alexander's brother and sister-in-law, Raymond and Sadie Alexander, had also strangely been left off of the invitation list. They had been consulted throughout the planning stages, but Sadie Alexander's forceful personality seemed to put off Du Bois and others in the NAACP office. Another very strange exclusion was Daisy Lampkin, one of the NAACP's newest and most successful field secretaries.

The invitee list also excluded three important activists. George Streater, who led the strike at Fisk University that overthrew its white president and had taught at Bennett College for Women for several years, caught Du Bois's attention in spring 1933 as a potential business manager for *The Crisis*. Streater was free because, though he did good

⁷⁹ Second Amenias Conference, Aug 18-21, 1933; Conferees List. Howard Thurman never replied to his invitation, reducing the presence of clergy to null. Lewis ascribes the lack of pastors to Du Bois's dislike of the profession. At the final culling, he did not dictate that there would only be one clergyman present. However, given his almost complete neglect of the clergy when he requested names does indicate this preference. Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: The Fight for Equality and the American Century, 1919-1963*, 319.

⁸⁰ Hughes to Spingarn, Telegram (Draft), Aug 1933, Box 95-6 Folder 223, Spingarn Papers MSRC. Hughes regretted not being able to come east before autumn. He sent "greetings to the important conference now being held. I hope sound and constructive good will come from it—and a program which will know kneed [in original] of attacking Basic princeable [sic] of Communism which will eventually emancipate the Negro people. I am very sorry not to be in attendance."

work at Bennett, "he [was] evidently rather too radical and ha[d] been let out for next year."⁸¹ Spingarn, part of the board who needed to approve any new hiring, thought his activist background did not suit him for business management, because "what he wants is agitation, which is more or less your [Du Bois's] part of the job."⁸² Du Bois let the matter drop for a time.⁸³ This was an occasion when Spingarn's cautious nature began to move him closer to Walter White, whom he did not care for, than Du Bois, whom he valued highly. White also did not like Streater and tried to prevent his hiring (which nevertheless finally occurred after Amenia).

Two other important activists left off the roster were John P. Davis and Robert Weaver. Their organization, the Negro Industrial League, was the only one diligently pursuing black representation in the New Deal administration, but it had only just been formed.⁸⁴ In the summer of 1933, Du Bois did not realize how powerful these men would become, nor did Spingarn or White foresee the challenge they would pose to the NAACP when they formed the National Negro Congress in 1935 with several Amenia alumni.⁸⁵ When asked about them, Du Bois dismissed them and their organization, in part because he knew little of it and in part because he was "opposed to needlessly multiplying organizations."⁸⁶

⁸¹ Du Bois to Spingarn, 22 May 1933, Reel 40, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

⁸² Spingarn to Du Bois, 31 May 1933, Reel 40, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

⁸³ Du Bois to Spingarn, June 29, 1933, Reel 40, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

⁸⁴ Myra Colson Callis to Du Bois, 24 Aug 1933, Reel 39, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

⁸⁵ Hilmar Ludvig Jensen, "The Rise of an African American Left: John P. Davis and the National Negro Congress." (Ph.D. Dissertation, Cornell University, 1997).

⁸⁶ Du Bois to Myra Colson Callis, 28 Aug 1933, Reel 39, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

With the invitations sent on his personal letterhead and acceptances pouring in, Spingarn worried over the practical details. He encouraged Du Bois to send him a proposed agenda so that he could send it to the conferees “to help them frame what they plan to say at the Conference.”⁸⁷ On the first note sent to conferees, Du Bois formulated the intellectual content and Spingarn attached a plea:

In view of the present world depression and the race problems which have exhibited themselves not only in the United States but in the West Indies, Africa, India, and Germany, what should be the ultimate goal of a young, educated American Negro with regard to (a) occupation and income, (b) racial organization, (c) inter-racial cooperation? Is it possible to work out a practical series of next steps to which we could get the adherence and immediate cooperation of a majority of the young educated Negroes? If this is possible, what part in such a programme should white friends and sympathizers be asked to share?⁸⁸

Point (a) told invitees that economics would be a central focus of the conference, but not necessarily the large structural issues that academics like Abram Harris studied for a living. This proposed agenda focused on the individual choices of the attendees. Du Bois encouraged those individual choices to be made in an international context. It was not only the Depression in America that weighed upon him, but also race problems throughout the world. And remarkably (given how demanding domestic problems were), he suggested that those world-wide problems should inform the goals of young African Americans. Du Bois’s influence over this text is evident in its international emphasis. Though Spingarn had wide ranging international interests in his literary criticism days, he “limited myself on purpose to the American situation and especially to American

⁸⁷ Spingarn to Du Bois, 27 Jun 1933, Reel 40, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

⁸⁸ J. E. Spingarn, “Agenda of the Aug 18-21, 1933 Meeting,” Reel 18, NAACP Papers Part 11 microfilm.

ideology.”⁸⁹ At the Pan-African Conference in 1900, Du Bois had declared in a speech entitled “To the Nations of the World” that “the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the colour line, the question as to how far differences of race ... are going to be made, hereafter the basis of denying to over half the world the right of sharing to their utmost ability the opportunities and privileges of modern civilisation.”⁹⁰ At the 1932 NAACP national conference, he urged members “to place the struggle of African Americans in an international context.”⁹¹ The focus on “inter-racial cooperation” indicates that Spingarn had a strong influence over this draft. Indeed, the last sentence seems to plead with conference members to find a place for him in the new direction they wanted to take the NAACP.⁹² In subsequent agendas, Du Bois would elaborate on each point, but continue to emphasize that they would analyze the current situation, world affairs, and the relation of African Americans to other groups.

⁸⁹ Spingarn to Herbert Seligmann, 2 May 1932, Reel 23, NAACP Papers Part 1 microfilm.

⁹⁰ Brent Hayes Edwards points out that before this famous line made its way into the *Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois delivered it before the international audience at the 1900 Pan-African Conference. Du Bois as quoted in Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 1.

⁹¹ Kenneth Robert Janken, *White: The Biography of Walter White, Mr. NAACP* (New York: New Press: Distributed by W.W. Norton, 2003), 176.

⁹² This analysis came from Holloway’s insight. Holloway, *Confronting the Veil*, note 21, p 220.

The Armenians Arrive

And the summer came, the New York summer, which is like no summer anywhere. The heat and the noise began their destruction of nerves and sanity and private lives and love affairs. The air was full of baseball scores and bad news and treacly songs; and the streets and the bars were full of hostile people, made more hostile by the heat. It was not possible in this city, as it had been for Eric in Paris, to take a long and peaceful walk at any hour of the day or night, dropping in for a drink at a bistro or flopping oneself down at a sidewalk cafe--the half-dozen grim parodies of sidewalk cafes to be found in New York were not made for flopping. It was a city without oases, run entirely, insofar, at least, as human perception could tell, for money; and its citizens seemed to have lost entirely any sense of their right to renew themselves. Whoever, in New York, attempted to cling to this right, lived in New York in exile--in exile from the life around him; and this, paradoxically, had the effect of placing him in perpetual danger of being forever banished from any real sense of himself.

--James Baldwin⁹³

NEW YORK CITY BOILS IN AUGUST. The bedrock grabs the sun out of the sky and traps it within its mantle of pavement. Before the wide use of air conditioning, the only relief was escape. Troutbeck, its trees and lake, offered a welcome relief. For twenty years, J. E. Spingarn had escaped the city's bustle and heat in favor of his family's 1000 acre estate in upstate New York. His wife's inheritance allowed them to purchase Troutbeck, a land and house with rich intellectual heritage. With his own horticultural and poetic loves, the house sank into Spingarn's personal psyche. Following WWI, he was housebound with an illness seriously exacerbated in the war. The house became his primary home, instead of only an escape from the city. From a city man with his thumb on the pulse of the city, Spingarn became a green-thumbed country man, reluctant to write literary criticism any longer but happy to publish short articles about his bridgery

⁹³ James Baldwin, *Another Country* (New York: Vintage, 1992).

project, his extensive cultivation of clematis vines, and his dedication of a town bridge for WWI fatalities.⁹⁴

The promise of discussion with other like-minded black people beckoned Anna Arnold, 34, from the city she loved towards a welcome retreat in the coolness of upstate New York. For Arnold, “the summer of 1933 was a time of decision.” She was dating Merritt Hedgeman and reflecting on five years in Harlem. She had expected upper Manhattan to be “a world free of color tension,” but found instead that it had followed her into the black enclave. Friday, August 18, the Minnesotan and her new coworker Wenonah Bond, 26, caught the subway at the recently constructed stop at 135th, just a few blocks from their offices at the 137th street YWCA.⁹⁵ When they arrived at Grand Central Station, they paid their \$3.85 for the 3:38 pm train to Amenia.⁹⁶ Arnold, the conferee with the greatest practical experience facing the fallout of the Depression, had been nominated for Amenia by Lillian Alexander, long-time board member of the NAACP.⁹⁷ Alexander told Spingarn that while she worked for the YW, she was “not at all YWCA-ish” and “has brains, ideas and all the things I think you want at the conference.”⁹⁸ A Dunbar High School and Boston University graduate, step-sister of the prominent African American anthropologist Caroline Bond Day, and a family friend of

⁹⁴ Harlem Valley Times, Amenia, NY, 4 Jun 1925, Box 24, Spingarn Papers, NYPL; J. E. Spingarn, “Garden on a Bridge” *Horticulture*, 1 Oct 1926, P 429, Box 24, Spingarn Papers, NYPL; “Talk of the Town,” *New Yorker*, 21 Mar 1936.

⁹⁵ NYC Subway.org, “135th Street (Ind 8th Avenue),” (2005).

⁹⁶ W. E. B. Du Bois, “Youth and Age at Amenia,” *Crisis*, Oct 1933.

⁹⁷ Anna Arnold Hedgeman, *The Trumpet Sounds: A Memoir of Negro Leadership* (New York: Holt, 1964); Lillian Alexander to Spingarn, 26 Jun 1933, Box 95-1 Folder 18, Spingarn Papers MSRC.

⁹⁸ Lillian Alexander to Spingarn, 26 Jun 1933, Box 95-1 Folder 18, Spingarn Papers MSRC.

Du Bois since childhood, Bond had recently returned from a year and a half studying in Europe. Her main conclusion from her international experience was that

If more of us could live in an international atmosphere and see that 'Judy O'Grady and the colonel's lady are just the same under the skin' we would not elect senators and representatives who vote money for guns and other machines for the destruction of life when they should be appropriating sums for life conservation and improvement—food and clothes for the unemployed, better hospitals, and more schools, especially in the black belt of Alabama.⁹⁹

Bond traveled to Armenia hoping to discuss "work opportunities and ed[ucation] opportunities for Negro girls in a bi-racial community."¹⁰⁰

At the station they connected with Marion Cuthbert, 37, one year into her position as national secretary for the YWCA. Cuthbert had come from her midtown offices at 42nd street and Lexington at the National YWCA. Her friend and colleague, Frances Williams, decided to drive herself to Armenia, grateful to the NAACP for "making it possible, in a time like this, for a group of young Negroes to view their world together."¹⁰¹ Cuthbert had had a busy summer before boarding the train for Armenia. On her mind was a book she was then writing about Juliette Derricotte by assembling Derricotte's letters and stories.¹⁰² Cuthbert had also begun to increase her participation in the NAACP, as one of the keynote speakers at the July annual meeting in Chicago, and

⁹⁹ "Miss Wenonah Bond Tells of Experiences in Europe," *Chicago Defender*, 17 Oct 1931, p 6.

¹⁰⁰ Wenonah Bond Registration Blank, Box 95-13 Folder 523, J. E. Spingarn, MSRC.

¹⁰¹ Frances Williams to Spingarn, 9 May 1933, Box 95-12 Folder 494, Spingarn Papers MSRC.

¹⁰² See Lauren Kientz, "There Is So Much More to Know Than I Am Accustomed to Knowing: Juliette Derricotte and Inter-Racialism, 1897-1931," (forthcoming).

was attending NAACP board meetings as a possible new member.¹⁰³ In July, she had met with Du Bois, E. Franklin Frazier, and Max Yergan, among others, at the first meeting of the Swarthmore Race Relations Institute.¹⁰⁴ Like Arnold, She was nominated for the conference by Lillian Alexander, who wrote Du Bois that “I am not alone in considering her the wisest, steadiest, and broadest minded of the young thinkers. She is sometimes called the Du Bois of the youth movement. She must be there.”¹⁰⁵

Cuthbert, Arnold, and Bond met YMCA worker Frank T. Wilson, 33, on the train. Once they traveled north of Harlem, there were few other black travelers. Wilson was the only man to represent the YMCA at Amenias, despite the large number of nominated Y men. At the last minute, Ralph Bullock, another Y secretary, had been detained in New York on a family emergency.¹⁰⁶ Wilson and Cuthbert shared a mutual friend in Juliette Derricotte. Wilson was Derricotte’s counterpart at the YMCA—national student secretary—and had travelled with her to India in 1928.¹⁰⁷ At the meeting, they each consulted with South African missionary Max Yergan, who, having returned to the states in April 1933 to accept the NAACP’s Spingarn Medal, would arrive at Amenias Saturday as one of a few invited day guests.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰³ Marion Cuthbert, "Honesty in Race Relations." Address Delivered at NAACP Annual Conference in Chicago, IL, Reel 9, NAACP Papers 1 microfilm.

¹⁰⁴ "Institute at Swarthmore College Comes to a Close," *Chicago Defender*, 9 Sep 1933, 11.

¹⁰⁵ Lillian Alexander to W.E.B. Du Bois, June 3, 1933, Reel 39, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

¹⁰⁶ Frank Wilson Registration Blank, Box 95-13 Folder 523, Spingarn Papers MSRC; R. W. Bullock to Du Bois, 29 Aug 1933, Reel 39, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

¹⁰⁷ Juliette A. Derricotte, "The Student Conference at Mysore, India," *Crisis*, Aug 1929.

¹⁰⁸ David Henry Anthony, *Max Yergan: Race Man, Internationalist, Cold Warrior* (New York: New York University Press, 2006).

On the two hour trip to Amenias, passing through lush green countryside, Anna Arnold became reacquainted with Roy Wilkins, 32. They had first met on Arnold's initiation into city life not in New York but in Minneapolis. When she was a teenager, her mother took her on her first trip to the big city from her hometown of Anoka, MN. Arnold excitedly anticipated seeing intelligent young black men. Though she got along well enough with her white classmates, she had always understood from family subtext that they were not worth her romantic attentions (even if her study-focused father had allowed dating) because when she met other African Americans, she would "find qualities beyond any I had known."¹⁰⁹ Her parents thus sheltered her from potential racism. The young man who dominated her first soiree with other black teenagers was Roy Wilkins, confident in his recent success at Mechanic Arts High School.¹¹⁰ Wilkins was one of the few to come to Amenias wishing to discuss "Building strong racial life—separated, more than in the past, from entangling alliances."¹¹¹ Wilkins' superior in the NAACP offices, executive secretary Walter White, had taken his car up the previous day to help with last minute details.¹¹²

The YWCA women were excited to reconnect with Mabel Byrd, 34. She folded the trip from Chicago to Troutbeck into a trip to Washington DC for an interview scheduled for the subsequent week with the Department of Commerce to be an advisor on

¹⁰⁹ Hedgeman, *The Trumpet Sounds*, 12.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Roy Wilkins Registration Blank, Box 95-13 Folder 523, Spingarn Papers MSRC.

¹¹² Transportation Plans, 95-11 Folder 524, Spingarn Papers MSRC.

African American economic affairs.¹¹³ The youngest Amenias had also taken a long train ride to arrive in Amenias from Baltimore. Juanita Jackson, 20, was already a college graduate and an accomplished organizer. She was currently the president of the Young People's Civic Forum in Baltimore.¹¹⁴ Jackson had explained the purpose of the forum in a recent edition of the *Crisis*, in addition to raising scholarship money, "[w]e are also attempting a tremendous spiritual thing—the lifting up of the spirits of the people during the depression, the feeding of intellectual, aesthetic and spiritual food."¹¹⁵ Her mother Lillie May Jackson was a major figure in Baltimore city politics and civil rights initiatives and had encouraged her daughters to succeed in education from an early age.¹¹⁶

Two markedly different men, M. Moran Weston II and Sam Dorsey, traveled south from Morningside Heights to catch the train at Grand Central. Weston jumped on

¹¹³ Myra Colson Callis to Du Bois, 24 Aug 1933, Reel 39, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

¹¹⁴ Hazel Browne, Juanita Jackson, and Thelma Louise Taylor Registration Blanks, Box 95-13 Folder 523; Thelma Louise Taylor to Spingarn, 30 Aug 1933, Box 95-10 Folder 441, Spingarn Papers MSRC. When they had accepted Spingarn's invitation, they expressed enthusiasm, but also reticence; Hazel Brown hoped

¹¹⁵ "Baltimore Youth," *Crisis*, April 1933, 89.

¹¹⁶ Prudence Cumberbatch of Brooklyn College is the expert on Juanita Jackson's family. Her working manuscript is a case study of the civil rights movement in Baltimore, particularly through the leadership of the Jacksons. See also Prudence Cumberbatch, "What 'the Cause' Needs is a 'Brainy and Energetic Woman': A Study of Female Charismatic Leadership in Baltimore," in *Want to Start a Revolution?: Radical Women in the Black Freedom Struggle*, ed. Jeanne Theoharis, Komozi Woodard, and Dayo Gore (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 47-71. Her thesis in this chapter is "While earlier twentieth-century black reformers often left the masses behind in their political campaigns, a new generation of civil rights leaders emerged in the 1930s that lacked the class antipathies of their respectable elders. They worked to build intraracial bridges across class differences through concrete political formation. Black women, like Juanita Jackson (Mitchell) and her mother, Baltimore activist Lillia May Carroll Jackson, played key roles in this political formation. However, few are recognized today for their public roles or for contributing to this shift. The dominance of African American male leadership during the 1930s and 1940s has become iconic, partly because concerns about 'the race' during that period were addressed in masculinist terms, as discussions of racial violence. As a result, there is a dearth of information on community activism. Even though Dorothy Height, Ella Baker, and Anna Hedgeman began their careers at this moment, they gained widespread national recognition only during the traditional civil rights movement" (48).

the underground at either of two new subway stops near his home in Harlem after completing his philosophy graduate studies at the Union Theological Seminary for the week. At 22, he was one of the youngest delegates to attend Amenias. He had come to join the illustrious Amenias roster when he organized "a national Conference on Negro Student Problems held in MacMillan Hall."¹¹⁷ Though young, Weston had already made many significant decisions in his life and encountered diverse strands of racism.

Weston grew up in North Carolina, son to an Episcopal priest. When he decided to follow his father's profession, he carefully vetted which northern school to apply to.¹¹⁸ He had done his preliminary work at St. Augustine's Junior College in Tarboro, North Carolina but could not finish his degree in the South with the freedom he desired. So in 1928, he applied as a transfer student to Saint Stephens College in Annandale on Hudson, NY, then affiliated with Columbia University. In response to his application, the assistant warden wrote that while Weston was eminently qualified academically to enter, he wished Weston would reconsider. His wish was cloaked in concern for Weston's social needs, but the dagger was his assumption that Weston was identical to any other black student. Weston would not be happy at St. Stephen's, the warden insisted, because the school's seclusion meant he would be the only black person for miles around. He assured Weston that "[t]here is no question of any sort of prejudice involved in what I am saying." Previous black students had been "liked, and well received, and respected, [but], without exception, the verdict of all has been that a small northern college can never be

¹¹⁷ Eben Miller, "Born Along the Color Line: The Second Generation of the Talented Tenth and 'the Problem of the Twentieth Century'" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Brandeis University, 2004), 185.

¹¹⁸ Harold Goodwin to Rev. M. M. Weston, Sr., 5 Feb 1929, Box 7 Folder 50, Weston Papers, Columbia University.

satisfactory for young men like yourself.”¹¹⁹ In his estimation, only schools in large cities would be satisfactory.

Weston replied with restrained politeness and explained that he had chosen St. Stephen’s particularly for its seclusion so that he might devote his time to his studies. He explained that “St. Stephens offers more of what I consider most essential to my fullest development at this time of my life than any other institution without a greater inconvenience than that which you suggest exists for me at your school.”¹²⁰ He was “confident that I can adjust myself to all the conditions at and surrounding St. Stephen’s without any serious loss to myself and without interfering with the comfort or happiness of anyone else deserving to be there.”¹²¹ His letter was accepted and his application was forwarded, and he was granted admittance, pending an interview.¹²²

When the head warden returned from a summer vacationing in Europe on the eve of the resumption of classes, he reviewed his assistant’s work. He revoked Weston’s acceptance and his financial aid because he hesitated

to introduce a single individual of one race or nationality into a group consisting entirely of persons of another race or nationality, especially when that group lives somewhat isolated from the general public and intimately in contact with one another. We have tried this in the past, not only with colored people but also with Asiatics. It has never worked satisfactorily.¹²³

¹¹⁹ George Libaire, Assistant Warden St. Stephens College, to Milton M. Weston Jr., 26 Jun 1928, Box 3 Folder 21, Weston Papers, Columbia.

¹²⁰ Milton M. Weston Jr. To George Libaire, Draft, n.d., Weston Papers, Columbia.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Stanley Brown, Registrar St. Stephen's College, to Milton M. Weston, Jr., 7 Jul 1928, Box 3 Folder 21, Weston Papers, Columbia.

¹²³ Bernard I. Bell, Warden St. Stephens College, to Milton M. Weston, Jr., 24 Aug 1928, Box 3 Folder 21, Weston Papers, Columbia.

The warden redirected Weston to Columbia University, where he was sure to “be much happier.”¹²⁴ It was not uncommon for African Americans to be directed away from northern colleges on the basis of their own “comfort.”¹²⁵ Weston entered Columbia as a student postulate at the last minute in the fall of 1928. In 1929, he signed up for membership in the Morningside Branch of the Socialist Party and received his “little red card.”¹²⁶ This was not an unusual decision for a Columbia student. His graduating class was almost evenly split between members of the Republican, Democratic, and Socialist Parties.¹²⁷ Upon graduation from Columbia in 1930, he entered the adjacent institution, the Union Theological Seminary where he studied “The Significance of Religion in the Life of Today” under Reinhold Niebuhr.¹²⁸

The other man studying at Columbia that summer was charismatic Sam Dorsey, 30, another man with socialist leanings. Abram Harris, 34, had recommended Dorsey for the Amenia conference because he would represent the “economic radical” point of view.¹²⁹ He came to the conference eager to discuss “Political theory and political action” because he thought “this conference is a splendid project. We certainly need to

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ “Perhaps the attitude of many colleges toward black students is reflected in the response of Princeton University’s president to Du Bois’s survey for *the College Bred Negro*: ‘The question of the admission of Negro students to Princeton University has never assumed the aspect of a practical problem with us. We have never had any colored students here, though there is nothing in the University statutes to prevent their admission. It is possible, however, in view of our proximity to the South and the large number of southern students here, that Negro students would find Princeton less comfortable than some other institutions.’”

¹²⁶ Robert E. Fitch to Milton M. Weston Jr., 23 Nov 1929, Box 3 Folder 24, Weston Papers, Columbia; Robert E. Fitch to Milton M. Weston, Jr., 12 Mar 1930, Box 3 Folder 24, Weston Papers, Columbia.

¹²⁷ *The 1930 Columbian, Yearbook*, (New York City: Columbia University, 1930).

¹²⁸ “Student Made Chief Editor at Ohio State,” *Chicago Defender*, 13 Oct 1928, 2.

¹²⁹ Shelby Davidson to Du Bois, 13 Apr 1933, Reel 39, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

get together. With no publicity and three days of discussion I believe we can get somewhere.”¹³⁰

Harris was also in New York that summer, resting for his health and writing his new work. He drove up Route 22, travelling the 94 miles from New York to Amenia on “the main route to the Berkshires” in Du Bois’s full car.¹³¹ Du Bois knew the route well, because he continued to visit Great Barrington, his hometown, which was 35 miles northwest of Troutbeck. In 1925, Harris had an ambivalent view of Du Bois, whom he sometimes admired as a mentor and other times criticized for being too sentimental and not scientific enough in his work. He also had a bit of an inferiority complex while squirreled away in far off places like West Virginia and Minnesota.

By 1933, the relationship between Harris and Du Bois was remarkably different. They met as intellectual equals. In the winter, Du Bois asked Harris to help him with his personal study of Marx and also assigned Harris’ *Black Worker* to his students.¹³² Du Bois “read and re-read with a great deal of interest your article on Marx, Feblem, and Mitchell.”¹³³ Harris and his wife hosted Du Bois in Washington on his return trips to

¹³⁰ Dorsey to Du Bois, 4 Apr 1933, Reel 39, Du Bois Papers microfilm; Emmett Dorsey Registration Blank.

¹³¹ “Amenia Conference” Description, Reel 18, NAACP Papers Part 11 microfilm; Du Bois, “Youth and Age at Amenia.”; Harris to Du Bois, 6 Jan 1934, Reel 42, Du Bois Papers microfilm; Harris to Du Bois, 24 Jul 1933, Reel 40, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

¹³² Du Bois to Harris 6 Jan 1933; Du Bois to Harris 9 Mar 1933; Du Bois to Harris, 22 Mar 1933; Harris to Du Bois, 20 Mar 1933, Reel 40, Du Bois Papers Microfilm.

¹³³ Du Bois to Harris, 2 Feb 1933, Reel 40, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

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Atlanta and declared himself “honored” to do so. For the trip to Amenia, Du Bois wrote Harris; “The seat in the bus will be open for your occupance on August 18th.”¹³⁴

The two other seats in Du Bois’s car were filled by Pauline Young, 32, from Delaware, and Dr. Virginia Alexander, 34, from Philadelphia.¹³⁵ Each was Du Bois’ personal friend. Though Pauline Young, a librarian from Wilmington Delaware, active NAACP member, and niece of Alice Dunbar Nelson, had been one of those to recommend individuals for Amenia, she had not been invited herself. She complained to Alexander that she had not received an invitation, which Alexander communicated to Du Bois. When spots appeared at the last minute, Du Bois was able to add Young to the list of invitees.¹³⁶ Young came to the conference hoping to discuss “hindrances and opportunities in professional work and dispersion, loss of racial identity, etc.”¹³⁷

Dr. Alexander was the only medical doctor and the only scientist (other than Howard Shaw, an engineer from Chicago) to be included in the list of attendees.¹³⁸ She suggested to Spingarn that the Amenia conferees read something before they came, particularly Dr. Du Bois’ commencement address on “Education and Work” given at

¹³⁴ Du Bois to Harris, 4 Aug 1933, Reel 40, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

¹³⁵ Eben Miller, “Amenia Conference, 1933,” in *Encyclopedia of the Harlem Renaissance*, ed. Cary D. Wintz and Paul Finkelman (New York: Taylor and Francis, 2004), 13.

¹³⁶ “Du Bois to Pauline Young, 14 Aug 1933, Reel 40, Du Bois Papers microfilm,” (1933).

¹³⁷ Pauline Young Registration Blank, Box 95-13 Folder 523, Spingarn Papers MSRC.

¹³⁸ David Levering Lewis calls her “the true successor to Jessie Fauset in his life, the woman who might become the second Mrs. Du Bois and for whom he felt a special passion and admiration that would be memorialized in the dedication of his great book *Black Reconstruction in America*. [...] Nina’s growing invisibility combined with the general knowledge that she accepted Alexander as a friend and family pediatrician may have excused for many what proved to be one of Du Bois’s deepest and most enduring liaisons.” Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: The Fight for Equality and the American Century, 1919-1963*, 272-74.

Howard University 1930.¹³⁹ Her close personal relationship with Du Bois tended to overshadow her own intellectual abilities in mixed companies. Some people, including Lillian Alexander, tended to view her as lacking her own opinions.¹⁴⁰ Given her quiet nature, she was probably ready to listen more than to speak at Amenias, even though she had had much more practical experience treating lower class African Americans than most those travelling north that Friday.

One final man drove from New York City to Amenias. Ira de.A. Reid, 33, left the headquarters of the National Urban League at 1133 Broadway, Room 876 around 5 p.m. He had graduated from Morehouse College, received an MA from the University of Pittsburgh on an Urban League Scholarship, and recently completed the residency requirements for a Ph.D. in sociology at Columbia. On his registration blank, he scribbled that he was particularly interested in "all phases of social adjustment." The Urban League had been focused throughout the 1920s on helping migrants to the city adjust the urban life, particularly by adopting middle class values. Administrators like Reid and his predecessor Charles Johnson kept a close eye on the many political dissidents that attracted African Americans in Harlem. They worried that the social dislocation of migration "the dashed dreams of its participants, provided fertile ground in which such rabble-rousing easily took root."¹⁴¹ Reid even worried about street corner speakers and viewed them as "symbol of ... social disorganization."¹⁴² His younger sister, Sara Reid,

¹³⁹ Virginia Alexander to Spingarn, 24 May 1933, Box 95-1 Folder 19, Spingarn Papers MSRC.

¹⁴⁰ Lillian Alexander to W.E.B. Du Bois, November 1, 1933, Reel 39, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

¹⁴¹ Touré F Reed, *Not Alms but Opportunity: The Urban League & the Politics of Racial Uplift, 1910-1950* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 98.

¹⁴² As quoted in *Ibid.*

24, was slated to arrive early Sunday morning on the train. She had just returned from ten months study in Denmark and currently worked at the 135th St New York Public Library in Adult Education and as a librarian.¹⁴³

Washington DC weather was even more suffocating in the summer than New York (Abram Harris moaned in August 1931 that “It’s been hot as blazes here; and I can hardly work”), yet it was the promise of intellectual debate that lured Howard University professors north more than the promise of cool weather.¹⁴⁴ Sterling Brown, 30, from the Howard English Department was the only creative writer at the conference. Brown was excited to have found a way through his “dismayingly crowded” summer to attend the conference. “I am anxious to participate in the conference and only the most exacting causes here could make me think of not doing so.”¹⁴⁵ Ralph Bunche, 29, had spent the summer recovering from his first extended trip abroad. He had spent 1932-1933 in Europe and Africa and upon his return was in great demand to share his experiences. He agreed, but only to discuss current political situations. He refused to suggest ways that African American culture had sustained characteristics from African societies. In this, he had a confrere at Amenia in E. Franklin Frazier, 38, Fisk University professor and University of Chicago Ph.D., drove to the conference from Nashville with the desire to discuss the “cultural basis of Negro life.”¹⁴⁶ He had spent the previous few years debating with Northwestern University professor Melville Herskovits about the African

¹⁴³ Sara Reid to Walter White, February 20, 1933, Reel 16, NAACP 2a Papers

¹⁴⁴ Bunche described DC as “a very cruel place in the summer.” Bunche to Woodson, 29 Jul 1935, Box 43, Bunche Papers UCLA; Harris to Stolberg, 3 Aug 1931, Folber 3 Box 4b Stolberg Papers, Columbia.

¹⁴⁵ Sterling Brown to Spingarn, 9 Aug 1933, Box 95-2 Folder 69, Spingarn Papers MSRC.

¹⁴⁶ E. Franklin Frazier Registration Blank, Box 95-13 Folder 523, Spingarn Papers MSRC.

traditions still present within African American culture, which Herskovits postulated and Frazier denied.¹⁴⁷

Another Howard contingent drove north separately. Charles Hamilton Houston, who earned the Howard Law School its accreditation, had spent the past several months trying the NAACP George Crawford case and others. He was in the very beginning stages of seeking out the cases that would pave the “Road to Brown.”¹⁴⁸ Edward Lovett, a junior associate in his law firm, accompanied him to Amenia at White’s behest. White recommended that Lovett, a 1932 graduate of Harvard Law School, attend the conference as another person predisposed to the NAACP way of doing things—“He has made two trips to Boston for the hearings in the United States District Court and in the Circuit Court of Appeals, attended our Annual Conference at Chicago, and is going next week with Arthur, Mr. Houston and myself to Cambridge for a meeting of our Legal Committee there at Felix Frankfurter’s house.”¹⁴⁹ He had also travelled to Alabama with Houston earlier in the summer to investigate the Willie Peterson case.¹⁵⁰ White suggested that Lovett’s NAACP participation made him “just the type you [Spingarn] and I wish to have at Amenia,” in contrast to those Du Bois advocated.¹⁵¹

Houston had visited the White House three days before Amenia, where he sat for hours waiting to be acknowledged. He had wanted to schedule an appointment for

¹⁴⁷ Holloway, *Confronting the Veil*; Anthony M. Platt, *E. Franklin Frazier Reconsidered* (New Brunswick [N.J.]: Rutgers University Press, 1991).

¹⁴⁸ Kenneth W. Mack, “Law and Mass Politics in the Making of the Civil Rights Lawyer, 1931–1941,” *The Journal of American History* 93, no. 1 (June 2006), <http://www.historycooperative.org/cgi-bin/justtop.cgi?act=justtop&url=http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/jah/93.1/mack.html>.

¹⁴⁹ White to Spingarn, 5 Jul 1933, Box 95-11 Folder 485, Spingarn Papers MSRC.

¹⁵⁰ Sullivan, *Lift Every Voice: The NAACP and the Making of the Civil Rights Movement*, 171.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

representatives from the NAACP, the International Legal Defense (legal arm of the US Communist Party) and the ACLU to discussing lynching legislation with the president. When he first inquired, he was told by a white secretary to return the next day. He did so at the requested time and waited an hour until the same secretary “approached them and curtly asked, ‘What do you boys want?’”¹⁵² They explained, waited another hour, and received a message that the president was too absorbed in organizing his new administration to meet with them. Houston responded that “The lives and physical protection of American citizens are just as important as any NRA program can be.”¹⁵³ This foray into presidential politics foreshadowed the long work of the NAACP over the next years to get an anti-lynching bill passed.

A few individuals made the long trek eastward to Amenia. Howard Shaw, 33, an electrical engineer with an engineering degree from the University of Michigan and a mathematics degree from the University of Chicago, caught the train at Chicago’s Union Station. He came to Amenia wishing to discuss “engineering and industrial opportunities and business opp. for Negroes.”¹⁵⁴ The only other conferee invested in a profession that manipulated the physical world, rather than cerebral or peopled ones, was Truly Hayes, 41, a carpentry teacher at Hampton Institute, who drove north from Virginia.¹⁵⁵ Two western conferees shared education experiences in Germany. Librarian Thelma Taylor, 26, drove east from Cleveland, Ohio. She had already received a B.A. from the University of Heidelberg and a B.S. from Western Reserve. Hazel Browne, 25, an

¹⁵² Sullivan, *Lift Every Voice: The NAACP and the Making of the Civil Rights Movement*, 173.

¹⁵³ As quoted in *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ Howard Shaw Registration Blank, Box 95-13 Folder 523, J. E. Spingarn, MSRC.

¹⁵⁵ Truly Hayes Registration Blank, Box 95-13 Folder 523, J. E. Spingarn, MSRC.

instructor at the Louisville Municipal College, took the train; she received an AB from the University of Kansas, Phi Beta Kappa, before pursuing graduate work at the University of Berlin on a scholarship from the Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority.¹⁵⁶ She came "especially interested in future of colored women, especially in new fields," but also feeling a little hesitant and shy. She wrote Spingarn that she hoped "my participation in it will be, in a measure, as beneficial to the conference as I anticipate that it will be to me."¹⁵⁷

All of those travelling had different agendas and assessments of the role of Black leadership within the NAACP. They arrived in Amenia, New York ready to debate their differences, find areas of agreement, and meet others "worth crossing a continent to know."¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁶ "Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorors Celebration," *Chicago Defender*, 8 Mar 1930, 4; "Studies Abroad: Picture of Hazel Brown," *Chicago Defender*, 12 Jul 1930, 3. Hazel Browne to Spingarn, 11 May 1933, Box 95-2 Folder 72, Spingarn Papers MSRC.

¹⁵⁷ Hazel Browne Registration Blanks, Box 95-13 Folder 523, Spingarn Papers MSRC.

¹⁵⁸ Frances Williams to White, 23 Aug 1933, Reel 18, NAACP Papers Part 11 microfilm.

Chapter 11

The Second Amenia Conference, August 1933 A Journey “Not too Lonely or Impossible”

The Conference Itself

THE MAJORITY OF CONFEREES ARRIVED AT TROUTBECK ON FRIDAY AFTERNOON, where a heavy mist and cool breezes met them.¹ A Spingarn family member (all of Joel and Amy's grown children were in attendance that weekend) chauffeured some to the house from the train station, while others traversed the dirt country roads on their own. They drove under sturdy maples and spied sprawling farmland through cuts in the trees. Driving along crests gave city-dwellers the ability to see far across valleys to tree clad hills and distant blue mountains. The cars crossed a stone bridge Spingarn had designed himself and faced the stately main house. Though the house itself was new (rebuilt after a 1917 fire), the air around it exuded history and age.² Silver, gray, and dusty yellow stones piled on top of each other to form walls dressed in summer vines. The second storey rested on the first, decorated with Elizabethan crossed wood rather than stone. Small windows dotted the walls. Peaked roofs capped the building. The path to the front door passed over an embedded miller's wheel, surrounded on either side by the low

¹ David L. Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: The Fight for Equality and the American Century, 1919-1963* (New York: H. Holt, 2000), 320.

² J. E. Spingarn, "Garden on a Bridge" *Horticulture*, 1 Oct 1926, P 429, Box 24, Spingarn Papers, NYPL; "Troutbeck, the Home of Poets," *Garden Magazine and Home Builder*, Feb 1925.

plants of a rock garden.³ Centered in the sturdy wood door, a wolf knocker waited to call its masters. To the side, a carved child surveyed visitors from the inconspicuous eaves.⁴ Each view of the house was obscured by tall Buttonwoods and Elms, which led Sinclair Lewis to describe the setting; "It's not a lawn—it's a grass grown cathedral!"⁵ Troutbeck's beauty, and his own tender care of it, provided a welcome aesthetic cushion to Spingarn, protecting him from the worst of the Depression's despair. Yet it also distanced Spingarn from the critiques of his guests and their knowledge of economic hardship.

The conferees were not yet invited inside this great stone dwelling, so redolent of an English country house. The house could not accommodate everyone, so early in the committee's discussions they decided to conduct the whole conference outside. The cars were directed around the house and up a dirt road a final mile to Troutbeck Lake. Surrounding this lake lay a fertile green lawn dotted with 12 tents, ten for sleeping, one for meeting, and one for the kitchen. White and Wilkins carefully considered where to get the tents and how they should be furnished to both care for the comfort of the attendees and to mitigate the expense for Spingarn. They ended up finding tents, cots, and blankets through army surplus (at the suggestion of veteran Spingarn). Much discussion went into providing mattresses. White had run the question of purchasing mattresses for only three days by Charles Hamilton Houston when he ran into him in New York City. Houston "scoffed at the idea of doing so for the men and very strongly expressed himself as

³ "Troutbeck, the Home of Poets."

⁴ Author's perceptions on an August 2008 visit.

⁵ "Troutbeck, the Home of Poets."

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feeling that mattresses should be secured only for the women.”⁶ The men should be able to handle sleeping a bit rough for three days.

At the end of the row of sleeping tents, an extensive tent protected tables already laden with a catered meal of gumbo soup, fish with cucumbers, and roast lamb to welcome the weary travelers.⁷ The New York City caterer, an old friend of Walter White’s, might have heard of James Weldon Johnson’s gumbo suppers and thought the soup an appropriate way to begin the weekend.⁸ One has to wonder whether the gumbo was the “watery, tasteless concoction that goes by the same name in Northern hotels and restaurants” that Johnson despised, or the rich soup he remembered from childhood, “the dish irresistible—the most soul-satisfying of all the dishes that Negro cookery has given the South.”⁹ Did the soup evoke the same connection for the other gathered African Americans from all over the country, including the Midwest and Pacific coast? Or was it an unknown dish, full of new flavors?

Those who had arrived by car mingled with those from the train. News came that two of the most frequently nominated individuals, Rayford Logan and William Hastie, could not make it, the former on doctor’s orders and the latter because of financial

⁶ White to Spingarn, 19 Jul 1933, NAACP Papers Part 11 microfilm.. Houston continued his suggestions in a subsequent letter to White (quoted in a White to Spingarn memo of July 22) “Another suggestion concerning preparation for the Conference and keeping costs at a minimum: I don’t know whether Major Spingarn would want to use a makeshift like the one I am going to suggest, but one way to insulate the cots and make them warm without a mattress is to lay newspapers on top of the cot before any cover is put on. The paper will keep draughts of cold air from coming from below. Also, I advise you in general to start saving old newspapers for the Conference, because they can be used around tents in a hundred different ways.”

⁷ Menu, Reel 18, NAACP Papers Part 11 microfilm.

⁸ Langston Hughes, *The Big Sea: An Autobiography* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993 (1940)), 249.

⁹ James Weldon Johnson, *Along This Way: The Autobiography of James Weldon Johnson*, ed. Sondra Kathryn Wilson (New York: Da Capo Press, 2000), 33.

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difficulties.¹⁰ Some attendees met this scene—blue lake, green lawn, tents, and trout stream—eager to get out their swimsuits and try their athletic prowess at field sports. Some soaked in the beauty of the scene. Others, though, were not so content. They had seen that grand house, where Spingarn and Du Bois would be staying the night, while they faced rugged accommodations. Sterling Brown remembered a joke soon told and often repeated—they could see who the “house Negroes” were and who the “field Negroes.” When Brown met Du Bois, the older was disconcerted to realize he was to intellectually engage with the grown son of his school mate at Fisk. Brown told Du Bois the joke. He acerbically replied, “oh you will always joke so, Sterling.”¹¹

Those who felt awkward and a little out of place found each other. There was a handful of attendees in their early twenties who were new to conferences—Moran Weston from Columbia, Louisville teacher Harriet Browne, Cleveland Librarian Thelma Louise Taylor, and Juanita Jackson.¹² Taylor shared her skepticism with the others about the Amenia conference—what could a weekend of discussion do?—but Jackson felt “that now is the time for the younger people to concentrate their forces and each one of us will profit, greatly, from the advantages of thought exchange.”¹³

¹⁰ Rayford Logan to Spingarn, 12 Aug 1933, Box 95-7 Folder 285, Spingarn Papers MSRC; William H. Hastie to Spingarn, 9 Aug 1933, Box 95-5 Folder 194, Spingarn Papers MSRC.

¹¹ My thanks to Francille Wilson for this anecdote. She heard it from Brown himself.

¹² Hazel Browne, Juanita Jackson, and Thelma Louise Taylor Registration Blanks, Box 95-13 Folder 523; Thelma Louise Taylor to Spingarn, 30 Aug 1933, Box 95-10 Folder 441, Spingarn Papers MSRC.

¹³ Juanita Jackson to Spingarn, 15 Apr 1933, Box 95-6 Folder 233, Spingarn Papers MSRC; Thelma Louise Taylor to Spingarn, 30 Aug 1933, Box 95-10 Folder 441, Spingarn Papers MSRC. Her enthusiasm before the conference “I feel that now is the time for the younger people to concentrate their forces and each one of us will profit, greatly, from the advantages of thought exchange” and freedom to speak afterwards says something about relationship to Spingarn (important though?) Jackson wrote to Spingarn that “my interest and enthusiasm have been aroused. I can see the splendid possibilities of such a conference.”

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Ira Reid and others felt no such trepidation about the conference setting. He **declared** himself “a quasi-professional conference ‘person’” though with “no particular **pride** in that status.”¹⁴ In the last few years, Sam Dorsey “had attended scores of **Socialist**, **Communist**, **Labor** and other conferences.”¹⁵ Marion Cuthbert and Frances **Williams** had been attending frequent conferences for ten years with the YWCA, the **National** Association of College Women, and the NAACP. Mabel Byrd had attended **International** Student Services meetings in Europe and the Communist Party Presidential **Convention** in Chicago. Bunche and Harris had been planning their own conferences at **Howard** University. Two Augusts’ before, the best lawyers in the country assembled at **the** annual meeting of the National Bar Association, headlined by Clarence Darrow and **presided** over by Raymond Pace Alexander. Charles Hamilton Houston and Edward **Lovett** participated in the emotional debate between representatives of the NAACP and **the** **International** Legal Defense.¹⁶

Mabel Byrd eagerly greeted the informal conference setting. She took the **opportunity** to confer “with that particular group of men and women,” something she had **long** “hoped for quite sincerely.” She had often read the words of many of those present **in** *the Crisis*, *the Opportunity*, and *the Journal of Negro History*, among other places, but

¹⁴ Ira Reid to J.E. Spingarn, September 2, 1933, Box 95-9 Folder 380, Spingarn Papers MSRC.

¹⁵ White to Spingarn, 8 Sep 1933, NAACP Papers Part 11 microfilm.

¹⁶ Kenneth W. Mack, “Law and Mass Politics in the Making of the Civil Rights Lawyer, 1931–1941,” *The Journal of American History* 93, no. 1 (June 2006), <http://www.historycooperative.org/cgi-bin/justtop.cgi?act=justtop&url=http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/jah/93.1/mack.html>.

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her understanding of their points of view blossomed with the “chance for informal discussion.”¹⁷

Among some of the attendees, camaraderie already flowed. The association of the Young Turks had already begun to form.¹⁸ Many of them followed Sterling Brown’s lead in using nicknames rather than given names. From his days at Dunbar High School, Brown had been called Dutch (shortened from Flying Dutchman).¹⁹ It was a name redolent of boyhood camaraderie, not the strict formality Du Bois and Spingarn always employed. A high school friend, Allison Davis, Flap, had been nominated for the conference in several letters, along with his wife, but could not come because they were in England. Emmett Dorsey went by Sam. Abram Harris had Abe. Ralph Bunche, the youngest of the Howard group and the one with the most unusual childhood in the far west, went simply by Ralph (some would later try their hand at Raoul). The freedom in these blithe nicknames was so different from Du Bois’s use of his last name and initials even among his closest friends. His consort Virginia Alexander wrote to him as “Dr. Du Bois.” Sometimes he went simply by the Doctor. After serving in World War I, Spingarn was referred to most commonly as “the Colonel” or Mr. Spingarn; he was Joel only to his wife. Du Bois wrote about Spingarn that “I do not think that any other white man ever touched me emotionally so closely as Joel Spingarn,” yet they referred to each other by

¹⁷ Mabel Byrd to Mr. And Mrs. Spingarn, 6 Sep 1933, Box 95-2 Folder 75, Spingarn Papers MSRC.

¹⁸ Ralph Bunche to Charles Johnson, 22 Mar 1932, Box 62 Folder 1, Bunche Papers UCLA.

¹⁹ Mercer Cook, ‘Dutch at Dunbar’ [Birthday Tribute to Sterling Brown] Delivered Museum of African Art on 1 May 1979, Cook Papers MSRC, Box 257-4 Folder 34.

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last name because Du Bois had never accepted Spingarn's invitation to first name
friendship.²⁰

The Howard contingent was not uniformly friendly, however. They reflected the
division within the NAACP itself. The social scientists leaned toward Du Bois, when
they were not establishing their own independent selves. The lawyers led by Charles
Houston tended to side with Walter White, particularly because they were collaborating
with him on a number of cases. The social scientists emphasized structural solutions
rather than individual legal cases; a year later they published their disgust with the
NAACP method (and Houston's prosecution of the Crawford case) in a group letter to the
editor of *Fortune* magazine.²¹

Like the conference setting, the appellation intellectual suited some more than
others. Part of the criticisms the NAACP was then working through was the concern that
they were too intellectualized and out of touch with the needs of everyday folk. Anna
Arnold was reluctant to call herself an intellectual because she did not want the artificial
separation between "intellectuals" and the "masses" that she felt it connoted.²² Sterling
Brown also struggled with this separation. He did not want to align himself with
"intellectuals" and yet felt there was something about his childhood friends and Howard

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David L. Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: The Fight for Equality and the American Century, 1919-1963* (New York: Henry Holt, 2000), 318; W. E. B Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn, an Essay Toward an Autobiography of a Race Concept* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & co, 1940), 255.

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Ralph J. Bunche, Emmett E. Dorsey, and Abram L. Harris, Letter to the Editor, *Fortune*, 30 Oct 1934, Box 24 Folder 10, Bunche Papers, Schomburg; Charles H. Houston and Leon A. Ransom, "The Crawford Case: An Experiment in Social Statesmanship," *The Nation*, 4 Jul 1934. Avery also describes the "Young Turks" resistance to court case based activism, but does not mention Houston's place at the conference. Sheldon Avery, "Up from Washington: William Pickens and the Negro Struggle for Equality 1900-1954" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Oregon, 1970), 195.

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Anna Arnold Hedgeman, *The Trumpet Sounds: A Memoir of Negro Leadership* (New York: Holt, 1964).

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colleagues that separated him from the farmers, day laborers, and itinerant storytellers whom he also enjoyed spending time with.²³

Other Young Turks did not have the same concerns that Brown did. Abram Harris had spent the last ten years establishing himself as an objective social scientist and an intellectual on par with Du Bois and Locke. In a 1929 commencement speech to junior high students, Ralph Bunche lauded “the man who dares, but dares intelligently, the man of ‘infinite resource and sagacity.’”²⁴ Beyond this general exhortation, Bunche defined the specific “Objective or Intellectual or ‘Detached’ Type” of African American as one who did not accept the “situation as is” but understood “its underlying causes and therefore a sounder basis for resisting and attacking it.”²⁵

The Spingarn families (Joel’s and Arthur’s) and Du Bois returned to the house following Friday’s meal and welcome. They had spent the evening reiterating again the importance of this meeting in light of the historical precedents of the First America Conference and then ostensibly turned over the control of the conference to the attendees. Du Bois was happy to note “When anyone got the floor, they really took hold of the thought and did something with it.”²⁶ The attendees elected Elmer Carter, editor of the *Opportunity*, as the leader of the conference, rather a surprising choice. He was one of the oldest of the invited guests and held a position more akin to the organizers than to the

²³ Sterling Allen Brown to Langston Hughes, December 7, 1931, Box 36 Folder 623, Hughes Papers, Beinecke.

²⁴ Ralph Bunche, “Courageousness of the Commonplace” Commencement Address at Randall Junior High School, 18 Jun 1929, Box 43, Bunche Papers, UCLA.

²⁵ Ralph Bunche, “Some Historical and Psychological Factors in Status of Am. Negro,” Northwestern University, Class in Social Psychology, 9 Dec 1936, Box 43, Bunche UCLA.

²⁶ W.E.B. Du Bois, “Youth and Age at America,” *Crisis*, October 1933, 226.

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guests. They also began to describe the current situation of people of African descent in the United States, to see where they held common ground. Outside of this group, they had to prove "the actuality of the problem of the Negro in this country," Cuthbert had recently written, because of "the number of times the whole matter is dismissed as being irrelevant or overemphasized or presented in an unnatural setting."²⁷ Carter was astounded and excited to see a new kind of "freedom from the restraint of racial inferiority" that led to such clarity in describing "the position of the Negro in American life."²⁸

Attendees broke up into many different groups following the opening session. Some prepared for bed feeling the weight of history that Du Bois and Spingarn had imparted. Mabel Byrd in particular felt (at least when thanking Spingarn after the meeting) that the new understanding of their responsibilities "would not have come to us so forcefully had you—those of the first America Conference—not been present to give us perspective."²⁹ Juanita Jackson told Du Bois after the conference that "[m]ore than ever before, I realize what your leadership has meant and continues to mean to our race."³⁰

Others were not so in awe of the preceding generation. They stayed up late talking about the problems with the NAACP, all the new issues the Depression brought about, and just getting acquainted. When Louis Redding, lawyer from Delaware and Pauline

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Marion Cuthbert, "The Negro Today, *Church and Society*, (Jan 1932) 1-2," in *Harlem's Glory: Black Women Writing 1900-1950*, ed. Lorraine Elena Roses and Ruth Elizabeth Randolph (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996).

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Elmer Carter to Spingarn, 20 Sep 1933, Box 95-3 Folder 93, Spingarn Papers MSRC.

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Mabel Byrd to Mr. And Mrs. Spingarn, 6 Sep 1933, Box 95-2 Folder 75, Spingarn Papers MSRC.

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Juanita Jackson to Du Bois, 29 Aug 1933, Reel 40, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

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Young's friend, finally arrived around 10:00 p.m., he "spent a couple of hours in talk with a group who increased [his] sense of a deep momentousness in the Conference."³¹

DURING THE SATURDAY MORNING SESSIONS, the private talks of the night before came to fruition. After a breakfast of fruit, cereal, corned beef hash, and Maryland biscuits, many individuals laid out all their critiques of the NAACP, while some remained silent and awed. In that latter category, Weston sat in a corner, acutely aware of his status as one of the youngest and took copious notes to occupy his hands, despite the glares from those concerned with publicity.³²

At the first session, conferees criticized the NAACP for losing the militancy and radicalism that marked its birth. The NAACP seemed to be cautious and full of only "legal defenders, propagandists, and political lobbyists" while neglecting the needs of the "masses."³³ Conferees had had a wide range of experience with cautious politics, radicals, and everyone in between. Just one person could capture the range of political experience among the conferees. Louis L. Redding proudly described his myriad experiences with African American "reform policies or philosophies." After graduating from the Harvard Law School, he had worked with interracial groups, full of "pious white folk, Quakers et al." that were largely "ultraconservative."³⁴ He had also closely

³¹ Redding to Wilkins, 2 Sep 1933, Reel 18, NAACP Papers Part 11 microfilm.

³² Eben Miller, "Born Along the Color Line: The Second Generation of the Talented Tenth and 'the Problem of the Twentieth Century'" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Brandeis University, 2004), 197.

³³ Avery, "Up from Washington", 198.

³⁴ Redding to Wilkins, 2 Sep 1933, Reel 18, NAACP Papers Part 11 microfilm.

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observed political processes, including “intimate discussions with politicians,” and intervened when something relating to African Americans was raised, all of which he termed moderate activities.³⁵ And finally, he had been “intimate with Communists, have represented them (always white) in court, especially in cases involving the rights of assembly and free speech, and have this year taken the joint cases of three Communists to our State Supreme Court.”³⁶ In addition to more formal legal relationships, Redding had also eaten and argued with Communist leaders. Finally, he also knew something of different kinds of African American life, because he had taught in rural Florida and urban Georgia. At the time of the conference, he practiced law “in small, border Delaware,” which kept him “constantly in intimate touch with Negro life and with a Negro population, urban and rural, which is one-seventh of the general population of the state.”³⁷ Redding later described the opening session,

Rather insistent were the pronouncements of those who opened discussions at the Conference of the imminence of basic change in the political, economic, and social structure of our country. What the change would bring no one would prophesy. Equally insistent was the judgment that the older policies for Negro advancement had failed and were inappropriate to the changed order impending. In view of all of this, it seemed to me a logical necessity that there should be a resolute decision to junk the old policies, followed by a clear-cut outlining of basically new philosophies, or policies. Such new policies I hoped would be adaptable to the Negro masses rather than considerate only of the ‘talented tenth’ (who, incidentally, numerically come nearer being a one-hundredth).³⁸

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Dorsey argued “that the discussions brought out the fact that the old formulae and ideologies of racial adjustment and advancement were no longer adequate. Therefore in our changed world new techniques and philosophies must be advanced.”³⁹

All around the NAACP in the 1930s, “thousands of African Americans organized themselves through Unemployed Councils, rent strikes, and the rank-and-file unionization movement of the early New Deal.”⁴⁰ The Communist Party grew in influence among African Americans. The Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters began to see serious victories as the first large black union. Yet the NAACP “committed its resources to making appeals in courts on a case-by-case basis and agitated by compiling facts and deluging government officials with information.”⁴¹ The NAACP, with its board of influential white and black members, emphasized gradual reform and a moral message, “to reach the conscience of America.”⁴²

Within their criticism of the NAACP’s status quo, conferees wondered how they, as the epitome of the Talented Tenth, would use their privileges. Most everyone there wanted to improve the lives of average African Americans. They had been taught from infancy that they must use their talents to fight the oppression of their race. They had also been encouraged to do their best in all things, and their best had to be better than all the white folk. At the same time, they had did not always know how to relate to workers and people not interested in the same questions as they were. Some, like Anna Arnold and

³⁹ Dorsey to Spingarn, 6 Sep 1933, Box 95-4 Folder 135, Spingarn Papers MSRC.

⁴⁰ Beth Tompkins Bates, “A New Crowd Challenges the Agenda of the Old Guard in the NAACP, 1933-1941,” *American Historical Review* 102, no. 2 (1997): 340.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Aug Meier and Jr. John H. Bracey, “The NAACP as a Reform Movement, 1909-1965: “to Reach the Conscience of America,”” *The Journal of Southern History* 59, no. 1 (1993): 3.

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Sterling Brown, had frequently mingled with all kinds of people. Others, like Abram Harris, restricted themselves mostly to intellectuals and scholars. Many frequently criticized the current state of the “black bourgeoisie.”

There was beauty and trouble within their conception of leadership. This group had succeeded. Despite significant and frequent obstacles due to economics and racism they had found a modicum of success. They supported themselves through intellectual and activist work. Yet that success did not always satisfy. Their peers around the country were trapped in jobs that wasted their talents. E. Franklin Frazier’s close friend Gustavus Steward worked in Ohio as an insurance adjuster, but longed to be a part of an intellectual environment. A generation before, African Americans would have been privileged to have such a middle class job, but Steward knew about the achievements of other African Americans through the pages of *The Crisis* and *The Opportunity*. He could send his materials in and try to be a part of the intellectual community from afar, but it was fundamentally unsatisfactory for him to have so little outlet for his well-informed opinions.⁴³ A few America delegates represented this group and their letters overflowed with enthusiasm at being able to associate with others on their intellectual level; in Frances Williams’ words, America provided “a sense of fellowship with others so the journey seems not too lonely or impossible.”⁴⁴

There was beauty as well in their responsibilities. Responsibility and leadership carried with it not just burden but life-meaning. The discussion about whether intellectuals should be scholars or activists that other intellectuals engaged in was not

⁴³ Gustavus Steward to Frazier, 6 Aug 1927, Frazier Papers MSRC.

⁴⁴ Frances Williams to J.E. Spingarn, 23 Aug 1933, Box 95-12 Folder 494, Spingarn Papers MSRC.

theoretical but a driving reality and need. Some agreed with Du Bois that African Americans bore “a special message for their society and even for humankind, which stemmed from the redemptive power of suffering.”⁴⁵ Each American’s letterbox was filled with requests for them to speak to non-academic groups. Their authority extended far beyond the boundaries of Howard or Fisk to small reading groups, libraries, elementary schools, and high schools.⁴⁶ Sam Dorsey and Ralph Bunche had spent the previous two summers teaching politics to working class individuals. Mabel Byrd believed, “that in attacking together problems of such importance that there emerged a new understanding and comprehension of the responsibilities that are ours.”⁴⁷

The trouble came in that this burden of responsibility was not fully their choice. Those who would have preferred to live their lives in archives or labs unconcerned with racial questions could not. A racist society, the needs of their communities, and the demand for their leadership would not let them. Humiliating encounters with a racist society emphasized to them over and over again that it had to be fought, not accommodated. Perhaps every African American leader before the Civil Rights Movement felt the tension between exploring their own interests and working for their community. Ernest Everett Just decided to abandon America and move permanently to Europe to pursue his science until fascism made that continent even more unbearable.⁴⁸ Booker T. Washington sank thousands of his own dollars into Tuskegee and behind-the-

⁴⁵ Patricia Morton, *Disfigured Images: The Historical Assault on Afro-American Women* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991), 57.

⁴⁶ See Bunche Papers, UCLA; Bunche Papers, Schomburg; Frazier Papers, MSRC.

⁴⁷ Mabel Byrd to Mr. And Mrs. Spingarn, 6 Sep 1933, Box 95-2 Folder 75, Spingarn Papers MSRC.

⁴⁸ See Kenneth R. Manning, *Black Apollo of Science: The Life of Ernest Everett Just* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983).

scenes civil rights work, while satisfying the needs of his own personality by building a monopoly over black public thought.⁴⁹

Conferees alluded to their frustration when they debated white patronage Saturday morning. They unanimously rejected the influence of white power and called for African Americans to have charge of their own identity. Their ability to freely voice this rejection confirmed the wisdom of Wilkins' and Spingarn's decision not to invite whites. When considering the problems of white patronage, YW secretaries might have thought about the unequal power structures within the YW.⁵⁰ Ralph Bunche might have also had in mind the process he had to go through to decide upon the topic for his Ph.D. dissertation and fund it.⁵¹

DELEGATES TOOK A COLLECTIVE BREATH when the discussions stopped for lunch. They shared a meal of cold ham with potato salad and peaches with cream.⁵² The schedule was then free till an evening meeting. Spingarn invited all the delegates to come to the main house for a tour of rooms and his beloved Clematis vines. Some welcomed this opportunity to get to know their host better. Others compared their own rustic accommodations with Spingarn's personal luxury. Virginia Alexander remembered how "prophetic" and "significant" Spingarn's words were during "group expressions between

⁴⁹ David L. Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois--Biography of a Race, 1868-1919*, 1st ed. (New York: H. Holt, 1993); Michael Rudolph West, *The Education of Booker T. Washington* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

⁵⁰ Nancy Marie Robertson, *Christian Sisterhood, Race Relations, and the YWCA, 1906-1946* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007).

⁵¹ Bunche to Edwin R. Embree, 8 Apr 1931; Embree to Bunche, 9 Jul 1941, Box 126, Bunche Papers UCLA.

⁵² Menu, Reel 18, NAACP Papers Part 11 microfilm.

sessions.”⁵³ Weston told Spingarn “that the prophecy you dare speak, based upon intuition, can be well substantiated by objective analysis and interpretation of the historic process of social and human development” (his phrasing evokes the young Abram Harris’ verbose academese.)⁵⁴ Cleveland librarian Thelma Taylor watched Spingarn very closely, quite surprised to “find a white man [...] so free from prejudice or bias.” She “fully enjoyed the meager contact” she had with Spingarn and his brother, and came away from the conference keenly aware “of [Spingarn’s] value—not financially—but spiritually and morally to our race.”⁵⁵

Despite such praise, an anecdote of this tour recounted by Du Bois indicates the awkward place Spingarn found himself in—a liberal interested in forcing America to live up to its democratic promise, not in subverting its economic system, among young people much further to the left, and, again, as a white president of a black organization.⁵⁶ In *Dusk of Dawn*, Du Bois wrote that

I remember one amusing incident: there was a young man in attendance (we will call him Jones), well-educated and in some ways brilliant, but on the other hand, a communist and also irresponsible and unreliable. The members of the conference had been invited up one day to the Spingarn home, a beautiful spacious country mansion with pools and gardens in the English style. Jones stood in the parlor and grinned; and said aloud to the visitors: ‘Comes the revolution, and Commissar Jones will live here!’
Spingarn did not appreciate the joke.⁵⁷

⁵³ Virginia Alexander to J.E. Spingarn, 2 Sep 1933, Box 95-1 Folder 19, Spingarn Papers MSRC.

⁵⁴ “Negro Officers in Coast Guard,” *Chicago Defender*, 12 Aug 1944, 11.

⁵⁵ Thelma Louise Taylor to J. E. Spingarn, August 30, 1933.

⁵⁶ Ross describes Spingarn’s political position as “Noneconomic liberalism.” B. Joyce Ross, *J. E. Spingarn and the Rise of the NAACP, 1911-1939* (New York: Atheneum, 1972), 14.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

As the closest conferee to the communist party, and possessed of a charismatic personality, Commissar Jones was most likely Sam Dorsey.⁵⁸

Underneath a blue sky of sun and a few clouds, those not on the tour took advantage of the outdoor setting.⁵⁹ The attendees fished, played baseball and tennis, swam, and walked through the forests. Ralph Bunche, though an old college sports injury plagued him throughout his life, was always happy to join an athletic event.⁶⁰ The setting furthered several of the goals of the conference. In an early description of the intended nature of the conference, the planning committee wrote that it being held in "beautiful rural surroundings" would give the conferees "an opportunity to indulge in simple recreations of the countryside, rowing, canoeing, fishing, swimming, woodland walks, and the like" which would "give the Conference an informal sense of leisure which could not be obtained by mere discussion in a public hall or urban centre."⁶¹ Sam Dorsey struck up a conversation with Spingarn's daughter, an art student. He introduced her to the paintings of Diego Rivera and later sent her two tickets to a "special showing of his murals."⁶² Frank Frazier spoke with Juanita Jackson. She shared with him the success of

⁵⁸ Eben Miller agrees with me in this. Miller, "Born Along the Color Line", 191.

⁵⁹ "The Weather," *New York Times*, 20 Aug 1933, N11.

⁶⁰ See journal about his travels to Europe and Africa in Box 62, Bunche Papers, UCLA. Excerpted in Ralph J. Bunche and Robert Edgar, *An African American in South Africa: The Travel Notes of Ralph J. Bunche, 28 Sep 1937-1 Jan 1938* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1992).

⁶¹ "Amenia Conference" Description, Reel 18, NAACP Papers Part 11 microfilm. Wilkins explained that the original draft of this document listed snake-hunting as one of the outdoor pleasures; he suggested that "that last diversion may have hinted at Dr. Du Bois's own view of the conference. In later correspondence we dropped the snakes in favor of woodland walks." Roy Wilkins and Tom Mathews, *Standing Fast: The Autobiography of Roy Wilkins* (New York: Viking Press, 1982), 151.

⁶² Dorsey to Spingarn, 6 Sep 1933, Box 95-4 Folder 135, Spingarn Papers MSRC.

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the Baltimore Young People's Forum and invited him to come speak, which he and other Young Turks later did.⁶³

Over the course of the afternoon, new guests began to arrive. Spingarn had invited NAACP board members to sit-in on the conference. He told them that while only the "32 young conferees should take part in the formal discussions, the presence of older and more experienced persons as auditors, and their participation in informal conversations during the afternoons would be of great value to the conferees, and might be of real interest and value to themselves."⁶⁴ NAACP field secretary William Pickens, First Amenia alumnus, had eagerly anticipated the Second conference. He was willing to clear his schedule, even to the extent of postponing a planned European trip, so that he could attend. A certain amount of disappointment came through his letters to Du Bois when he realized he would only be accepted as a day guest.⁶⁵ He remembered that day guests at the first conference had been numerous and eminent, but not an essential part of the conference. Arnold must have greeted him with enthusiasm—she had appreciated his wit at winter parties in Harlem.⁶⁶

Mary White Ovington and James Weldon Johnson drove over from their homes near Great Barrington, Massachusetts. Spingarn's neighbor and prominent architect Louis Mumford was excited "by the scene at the lake" Wednesday during the tent setup and

⁶³ Juanita Jackson to Frazier, 29 Dec 1933, Folder 2 Box 131-50, Frazier Papers MSRC.

⁶⁴ J. E. Spingarn, Invitation to the Amenia Conference, Reel 18, NAACP Papers Part 11 microfilm.

⁶⁵ Pickens to Spingarn, 8 Aug 1933, Reel 18, NAACP Papers Part 11 microfilm; Pickens to Spingarn, 8 Jun 1933, Box 18, NAACP Papers Part 11 microfilm.

⁶⁶ Hedgeman, *The Trumpet Sounds*.

thought it would "be fun to attend the discussion" Saturday night.⁶⁷ Max Yergan stopped by in the middle of his Spingarn Award tour that summer.

After the majority of day guests arrived, the late afternoon afforded the chance for a group photograph. Those who had been counting on no publicity might have worried how the picture would be used. The photographer set up the conferees and day guests in four rows in front of the main meeting tent. The resulting picture shows at least some of the physical diversity of the attendees. Frances Williams and Marion Cuthbert sit on the lawn, with legs demurely crossed next to Frank Wilson. Williams hides behind a shy expression, half-moon glasses, and a slouch hat. Cuthbert is bareheaded, with a flower pinned to her lapel. Seated between Weston and Spingarn, Mabel Byrd, stares fixedly into the camera, ready to challenge the world and yet with shoulders a little slumped in weariness. Du Bois is one of the few looking off into the distance instead of into the camera. In front of him sits Virginia Alexander, in a gracefully embroidered coat. A group of women, dressed quite fashionably in suit coats and pearls, sat uncomfortably on the lawn. Ralph Bunche stands in the back corner in black coat and white tie. Ira Reid sits nonchalantly in the front row in short pants and an open collar, holding a camera.⁶⁸ E. Franklin Frazier looks rather uncomfortable, while in front of him Moran Weston challenges the camera with his cool. Next to Weston, Juanita Jackson, dressed in a modest dark dress and lace collar, leans eagerly forward, her face lit by a smile and her hair crowed by a big bow. Next to her Thelma Taylor in a white beret sits back with a skeptical look on her face. Walter White, dressed head to toe in white and with one of the

⁶⁷ Mumford to Spingarn, 17 Aug 1933, Box 9, Spingarn Papers NYPL.

⁶⁸ "Masters of Arts" *Crisis* Aug 1925, p 192.

lightest faces in the crowd, almost fades into the tent behind him. He leans slightly into Charles Hamilton Houston. Ovington, petite and white haired, grins to be in a crowd of such vibrant young people. She had recently returned from a fundraising tour around the country; throughout which she met young folks eager to know about the NAACP and to start new branches. At sixty-nine, her hope for NAACP's future lay not in her squabbling contemporaries, but in the young surrounding her waiting for the photo to be taken.⁶⁹ She stands with Lillian Alexander to her right and two of her old NAACP colleagues, William Pickens and James Weldon Johnson, immediately behind her. Johnson wore his "fedora at the jaunty angle befitting 'Gentleman Jim.'"⁷⁰

After a dinner of vegetable soup, fish with cucumbers and roast chicken, the evening discussion commenced under the tent, bringing with it a different tenor to the gathering. The introduction of so many walking out of the NAACP's past and future encouraged more reform-minded conferees to speak up. Individuals were no longer comfortable with the morning's strident critique of the NAACP or even leaning towards communism. The "untrammelled" space felt constricted.⁷¹ Discussion flowed towards "a democracy that was reforming itself."⁷² Without a clear consensus, communism was dropped as impossible.

⁶⁹ Mary White Ovington and Ralph Luker, *Black and White Sat Down Together: The Reminiscences of an NAACP Founder* (New York: Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 1995), 321; Carolyn Wedin, *Inheritors of the Spirit: Mary White Ovington and the Founding of the NAACP* (New York: Wiley, 1998), 264.

⁷⁰ Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: The Fight for Equality and the American Century, 1919-1963*.

⁷¹ Miller, "Born Along the Color Line", 191.

⁷² Findings Committee Report, Reel 18, NAACP Papers Part 11 microfilm.

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To Louis Redding's disappointment, reform suited the temper of the delegates better than revolution. He blamed this on the desire of the delegates to maintain a middle class lifestyle; he felt the conferees recede from the "notion of impending change in our order" in favor of "protecting their personal security" within "the existing economic order."⁷³ Among this professional group perhaps the fear of losing their jobs within this system, jobs so scarce within their communities, outweighed the idea of overturning the whole system. Or perhaps no adequate alternative system was proposed. Communism had inherent flaws—it had not yet proved its ability to transform racism. Most of the attendees seemed to feel the necessity of dealing with the world as presented to them. They could agree with Pickens, who had argued in 1931, "'Even if Communism were established here,' he wrote, 'the Negro would need to take care of himself against prejudice—race and color prejudice—just as he has to do now. Communism could not immediately change the history and psychology of the American white people.'"⁷⁴ Bunche and Harris, moving to the top as leaders of the group, both appeared to advocate socialism more than revolutionary Marxism.

Away from a discussion of communism and revolution, conferees turned their attention toward their "attitude toward any programme: (a) voluntary and involuntary segregation with group loyalty and nationalism, (b) dispersion, loss of racial identity at least spiritually, and entrance into the groups and programme of other groups and people"⁷⁵

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Sheldon Avery, *Up from Washington: William Pickens and the Negro Struggle for Equality, 1900-1954* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1989), 133.

⁷⁵ W. E. B. Du Bois, "Youth and Age at Amenia," *Crisis*, Oct 1933.

At the First Amenia Conference in 1916, delegates debated about the influence of Washington, who had advocated a form of self-segregation meant to improve blacks' economic status. They largely agreed that fighting for civil rights and integration made more sense than Washington's plan. Since that time, Marcus Garvey had motivated a million African Americans to join with his picture of black nationhood, which included militant language and a mythology surrounding Africa. Amenia conferees did not agree on any one understanding of nationalism. Many refused to reject it completely, like the integration program of the NAACP tended to, others warned of the deleterious effects of "militant racialism," and still others embraced self-segregation.⁷⁶

E. Franklin Frazier declared that nationalism was inescapable "because of external pressure applied to" African Americans.⁷⁷ Black people would have to support each other and maintain strong communities. This did not by any means connote that Frazier accepted segregation. Indeed, Frazier adamantly refused to bow to any semblance of segregation while working for Atlanta University. His article "The Pathology of Race Prejudice" inflamed the white community of Atlanta to the extent that Frazier and his wife feared lynching. They left hastily for Chicago, where Frazier pursued a doctorate. In that article, Frazier described racism as a white psychological pathology. He argued that "the Negro-complex obtrudes itself on all planes of thought. Health programs are slighted because it is argued Negroes will increase; the selective draft is opposed because the Negro will be armed; woman suffrage is fought because colored women will vote."⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Dorsey to Spingarn, 6 Sep 1933, Box 95-4 Folder 135, Spingarn Papers MSRC.

⁷⁷ Redding to Wilkins, 2 Sep 1933, Reel 18, NAACP Papers Part 11 microfilm.

⁷⁸ E. Franklin Frazier, "The Pathology of Race Prejudice," *Forum*, June 1927.

Frazier later explained his statement about nationalism at Amenia to Walter White; “I was advocating a revolutionary nationalism; that is, the development of racial solidarity as a cohesive force among a people who were exploited by the white master class in this country.”⁷⁹

Redding called Frazier’s idea “fundamental” as long as people like Marcus Garvey were avoided. He warned that “[t]he chief dangers in its adoption are that charlatans and demagogues within the group may use it for personal aggrandizement and that it may be so overworked as injuriously to isolate Negroes from the main stream of American thought.”⁸⁰

Anna Arnold found solace in nationalism. In ten years of teaching in the South and working for the YWCA, she had faced the implacable hatred of most whites and the staunch “patience” of the few white liberals. From her experiences, she felt “that no Negro could expect any white person to love, respect and honor any people except white people.”⁸¹ Out of this realization, she saw “only one way to freedom—nationalism.”⁸² Though at this point, she was not educated in the complexities of black nationalism, she “knew that somehow the great talent and spirit of Negroes must be developed into a unified voice to demand not alms, but its birthright.”⁸³ At the same time, she was in the midst of a major reconsideration of her life’s work. She had moved to Harlem five years

⁷⁹ Frazier to White, 15 Jun 1934, Box 131-16 Folder 32, Frazier Papers MSRC.

⁸⁰ Redding to Wilkins, 2 Sep 1933, Reel 18, NAACP Papers Part 11 microfilm.

⁸¹ Hedgeman, *The Trumpet Sounds*, 43.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 44.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

before, grateful to get away from whites, yet Harlem had not offered the freedom from the color line that she had envisioned. She had begun to realize that

I could no longer merely talk at white people. I would need to work with them. In the light of my concern that Christians should lead in the struggle against segregated facilities, I needed to find out what the possibilities were for basic communication between Negroes and whites, what the roles of the Christian Negro woman and the Christian white woman were. At that moment I was deeply grateful for the national and international character of Harlem, for it had given me intimate knowledge of the achievements, courage, and talent of American Negroes. White people needed some of the experience which had been mine in Harlem. Perhaps I could find ways to share some of what I had learned.⁸⁴

Perhaps it was her contribution to the discussion of nationalism that led Spingarn to declare she was “one of the brightest women at the Conference.”⁸⁵

The Depression had made even Du Bois, previously the standard bearer for NAACP’s policy of integration, feel the weight of inevitably that bore down on the extensive systems of *de jure* and *de facto* segregation throughout the United States.⁸⁶ Du Bois began to propose an extensive system of “cooperative and collective economies.”⁸⁷ In May 1933, only a few months before Amenian, Du Bois published “Marxism and the Negro Problem” in the *Crisis*, which declared that racism superseded class conflict. The exploitation of African Americans came “not from a black capitalistic class but from the

⁸⁴ Anna Arnold Hedgeman, *The Trumpet Sounds: A Memoir of Negro Leadership* (New York: Holt, 1964), 63-64.

⁸⁵ Spingarn to Du Bois, 25 Oct 1933, Reel 40, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

⁸⁶ This weight of inevitability manifested itself as “facing the facts.” He later explained that “[t]his plan did not establish a new segregation; it did not advocate segregation as the final solution of the race problem; exactly the contrary; but it did face the facts and faced them with thoughtfully mapped effort.” Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn*, 305.

⁸⁷ Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: The Fight for Equality and the American Century, 1919-1963*, 311.

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white capitalists and equally from the white proletariat.”⁸⁸ What African Americans needed was “such internal organization as will protect him from both parties, and such practical economic insight as will prevent inside the race group any large development of capitalistic exploitation.”⁸⁹ Du Bois’s promotion of just such an organization would lead to his break with the NAACP, a break which pivoted around his support for self-segregation in a *Crisis* article a few months after the Amenia Conference.⁹⁰

Ira Reid came away from the conference with a completely different sense of the debate over nationalism. He had worked for the National Urban League for almost a decade. The NUL focused on helping new migrants to urban centers “assimilate” to the north based on the models of assimilation that came out of the University of Chicago, as Touré Reed argues.⁹¹ Reid brought with him to Amenia a persistent sense that this focused had been for not; he believed that “a program of assimilation had failed.” At the conference, however, he “saw concrete evidence of its complete acceptance by the young Negro. Were not the general issues discussed, and the particularized situations that so many wished to discuss, apt examples of the effect of an education toward social, cultural and economic assimilation?”⁹² Reid hoped that unionization, rather than a focus on

⁸⁸ W. E. B. Du Bois, “Marxism and the Negro Problem,” in *W.E.B. Du Bois: A Reader*, ed. David L. Lewis (New York: H. Holt and Co., (1933) 1995), 543.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ For a few readers, Du Bois’ plans for racial businesses could use the new regimes in Germany and Italy somewhat as examples. One individual impressed by Du Bois’s plans wrote Walter White after the 1933 NAACP annual conference that “I am even in favor of a Negro brand of a kind of Fascism which would substitute economic power within the race for the usual political aims of like groups in other countries.” William E. Hill to Walter White, 4 Jun 1933, Reel 40, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

⁹¹ Touré F Reed, *Not Alms but Opportunity: The Urban League & the Politics of Racial Uplift, 1910-1950* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008).

⁹² Ira Reid to Spingarn, 2 Sep 1933, Box 95-9 Folder 380, Spingarn Papers MSRC.

nationalism, would help African Americans find jobs and be able to participate in the economic advantages of collective bargaining. He also thought that unionization, rather than “narrow racialism,” would help stabilize black communities suffering “‘a breakdown of cultural controls over conduct’” from “a broader class vision.”⁹³

In contrast to Du Bois and the others who saw nationalism as inevitable, Ralph Bunche and Abram Harris rejected nationalism as a tragic pursuit. In response to Du Bois’s writing on Marxism in 1933, Harris encouraged Du Bois to see Marx’s approach to racial problems—“labor in a white skin cannot emancipate itself without emancipating labor in a black skin”—as adequate.⁹⁴ Bunche also responded to Du Bois; in his notes for an undated speech from this era, Bunche rejected Du Bois’ calls for a separate African American economy. He spoke adamantly against “race philosophy,” which he saw as “at one and the same time a handy device for the exploitation of people and a refuge for the tired ‘racial radical’ who has grown weary of a long and seemingly futile struggle for equality.”⁹⁵ Du Bois’s ideas would only lead to a kind of “double oppression” for African Americans. This double oppression did not, as one might first presume, come from race and class. In Bunche’s estimation it emerged from two layers of class oppression—first by “a select assortment of ‘middle-class’ Negroes,” who then “would be in turn oppressed by the broader white capitalist economy in which we all live and must continue to live until fundamental changes are made in the order.”⁹⁶

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Reed, *Not Alms but Opportunity*, 101. The middle quote is Reid in 1932, the others Reed.

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As quoted in Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: The Fight for Equality and the American Century, 1919-1963*, 309-10.

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Ralph Bunche, “Tragedy of Racial Introversion (Phobia)” Speech Box 43, Bunche Papers UCLA.

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What then were Bunche's suggestions? First, African Americans could not give up on the fight for "minority rights," because this was a question of tactics, not fundamental issues. Second, Americans in general needed to identify and address the fundamental structural issue behind the conflict between the white and black races. He identified this conflict as the outcome of Europe's imperialistic expansion, which was economic to its core. Racial conflict, whether in Africa, Asia or the United States, had to be traced back to the economic motivations; "the only sure way to fight the evils of race prejudice is by articulating every manifestation of racial persecution to its source--the desire to exploit economically."⁹⁷ Simply put, "all attempts to meet racial persecution by programs of racial self-sufficiency and ideologies of racial glorification are suicidal."⁹⁸

In a final cautionary note in the discussion on nationalism, Sam Dorsey encouraged the conferees to remain attentive to the long-range goal of integration. Despite all the criticism foisted on NAACP policies and actions of the last several years, integration into the full civil, political, social, and economic life of the country had to remain the long term goal.⁹⁹

Charles Hamilton Houston moved the discussion away from nationalism to politics. He suggested that African Americans distribute themselves among all the political groups in order to increase their influence. African Americans had historically been linked to the Republican Party, in those places where voting was possible. Yet the Republican Party repeatedly failed to address the practical needs of African Americans.

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Ibid.

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Ibid.

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Redding to Wilkins, 2 Sep 1933, Reel 18, NAACP Papers Part 11 microfilm; Wilkins and Mathews, *Standing Fast*, 152.

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Long before the 1930s, even the rhetoric of civil rights by Lincoln's Party had disappeared.¹⁰⁰ As black people moved north in the Great Migration, they left districts with fifty years of experience disenfranchising them and entered precincts where voting was finally (mostly) unfettered. Most African Americans voted for Herbert Hoover in 1932, but the NAACP had begun encouraging African Americans to desert the Republican Party in a few specific contests. They targeted the senators who had approved Hoover's 1930 nomination to the Supreme Court, John J. Parker. Parker was an avowed and virulent racist. The NAACP vehemently protested his nomination, and coupled with other reasons, succeeded in convincing the Senate to reject Parker's nomination. In the next election, the NAACP encouraged African Americans to desert Pro-Parker Republican Senators, which they did in overwhelming numbers. The incumbents were defeated in both cases. By 1933, it seemed African Americans could be a powerful northern voting bloc that could support whichever candidate promised greater change for black communities.¹⁰¹ Political observers like Charles Houston might have feared African Americans would become the pawns of the Democrats as they had those of the Republicans. This was a savvy suggestion meant to make democracy work for African Americans—not by any means overthrow it.

AS THE DISCUSSION CONCLUDED, the day guests left and gave the overnight guests again the comfort of a smaller audience. Talk and laughter among some went late into the

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The first thorough investigation of the Republican Party's betrayal of African Americans came from Rayford Logan, Howard historian and Amenia attendee but for an injury. Rayford Whittingham Logan, *The Betrayal of the Negro, from Rutherford B. Hayes to Woodrow Wilson* (New York: Collier Books, 1965).

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Kenneth W. Goings, *The NAACP Comes of Age: The Defeat of Judge John J. Parker, Blacks in the Diaspora*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990); Harvard Sitkoff, *A New Deal for Blacks: The Emergence of Civil Rights as a National Issue*, 3 vols. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 85-86.

evening. In his *Crisis* article about the weekend, he harrumphed “there was on the part of a few a certain, not unexpected, but nevertheless startling lack of self-discipline. It has always been interesting to me to see how young people in many countries organized their government and discipline and enforce it with a certain ruthlessness. But here out of twenty-six, five did as they pleased with regard to noise, sleep, and enjoyment with utter disregard of the perfectly evident desires of the rest, and to cap the climax, the rest uttered no protest. I have seen evidence of this sort of thing among young colored people elsewhere. It is for us and the race a new and pressing problem.”¹⁰²

Despite his frustration with this misbehavior, Du Bois was also disappointed that no one wished to sing together. In his *Crisis* article about the conference, Du Bois bemoaned his discovery that “these young people could not sing.”¹⁰³ Unlike other national groups, who in similar circumstances would burst into song, this group was musically mute. Du Bois snidely remarked that “We did not know any songs and we could not sing them. We could not even try. We were too sophisticated.”¹⁰⁴ Perhaps he had in mind the conviviality of the first conference, of which he remarked “[t]here was present a pervading and saving sense of humor that laughed the poseur straight off the rostrum.”¹⁰⁵ Two things are seemingly evident here; perhaps the attitude of the new generation embodied the “poseurs” ridiculed roundly by the older generation, or perhaps

¹⁰² Du Bois, “Youth and Age at Amenia,” 227.

¹⁰³ Du Bois, “Youth and Age at Amenia,” 227.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ W. E. B. Du Bois, “The Amenia Conference,” in *W. E. B. Du Bois: A Reader*, ed. Herbert Aptheker (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1925).

the humor of the younger generation, evident to other participants, remained opaque to Du Bois.

Not all participants agreed that sophistication and over-seriousness permeated the air. Indeed, Wenonah Bond argued that serious discussions at the conference succeeded only at the behest of jokes and comedy at other times. She wrote,

It was a grand crowd—nice people with whom to swim and row and walk and play baseball, and exchange jokes; people who do successful jobs, yet who have time to follow hobbies and avocations with enthusiasm. People who could talk of serious matters until five A.M. yet laugh hilariously at an eight o'clock breakfast. They know that the man or woman who tries to solve weighty problems must have a sense of humor and proportion, or he is lost.¹⁰⁶

Sunday morning, after the 8 o'clock breakfast of fruit, fish cake, cereal, bacon and eggs, Spingarn made an impassioned plea.¹⁰⁷ He was frustrated that there had yet to be any discussion of a particular plan. He had heard only generalized theory discussed so far. According to Harris, he kept "expecting someone to work out the ideas of a new program and then tell the administrative leaders of the Association how these ideas can be put into practice day by day."¹⁰⁸ The conferees did not believe so heartily in the NAACP that they wanted to discuss its future in detail. Nor did they feel comfortable writing distinct points to pursue like the First Amenia delegates had.

Sunday afternoon brought more play and individual discussion. Mary White Ovington chatted with Wenonah Bond about the successful organization of the YWCA. Ovington's concern with the future of the NAACP centered upon the lack of connection

¹⁰⁶ Wenonah Bond, "Impressions of the Second Amenia Conference," Box 95-13 Folder 517, Spingarn Papers MSRC.

¹⁰⁷ Thelma Louise Taylor to Spingarn, 30 Aug 1933, Box 95-10 Folder 441, Spingarn Papers MSRC.

¹⁰⁸ Harris to Spingarn, 27 Jul 1934, Box 5 Folder 3, Spingarn Papers NYPL.

between New York and local branches.¹⁰⁹ Ovington's greatest desire by this point was to break the bureaucratic hold of the national organization over the branches. She had resigned as chairman in 1932 so she could devote more time and energy to the branches, starting with a country-wide tour. She would have been happy to discuss social work with Bond because she had been befriending social workers and other women involved in settlement work since her own days as a settlement worker. She was one of the few in the national office to recognize and valorize the hard working black women at the center of branches. Her biographer explained, "She noticed over the years of increasing New York City-centered bureaucratization, that 'no one pays attention' to the branches 'except to beg them for money,' and that when branches *were* recognized, 'the showy people are noticed, but not the hard workers.'"¹¹⁰

The Sunday evening session commenced with Scotch broth, roast beef, fish with cucumbers, green vegetable, corn, potatoes, and "salad romaine."¹¹¹ After the ice cream, cake, and coffee a concrete discussion of the problems of the masses and the New Deal ensued. In reaction to a call for more African American representation in the federal government, particularly to ensure that New Deal help was equitably distributed, Johnson might have shared his own experience with the first "Black Cabinet." During Teddy Roosevelt's and Howard Taft's administrations, a group of "colored men who held important federal positions in the capital" met frequently to discuss "the political state of the nation, with special reference to its Negro citizens." Johnson believed that this group,

¹⁰⁹ Ovington to Spingarn 22 Aug 1933, Box 95-9 Folder 353, Spingarn Papers MSRC.

¹¹⁰ Wedin, *Inheritors of the Spirit: Mary White Ovington and the Founding of the NAACP*, 182.

¹¹¹ Menu, Reel 18, NAACP Papers Part 11 microfilm.

even though it was in the shadow of Booker T. Washington, had had “considerable influence and power.” Yet since Taft’s administration, presidents had “adopted a policy of appointing fewer and fewer Negroes to important positions; the lowest mark, close to zero, being reached in President Hoover’s administration.”¹¹² The younger group in attendance would never have experienced black political power in Washington; Teddy Roosevelt’s distant cousin had yet to assemble the team of advisors under Mary McLeod Bethune who would become the more famous “Black Cabinet.”

That evening, some conferees presented “the position of the Negro in the agrarian economy of the South.”¹¹³ Then Spingarn’s friend and neighbor Henry Morgenthau, Jr., head of the Farm Credit Administration who a year later became FDR’s Secretary of the Treasury, rose to give a speech about potential openings for African Americans in the New Deal administration.¹¹⁴ Morgenthau was on a scouting mission. He wanted to appoint an African American adviser and African American agents “under the ameliorative Farm Credit Administration.”¹¹⁵

Three conferees had experience wrestling with the powers that be in Washington. Dorsey had spent the previous few months petitioning the agencies charged with realizing the National Industrial Recovery Act, the last act of Roosevelt’s First Hundred Days, to appoint an African American on the Labor Advisory Board. He knew, “a Negro on the

¹¹² Johnson, *Along This Way*, 239.

¹¹³ Elmer Carter to Spingarn, 20 Sep 1933, Box 95-3 Folder 93, Spingarn Papers MSRC.

¹¹⁴ “Henry Morgenthau, Jr. (1934-1945)” History of the Treasury: Secretaries of the Treasury.
<http://www.treas.gov/education/history/secretaries/hmorgenthaujr.shtml> (accessed January 13, 2008).

¹¹⁵ Redding to Wilkins, 2 Sep 1933, Reel 18, NAACP Papers Part 11 microfilm.

board couldn't bring about 'the revolution' but it would be something."¹¹⁶ The Wednesday before the Amenia conference Du Bois wrote to encourage his work, "I think your move in the N.I.R.A. is excellent and it is really in the line of what the N.A.A.C.P. and other organizations ought to be doing," but lamented, "I am afraid it will not."¹¹⁷ The week after Amenia, Mabel Byrd interviewed with the Department of Commerce to be the advisor Dorsey recommended.¹¹⁸ Her term there will be discussed in the subsequent chapter. Houston had spent a frustrating few days earlier that week trying to get in to see the president about anti-lynching legislation.

Redding believed that the evening was a success; "I left the Conference believing that the thought given to the concrete problems of Negro farmers in the South (and these, after all, are a large sector of the Negro mass) was a most valuable accomplishment, made more valuable by what seemed like the promise of" African Americans employed within the FCA.¹¹⁹ The attendees at Amenia did not trust white paternalism to distribute New Deal relief among white and black people. Rather, they suggested, "it is absolutely indispensable that in this attempt of the government to control agriculture and industry, there be adequate Negro representations on all boards and field staffs."¹²⁰

After surveying this crowd of young African American intellectuals, Morgenthau insisted, according to Spingarn, "on having a man who has grown up with the problem and knows it from the ground up, rather than a professor of economics or an intellectual

¹¹⁶ Dorsey to Du Bois, n.d. [Jul 1933], Reel 39, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

¹¹⁷ Du Bois to Dorsey, 16 Aug 1933, Reel 39, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

¹¹⁸ Myra Colson Callis to Du Bois, 24 Aug 1933, Reel 39, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

¹¹⁹ Spingarn to Du Bois, 24 Aug 1933, Reel 40, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

¹²⁰ Findings Committee Report, Reel 18, NAACP Papers Part 11 microfilm.

who knows it only from books[.] Harris is exactly the type he objects to, and Pickens the type he wants. If Pickens could only get on with people, he would be all right, but there must be people of his general type who would be of real service in such a position.”¹²¹ Upon further discussion, Morgenthau decided his ideal candidate for an advisor was Du Bois, which came rather as a shock to Spingarn and Du Bois. Spingarn loved the idea, though he suggested that Du Bois would rather frighten the south and build too much political opposition. Du Bois shrugged off the question.¹²² He would not be persuaded by Spingarn to take up a federal position again.

Spingarn later suppressed all mention of Morgenthau’s visit. At a time when a “Black Cabinet” seemed as distant and illusory as an interracial workers union (though just as full of promise), perhaps Spingarn feared scaring the FCA official away from the idea with publicity.

LOUIS REDDING LEFT AT MIDNIGHT AND DROVE THROUGH THE NIGHT, “so excited mentally that, without sleep or desire for it, I drove westward until 5 P.M., on Monday, continually mulling over aspects of the discussions.”¹²³ For those he left behind, there was time for one final session. Different individuals aired final thoughts on the conference. From Du Bois’s and Spingarn’s corner came a distinct air of disapproval and disappointment.¹²⁴ Spingarn had wished for a specific program. Carter tried to temper Spingarn’s disappointment by explaining, “The conference was composed, for the most

¹²¹ Spingarn to Du Bois, 24 Aug 1933, Reel 40, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

¹²² Spingarn to Du Bois, 24 Aug 1933, Reel 40, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

¹²³ Redding to Wilkins, 2 Sep 1933, Reel 18, NAACP Papers Part 11 microfilm.

¹²⁴ Harris to Spingarn, 27 Jul 1934, Box 5 Folder 3, Spingarn Papers NYPL.

part, of people from diverse sections of the country with little or no actual knowledge of the administrative difficulties of that organization. To expect this group to reconstruct the program of the NAACP or any other organization then, was to expect the impossible.”¹²⁵

Du Bois had wished conferees would agree with him; that “such insistence upon the compelling importance of the economic factor that this would lead to a project for a planned program for making the racial segregation.”¹²⁶ Houston, too, was disappointed that the conference had failed to achieve a specific plan; he later called it the “anemic” conference.¹²⁷ Some of the women must have been disappointed to have no formal discussion of women’s place or practical employment statistics—despite the desire to discuss issues particular to women that several brought with them.¹²⁸

Spingarn and Du Bois could not dampen enthusiasm for the conference among many of the conferees. The first point many mentioned in thank you letters was the intellectual community they had found. Frances Williams wrote Walter White that “Thelma Taylor, Juanita Jackson, Hazel Brown, Bunch, Houston, Sterling Brown, Abe Harris were worth crossing a continent to know.”¹²⁹ Pauline Young treasured “the thot stimulus and the feeling of optimism I received from the Second Amenian Conference with its galaxy of brains and spirit,”¹³⁰ In small communities far and wide they felt

¹²⁵ Elmer Carter to Spingarn, 20 Sep 1933, Box 95-3 Folder 93, Spingarn Papers MSRC.

¹²⁶ Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn*, 301.

¹²⁷ Genna Rae McNeil, *Groundwork: Charles Hamilton Houston and the Struggle for Civil Rights* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), 88.

¹²⁸ Anna Arnold, Hazel Browne, Wenonah Bond Registration Blanks, Box 95-13 Folder 523, Spingarn Papers MSRC.

¹²⁹ Frances Williams to White, 23 Aug 1933, Reel 18, NAACP Papers Part 11 microfilm.

¹³⁰ Pauline Young to the Spingarns, 11 Sep 1933, Box 95-12 Folder 513, Spingarn Papers MSRC.

lonely and unable to communicate with others who had similar intellectual interests, but had found minds willing to engage on the same level.

Secondly, conferees could not agree with Spingarn that nothing concrete came out of the conference. "I have never before had an experience so illuminating and thought-provoking," wrote Edward Lovett. "I am unable to express the extent to which I have been stimulated to service."¹³¹ Juanita Jackson considered "it the finest conference I have attended. The trends of thought revealed, the information furnished the possible techniques and programs given, the interesting personalities—all were extremely helpful to me. In some very pressing problems confronting our group here, I received definite guidance."¹³²

More seasoned conference goers tempered their praise. Ira Reid declared that, of the many conferences he had attended, Amenia "is one of the very few that I have been constrained to think upon constructively when it was done."¹³³ Sam Dorsey assured Spingarn that "I have talked with many of the men that were there and they all seemed to think that a much needed clarification of the issues now besetting American life, was achieved."¹³⁴ In their minds, at least the first goal of description had been accomplished successfully. Dorsey was unlikely to praise Spingarn simply out of politeness.

THROUGHOUT THE CONFERENCE, and especially as they packed their belongings, climbed into cars, and made their way to the train station, Amenia attendees considered

¹³¹ Edward P. Lovett to Spingarn, 26 Aug 1933, Box 95-7 Folder 288, Spingarn Papers MSRC.

¹³² Juanita Jackson to Spingarn, 29 Aug 1933, Box 95-6 Folder 233, Spingarn Papers MSRC.

¹³³ Ira Reid to Spingarn, 2 Sep 1933, Box 95-9 Folder 380, Spingarn Papers MSRC.

¹³⁴ Dorsey to Spingarn, 6 Sep 1933, Box 95-4 Folder 135, Spingarn Papers MSRC.

their responsibility as leaders and intellectuals. They were quite self-conscious of their role as educated leaders; as Marion Cuthbert explained “the experience will be the means of crystallizing for some of the group certain convictions and, moreover, will be an impetus toward personal achievement and the definite acceptance of group responsibility which will have a compounding effect upon the way the racial group will develop in the next ten years.”¹³⁵

Conferees’ leadership roles intertwined with two primary considerations—the immediate needs of the masses and the need for careful social science scholarship. While these two could interact, they could also react as oil to water. Anna Arnold suggested this second impulse when she explained her reaction to being called an intellectual; she was “both flattered and disturbed to be called an intellectual because my recent experience with the problems of the masses of people made me fear words which might separate us.”¹³⁶ Though certainly meaning the specific word “intellectual” would divide, Arnold might have also been advocating actions over words.

In contrast, Wilkins, Harris, and Bunche suggested solutions embedded in their belief in the power of words. Wilkins believed that “a fluid body of informed Negro opinion and influence is indispensable.”¹³⁷ This would take the form of a nation-wide “propagandizing bureau” that would “concern itself with manifold and intricate problems affecting Negroes, these problems varying with time and place.”¹³⁸ Harris had been

¹³⁵ Marion Cuthbert to Spingarn, 11 Sep 1933, Box 95-4 Folder 121, Spingarn Papers MSRC.

¹³⁶ Hedgeman, *The Trumpet Sounds*, 62.

¹³⁷ Redding to Wilkins, 2 Sep 1933, Reel 18, NAACP Papers Part 11 microfilm.

¹³⁸ Ibid. Wilkins suggested later that he had advocated this as “a small slap at Arthur Spingarn and the N.A.A.C.P. board for dismissing the expansive ideas I had brought back from the Mississippi delta as too

suggesting something similar since late 1932. He desired to organize “a black lectureship bureau whose members would tour college campuses and bring radical social and economic concepts to the fore.”¹³⁹ Throughout the 1930s, Harris tried to meld social activism and scholarship (later in his position at the University of Chicago, he turned almost entirely to scholarship). He mined the ideas of Marx for readily applicable solutions to the problems of the working class.

Bunche also believed social science scholarship could answer the problems of humanity. Furthermore, he believed “that the Negro of all scholars must first develop a broad and international background if his contributions to the solution of our own peculiar domestic problem are to make much impress.”¹⁴⁰ Only “an intelligent analysis of the problems of the group in terms of the broad social forces which determine its condition” could support a “realistic program for any minority group in modern America.”¹⁴¹ While Bunche placed great faith in the social sciences to communicate the fundamental problems of society to their students, he had far less hope in the transmission channels—the universities. He viewed them as inevitably controlled by the moneyed interests. In particular, the black colleges and universities had to bow to wealthy white philanthropists and Christian missionary boards in order to receive

expensive for the times.” Wilkins and Mathews, *Standing Fast*, 152. Holloway suggests that with this statement Wilkins barely concealed “his faith in the centrality of the NAACP.” Jonathan Scott Holloway, *Confronting the Veil: Abram Harris, Jr., E. Franklin Frazier, and Ralph Bunche, 1919-1941* (Chapel Hill [N.C.]: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 149.

¹³⁹ Harris to Du Bois, 26 Dec 1933, Reel 40, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

¹⁴⁰ Bunche to Holcombe, 28 Feb 1931, Box 126 Folder 4, Bunche Papers UCLA.

¹⁴¹ Ralph J. Bunche, “A Critical Analysis of the Tactics and Programs of Minority Groups,” *The Journal of Negro Education* 4, no. 3 (1935): 320.

continued funding.¹⁴² Yet, Bunche believed that if the social sciences were taught in their fundamental form, students would find their way to seeing the causes underlying society's functioning.

Wenonah Bond believed a third way had been found through this discussion of words versus actions—the conferees had each learned the benefit of the other group's way. In her review of the conference, she suggested “that those who ‘know’ have been stimulated to ‘do or die,’ and that those [who] have been ‘going places and doing things’ will be found digging up facts with which to strengthen their work and their appeal.”¹⁴³

This mutual learning did not come through the published “Findings” of the conference, which emphasized structural analysis over practical programs. The “intelligent analysis” that occurred over the weekend of August 18-21, 1933 led initially to a document published at length and in abbreviated form in black newspapers across the country. This Findings document was compiled by a committee chaired by Charles Hamilton Houston, with Anna Arnold and Hazel Browne as secretaries. Other committee members included Ira DeA. Reid, Abram L. Harris, and Mabel Byrd.¹⁴⁴ (Anna Arnold

¹⁴² Bunche's critique of the compromises Black colleges made to the forces of capitalism was echoed by Fisk President Thomas Jones in his response to Du Bois's suggestion that Jones hire E. Franklin Frazier. Jones said, “We need a man of pretty careful judgment, diplomatic temperament and with an appreciation of the spiritual and moral value in social work as well as the scientific theory and technical training which are required of a good social worker. It is on this matter of personality and tact about which I have questions regarding Mr. Frazier. While he doubtless could make great success in one of our northern schools or in Fisk in any other position than this one which calls for close cooperation with a representative of the southern Methodist Church, I doubt if he would be happy in this relationship.” Jones quoted in Holloway, *Confronting the Veil*, 141-42.

¹⁴³ Bond, “Impressions of the Second Amenia Conference,” Box 95-13 Folder 517, Spingarn Papers MSRC.

¹⁴⁴ Press Release Distributed by the “Publicity Committee,” Composed of Du Bois, Elmer Carter, Wilkins, Reel 18, NAACP Papers Part 11 microfilm.

“borrowed” Moran Weston’s notes for their efforts, but never returned them.)¹⁴⁵ This document highlighted two primary findings of the conference. First, the conferees agreed that, while the older generation was respected, “the leadership which is necessary is that which will integrate the social problems of the Negro within the larger issues facing the nation.” These problems were economic and must be solved by an interracial union of workers. Second, they preferred a “democracy that is attempting to reform itself” as more likely to lead to the amelioration of workers’ problems than communism or fascism.¹⁴⁶ Both of these ideas led straight back to Harris, Bunche, and Reid. Given Harris’ difficulty in working with others, particularly women, it could be concluded that he took over the drafting of the document and refused to cooperate with the rest of the committee. The women on the committee may have been glad to hand over the reins. Arnold was busy settling into her new position as executive secretary of the Catherine Street Branch of the Philadelphia YWCA and planning for her marriage. Arnold’s positive response to Harris may have encouraged her to let him take the lead: “I was particularly impressed with Abram Harris because he was an economist and my experience with the depression made me eager to know more about economics and the effect of that science upon man.”¹⁴⁷ Byrd was building a new program in the research division of the National Recovery Administration.

The suggestion for interracial class unity and intra-racial unity placed the onus squarely upon African American intellectuals. In the Findings document at least, the

¹⁴⁵ Eben Miller, “Born Along the Color Line: The Second Generation of the Talented Tenth and ‘The Problem of the Twentieth Century’” (Ph.D., Brandeis University, 2004).

¹⁴⁶ Findings Committee Report, Reel 18, NAACP Papers Part 11 microfilm.

¹⁴⁷ Hedgeman, *Trumpet Sounds*, 65.

Amenia attendees readily accepted their mantle of leadership. No matter what class differences might exist within African American communities, it was imperative that the “race must weld themselves together for the common welfare. This point of view must be indoctrinated through the churches, educational institutions and other agencies working in behalf of the Negro. The first steps toward the rapprochement between the educated Negro and the Negro mass must be taken by the educated Negro himself.”¹⁴⁸

In their political analysis, the Findings Committee mostly accepted the status quo of African Americans relating to a hostile majority society. They rejected fascism because it would cement black people’s place at the bottom of society (rather than embracing a type of fascism based in promoting the black race). They rejected communism for being unrealistic in the current setting. Much like William Pickens, they accepted the reality of a reforming democracy and asked, what now? Pickens had written to White a similar sentiment a year before the conference; “The Negro will get only what he takes, ...and when he takes it, he must take it from the dominant society. That dominant society may or may not in the future be communist; at present it is not Communist.”¹⁴⁹ Within a white bourgeois controlled democracy, what was essential was awakening white and black workers to the similarity of their situations. Then a new labor movement could be formed which would focus its attention on activities “political as well as economic for the purpose of effecting such social legislation as old age pensions, unemployment insurance, the regulation of child and female labor etc.”¹⁵⁰ This strong

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Pickens to Walter White, 28 July 1932, as quoted in Avery, "Up from Washington", 202.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

disagreement over nationalism worked its way into the Findings document published widely following the conference. Surprisingly, no mention was even made of nationalism in that document. Instead, the document urged unity across class and race lines. In strong opposition to Du Bois, it declared near the beginning that "the primary problem is economic."¹⁵¹ This indicates that Bunche and Harris, while in the minority, managed to sway enough of their fellow attendees to be the majority opinion in the end.

THE NEW YORK *AMSTERDAM NEWS* EDITOR CAPTURED one of the central difficulties faced by African American intellectuals. He mocked conferees' sense of responsibility as paternalistic and insincere. Conferees had advocated reducing their dependence on white paternalism, yet the editor believed the group represented just another form of paternalism. "Here is a group of Negroes advocating labor organization as the solution to the Negro's present plight. And yet in the entire group there is not a single representative of the industrial masses through which this salvation is to be achieved. This exclusion of representatives of the working class is the essence of paternalism."¹⁵²

The Second Amenia conferees were both separated and united to other African Americans. Their education and class separated them, while racism and personal responsibility brought them together. At Amenia they found a network of individuals from similar backgrounds and with a similar concern for ideas and activism. The conference did not succeed in the goals Spingarn and Du Bois had planned. Spingarn did

¹⁵¹ Findings Committee Report, Reel 18, NAACP Papers Part 11 microfilm.

¹⁵² Editorial, "Amenia Conference," *New York Amsterdam News*, 6 Sep 1933, 6.

not get a concrete program, nor did the conferees spend any time discussing what role white intellectuals should have. They focused instead on their own roles and goals. Du Bois did not cement himself as the intellectual guru of the group.

The NAACP did find some new talent, as detailed in the next chapter. As head of an NAACP committee, Abram Harris challenged it to live up to its desire to meet the needs of the masses. Juanita Jackson began a youth campaign that successfully brought students and young people into the NAACP. Several of the women conferees were vetted for positions on the NAACP board. Houston started the Legal Defense Fund. And Du Bois resigned the organization most closely identified with him, among heated controversy over his support for self-segregation.

It was not an overwhelming success for the NAACP, however. Within two years, the Young Turks at Howard started the National Negro Congress under the leadership of John P. Davis and A. Philip Randolph. Amenia conferee Marion Cuthbert was named treasurer, but on the side informed Walter White about the internal maneuverings of this competing organization.

The success that the NAACP found or did not find was not the most important outcome of the conference. Rather, it was the camaraderie the young black intellectuals had found among themselves. Those who were in isolated communities found others with similar mindsets and a similar level of fascination in deep questions. Those familiar with such a community, like the Young Turks or the Y women, found individuals outside of their own cohorts. Social workers like Anna Arnold challenged the professors to make their theories real to the individuals she had cared for in the depths of the Depression. The professors encouraged the social workers to broaden their horizons and ask bigger

questions about the structure of racism and economics. And all of them found hope for a weekend, that their journey was not “too lonely or impossible.”¹⁵³

¹⁵³ Frances Williams to J.E. Spingarn, 23 Aug 1933, Box 95-12 Folder 494, Spingarn Papers MSRC.

Part 5

“Trends of Thought Revealed”

Organizing in the Aftermath of the Amenia Conference

The Second Amenia Conference identified a generation of leadership not yet utilized by the NAACP. Each officer and board member went home with different plans for the younger generation. Meanwhile, the young people traveled back to their homes considering how to achieve some of the very theoretical things they had discussed over the weekend. Each one remembered how the weekend had started out so radical and gradually smoothed back into conformity by the end. Would their plans for the future do the same thing? Almost everyone agreed that the NAACP needed a dramatic transformation. The question was, would the powerful secretary allow such a transformation?

This section knits together several different storylines in the months immediately following the Second Amenia Conference. Mabel Byrd went to Washington DC to apply for a job in the NRA office. John Davis and Robert Weaver popped into the spotlight with the Joint Committee on National Recovery, which carefully assessed the NRA codes for racial discrimination. J.E. Spingarn and Lillian Alexander hoped to bring some of the Amenia conferees onto the NAACP Board to stir new plans and ideas. Walter White decided to take on the Congress as his predecessor had, battling for an Anti-Lynching Bill. Du Bois waited quietly in the background, mulling over all his new ideas, until he shattered conversations by endorsing voluntary segregation.

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Chapter 12

The NAACP Transforms while Standing Still

One of the first attempted overhauls of the NAACP following Amenia was reconstituting the Board of Directors. Amenia had refreshed Spingarn's relationship with Du Bois. Unlike the previous year, when he tried to balance the competing demands of White and Du Bois, the chairman was ready to fight on the editor's side. The controversies swirling around White, including Scottsboro, use of funds, and the George Crawford case, made Spingarn loathe to see Du Bois retire, even though he had arranged for the editor to relocate to Atlanta a year before.¹ At a board meeting on Monday, October 9, 1933 Spingarn was granted power to set up a nominating committee for new board members.² He appointed Lillian Alexander the chairperson of the committee with Du Bois and Ovington serving. Alexander decided to bring some of the female leadership so vital to Amenia onto the board. Du Bois loaded his list of candidates with free thinkers he believed he could sway in his direction, because surely men of intellect would chose himself over that quintessential organizational man—Walter White. Spingarn urged the editor to do what he must; “‘Whatever happens, I want you to feel that the Association is *yours*, something you helped to create, something you have helped to keep alive,’ he crooned. ‘Don’t fail me or the Association now.’”³

¹ David L. Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: The Fight for Equality and the American Century, 1919-1963* (New York: Henry Holt, 2000), 322.

² *Ibid.*, 333.

³ As quoted in *Ibid.*, 334.

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During the fall, these three discussed who to bring onto the board. Women were not new to the board, though they had been a small minority. Ovington had started campaigning for women to join the board in 1920, when she returned the list of nominees marked with a distressed, "no woman's name."⁴ At her insistence, the board welcomed Mary Talbert and educator Nannie Burroughs. Ovington had stipulated that the next person they hired be a woman, so they also arranged to hire a woman field secretary, Addie Hunton. Since that time, the only women on the board included the figurehead Jane Addams (who started removing herself almost entirely from public service in the early 1930s), Nannie Burroughs, and Lillian Alexander, who joined the board in 1924.⁵

Alexander was ready to see a greater female presence on the board, and knew many individuals who would be perfect. The woman she most admired was Marion Cuthbert. Du Bois had long worked in close quarters with a variety of women, some his lovers and some not. If more women were going to join the board, he insisted on his closest female ally—Dr. Virginia Alexander—but condemned Cuthbert for wearing too much YWCA perfume. He had seen her in action at Swarthmore and at Amenia and did not like the way she couched her language. Lillian Alexander wrote a distressed letter to Du Bois when she received these opinions, starting with Virginia Alexander (they were of no relation). "You believe in me and trust me-- I know, let me ask you on faith -- let us not insist upon using Virginia's name! Not now-- I am without malice and she is my friend too. Will you agree to this?"⁶ Lillian Alexander did not wish to see Virginia

⁴ Carolyn Wedin, *Inheritors of the Spirit: Mary White Ovington and the Founding of the NAACP* (New York: Wiley, 1998), 186-87.

⁵ "Mrs. Lillian A. Alexander, May 2, 1876-September 13, 1957," *Crisis*, October 1957, 483-4.

⁶ Lillian Alexander to W.E.B. Du Bois, November 1, 1933, Reel 39, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

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Alexander acting in New York as Du Bois' conduit from Atlanta, and doubted the younger woman's ability to stand up for her own opinions. And perhaps she reacted to Du Bois' less than secret affair with Virginia Alexander.

Du Bois explained to Spingarn his antipathy to Cuthbert: "She is without doubt an intelligent girl but she is a trimmer. I mean that she has the psychosis of a YWCA worker and is careful not to offend her audience or her associates." (One wonders at his use of "girl." Though Cuthbert was much younger than his own 65 years, at 37 she was not exactly still in puberty.) Sometimes such diplomacy was effective, Du Bois conceded with clenched teeth, but "it doesn't bare the truth. This was shown in her speech at Swarthmore this summer. We let her down easy but if she had been a man explaining the doctrines of the YWCA, the results would not have been as pleasant. ... Virginia Alexander does not express herself as well as Miss Cuthbert but she is independent and honest and absolutely reliable. She ought to attend at least half the meetings and do some committee work."⁷

Lillian Alexander could not understand Du Bois' objections to Cuthbert. "I do not agree at all with your feelings about her being a trimmer --she is anything but that," Alexander insisted. "Indeed the people of her age and younger all over this country look to her for leadership in thought, judgment and a fine understanding of what it is all about --don't you recall I told you at Amenia? (Swarthmore?) that they call her the 'Du Bois of womanhood'? This was before we were even thinking of the present situation."⁸ Alexander sincerely hoped that for once, Du Bois might defer to her; "have your way but

⁷ W.E.B. Du Bois to J. E. Spingarn, October 25, 1933, Reel 40, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

⁸ Alexander to Du Bois, November 1, 1933.

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do let it be my way this once! Because! (This doesn't mean Marion if your mind really rejects her)!"⁹ Despite her insistence, she was ready to accept Du Bois' decision.¹⁰

Cuthbert and Du Bois had two very different ways of perceiving the world. Cuthbert relied upon religion and beauty to sustain her through each day. Like her late friend Juliette Derricotte, she believed that whites could learn to accept African Americans by opening their souls to beauty and truth. If whites could only transform their vision to see, truly see, a black person as a lovely, complicated human being, race relations would be so much simpler. She recognized that intellect was only the starting place in race relations, not the end goal. Individuals could accept mentally that blacks were equal, but still had to deal with all the echoing emotions that weighted down interracial interactions. She urged the national YW audience to work through their emotions by searching for beauty, phrasing it the whole while through her own journey to recognize beauty in whites. There is something totalizing about the word "beauty" that is not captured by any of its synonyms. She is not talking only, or necessarily, about physical beauty. This is a word that is so vast and powerful that it can be part of a trinity with truth and love. But just as those words can be sentimentalized and cheapened through overuse, so too can beauty. When reading Cuthbert or Derricotte, it is important to focus on the largest, deepest meaning of the word, as she captures in the following quote, not on its trite shadow. "There is a quality about life that every little while touches some inner response in us and that small flame which is the self flares up as if the life element of its air were multiplied. This ecstasy may come in a word, in a face, some

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Lillian Alexander may have been willing to follow Du Bois' lead, but she was far more than the lackey David Levering Lewis paints her as in Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: The Fight for Equality*.

scene of nature, some revelation of inner gift, and the soul speaks first with its singing, and the word formed is: Beautiful.”¹¹

But how did that relate to race relations?—By finding “beauty in these people of another race.” To explain, she described how she discovered beauty by looking into life; “For beauty is an emanation, and what is most discernible on the surface is the least part of it; what is held within the greatest.” Looking into people with a spirit of questing, Cuthbert could suddenly find a communion of souls, and when she returned to the exterior, it was suddenly beautiful. “Not all persons in this other race will affect me so, I am sure. Not all my own race, by any means, have achieved an inner and outer harmony that quickens my spirit, but the miracle is that I have discovered in and of itself a beauty living within and without these people who were odd, unlovely and even grotesque to me.”¹²

At first blush, Cuthbert’s essay seems to be simply reiterating the aphorism to “not read a book by its cover.” For Du Bois, this would be hopelessly simplistic. Yet there is more here than that, a delicate examination of the mixture of emotions and intellect prohibiting effective race relations. “Exultation in the beautiful” also developed compassion “for those who have traveled far the road of the spirit, no little sentiment, but an understanding of what makes for the discord or the lack.” That compassion compels them not to sigh over the unfortunate, but to set “themselves resolutely to the task of helping right that much of human life.” Cuthbert wanted to find a way to motivate individuals; Du Bois more and more wanted to find a way to transform structures

¹¹ Marion Cuthbert, “Intimations of Religion.” *Womans Press*, May 1934, 246-47.

¹² *Ibid.*

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(especially as he entered his Marxist phase). "All in us that pants toward the Eternal shall learn in increasing measure to become a similar passion for human-kind," to realize that races are composed not of "curious divisions of dust, but of that boundless energy in its highest form--man." With that realization, that "miracle moment of comprehension comes" individuals see "in all of humankind sons of the Most High, of the dawning--bearers all, though it may be little or much, of the inextinguishable flame of Life itself."¹³ In some ways, this language echoes the Du Bois of thirty years previous, in his flowing, flowery words in *Souls of Black Folk*, except that Cuthbert does not discuss the unique experiences of black people. In her essay, the author could be black or white--anyone confronting a foreign culture that is accompanied by negative stereotypes. Her advice could work for those travelling abroad as much as for whites encountering blacks, or blacks encountering whites.

Du Bois was then obsessed with economic interpretations of history, most readily apparent in his 1934 publication *Black Reconstruction* that was in its final edits that fall. In contrast, Cuthbert understood humanity's economic impulses, but believed there was much more to life:

The persons who believe that all of human difficulties are basically economic--and at the present time this group seems to include the vast majority of those doing any thing about human relations--will argue that psychological and esthetic differences do not make much of the problem of conflict. It is impossible to argue with the persons for whom economics is a religion. In the first place they are largely right. Just as the scientist

¹³ Ibid.

who asserts that mathematics is at the basis of all science. it is indeed. But we distinguish between botany and astronomy, nevertheless. Supply and demand for our hungers moves us all, basically, but there are hungers of the body, the mind and what we venture to call the spirit.¹⁴

In her next article in this same series, Cuthbert discussed interracial friendship, explaining that whites must be willing to patiently wait for blacks to trust them and let down their guard.¹⁵ To a man focused on the sweep of history, talking about individual friendship seemed like “trimming.” Cuthbert showed the same love towards the anonymous white woman as she demands that whites show towards black. A love not based in preference, but “is justice grown imaginative, deals not with taste but with the decencies of the civilized.”¹⁶ This is a radical choice in a world where anonymous whites did not deserve such love, but it is also a choice easily subsumed by the commanding violence arising every day. Men like Abram Harris and Du Bois believed this turning of the other cheek symbolized too much accommodation and weakness. They wanted to fight, not to love.

In addition to Virginia Alexander, Du Bois championed Mabel Byrd for the board, even though her present employment in Washington DC would make it difficult for her to attend board meetings. “She is extraordinarily clear-headed and courageous to a fault” and “a fine, level-headed person.”¹⁷ In the same letter, Du Bois suggested Abram

¹⁴ Marion Cuthbert, “Variety, Spice and Life,” *Womans Press*, September 1934, 408.

¹⁵ Marion Cuthbert, “Variety, Spice and Life II,” *Womans Press*, November 1934, 502-3.

¹⁶ Cuthbert, “Variety, Spice and Life..V,” *Womans Press*, October 1935, p 442

¹⁷ W.E.B. Du Bois to J.E. Spingarn, October 18, 1933, Reel 34, Du Bois Papers microfilm; Du Bois to Spingarn, October 25, 1933.

Harris, "He is our best theoretical economist, and while as yet over-academic, has a clear, logical mind and is reliable" and Sterling Brown, "He represents the literary angle and is well grounded in English. At the same time, intensely interested in our work."¹⁸ Charles Houston and E. Franklin Frazier made the list as well. The later three were not enemies of White (indeed, they played an infrequent game of poker at the secretary's house while in New York) but they were independent thinkers who had made clear at Amenia that they disagreed with the current direction of the association. Du Bois also campaigned for Rachel Davis Du Bois, who had been on the Crisis board with him for a few years already and supported him in most of his endeavors. White objected to Davis Du Bois, suggesting instead that the South should have greater representation on the board.¹⁹

As Du Bois continued to put together his list, Spingarn and Alexander became increasingly worried. All of Du Bois' suggestions lived outside of New York and would not be able to serve actively on committees. Spingarn encouraged Du Bois to reconsider Marion Cuthbert, who unlike Virginia Alexander or Mabel Byrd, would be able to attend meetings. "What we need, as I wrote you, is people who can do work, not merely names of bright youngsters or distinguished oldsters."²⁰ Spingarn also suggested Anna Arnold, who had impressed him favorably at Amenia.

Spingarn's enthusiasm in the wake of Amenia began to wane and he suggested that he step down from all active duty—as president and as chairman of the board. Alexander and Du Bois urged him to see that this would unduly upset the association. He

¹⁸ Du Bois to Spingarn, October 18, 1933.

¹⁹ Walter White to Lillian Alexander, November 9, 1933, Reel 39, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

²⁰ J. E. Spingarn to W.E.B. Du Bois, October 25, 1933, Reel 40, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

agreed to stay on as president, but suggested that Louis Wright be named as chairman. "He need do no more than preside at Board meetings, but even that would have extraordinary symbolic significance; the President of Smith College and others like him would be presided over by a member of the colored race."²¹ Wright had the trust of both White and Du Bois, an exceptional feat. The biographers of both men describe the close relationship Wright had to White or Du Bois, not mentioning the other man. During the controversy surrounding the Rosenwald Fund's proposed Harlem Hospital, a segregated institution, Du Bois stood with Wright's insistence on integration, against his own personal assessment that "what Negroes need is hospital treatment now."²² Du Bois continued to mull on his public and private stance toward voluntary segregation throughout the winter.

Du Bois finally accepted Alexander's judgment on Cuthbert, but urged her once again to reconsider Virginia Alexander. He hoped both women might join the board. Virginia Alexander was a smart woman with a strong independence of thought; Lillian Alexander need not worry that Virginia would be unduly influenced by Du Bois or by her sister-in-law Sadie Alexander. "I feel strongly in her case because I know better than most people the fight that she has had for independence."²³ He gave as an example her work on the YWCA board. "She was thwarted and frustrated by Crystal Byrd. She resigned not because she did not like Anna Arnold. She does very much but because of

²¹ J. E. Spingarn to W.E.B. Du Bois, October 27, 1933, Reel 40, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

²² Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: The Fight for Equality*, 291.

²³ W.E.B. Du Bois to Lillian Alexander, November 3, 1933, Reel 39, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

the unfair attitude of the white board toward the whole problem, influenced as it was by Crystal Byrd.”²⁴

In order to accommodate all these suggestions, Du Bois proposed twelve new seats on the board, three for whites (Martha Gruening, Rachel Du Bois and one other), and two to remain temporarily vacant. He also urged the association to create a larger group of Vice-presidents, a “body of Elder Statesmen” that would lend the legitimacy of big names while the Board of Directors actually directed the association.²⁵

In late November, Lillian Alexander suffered a heart attack. She had recovered enough by January to present the nominating committee’s list of new board members, with terms to expire December 31, 1936, to the annual business meeting. On the list were suggested new members and the existing members coming up for reelection:

Sterling A. Brown, Washington

Marion Cuthbert, New York

Clarence Darrow, Chicago

Hubert T. Delany, New York

Rachel Davis Du Bois, New York

Lewis S. Gannett, New York

Abram L. Harris, Washington

James Weldon Johnson, New York

Joseph Prince Loud, Boston

Lucy R. Mason, New York

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: The Fight for Equality*, 334.

Carl Murphy, Baltimore

Hon. Frank Murphy, Detroit

Dr. William Allen Neilson, Northampton, Mass.

Arthur B. Spingarn, New York

Charles H. Studin, New York²⁶

Neither Mabel Byrd nor Virginia Alexander made the list, while Marion Cuthbert, Sterling Brown, and Abram Harris did. Charles Houston, who was already ramping up his involvement with the NAACP through the Crawford case, and E. Franklin Frazier were also omitted.

Houston is an interesting figure in all of this. He was not the only young person at Amenia to choose the NAACP over a new organization; Frances Williams and Juanita Jackson also did. However, he was most like the Young Turks who rebelled. He had gone to Dunbar High School and received one of the scholarships set aside by Amherst College. Following graduation, he attended Harvard Law School and joined his father's practice in DC. His father served the middle class and wealthy black community's legal needs and avoided civil rights cases. The younger Houston decided to open up the practice to criminal investigations and started to seek out cases with wider ramifications than property disputes. At the same time, the Howard University Law School hired him to teach. Houston taught in their evening classes, but became increasingly frustrated by the lack of rigor and accreditation. He took the school into his own hands and by the mid-

²⁶ "Report of the Nominating Committee," January 1934, Reel 5, NAACP 1 papers microfilm.

1920s created a respected, accredited law school out of bare bones. By the time he came to Amenia, he was a well respected lawyer whom the NAACP had started to turn to for advice. Like many of the Amenia conferees, he was frustrated by the current direction of the association. Unlike many of the Young Turks, he was not happy with theoretical discussions of new beginnings. Walking away from the weekend, he dismissed it as the “anemic conference of Amenia” because they had failed to generate any specific plan of action, writing later that “we have too many damn words without action already.”²⁷ He was the type of man J.E. Spingarn had hoped to see rise to power.

For most of the previous twenty five years, the NAACP’s legal representation had been led pro-bono by Arthur Spingarn and Clarence Darrow, white liberals with connections. They brought on various new lawyers as needed, but almost always white. The NAACP was not alone in thinking that white lawyers had a greater chance being heard by northern and southern judges and juries. Black lawyers often could not receive even a hearing, or be allowed in a courthouse. However, the legal system was beginning to open up just enough by the mid-30s that it was possible to hand more work over to an African American lawyer. Houston was an obvious man to turn to. When Du Bois had been threatened with libel over his statements about Howard University, he had turned not only to Arthur Spingarn, his long time family friend and lawyer, but also to Charles Houston, then on the ground in DC. After the communists grabbed the Scottsboro Case out from under the hands of the NAACP, as Walter White would say, association officials were constantly on the lookout for the next Scottsboro Case. They thought they

²⁷ Genna Rae McNeil, *Groundwork: Charles Hamilton Houston and the Struggle for Civil Rights* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983), 88-9.

might just have found it in George Crawford and decided to lay it in Houston's hands, the first time the NAACP would make a black lawyer the lead on a case under its charge.

George Crawford, accused of killing two high-status white Virginians, Agnes B. Isley and Mina Buckner, had fled north to Boston. Police there extracted a confession out of him under duress and extradited him to Virginia. The NAACP believed in his stated innocence. Houston started out as an assistant on the case, but was moved to lead because of his "residence in neighboring Washington, D.C., his familiarity with some aspects of the case, and his professional ability." Houston was hesitant at first, and told White that in order to prepare a thorough case, he would have to take a leave of absence from Howard Law. Yet, he also recognized that "if Crawford could be defended by all Negro counsel it would be a turning point in the legal history of the Negro in this country."²⁸ White won him over, and Houston assumed leadership of the defense by October 20, 1933, too late to secure a leave for 1933-34. Part of his acceptance hinged on black co-counsel, so he brought Edward Lovett onto the case. The Virginia case began in early November, with Houston immediately began to press for a change in venue by presenting the lack of African Americans in the jury pool. The Supreme Court had deemed this unconstitutional a few years before in one of the Scottsboro trials. Regardless, the court blocked all of Houston's efforts and he settled down to developing as strong a case as could be presented in the Loudon county. The case transformed when Crawford's girlfriend turned state's witness and confessed to lying about Crawford's whereabouts the night of the murder. Up to that point, Houston had been working fiercely under the full assumption of Crawford's innocence. He had to rethink his entire strategy as more

²⁸ As quoted in *Ibid.*, 90.

evidence came to light pointing to Crawford's involvement in the murders. The full trial started in December. Houston and Lovett had to drive an hour each way every day because no one was willing to shelter them in the town of Leesburg. Blacks were afraid of the ramifications and whites whispered about "running the 'Nigger' lawyers out of the county."²⁹ Houston turned his efforts to saving Crawford's life as the weight of circumstantial evidence bore down on the all-white, hostile jury. Despite their hostility, the jury did not sentence Crawford to death, only to life imprisonment.

Walter White jubilantly declared the case an "outstanding example of successful legal defense," but Houston was not so sure.³⁰ He believed he had saved Crawford from the electric chair, but was not convinced that justice had been served. He gave the case in appeals to a fellow attorney, hoping that it was over for him. He turned to other civil rights cases and also began to plan out a strategy for dismantling segregation in schools, starting with graduate and professional schools.³¹ An influx of funds from the Garland Fund allowed him to begin setting up the NAACP Legal Defense Fund. However, Houston had not escaped the storm surrounding the Crawford case. It had hardly even begun.

The new NAACP board came together for the first time for the Annual Business Meeting in January in New York City. Du Bois had brought a few of his protégés on

²⁹ As quoted in *Ibid.*, 93.

³⁰ As quoted in *Ibid.*, 95.

³¹ McNeil, *Groundwork: Charles Hamilton Houston and the Struggle for Civil Rights*.

board, but it was not clear how much change they could make. Harris had not yet sat through any board meetings before he sent a “long, lucid despairing letter” to Du Bois. “You can’t rely upon the James Weldon Johnsons and the Walter Whites for any new programs,” he declared, because they “stood in the way ‘of clear thinking on the present relation of the Negro to world forces.’”³² This letter came towards the end of an extended conversation between Harris and Du Bois about an idea Harris had been meditating on since Amenia. He knew thoroughly everyone’s critique of his plan for interracial working class unity, particularly that it was impractical.

Meditating on this criticism, and his own belief in the power of the social sciences, Harris suggested that they put together an intercollegiate lecture circuit of young African American intellectuals to tour colleges and explain the social and economic bases of racism. Disagreement arose between Harris and Du Bois over the needs for an African American intellectual cohort. Harris, interestingly enough, took a position closer to Du Bois’s idea of the talented tenth, espoused frequently since its inception forty years previously. Du Bois argued that solutions to the economic problems could not wait for African American intellectuals. He told Harris that

You are assuming scholarship and talking from the point of view of what a free and independent mind should seek in the matter of truth. I am conceding all that when we get a free and independent mind in such quantity, but at present our talent is being strangled to death and there is no more tremendous proof of the Marxian dogma than the fact that our

³² Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: The Fight for Equality*, 334.

fundamental economic situation today is making science, art and literature
among us almost impossible.³³

This quote reflects Du Bois's opinions in the 1930s, in concert with those of Carter G. Woodson, that African Americans had been systematically "miseducated" in the United States. In a 1933 commencement speech at Fisk, reprinted in the *Crisis*, he updated his opinions on the educational systems. First, he explained how the industrial education system of Booker T. Washington had had part of the truth because it responded to the conditions that Black people immediately found themselves in. Yet, his original critique of the industrial system had played out in the cracking apart of the industrial machine; "it has become so clear that Negro poverty is not primarily caused by ignorance of technical knowledge that the industrial school has almost surrendered its program."³⁴ Then he goes beyond this to criticize his old position, which had been "What Black men need is the broader and more universal training so that they can apply the general principle of knowledge to the particular circumstances of their condition."³⁵ This, too, had had part of the truth, but only an incomplete part.

What was needed, argued Du Bois, was a university grounded in African American life and history. Indeed, given his other examples (that of a Spanish, French, or English University), a "Negro university" grounded in Black nationalism. This university must start, not with the universal and work toward the particular, but start with the

³³ W. E. B. Du Bois to Abram Harris, 3 January 1934, in *The Correspondence of W. E. B. Du Bois: Volume 1 Selections, 1877-1934*, ed. Herbert Aptheker (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1973), 470-471.

³⁴ W. E. B. Du Bois, "The Negro College," in *Du Bois on Education*, ed. Eugene F. Jr. Provenzo (Walnut Creek: AltaMira, 2002), 247.

³⁵ Ibid.

particular circumstances of African Americans and work from there toward the universal. He explained, "starting with present conditions and using the facts and the knowledge of the present situation of American Negroes, the Negro university expands toward the possession and the conquest of all knowledge. It seeks from a beginning of the history of the Negro in America and in Africa to interpret all history; from a beginning of social development among Negro slaves and freedmen in America and Negro tribes and kingdoms in Africa, to interpret and understand the social development of all mankind in all ages. It seems to reach modern science of matter and life from the surroundings and habits and aptitudes of American Negroes and thus lead up to understanding of life and matter in the universe."³⁶

For Du Bois, the primary function of African American intellectuals was not to impart knowledge but to induce action. He continued in his letter to Harris, "[w]hile, therefore, I have no doubt that a group of Negro scholars could form an institute for inter-collegiate lectures, the chief object of this in my mind would not be the information which they can impart, but the action toward economic salvation that they can induce."³⁷ Similarly, he argued in his 1933 Fisk commencement speech that "[t]he university must become not simply a center of knowledge but a center of applied knowledge and guide of action."³⁸ It is important to recognize here that Du Bois was not expressing a lack of confidence in the scientific method to end racism. Rather, he was explaining the conditions that were necessary to accomplish good "science, art and literature." The

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Du Bois to Harris, 3 January, 1934, 471.

³⁸ Du Bois, "The Negro College," 248.

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conditions of social ostracism inherent in Jim Crow and industrial capitalism did not lend themselves to this. In his commencement speech he argued, "There are sinister signs about us, antecedent to and unconnected with the Great Depression. The organized might of industry North and South is relegating the Negro to the edge of survival and using him as a labor reservoir on starvation wage. No secure professional class, no science, literature, nor art can live on such a sub-soil."³⁹ Yet, African Americans needed to pursue science and literature; they needed to be "led by trained university men of broad vision" in order to "work out by economics and mathematics, by physics and chemistry, by history and sociology, exactly how and where he is to earn a living and how he is to establish a reasonable Life in the United States or elsewhere."⁴⁰

Harris responded most directly to Du Bois's statement that African American intellectuals were "strangled" (trammeled even) and that in the present conditions art and science were nigh near impossible. Harris argued that they could not wait for the conditions to be right; "We can't wait for minds and scholars to spring up out of the earth. We have got to develop them ourselves."⁴¹ African American economic improvement depended squarely upon good leadership. So far, this is remarkably similar to Du Bois's plans for a "Negro College" in his Fisk commencement address.

Harris diverged from Du Bois in his explanation of the economic forces which preclude the self-segregation and economic self-help movements advocated by many African Americans during the depression. It was precisely during 1933 and 1934 that Du

³⁹ Ibid., 249.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Harris to Du Bois, 6 January, 1934, in *The Correspondence of W. E. B. Du Bois*, 471.

Bois split with the NAACP over his comments that African Americans should embrace institution building within a segregated world (as illustrated in his above comments about the need for Black nationalist foundations for a “Negro university”). Harris’s primary argument during this time, in contrast, was that the “prospects for successful Black capitalism in America were nonexistent.”⁴² In his letter to Du Bois, Harris posited that the current process of cartelization of industry in America meant that if African American leaders started a “co-operative movement among the Negro as a means of economic self-help [they] must be prepared to see it wiped out of existence by these changes.”⁴³ African American’s desires for specific change in their conditions needed to be tied to the “general (i.e. throughout America and even the world) demand for Change.”⁴⁴ If specifically African American organizations would fight for this Change, then Harris encouraged them. But if they were unable to do so, there was no place for them. Most tellingly, Harris stated that “From the standpoint of social direction and intellectual perspective there should be no *Negro* movements.”⁴⁵ Where Du Bois argued that knowledge should move from the particular to the universal, Harris argued that it should move from the universal to the particular. African American intellectuals must “think of the race problem in terms of general economic and social changes.”⁴⁶ If they fail to do so, Harris had concluded after in-depth research, they “will effect no permanent or

⁴² Indeed, William Darity, Jr. states that this was the central message of Harris’ work, particularly *The Negro as Capitalist*. William Darity, Jr. “Introduction” Abram L. Harris, *Race, Radicalism, and Reform: Selected Papers*, ed. William Darity Jr. (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1989), 1.

⁴³ Harris to Du Bois, 6 January 1934 in *The Correspondence of W. E. B. Du Bois*, 471-472.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 472.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

fundamental change in the conditions of the Negro masses.”⁴⁷ This change must begin in an over-turning of bourgeois values. Harris argued that almost all African American leaders but Du Bois encourage their followers “to emulate the values which these [white, conservative] interests represent.”⁴⁸ Only Du Bois attacked “these interests on grounds of broad social and economic policy.”⁴⁹ Harris believed that his inter-collegiate lectures would introduce African American college students to new ideas and new values. He had greater confidence in the leadership of his own generation (particularly his colleagues at Howard) than he did in the older generation. He believed any new programs, such as that which might have come out of Amenia, would either have to bow to conservative moneyed interests, like those at the Rosenwald and the Phelps-Stokes funds, or would need “people behind us who are sick of the old intellectual rubbish whether in literature or some other phase of life.”⁵⁰

To Harris, the most important thing was an economic and social critique of the race problem. Du Bois reached this by moving through the particular to the universal. Harris reached in reverse. Yet, in a final P.S. to his letter, Harris made clear what was most important to him; “you ought to be sure by now of how much I feel myself a part of you; that in spite of fundamental disagreement there is hardly a single living man for whom I have greater affection and genuine admiration.”⁵¹

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 473.

⁵¹ Ibid.

Despite his professed admiration Harris was dismayed by Du Bois' response. He poured out his emotions in a lengthy epistle to Stolberg, dredging himself out of a "nasty as hell" mood in order to grab pen and paper. He explained his plan for the lecture series, and Du Bois's dismissal of it. Mulling over that dismissal, he started to rethink his own motives. "Perhaps my suggestion was foolish but I think I was actuated by a purely selfish motive. What I really was motivated by was the desire to get a-way from this place, the stupidity of students, their asinine papers, and their sophisticated ignorance." Traveling between Howard, Fisk, and Atlanta would give him a break from routine, if nothing else. He explained to Stolberg why he still believed in the power of the intellectual, despite Du Bois. And despite his students; "In spite of my fundamental conviction that I am right, I have the feeling that the kind of program Du Bois and others seem to have in mind is the only kind the Negro can understand. I have tried to put thru my point of view over to my students and it was like speaking to inhabitants of Mars. They just don't understand plain English. I am sick of the whole business: they wont even read a book. So to hell with their stinking and confused messy vulgarity."⁵² Many of Harris' students described him as an excellent teacher. Four years later, he would confess to Stolberg that "The older I grow in experience, the more I realize that my task in life is to train students. But I have to train them in my own way."⁵³ His frustrations with his students came out of a man who truly cared about them and their education, not from someone who could not be bothered by them, as it seems on first blush. As always, he

⁵² Abram Harris to Benjamin Stolberg, January 9, 1934, Folder 3 Box 4b, Ben Stolberg Correspondence, Columbia University Special Collections.

⁵³ Abram Harris to Benjamin Stolberg, July 20, 1937, Folder 3 Box 4b, Ben Stolberg Correspondence, Columbia University Special Collections.

turned to scholarship to take his mind off of everything threatening to shake his tenuous sense of well-being. "Take a look at the paper I am sending! I may be running up in the next two weeks to see you. My Marx piece is going rather slowly. It is hard stuff to set to words. Perhaps, I ought to talk over what I've done with you."⁵⁴

Harris already contemplated resigning from the NAACP board, he wrote Stolberg, but thought he should at least "give them a chance to invite me to a meeting of the Board. And it seems that they ought to be having a meeting very soon." Stolberg had suggested to him that Arthur Spingarn was someone Harris would agree with. Perhaps he would find an ally there, but Harris doubted it. "What you say about Arthur S. is interesting. But I feel sure that he belongs to the same crowd. The scrap I had with him at Amenias convinced me that he does."⁵⁵ This was one of Harris' last letters in Stolberg's collection. Unlike his friendship with Calverton, there was no explosion to explain the end of the friendship. Stolberg moved ever more deeply into Trotskyist politics as the 30s wore on; perhaps in the end it was ideology that ended it.⁵⁶ [not likely--The department's affairs seem to be all right. But your boy Sam has gone completely 110% Trotskyite and that does show in his work since I do have it on the best authority that many of his lectures are definitely anti-Soviet. That seems to be the path he has chosen now. By now you have probably heard of his chairmanship of the Hippodrome Trotsky Defense Meeting held in New York a few weeks ago. They used Sam in that. He is not too well known in

⁵⁴ Harris to Stolberg, January 9, 1934.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ "Trotsky Backers Act to Clear Him," *New York Times*, February 1, 1937; "Trotsky Committee Leaves for Mexico," *New York Times*, April 3, 1937; Frank L. Kluckhohn, "Dewey 'Impartial' in Trotsky Inquiry," *New York Times*, April 7, 1937; Frank L. Kluckhohn, "Plotter's Meeting Denied by Trotsky," *New York Times*, April 13, 1937.

America and New York, and since the Trotskyites wanted a Negro front, they secured Sam and Abe. Ben Stolberg sent him the telegram telling him to come up and as chairman Sam read a message from Abe to the meeting. Sam commenced his speech with protestations of friendship for the Soviet and ended up by out-Hearsting Mrs. Dilling, all of which the Metropolitan press gobbled up. March 11, 1937 no author in my notes, though Dept of Philosophy letterhead, to Bunche, Schomburg B 10 F 14. Maybe there are letters that just weren't kept] Given the unimpeded friendly tone of shared confidences in the two letters from 1937, it may just be that the letters are lost.⁵⁷

Harris did not give up on his thoughts about the lecture course. Nor did he resign from the NAACP board before he had even given it a chance. Rather, he grudgingly began to attend meetings. His confidence rose a little when he realized the others on the board looked at him with respect and were willing to appoint him to boards. Maybe he would be able to redirect the ship's course yet.

Walter White had his navigational instruments firmly set on passing an Anti-Lynching Bill as 1934 entered its first weeks. Senators Costigan and Wagner sponsored the bill in the Senate, always the house of Congress that gave the bill the most trouble. Southern Senators could more powerfully resist the bill through a filibuster than their compatriots in the House. An array of committee hearings in February and March offered White an opportunity to prove that interest in the bill extended far beyond black and

⁵⁷ Harris to Stolberg, July 20, 1937; Abram Harris to Benjamin Stolberg, July 23, 1937, Folder 3 Box 4b, Ben Stolberg Correspondence, Columbia University Special Collections.

interracial organizations. For mobilization, he turned to NAACP local branches and to YW women.

Frances Williams and others worked with women to support the Costigan-Wagner Bill after the national board voted to sponsor the bill. Williams kept the issue at the forefront of the national YW by writing a monthly column in the “Public Affairs” section of the *Womans Press*. She detailed the state of the bill, as well as the efforts of the Joint Committee to fight discrimination in the NRA.⁵⁸ Elizabeth Eastman, the YW’s lobbyist in the Capital, also frequently posted reports on the Anti-Lynching bill in her monthly column, “The Capital Letter.” Williams, Alexander, and Eastman also wrote letters urging women to show up at committee meetings, so that the room would be filled with a supportive audience. In addition to women from the DC and Baltimore areas, YW representatives also traveled from Tennessee “to register their sense of the desperate need for the legislation.”⁵⁹ Elizabeth Eastman believed that the hearings held on the bill February 20 were some of the “most impressive hearings I ever attended.”⁶⁰

Despite the efforts of the YWCA, the NAACP, and others (including the newly formed Writers League Against Lynching), the 1934 bill was killed by a filibuster and never brought to the Senate floor for a vote. Most of the participants in the campaign had been encouraged that it had made it out of committee and that they had been confident

⁵⁸

I assume that Williams wrote these brief unattributed passages, titled “Special Problems of Minority Groups: The Negro” because she was the senior African American working for the Public Affairs Committee and because of the focus of the paragraphs on matters Williams was directly involved with—anti-lynching and the Joint Committee.

⁵⁹

Elizabeth Eastman, “The Capital Letter,” *Womans Press*, April 1934, 211.

⁶⁰

Ibid.

that if it did come up for a vote, it would have passed. White, Williams, and field secretary Daisy Lampkin immediately set about raising funds for next year's campaign.

During the 1934-1935 push for anti-lynching legislation, the greatest push of the decade, the NAACP arranged to protest outside the Attorney General's Conference on Crime in Washington DC. The convention considered all manner of crimes, but lynching and mob violence were not initially on the program. Roy Wilkins led the initial protest, joined by Amensians Sam Dorsey and Edward Lovett, as well as many others. The protesters carried signs detailing the number of men and women killed by lynching and wore nooses around their necks. During an initial picket, the three leaders, as well as journalist George Murphy Jr. were arrested by the DC metropolitan police for carrying signs and parading without a permit. They were taken in a police wagon to the station and charged \$5 each to appear before Police Court later in the week. The judge they appeared before about the sign charge dismissed the charges because the law was related to advertising signs, not protest ones. A large picture of them climbing into the paddy wagon was splashed across several papers, but the incident was not used as a spark for civil disobedience like later protests. The protesters' intention was not to get arrested—that strategy had not yet been developed. Protests later that week were led by Charles Hamilton Houston and Virginia McGuire (president of the DC NAACP chapter). "The pickets were lined up just off the sidewalk across Seventeenth Street from the hall, and were careful to avoid any act which might cause police intervention. Park and city police were present but simply looked on."⁶¹ Dorsey did take great delight in this proof of his

⁶¹ "N.A.A.C.P. Pickets Crime Confab And Forces Action On Lynching, Chief Executive Is Outspoken," *Pittsburgh Courier*, December 22, 1934; "Mob Violence Hit In Crime Program," *Chicago Defender*,

radical chops, sending copies of the newspaper clipping around to friends. To Frazier, he affixed a note, “Lest you miss this gem of social wisdom and personal courage. As ever, Sam.”⁶² It is interesting that the most radical of the Young Turks, the one to most wholeheartedly throw himself into Communist politics, was arrested only once, as far as we know, for a protest against lynching. This suggests that the cause was as powerful a one among African Americans as Walter White imagined it to be, if not as all-consuming as it became for the NAACP secretary.

The protest, coupled with a supportive speech from Franklin Roosevelt, worked. The eight-point program that came out of the convention included a passage on lynching, surprising everyone involved. It declared that “the use of methods not in accord with orderly and lawful procedure be condemned in dealing with industrial conflicts and racial antagonisms.”⁶³ Walter White’s steady lobbying of the Roosevelt family had evidently swayed the president enough that he was willing to support anti-lynching measures within his own branch of government, if still not in the Senate, where he faced the threats of the most conservative members of his party. YW women again arranged massive letter writing campaigns. Frances Williams and Lillian Alexander planned a major letter writing drive at the 137th St. YWCA and Ashland Pl, where they set up a table with form letters, postcards, and blank stationary ready for women to write out their opinions.⁶⁴ Together these two YWs gathered almost 2000 letters. Despite these positive moves

December 29, 1934; “They Can’t Arrest Roy Wilkins...But They Did in Dee Cee Picket Demonstration at National Crime Confab,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, December 29, 1934.

⁶² Emmett E. Dorsey to E. Franklin Frazier, December 1934, 131 Box 8 Folder 31, Frazier Papers, MSRC.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ “You St. and Thereabouts,” *Norfolk New Journal and Guide*, October 7, 1933.

forward, the 1935 anti-lynching campaign ended the way previous ones had, filibustered in the Senate. Many of the supporting groups lost some of their fervor for the campaign after that year and only Walter White pressed forward with tenacity.⁶⁵

In the spring, Houston continued to ramp up his legal activities and was spending more and more time in New York City. White realized they would need a contact person in Washington DC, and thinking about Sam Dorsey's valiant efforts in the protest, he directed Houston to take him on a visit to an important white woman in Washington. Elizabeth Eastman wrote the "Capital Letter" for the *Womans Press* every month and The YW coalition offered necessary and consistent mostly white support for the anti-lynching bill. Eastman reported to Frances Williams about the evening she spent with Dorsey and Houston, which Williams then ferried back to Houston;

She gave a rather interesting description of the evening you took Sam Dorsey to her home. She objects to him. She said his attitude when he arrived was bad. He looked them over and let it be known what slight regard he had for both of the women present, one of whom was his hostess. Miss Eastman says that Miss Barchard is very wise, and before the evening was over, Mr. Dorsey relaxed and began to pay attention to the business in hand, but she did not think he was very valuable, and she wondered what point you had to make in bringing him there. She knows of his connection with [Susanne La Folette] and the radical writers group. I explained to her what I thought was your reason in bringing him, namely, that Sam and Ralph are the two men who have studied government and

⁶⁵ Kenneth Robert Janken, *White: The Biography of Walter White, Mr. NAACP* (New York: New Press, 2003).

politics and are therefore supposed to know something about it, and that you were merely trying to use the resources that you had. It is needless to say that it would have been against my judgment to have ever taken Sam out there. She does not feel that he was a gentleman, and that is her first requisite.⁶⁶

If White and Houston needed someone in Washington, she suggested they not rely upon Dorsey. "Ralph I know is highly theoretical but he is a gentleman in ways, Bill Hastie would be the first and foremost choice. Miss Eastman likes him very much. But needless to say, Charlie, you are her first pick. Of course from your angle, Miss Eastman and her likes may not be important, but I hope this isn't your point of view."⁶⁷

While White and Williams were pushing for the Anti-Lynching bill and Houston was developing Legal Defense Fund strategy, Mary White Ovington traveled through the South. She wanted to see for herself the suffering of the Depression and also work to set up local NAACP chapters. Though still a strong presence on the national board, she was finding more and more that she preferred to be in the field, working with concrete problems and interesting individuals, rather than running interference between the forceful personalities at 69 Fifth Avenue. In Florida, she was particularly entranced by a young woman teaching theater at Bethune-Cookman College—Zora Neale Hurston.

⁶⁶ Frances Williams to Charles Houston, February 11, 1935, Reel 28, NAACP 1 papers microfilm.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

In addition to teaching dramatics, Hurston was trying to build a local NAACP branch. Ovington wrote glowing reports about the young woman, and dismal records of the status of race relations and economics, to White, Pickens, and Wilkins, each with a slightly different emphasis. To White, she wrote about their fundraising efforts.

Zora Hurston yesterday started a movement for the 'Penny a Negro' at Sanford, a mean city as regards the whites. They are a little scared about a branch but Zora thinks they will have one soon. Where people are timid, and God knows they have reason to be in this unholy soul, they like to hear about the anti-lynching bill, that is safe, and of course as all the money goes into the same general fund, I feel that it is best to raise it the easiest way. I see by the last minutes that you need anti-lynching money very much. ... So in the more fearful communities Miss Hurston and I will get the 'Penny a Negro' contribution first, which can be used as soon as sent. ... [Hurston] believes and knows about the work, and every one knows her name as her father was a beloved itinerant preacher.

(Incidentally Lippincott publishes a novel of hers in May.)⁶⁸

She shared a bit more of her discomfort with the trip with William Pickens, including thoughts about lynching she felt uncomfortable sharing with the Secretary. She did not agree with him that the Anti-Lynching Bill should be the focus of all their efforts.

I have learned a great deal from this trip, and I'm afraid I don't feel as encouraged as before I set out. There may be occasional liberality in the south toward the color question but it is so occasional as to scarcely to

⁶⁸ Mary White Ovington to Walter White, February 15, 1934, Reel 20, NAACP I papers microfilm.

count. The Negro lives the other side of the railroad track, and is no more to be thought of when improvements are to be considered than the clay roads that his houses face. He is a nonentity. That bothers me more than the sporadic lynchings. The lynchings are the end of a policy that is meted out to every black man (beating is more common I believe honesty, when it comes to dealing with a black man. Still, with many of the population, he has no rights that a white man is born to respect.⁶⁹

To Wilkins, she took a more motherly tone. She worried what would happen to him if he should ever travel deep into the South. "It's a very different world from Minnesota and I don't know that I want you to handle the publicity at Oklahoma. You might forget to say 'sir' to the white reporter and while martyrdom may help the cause we haven't enough workers to lose any! It wouldn't be like Mississippi where you were playing a part." Also, she expressed concerns that fighting with the New Deal, the NAACP's other main focus, did not do much good, because "The relief will be over soon and the administration will not antagonize the South and I can't see that things can be changed unless the distribution of these benefits is given to federal officers and that would put the South in a place by itself." Nevertheless, she hoped "to talk with some people in Washington on my return and I do sincerely hope the matter will be investigated and written up." Publicity might shake up white indifference, which was "the major sin of the whites down here. Indifference may end in lynching but it is the beginning that should be attacked now."⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Mary White Ovington to William Pickens, March 2, 1934, Reel 20, NAACP I papers microfilm.

⁷⁰ Mary White Ovington to Roy Wilkins, March 6, 1934, Reel 20, NAACP I papers microfilm.

White was full of confidence that the Anti-Lynching Bill would pass the next year. He was equally confident that the bill was the best way to spend the NAACP's resources. It would unify the many different organizations and individuals interested in improved race relations in the United States. Frances Williams kept the YWCA women, a fairly powerful lobby in itself, knit tightly to White's vision of the future. It certainly helped that White and Houston charmed every YW woman they met. Charles Hamilton Houston cultivated a genuine friendship with the secretary, and used that friendship to expand the NAACP's legal vision.

Harris, Bunche, and Du Bois' discrete plans to democratize the NAACP could not be pushed through the board. Each man turned away from the association, hoping in part to build something better elsewhere. But also hoping to return to their scholarship. Harris went back to Marx and Veblen. Bunche began to plan his second research trip to Africa and this time he intended to spend the majority of his time with Africans, not Europeans. Du Bois stayed in Atlanta and began to battle with Carter G. Woodson over an Encyclopedia of the Negro.

John P. Davis was not done, however. He had been leading the Joint Committee for National Recovery in the year and a half since America. He pressured the New Deal Administration to take the rights and needs of African Americans seriously. Walter White and Frances Williams agreed about the serious and necessary nature of the work and collaborated with him. They were not sure they could trust the younger man. Like Sam Dorsey, they were not quite sure if he was "civilized" enough for interracial work. Davis

did not really care what they thought. He steadily pushed those around him to flesh out the major ideas boiling within him. He was wary neither of grand visions nor hard work.

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UNTRAMMELED THINKING
THE PROMISE AND PERIL OF THE SECOND AMENIA CONFERENCE, 1920-1940

VOLUME IV

By

Lauren L. Kientz

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

History

2010

Chapter 13

The Byrd Affair

The Second America Conference landed at the end of Franklin Roosevelt's first hundred days. Throughout the months between his election and his inauguration, FDR sequestered himself with aides, barely nodding to the press. But as soon as he placed his hand on the Bible to make the oath of office, he shared the scope of his first 100 days with the public. He would take charge of the Depression and throw the mighty weight of the Federal Government behind relief. His aim was to get people and banks working again, so that the economy could restart out of the slump it had fallen into with an overproduction of goods and no one to buy them (in the simplest terms possible for what was a globally interconnected financial meltdown). Herbert Hoover had attempted to convince industries to continue to pay their employees good wages and to continue to produce goods, but it was a gentlemen's agreement that would fall apart if any industrialist bowed out. Roosevelt attempted to turn the gentlemen's agreement into law through the National Recovery Administration. The NRA, set up under Colonel Hugh Johnson's careful eye, was meant to create industrial codes for every single industry (bar a few like domestic labor that were not formalized enough). They would set up minimum codes and standards of production. From the beginning of the discussion of the NRA, the question arose as to whether there would be regional differences in these codes. Southern industrialists in particular argued that people in their region made less because living costs were lower. They also did not want to have to give black employees the same wage as white employees. For their part, many black employees feared that they would lose

their already tenuous hold on employment so that their employers could give the equal wage to a white person instead of to them.

Throughout the summer of 1933, African American organizations, driven particularly by the NAACP, called for Johnson, Harold Ickes (Secretary of the Interior), and Roosevelt himself to appoint an African American to the NRA to protect black interests. New Deal administrators felt compelled to hire black employees because of the loud and persistent calls of black individuals and organizations for representation, but that did not mean they knew how to work with them. Many of these administrators had never thought of themselves as racist (some even believed themselves racial liberals), but they had also never thought of the particular needs of a black employee or how they should listen to him or her. In the same room with blacks, whites danced around the issues, promising no discrimination, but they felt free to talk bluntly and cynically with each other about the reality of their promises.

One of the first Americans to encounter this difficult duality was Mabel Byrd. After the intense discussion and peaceful scenery of the Berkshires, Byrd traveled south to Washington, DC for an interview with the Department of Commerce for just such a position.¹ Her jaded career with the NRA illustrates the bumbling ways that white officials could ignore or trod on African Americans, even when believing themselves to be nonracist and in the right. Ickes was, after all, a past president of the Chicago branch of the NAACP. Yet the NRA officials did not give Mabel Byrd a chance to exercise her new position. She was not given an office nor the right to travel south to make inquiries into real employment situations and whether or not blacks were losing jobs to whites

¹ I have yet to find any information about the content or the conducting of the interview, though I have looked through the relevant National Archives files.

because of the NRA codes. As a final bit of humiliation, she was barred from the Senate Restaurant while visiting Capital Hill for the Anti-Lynching Hearings arranged by Senator Costigan and the NAACP. The FDR administration is sometimes painted as a great turn around for African Americans in the national government. For the first time since the Wilson administration banned blacks from government service, FDR and his Cabinet hired many black workers. Getting hired was only the first baby step through the door; “token” black employees had to try to do their job and educate their co-workers and bosses on the intricacies of race relations. If anyone could do that, graceful, intelligent, cosmopolitan Mabel Byrd seemed like the one.

During the week of her interview, Byrd stayed with Mrs. Myra Callis, a case worker with the DC Emergency Relief Agency who had also pursued graduate work in economics at Chicago. Callis had written a master’s thesis on “Negro Home Workers in Chicago,” which was published in 1928 in the *Social Service Review*. In 1932, she worked with Lorenzo Greene on “The Employment of Negroes in the District of Columbia,” doing personal investigation into the working conditions of hotel staff members.² She had not been able to pursue economics fulltime because the pressure to make a living interceded.³ When Byrd returned to her home after a successful interview with Dr. Abraham Sachs, Callis plied her for advice about also getting an appointment in the administration. Byrd suggested she write to Du Bois for help.

While describing her own problems to Du Bois, Callis also inquired about John P. Davis. A white person had recently asked Callis about him and his organization, the

² John Davis to Mr. Berrall, memo, Reel 1 NNC papers

³ Myra Colson Callis to Du Bois, 24 Aug 1933, Reel 39, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

Negro Industrial League. She understood that he had “made the best impression of any Negro appearing at ‘code’ hearings” and wanted to know what Du Bois knew about him. Du Bois offered to write a letter for her, but protested ignorance about Davis’ organization. Though Davis had been “a very pleasant person and intelligent co-worker” the one summer he edited the *Crisis*, Du Bois had no new knowledge.⁴ Regardless of his personal merits, “on principle, I am opposed to needlessly multiplying organization, and I should assume that Mr. Davis’ organization is chiefly on paper.” Du Bois advised Callis that “Mr. Davis and his friends should be treated as individuals of intelligence and not as the representatives of any mass movement.”⁵ The Negro Industrial League grew on Harvard University’s campus out of the minds of several black graduate students from several New England colleges. They supported Davis and Weaver to stay in Washington DC and attend all the code hearings on fair competition, when the two young men decided to “desert the realms of discussion and theory and enter into the sphere of practical measures.”⁶

After interviewing her, Dr. Abraham Sachs hired Byrd to work with him in the Division of Research and Planning within the National Recovery Administration, even though she had publicly approved communism the year before. It was unlikely that Sachs had seen her article in the *Crisis*, and she probably did not bring up her communism.⁷ At

⁴ Du Bois to Callis, Aug 29, 1933, Reel 39, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

⁵ Du Bois to Callis, Aug 29, 1933, Reel 39, Du Bois Papers microfilm.

⁶ “The Negro Industrial League,” Reel 1, NNC Papers microfilm.

⁷ Her tenure with this organization, and the subsequent controversy, is the one aspect of Mabel Byrd’s life that has been covered in the literature. The following have a sentence or a paragraph about this episode: Herbert Hill, *Black Labor and the American Legal System* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 99; David L. Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: The Fight for Equality and the American Century, 1919-1963* (New

the same time, as many writers within the Federal Writers Project later found out, the New Deal Administration was a bit more tolerant of communists than earlier or later governments. Sachs hired Byrd to gather facts about the distribution of NRA funds to African Americans.⁸ She joined a relatively small office at the end of their first major hiring spree. The 400 in August would grow to 4500 in six months. Only about fifteen percent of the office was female.⁹

Byrd entered Washington at the end of Franklin Roosevelt's first hundred days, in that early, wild time of setting up all the alphabet organizations with staff, financing, and projects. Hugh Johnson designed the NRA to create codes for different industries (bar a few like domestic labor that were not regulated enough).¹⁰ The association determined minimum wages and standards of production in order to restart the economy and prevent the then-presumed cause of the Depression, over-production and under-consumption. During the summer months, the NRA staff began investigating the nation's ten largest industries. They started with the cotton-textile industry and almost immediately confronted the question whether regional differences should be included in these codes.¹¹

York: Henry Holt, 2000), 328; Nancy J. Weiss, *Farewell to the Party of Lincoln* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 57; Mark I. Solomon, *The Cry Was Unity: Communists and African Americans, 1917-36* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1997), 270; Landon R. Y. Storrs, *Civilizing Capitalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 107.. Strangely, though, not one of these works mentions her article, published the year before, praising communism in the *Crisis*.

⁸ "Gets Place in NRA Research Division," *Pittsburgh Courier*, September 9, 1933.

⁹ John Kennedy Ohl, *Hugh S. Johnson and the New Deal* (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1985); Margaret C. Rung, "Gender and Public Personnel Administration in the New Deal Civil Service," *American Review of Public Administration* 27, no. 4 (December 1997): 307-24.

¹⁰ Ohl, *Hugh S. Johnson and the New Deal*, 103.. Johnson wrote the first draft and then led the conference formulating the final draft presented to Congress. FDR signed the National Industrial Recovery Act into law on June 16, 1933. The bill was tenuous from the first and filled with vague language. Word that FDR named Johnson director of the NRA leaked to the press on May 18, 1933.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 115.

Southern industrialists argued that people in their region should make less because living costs were lower. They also did not want to have to give black employees the same wage as white employees, arguing that they were inferior employees and lived on less than whites. Many black employees feared that they would lose their already tenuous hold on employment if their employers were forced to give them equal wages. Rather than pay, the employers tended to fire black workers in favor of white ones. Black organizations fought legalizing this kind of discrepancy between minimum wages. Many stories started to circulate about NRA's unequal distribution between whites and blacks and about African Americans losing employment. Blacks began calling the agency "Negroes Robbed Again," "Negro Run Around," "the Negro Removal Act," among other invectives. Hugh Johnson publicly assured African Americans who wrote him that there was absolutely no discrimination in the codes.

Byrd's tenure with the NRA was above all a publicity stunt, meant to appease African Americans crying foul play. Newspapers from Washington and New York praised her as an "efficient able Negro woman," "a trained colored economist—a woman," "former research assistant to famed Prof. Paul Douglas" of the University of Chicago, and a "shrewd economist."¹² Fellow communists documented her involvement with pride; she was not a "betrayor" but a committed activist "who sought to advance democracy and progress from within the government."¹³

¹² "What Daily Press Said of Miss Byrd When she was Appointed," RG 9 Entry 23 Box 270 Folder 542 (G-M), National Archives.

¹³ Mark I. Solomon, *The Cry Was Unity: Communists and African Americans, 1917-36* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1997), 236.

When Byrd and Waltye Murphy, her secretary, arrived at the federal buildings, they had not been assigned an office.¹⁴ After this grim introduction, they continued to be ignored. Byrd was not invited to any of the staff meetings of her department.¹⁵ According to a Washington paper, she was “asked to make a first-hand survey of conditions among Negroes in the South” and “railroad tickets were purchased for her, an itinerary mapped out, and Miss Byrd was all ready to leave” on a September morning.¹⁶ Immediately before she boarded the train, her supervisors told her the trip was cancelled, with no explanation. She remained deskbound for the rest of the fall.¹⁷

She did not give up so easily, though. In lieu of traveling south, she mailed “fifty questionnaires to leading colored men in industrial centers, chiefly of the South, requesting the exact facts about displacement of colored labor by whites.” Like other black social scientists, she believed in the power of quantitative data and so wanted to make “an irrefutable statistical study” of the “open secret” that employers refused to pay NRA wages to African American workers. In an interview with the *New York Dailey News*, she explained that “Colored men robbed of their livelihood mean colored families on relief. ... It seems to me we have a perfect right to ask the Administration, ‘What are you going to do about it?’”¹⁸ She continued to submit proposals, despite the fact that they

¹⁴ Ibid., 235.

¹⁵ Clark Foreman to Harold Ickes, December 13, 1933, RG 9 entry 23 Box 270 Folder 542, National Archives.

¹⁶ “What Daily Press Said of Miss Byrd When she was Appointed.”

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

remained unsigned and unauthorized on her supervisors' desk. Also, she compiled labor statistics like those she had assembled at Fisk.¹⁹

While Byrd was settling into her new office, other changes in the government's relationship to African Americans were afoot. Throughout the summer, postcards, letters, and telegrams had flooded the offices of Harold Ickes, Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins, General Hugh Johnson, director of the NRA, and members of the Labor Advisory Board calling for a black representative to oversee the economic status of African Americans. Different organizations, like the NAACP, had called on their local branches to facilitate the letter writing campaign. Women motivated the vast networks of their clubs and organizations to pass along information and call for action.²⁰

In response to this pressure, Secretary Ickes hired white Georgian Clark Foreman as the Advisor on Negro Economic Affairs based upon the advice of his white advisors. Foreman was a liberal active in the Interracial Commission. NAACP executive secretary Walter White sent an immediate telegram protesting that a white Southerner had been chosen for the position rather than a black person. Ickes "replied regretting the Association's attitude and expressing the hope that 'on further consideration of the principles involved and an opportunity to observe Mr. Foreman's work' our attitude will be a more friendly one [to you]."²¹ Ickes did not acknowledge or seem to understand why a black person might be preferable to Forman.

¹⁹ Col. R. W. Lea to Alvin Brown, Memo, December 13, 1933, RG 9 Entry 23 Box 270 Folder 542 (G-M), National Archives.

²⁰ Joyce Ann Hanson, *Mary McLeod Bethune & Black Women's Political Activism* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2003), 123..

²¹ Walter White, "Report of the Secretary for the September 1933 Meeting of the Board," September 6, 1933, Reel 5, NAACP I papers microfilm.

In a scathing critique of all the individual administrators he brushed up against, Davis gave his own opinion of Ickes' selection of Foreman. "I think I get the drift of Ickes' mind. He wanted to have a bureau where all Negroes could send their complaints to the 'Great White Father.' He wanted Clark to sort them out, throw some in the large wastebasket provided for the purpose, and give advice on the others. But Clark has taken his job too seriously with dire results." Though Foreman was a "nice fellow," he was "that type of emancipated Southern who likes to boast how liberal he is on the Negro problem." He also misdirected his advice, "instead of advising the Secretary of Interior he has spent most of his time advising Negroes." He suggested building houses for blacks, but only within the bounds of segregation. "His ideas runs something like this: Negroes are always complaining. Let them stop. Let them set themselves up with some of this public works money into separate little colonies quite apart from white people. White people will like this better; colored people should."²² Foreman had initially welcomed Davis's insight, but when African Americans, often through Davis, complained that this was segregation, Foreman blocked contact to Ickes.

John P. Davis and Robert Weaver, the two men that Du Bois had so easily dismissed in August, had been attending every code meeting they could and assiduously researching the affects of NRA codes upon different localities. Davis and Weaver had been with Ralph Bunche at Harvard; Davis walked away with a law degree and Weaver with a Ph.D. in Economics.²³ Rather than finding a place in a firm or academia, they

²² John P. Davis, "The Government Tackles the Negro Problem: Reminiscences of a Lobbyist," Reel 2, NNC Papers microfilm.

²³ There is a 2008 biography of Weaver that says he was only the second black person to receive a doctorate in economics in 1934—ignoring Harris. He was never considered for a position at Harvard, even though he was one of the best in his class. He spent a year at the North Carolina Agricultural and Technical

headed to Washington DC to set up their own office at 717 Florida Avenue, near the key intersection of U Street and 7th Ave, a few blocks south of Howard University. The NAACP spent the month after America trying to also tract the New Deal's relationship to blacks, but Davis and Weaver had the distinct advantage of being based in Washington DC, having the time to visit so many code hearings, and possessing the training to know the levels of obfuscations they were hearing. They pressed this advantage when they invited national organizations to merge their efforts in the Joint Committee on National Recovery. The YWCA, NAACP, and Federal Council of Churches were the first and most active organizations to join Davis' Negro Industrial League. Early members also included the AME Church and the AME Zion Church. They invited George Haynes, sociologist and executive secretary of the Department of Race Relations of the Federal Council of Churches, to be the symbolic head of the new Joint Council, with Davis as executive secretary and Weaver as Research Director. To bring in the powerful women's organizations, they invited Nannie Burroughs to be treasurer. They developed a preliminary budget of \$2600 for six months.²⁴ In his weekly column syndicated in black newspapers, Howard Professor Kelly Miller welcomed the new committee, pointing out that while the NAACP had done good work, they needed someone in Washington to effectively lobby Congress if they were going to assure black representation in the NRA codes.²⁵

College before returning to Cambridge to finish his dissertation (received the doctorate in June 1933). Wendell E Pritchett, *Robert Clifton Weaver and the American City: The Life and Times of an Urban Reformer* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

²⁴ White, "Report of the Secretary for the September 1933 Meeting of the Board."

²⁵ Kelly Miller, "A Lobby in the U.S. Capital," *Afro-American*, September 30, 1933.

Davis and Weaver immediately launched into compiling data and preparing briefs about the status of black workers in specific industries. William Hastie offered to be the representative from the NAACP. Weaver studied the steel, lumber and bituminous coal codes and wrote briefs about how they affected black labor. He then solicited support for the briefs; for the coal industry report John L. Lewis, President of the United Mine Workers and Mary Van Kleck of the Russell Sage Foundation offered their names.²⁶ They also tracked whether the codes were set up with a lower minimum wage for blacks, explicitly or implicitly, as many southern employers demanded, and whether or not occupations primarily held by African Americans were covered by the codes.

In addition to studying the codes, the two men focused on the real effects of the NRA activities. Davis took several trips south, documenting whether African Americans were being paid less than the minimum wage, or if they were being displaced in favor of white workers because employers refused to pay minimum wages to black workers. The latter was one of black workers greatest fears about the NRA. One of their main concerns was the Agricultural Administration Act, because the AAA attempted to reignite the farm economy by sending the relief directly to farm owners, leaving it at their discretion whether to share the help with their sharecroppers and tenants. The AAA paid farmers to plow under their crops in order to drive up the price of foodstuffs. Farmers drove off sharecroppers and tenants without sharing any of the money the federal government had given.²⁷

²⁶ White, "Report of the Secretary for the September 1933 Meeting of the Board."

²⁷ Davis to House Representatives, n.d., Reel 2, NNC Papers.

The YWCA National Board loaned Frances Williams for the month of October “as an executive to assist the work of the Joint Committee.” She and Myra Colson Callis, who had decided to join the work despite Du Bois’ tepid reply to her letter, focused on “the improvement of the status of Negro women in the codes of fair competition now being put into operation by the NRA.” Callis, a trained economist, was in charge of the Joint Committee’s plans on helping black domestic workers, but was also expected to “assist the officers of the Joint Committee in their general administration duties.” Williams petitioned the Associated Negro Press (ANP) to help her gather information. She called out for “all possible information on the unemployment problems faced by Negro women” to be sent to the Joint Committee office.²⁸ Throughout the fall, the JCNR protested violations of codes in the Southern steel industry conditions, the proposed code for hotel workers, and fought the absence of a domestic worker code.²⁹

After she returned to New York, Williams wrote about the NRA for the YWCA readership. She described the state of affairs as “A tragic situation--a government seriously concerned with recovery, a government with a good system or scheme to lead its people into recovery and 11 million people for whom the scheme does not seem to work, 11 million people who with the operation of the plan have fewer jobs and less money.” She also explained to the primarily white audience why African Americans had started to call the NRA the “Negro Run Around” or “No Recovery A-tall.” In order to

²⁸ “Y.W. Worker to Aid Joint Committee,” *Norfolk New Journal and Guide*, October 28, 1933, 14.

²⁹ “Protests Violations of NRA Codes by Southern Whites,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, September 23, 1933; “Steel Workers Lose Million,” *Afro-American*, September 16, 1933; “Bishop Jones Flays Hotel Workers’ Code,” *Afro-American*, October 7, 1933.

explain and offer a solution for these problems, Williams quoted Davis at length, concluding with her interpretation of his solution

What is the way out? 1. An accurate description and analysis of the situation as it is. 2. A study of the implications and consequences of the various ways out. 3. A weaving of the Negro into the entire place for Federal Recovery in the places where he as an individual best fits, a plan to be executed in infinite detail by each small segment of the government's organization.³⁰

Note again the younger generation's reliance upon careful data collection, scientific suggestions, and a racially integrated solution. Williams' reliance upon Davis' opinion of the situation started the tight fellowship between the YWCA and the JCNR which would continue over rocky road the next few years. This fellowship was sustained through Williams' continued work with the JCNR and monthly updates on its status in the *Womans Press*.

In addition to starting their concrete work, the Joint Committee continued to petition for black representation, this time on one of the advisory boards.³¹ Davis explained why this was advisable:

There was Leo [Wolman, chairman of the Labor Advisory Board] smoking his calabash at a desk piled with papers. He looked busy and hurried. I felt a little ashamed of having to worry him. But these codes were bothering me. I was certain that I had a plan by which I could take some of the worry off his mind. I knew that the Labor Advisory Board was made up of outstanding experts, but I also knew that these experts happened to be a woman, a Catholic, two Jews, and well known American Federation of Labor executives. It seemed not unlikely to me that another expert could be secured who would be a Negro. Leo and his eight colleagues had far too much other work to do to bother a great deal about keeping discriminations against Negroes from creeping into the codes. So I asked Leo if it wouldn't be a good thing to scout around among his 11 million Negro fellow citizens for one man or woman who could serve on

³⁰ Frances Williams, "The Negro and the NRA," *Women's Press*, January 1934.

³¹ White, "Report of the Secretary for the September 1933 Meeting of the Board."

his board. Leo said he would try. But so far he has been unsuccessful. It seems that the other board members didn't like the idea or something.³²

The NRA leadership alternatively promised someone and delayed naming anyone. A lengthy article in October described different prominent men that were being considered for the Consumer Labor Board, including Eugene Kinckle Jones and T. Arnold Hill of the Urban League, Dr. George E. Haynes, and John P. Davis. In the article, Secretary of Commerce James Roper explained that even though the nomination kept getting delayed, there was a black woman offering “exceptionally excellent type of service” that more than compensated. (Davis described Roper as “one of God's own noblemen right out of Dixie.”)³³ He praised her as “one of the finest and most efficient economists in the government” yet could not remember her name or name the correct department she worked in. The ANP reporter, his tone dripping with the irony of the situation, knew that Roper was talking about Mabel Byrd because there were so few black employees of the government.³⁴ At one point in early October Byrd's name was put forward as a possible candidate for the Department of Commerce Board, but Roper and the NRA leadership never gave “this problem very careful study,” as one official later confessed, and appointed no one that fall.³⁵

³² Davis, “The Government Tackles the Negro Problem: Reminiscences of a Lobbyist.”

³³ Ibid. He calls him Daniel Roper, not James Roper, but identifies him as the Secretary of Commerce.

³⁴ “Delay Naming of New Commerce Dep't Official,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, October 7, 1933.. Though it is understandable that a Secretary of Commerce would not know the names of all his employees, it is rather ironic that he was asserting that Byrd was doing all the work necessary, exceptional work at that, when he did not even seem to know what she was doing.

³⁵ “Roper Delays His Selection,” *New York Amsterdam News*, October 4, 1933.; Col. R. W. Lea to Brown, December 13, 1933. When Abram Harris took up a position on the Board of Commerce the following year, he found it frustrating and powerless. proof

Immediately after the article appeared naming them as possible candidates, Hill, Davis, and Haynes wrote the ANP that they had no interest in a government post.³⁶ The *Pittsburgh Courier* ran their decision under the headline “‘Big Shots’ Pass Up Department of Commerce Job.” Davis had arrived in the big leagues in only a few months.³⁷ They each asserted that they could do better work in their current positions. The ANP branded this assertion “an unselfish and high minded altruism ... placing the good of the race before their personal advancement.”³⁸ They were unwilling to let the New Deal appoint a few black people and thus get out of giving “a square deal for Negroes in this country.” Rather, “the most effective means to that end will be united action for the goodwill of all and through certain broad measures for all” and Davis, at least, planned to be at the head of that united action. He explained that they wanted to cooperate with the government. “We want the public officials to see that as far as possible the codes and other measures of Recovery shall be administered without discrimination on account of race or color. While we believe that there must be Negroes in all various departments at the counsel table when matters affecting Negroes are being considered, we are interested in such appointments only as steps toward those larger measures which the rank and file of Negroes now need and demand.”³⁹

By October the number of organizations participating in the Joint Committee had risen to fifteen because several sororities, fraternal organizations, and professional

³⁶ “Three Disdain Post in Federal Bureau,” *New York Amsterdam News*, October 11, 1933, 3.

³⁷ “Big Shots” Pass Up Department Of Commerce Job; “Happy Where They Are,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, October 14, 1933, 5.

³⁸ “Big Shots” Pass Up Department Of Commerce Job; “Happy Where They Are.”

³⁹ Ibid.

associations had joined. Davis arranged meetings which Walter White, Frances Williams, and Mabel Byrd attended, among many others.⁴⁰ In the middle of the month, Davis ran up to New York for a weekend discussion about a domestic worker code with the National Committee on Employer-Employee relationships.⁴¹ He dashed back to Washington in time for a conference on Wednesday, October 19 between the Joint Committee on National Recovery and Ickes and Roper of Roosevelt's cabinet. White, Haynes, Williams, and a Mr. J. A. Lankford of the National Technical Association all attended, with John Davis as the spokesman (an impressive feat for the young man, given how much White liked to be in charge. As the fall progressed, White started to act more and more like the Joint Committee was a subsidiary of the NAACP).⁴² The Joint Committee had had recent evidence that some New Deal officials were willing to work with them and wanted to press for this to continue, lest the urge lessen with time. Walter White had happily reported the following to the NAACP board just before leaving for DC:

There have been two most encouraging signs of desire on the part of officials of the NRA to deal fairly with the Negro: Recently at Atlanta, Georgia, Deputy Administrator Harold N. Waite made the statement that all labor—white, black or brown—is to get the minimum wage of forty cents an hour and the thirty-hour week. Shortly thereafter General Hugh Johnson quietly fought the differential between the wages of white and colored labor which Southern lumbermen and their political supports had sought to have incorporated in the code. Newspaper dispatches of September 28 stated: ‘Over the protests of the lumbermen and their

⁴⁰ “Plan Big Battle for Rights of Twelve Million,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, October 21, 1933; “You St. and Thereabouts,” *Norfolk New Journal and Guide*, October 7, 1933.

⁴¹ “Help Draft Code for Domestics,” *Afro-American*, October 21, 1933.

⁴² “Leaders Confere with Roosevelt Cabinet Members,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, October 21, 1933, 2.

political supporters Johnson struck the low colored wage scale from the code and insisted that a higher one be substituted.⁴³

The JCNR's work was built on careful examination of individual cases. Such small successes encouraged them to continue to press their concerns.

The JCNR was shaken in November by the sudden departure of Research Director Robert Weaver when Clark Foreman hired him as his assistant and potential successor.⁴⁴

After Davis had so hotly declined any such post himself, he was shocked by his partner's decision and publicly excoriated him in the press. Davis had several complaints. Weaver was so qualified that he should have been Foreman's superior, not the other way around.

Also, he publicly condemned Foreman for hiring Weaver, hinting strongly that the bureaucrat poached Weaver from the Joint Committee.⁴⁵ Davis repeated his warning to

Foreman and Ickes that Weaver's hiring should not be considered the end of working for African Americans. Davis called his hiring a palliative and refused to be dosed.⁴⁶ The

JCNR's executive secretary had begun to have a reputation among his collaborators for his hot temper, and such an angry exposure of domestic squabbles must have shocked some of them. After hearing repeated demands for more black representation in the national government, Foreman must have been confused by this reaction to his fulfilling this demand. Certainly the genteel ladies of the YWCA were not sure quite what to make

⁴³ Walter White, "Report of the Secretary Meeting of the Board," October 1933, Reel 5, NAACP 1 papers microfilm.

⁴⁴ Hanson, *Mary McLeod Bethune & Black Women's Political Activism*, 125-126; "Coe Named Advisor on NRA Group," *Pittsburgh Courier*, November 18, 1933. Rose Marcus Coe replaced him as research director, once again highlighting the important place of women within the JCNR that is obscured if all the attention is placed on Davis.

⁴⁵ "Objection Raised To Weaver Appointment In Interior Dept. By Joint Committee," *Norfolk New Journal and Guide*, November 18, 1933; "Raise Objections to Weaver Appointment," *Pittsburgh Courier*, November 18, 1933.

⁴⁶ "Think Weaver Should Be Over Clark Foreman," *Afro-American*, November 18, 1933, 11.

of the young lawyer, and turned to Walter White and Frances Williams for advice. For the moment, they assured the YWCA leadership that Davis was useful.

John Davis did not limit his research to DC code hearings. With the small money raised from the contributing organizations, Davis travelled throughout the south gathering concrete information on the status of black workers. Sterling Brown described one of these trips towards the end of a book review in his monthly column in *Opportunity*. The book he reviewed was a collection of photographs of the South full of romantic images of the pastoral south. In his concluding remarks, he contrasted these pretty pictures with those Davis brought back to DC after his recent trip south.

These tell a harsh story, not so much of divorce from the machine age, as of ignorance, squalor, injustice, exploitation. One of them, especially, is of pertinence here. Its locale is Arcadia, South Carolina; the chief character is named 'Gentle' Woodson. The picture is of a shack with six children on the steps, and two women in the doorway. The legend reads: 'This is the family of Gentle Woodson, together with his sister-in-law. No one works but Gentle, who gets twenty cents an hour; but has work on the average of twenty hours a week. He supports everyone in the picture on his earnings.' Obviously to other dwellers in this section, or visitors to it, there is something in this Gilead other than balm.⁴⁷

Woodson's wage would have doubled if he had been given the minimum wage of forty cents then being discussed in the code discussions.

Byrd's precarious position within the NRA office exploded into controversy on a Tuesday night at 7:30, December 12, 1933.⁴⁸ Labor Advisory Board members invited prominent African Americans through the Urban League to gather at Howard University with board members and city officials to discuss passing a code accepting lower wages for African Americans. In the formal Moorland room of the Founders Library at Howard,

⁴⁷ Sterling Brown, "Arcadia, South Carolina," *Opportunity*, February 1934.

⁴⁸ Foreman to Ickes, December 13, 1933.

with dark wood paneling and reference books lining the walls, influential African Americans from around the country mingled with awkward white officials who had come to press their hosts where they did not want to go. Among the scholars present were John Hope, president of Atlanta, Mordecai Johnson, Kelly Miller, and Abram Harris. Those travelling from their downtown positions were the newly appointed Eugene Kinckle Jones, special adviser on Negro economics to the Secretary of Commerce, William H. Hastie, assistant solicitor of the Interior Department, and Mabel Byrd, research and planning unit of the NRA. From the New York Urban League came T. Arnold Hill and Ira Reid. A special delegation from Oklahoma happened to be in town and appeared under the leadership of prominent newspaper editor Roscoe Dungee. Many others packed the tight room.⁴⁹

The meeting's officers, Dr. Isadore Lubin, head of the Bureau of Labor Statistics, T. Arnold Hill, and Dr. Meyer of the Labor Advisory Board, began by asking if there where any members of the press in the room. No? Then they would proceed in that privacy. Their first order of business was to persuade the reluctant audience to agree that lower wages would protect African Americans' existing jobs. As they spoke, "an undercurrent of opinion" developed "that the conference had been held on the Howard campus instead of downtown in some government building, so as to lend color to any expression of consent that might develop for differentials in the NRA codes." That explained why the meeting had been called so secretively. If the government representatives failed to get black support, they could leave without public shame. When the floor opened for comment, "no Negro supported the contention that a differential

⁴⁹ "Expose Secret NRA documents," *Afro-American*, December 16, 1933.

discriminatory wage, because of subnormal ability, or section, or under any other guise, would be advantageous for Negroes,” Clark Foreman reported to Harold Ickes the next day. “All Negroes who spoke agreed that such attempts at discrimination were reprehensible and unacceptable for Negroes.”⁵⁰

Before the meeting moved much further, John P. Davis strode to the front of the room with documents grasped tightly in his hand. As he began to read, the room became increasingly tense and people began to mutter in consternation. The reporters in the room, unbeknownst to the NRA men, paid careful attention. Davis had discovered the minutes from a meeting of a special Industrial Recovery Board meeting held on September 18, 1933.⁵¹ This board was comprised of the secretaries of Commerce, Labor, and the Interior, meant to oversee Hugh Johnson and assure he did not get out of hand.⁵² The meeting had been held immediately prior to Byrd’s planned departure south. The board discussed how to deal in general with the strident calls of black people for representation in the New Deal Administration and in particular with Mabel Byrd’s position.

Over and again the minutes revealed the brazen lack of sensitivity exhibited by the board members as they plowed forward in territory unturned by the federal government since Reconstruction. Note particularly the vocabulary the secretaries felt free to use when they thought themselves free of black observation. They started the meeting agreeing that that the numerous calls from African Americans for equal

⁵⁰ Foreman to Ickes, December 13, 1933.

⁵¹ I wish I knew who his inside source was. Perhaps Robert Weaver had discovered these minutes during his work with Foreman. Perhaps Foreman himself had passed them along.

⁵² Ohl, *Hugh S. Johnson and the New Deal*.

treatment was a “clamorous” nuisance, not attempts to protect legitimate rights (as Byrd had predicted in her Prague speech).

Secretary Ickes, a racial liberal, past president of the Chicago NAACP, and a self-professed curmudgeon, resisted appointing African Americans specifically to represent blacks because he feared that would take him into what was later called identity politics.⁵³ “If we did that, we would have to appoint women as women and nationalities as nationalities.”⁵⁴ When he had followed this line of thinking and appointed Foreman to represent African American interests, black leaders criticized him for it. While some politicians would not have worried about such criticism, it bothered Ickes because he “was a passionate defender of the underdog, and he cared intensely about individual rights and civil liberties. Fair treatment for black Americans was one of his many causes,” according to historian Nancy J. Weiss.⁵⁵ His words also convey his presumption that people of color or women had nothing unique to offer that white men could not also understand.⁵⁶

Secretary Perkins sighed in frustration that they could not simply espouse one solution offered by a unified opinion because “These Negroes do not agree with each other.” In response, showing a modicum of nuance, Secretary Ickes explained that

⁵³ Harold L. Ickes, *The Autobiography of a Curmudgeon* (New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1943).

⁵⁴ “Expose Secret NRA documents.”

⁵⁵ Weiss, *Farewell to the Party of Lincoln*, 51.

⁵⁶ This is still a common presumption in Washington, particularly evident in recent discussions about Supreme Court Justice nominee Sonia Sotomayor. Some criticized her remarks that her background gave her something to offer that others on the court did not have (catch phrased as her being a “wise Latina”). Conservatives thought she was placing racial politics with this remark and could not understand how her background might help her understand things that white males did not.

African Americans had “to be dealt with as individuals.”⁵⁷ However, he also asserted that he thought Foreman “will give them better service than a Negro would in his position” because he would not be clouded by personal passions.⁵⁸

Johnson, not a self-professed racial liberal by any means, introduced the subject of Mabel Byrd, without indicating that he knew anything about her other than her race and gender—“Dr. Sachs has appointed a Negress to look into certain matters with respect to Negro labor. I questioned the wisdom of it and the extent of authority he has given her.”⁵⁹ (Only the year before James Weldon Johnson had written a short note on racial etiquette in his autobiography and explained that among many acceptable terms, “Negress is considered unpardonable.”)⁶⁰ Given how little authority Byrd ever had, what amount would have suited Johnson? That he did not appreciate her talent or experience because he could not see past her race and gender is clearly seen in his language.

The board next considered whether it would be a good idea to permit Byrd to travel south on her research trip. Perkins nodded sagely at Johnson’s worry about the trip, “You have to watch your assignments very closely,” but then admitted that because “the Negroes are treated differently as workers than any other group of people, ... it is just possible that one who has exhibited discrimination against Negroes, and who has the necessary training in the other field, is not qualified to follow up their complaints.”⁶¹

⁵⁷ “Expose Secret NRA documents.”

⁵⁸ “Meeting of Special Industrial Recovery Board,” September 18, 1933, Reel 1, NNC Papers microfilm.

⁵⁹ “Expose Secret NRA documents.”

⁶⁰ James Weldon Johnson, *Along This Way: The Autobiography of James Weldon Johnson*, 1st ed. (New York: Da Capo Press, 2000), 375.

⁶¹ “Meeting of Special Industrial Recovery Board.”

But, “other things being equal, a Negro investigator sent out would be able to bring back the facts better than anybody else.”⁶² The others in the room could not agree with this opinion and Perkins wondered whether they could even find “a man or woman trained in the collection of facts,” blatantly ignoring Byrd’s extensive education and experience.⁶³

Dr. Dickenson, “who [had] done very competent work at the University of Chicago,” but evidently did not know fellow alumna Byrd, thought that “the selection of the research worker from the Negro race to go down to make that investigation would perhaps meet with difficulties that would not be met by a research worker of some other race.” The only advantage he could see would be winning “the confidence of the Negro,” but that could “be accomplished in a tactful way, which would be, instead of sending a research worker from their race, to put the investigating in the hands of some outstanding Negro like Dr. Moton.”⁶⁴ Dickenson suggestion of Moton, Booker T. Washington’s successor at the Tuskegee Institute, made sense because Moton had dedicated himself to building a positive relationship between black people and the government.⁶⁵ He had made himself “acceptable to the most racist politicians.”⁶⁶

When Davis read the next words, Byrd finally knew why she had not been permitted to travel south. At that fateful meeting, Dickinson demanded to know, would

⁶² “Expose Secret NRA documents.”

⁶³ “Meeting of Special Industrial Recovery Board.”

⁶⁴ “Expose Secret NRA documents.”

⁶⁵ Wilson Jeremiah Moses, *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism, 1850-1925* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 243.

⁶⁶ Francille Rusan Wilson, *The Segregated Scholars: Black Social Scientists and the Creation of Black Labor Studies, 1890-1950* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006), 135.

“this research worker be given her ticket and sent down this afternoon?”⁶⁷ Johnson revealed that he had already put a stop to that because he thought it unwise. Ezekiel agreed with his assessment; “we would be playing with fire to send a Northern trained Negro to the South, and certainly, anyone trained in Chicago.” Perkins agreed, abdicating her original opinion that a black researcher would be best, and said that it would be safer to just “put a distinguished Negro citizen [like Moton] on some of the central boards.”⁶⁸ Byrd would not be going south because, as Johnson declared, authorizing her trip “was crazy. It gave her authority to go in and interrogate employers and all that kind of thing.”⁶⁹

There was a certain amount of reason in their caution. Southerners could be suspicious of outsiders, and there had been many documented cases of northern African Americans being attacked when they started to ask questions. And black women, especially, were not respected by white men in general nor protected by the law. Yet, Mabel Byrd had spent a year working with Charles Johnson and E. Franklin Frazier as a field researcher in such tense cities as Birmingham, AL, Columbus, GA, Memphis, TN, and New Orleans, LA. Part of this job, just three years before, was interviewing white employers of black workers. She had already done what the board members feared she would do, without throwing flames or endangering herself. Surely there were few other African Americans in the country as well trained or experienced as she. But these board members did not know Mabel Byrd as an individual; they knew her only through their

⁶⁷ “Meeting of Special Industrial Recovery Board.”

⁶⁸ “Expose Secret NRA documents.”

⁶⁹ Ibid.

own expectations of her as a black woman. Rather than safe-guarding the rights and jobs of African Americans, in this case they wanted to make the politically expedient choice.

At the Howard meeting in December, John P. Davis concluded his reading of the minutes by declaring that they were “an indication of the callous indifference exhibited by President Roosevelt’s official family in treating with authorized Negro representatives of national organizations.”⁷⁰ The New Deal Administrators slunk back downhill to their offices or back to their suburban homes. The meeting had shaken them and they would not easily forget it.

The morning after the Howard conflagration, the New York *Amsterdam News* published the news that Byrd’s office (herself and her secretary) would be canceled on Friday the fifteenth.⁷¹ The minutes themselves hit the press a few days later. A flock of letters flew around NRA offices that Wednesday. Clark Foreman, disturbed by all that had been said the night before, set about to do something. He wrote to Colonel R. W. Lea, the Assistant Administrator for Industry, “It occurs to me that, in view of the avowed need on the part of the staff of the Labor Advisory Board for assistance in dealing with the problems which affect Negroes, Miss Mabel Byrd might be transferred to the staff of the Labor Advisory Board where she could carry on her work under more congenial conditions.”⁷² Foreman wanted to promote Byrd’s work, but at the same time give her a position declared “safer” by Perkins. After receiving the letter, Colonel Lea confessed that “This negro question is one to which I have given practically no time since

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ “NRA Cancels Negro Office: Drops Mabel Byrd as Social Economist in New Bureau,” *New York Amsterdam News*, December 13, 1933.

⁷² Clark Foreman to Col. R. W. Lea, Assistant Administrator for Industry, NRA, December 13, 1933, RG 9 entry 23 Box 270 Folder 542, National Archives.

it was handed to me. I feel, however, that this move is one which we should definitely consider.”⁷³ He demurred over why Byrd was unable to do her job, but said that regardless “I feel that this work should continue. In fact, I would be in favor of giving Miss Byrd, or some other representative, a more official capacity than she has had up to now.”⁷⁴

Foreman also wrote to Secretary Ickes a report of the previous night’s discussion. He confirmed that “Miss Byrd has never been able to function as an investigator and has never been called in to any of the staff meetings of her division.” When her office would be discontinued in two days, it would leave “the NRA without any one specifically concerned with Negro problems, despite the admission of the officials that they require assistance in handling these problems.” This was a dangerous step, “bound to increase the resentment of the Negro population against the NRA.” But Foreman was not just worried about the NRA’s reputation. “I feel sure that the Administration does not intend to discriminate against the Negro tenth of our population and I believe that if the matter could be brought to the attention of the higher officials, it could be fairly adjusted.”⁷⁵

Despite all his missteps, Foreman tried to make the situation better and evoked his boss’ self-identity as a liberal (bringing public rhetoric into private correspondence). But he could not give Byrd the kind of job she desired, though he did get her a position on the Labor Advisory Board. Life on the Board did not have the kind of hands on research component and direct ability to effect change for which Byrd had been searching. She

⁷³ Col. R. W. Lea to Brown, December 13, 1933.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Foreman to Ickes, December 13, 1933.

stayed for a month, having at least one private session with General Johnson, on Christmas Eve no less.⁷⁶ By January 27, Byrd had been replaced by “an English-born Caucasian.”⁷⁷ It is unclear whether she left of her own accord or was ousted.

Byrd did not immediately leave DC. Without a job, she threw herself into organizational activities. For example, in March she attended a hearing on the Costigan-Wagner Anti-Lynching Bill. During the hearing’s lunch break, Byrd, Miss Amelia Sears, commissioner of Cook County, Illinois, Mrs. Clara Call Page, of the Cook County Bureau of Public Welfare, and a man named Bowen, went downstairs to the Senate Café. They were all testifying in front of the committee. Sears described what happened next:

Miss Byrd and Mrs. Paige reached the door of the dining room ahead of Mr. Bowen and myself, looking for a table. A waitress approached and asked Mrs. Paige, in the presence of Miss Byrd, if Miss Byrd was colored. When told that she was, the waitress said that she could not eat there. We all protested against that. Shortly a plainclothes man approached and supported the stand taken by the waitress. I asked him who his superior officer was and immediately sought this person in the guardroom before. In the meantime, uniformed men came and seized Miss Byrd. She did not curse, but rightfully told them not to touch her inasmuch as she had committed no crime and had created no disturbance, any more than anyone else in the party of four.⁷⁸

The ANP reported that she was dragged through Capitol corridors before arriving at the police headquarters, where she fainted. She only revived an hour later. Finally taken home, she stayed in bed severely ill.⁷⁹ (This reaction seems too feminized for me to

⁷⁶ Alvin Brown to Col. R. W. Lea, December 21, 1933, RG 9 Entry 23 Box 270 Folder 542 (G-M), National Archives.

⁷⁷ “White Research Expert Named in NRA to Study Displacements,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, January 27, 1934, 4.

⁷⁸ “No Disorder in Cafe by Miss Byrd,” *Atlanta Daily World*, March 12, 1934.

⁷⁹ P.L. Prattis, “Woman Dragged from U.S. Senate Cafe,” *Norfolk New Journal and Guide*, February 24, 1934; “Miss Mabel Byrd Brutally Handled by D.C. Policemen,” *Atlanta Daily World*, February 21, 1934.

believe it entirely. Byrd had been through a lot to faint away in this case.) The story made front page news in black newspapers, under headlines like “Miss Mabel Byrd Brutally Handled by D.C. Policemen” and “Woman Dragged from US Senate Café.” White offered her NAACP legal assistance, but she hired her own lawyer. Senator Copeland, chairman of the Senate rules committee, ordered that the restaurant be opened to all African Americans, the reverse decision of the House when its restaurant had refused service to Representative Oscar DePriest the month before.⁸⁰ Copeland, though, decided to push for a table reserved for black patrons, a segregationist compromise rejected by the NAACP and others. He also started to insist that there had been no Jim Crow in the restaurant, but rather that there had been no open tables.⁸¹ Ernest Gruening published a sharp editorial condemning the action in *The New York Evening Post*, of which he had just become editor.⁸² Byrd was also able to enlist the help of Senators from the northwest, her home states, in the fight.⁸³

DePriest called for an investigation of the restaurant and obtained 143 signatures to get it out of the committee chaired by a Representative from North Carolina. In response, the House began to claim that the restaurant was only for members of Congress and their guests and posted a sign outside the door, “For Members.” Howard University students also supported the fight, going to “the restaurant in a considerable group but [they] were ejected by uniformed guards in a scuffle in the corridor.” The DC branch of the NAACP sent thirty-three interracial groups to the restaurant to be served. The

⁸⁰ Prattis, “Woman Dragged from U.S. Senate Cafe.”

⁸¹ “Copeland Says No Jim Crow in Senate Cafe,” *Afro-American*, March 3, 1934, 2.

⁸² “Friend of Negroes Edits Oldest U. S. Daily,” *Norfolk New Journal and Guide*, March 10, 1934.

⁸³ “Senator Tells Miss Byrd She has Good Case,” *Afro-American*, March 10, 1934, 2.

NAACP believed that the national discussion aroused by the incident “was responsible directly for the defeat in the August primaries of Representative J. J. Cochran of St. Louis Missouri, who at the time expressed his opinion that colored people should be satisfied to eat in the basement.”⁸⁴

Ten years later another interracial delegation of church women testifying for a bill (this time the Fair Employment Practices Commission bill) that included Anna Arnold Hedgeman was again asked to leave the Senate restaurant. The waiters had learned this time to explain that the Senate dining room was open only to Senators and their guests. Hedgeman pointed out all the others in the dining room who were not Senators or guests. Several of the northern women of the group protested their treatment all the way to the White House, not realizing how extensive segregation in the nation’s capital was. “It was in this atmosphere,” Arnold Hedgeman explained, “that our Negro, Jewish and white Protestant staff began the task of developing an FEPC program.”⁸⁵ Black and white staff members of the FEPC program could not even eat together in public except at the Union Station, and even then they could not share a cab to get to the Union Station.

Byrd returned to Chicago the city, though evidently not the school as it has no record of her ever completing her masters in economics.⁸⁶ She also returned to radical politics, becoming chair of the Chicago Women’s Committee Against War and

⁸⁴ (Pamphlet of the NAACP, no title or author, Reel 1 NNC Papers)

⁸⁵ Anna Arnold Hedgeman, *The Trumpet Sounds: A Memoir of Negro Leadership* (New York: Holt, 1964), 88.

⁸⁶ author correspondence with the archivist of the University of Chicago.

Fascism.⁸⁷ In August of 1934, she was part of the American delegation to the International Women's Conference against War and Fascism held in Paris. Ella Reeve Bloor, mother to the Communist Party travelled the country encouraging women to attend the conference; she called Byrd "a brilliant young honor graduate."⁸⁸ In New York, prior to leaving for Paris, Bloor was made chairman and Byrd secretary of the fifty two member delegation, comprised of "wives of miners, farmers and sharecroppers, workers, social workers, middle class women who hated war, and representatives of religious organizations."⁸⁹ Once they arrived in Paris, Byrd again distinguished herself and was elected one of the secretaries of the whole conference.⁹⁰

After this episode, Mabel Byrd mostly dropped out of the black press.⁹¹ She married Dr. L. S. Curtis in her late thirties, moved with him to St. Louis, and had twin boys, Robert and Thomas.⁹² Dr. Curtis was a professor of economics at Harris Teacher's

⁸⁷ Kathleen A. Brown, "The "Savagely Fathered and Un-Mothered World" of the Communist Party, U.S.A.: Feminism, Maternalism, and "Mother Bloor"," *Feminist Studies* 25, no. 3 (Autumn 1999): 558.

⁸⁸ Ella Reeve Bloor, *We are Many: An Autobiography by Ella Reeve Bloor* (New York: International Publishers, 1940), 254. During the 1920s and 1930s, Bloor "was the most visible nationally recognized woman organizer in the Communist Party." Brown, "The "Savagely Fathered and Un-Mothered World" of the Communist Party, U.S.A.," 538.

⁸⁹ Bloor, *We are Many: An Autobiography by Ella Reeve Bloor*, 253.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 255. Lulia Jackson, one of the other black American attendants, a miner's wife who had been active in Pennsylvania miners strikes, protested against the strong emphasis on peace throughout the conference. She argued, "It has just been said that we must not fight, that we must be gentle and kind to our enemies, to those who are for war. I can't agree with that. Everyone knows the cause of war—it is capitalism. We can't just give these bad capitalists their supper and put them to bed the way we do with our children. We must fight them." In response, "Everyone laughed and applauded, even the pacifist."

⁹¹ I am continuing to seek out other sources about her life.

⁹² I am trying to locate these men, who would be in their seventies, to share what I have on Mabel Byrd and inquire into their memories. Except for Ralph Bunche, whose children are publicly known, few other Amenians had children. The Fraziers, the Browns, and the Hedgemans were childless; I'm not sure about Sam Dorsey—though I could find out; Marion Cuthbert never married; Frances Williams had a brief, annulled and childless, union; Wenonah Bond married and had a daughter Adele Logan Alexander (but she did not become a large part of this dissertation. I have spoken to Alexander and her daughter, Elizabeth

College and Washington University.⁹³ Du Bois stayed with her family the morning after his 80th birthday party when he passed through there on a speaking tour.⁹⁴ She was executive director of the People's Art Center from 1950-1963, which had started as a WPA art project. She reemerged as a protest leader in the late fifties when the board of directors tried to stop her from producing racially aware drama.⁹⁵

Mabel Byrd had left the scene of the New Deal, but African Americans continued to struggle with federal administrators over the roll of blacks in the administration (which continued to grow) and the treatment of blacks outside of it. White administrators learned important lessons about racial etiquette from their interaction with Mabel Byrd and her support base. It had been, after all, since before Woodrow Wilson's tenure in office that there were significant numbers of blacks on the Hill.

In spring 1934, Harold Ickes formed an interdepartmental committee composed of all the blacks and people interested in Negro Affairs hired by the New Deal. At the second meeting, subcommittees on Labor and Agriculture were set up. Eugene Kinckle Jones, previously of the Urban League and now of the Department of Commerce, and Robert L. Vann, assistant to the attorney general, presided over the meetings. Among

Alexander (who read her poetry at Barack Obama's inauguration), but the conversations were short and not terribly enlightening.

⁹³

W. Sherman Savage to Robert D. Clark, November 26, 1974, Byrd Biography Single File Archives, University of Oregon Special Collections. He also taught at Lincoln University.

⁹⁴

Du Bois to Nina Du Bois, March 12, 1948, *Correspondence of W. E. B. Du Bois: Selections, 1944-1963*, Herbert Aptheker, editor (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997), 200-201.

⁹⁵

There is a small collection of materials relating to this episode in St. Louis at the Missouri Historical Society.

those present were Forrester Washington, FERA, Robert Weaver, Department of Justice, and Clark Foreman, Department of Interior. In other words, those criticized by the Young Turks and John Davis for being too willing to compromise with the administration.⁹⁶

Secretary Roper, the man who had gotten into deep water over some of his comments relating to Byrd, welcomed the assembled gathering, praising the men before him for their willingness to collaborate. He urged them not to “confine your thinking primarily to any one sector.”⁹⁷ He had only one measure of a good adviser, a measure that Eugene Jones fit admirably, “and it is a very simple one, namely, is the person able to overflow in his thinking and in his sympathies so that the persons outside of his own group will receive benefit?” Recognize this, he further explained, “the only society that is worth preserving is that society which is willing to recognize responsibility as well as rights.

The balancing of those two factors completes the picture of life.”⁹⁸ Roper’s speech represented once again a central frustration African Americans confronted when working in interracial settings. Abram Harris had confronted this as a young man in his relationship with V.F. Calverton, when the latter asked him why he always had to write about issues relating to blacks. Harris accepted the criticism, but also pleaded to be understood—if he did not study blacks, who would? Over and again, white males align

⁹⁶ Department of Commerce, Washington, March 6, 1934, NNC Reel 2. The list of those involved is a neat overview of most of those African Americans in the administration, including Dr. E. H. Shinn, Extension Service, Dpt of Ag; William D. Bergman, Chief of Appointment Division, Navy Department; J. Phil Campbell, Regional Assistant, Division of Program Planning, AAA; Dr. Floyd W. Reeves, Tennessee Valley Authority; Forrester B. Washington, Director of Negro Work in the Civil Works and FERA; W. H. McReynolds, Administrative Assistant to the Secretary of the Treasury Department; Eugene Kinckle Jones, Advisor on Negro Affairs, Dept of Commerce; W. D. Searle, Chief, Division of Civilian Personnel, War Department; J.J. McEntee, Assistant Director of the Emergency Conservation Work; Dr. Ambrose Caliver, Bureau of Education; Bruce Melvin, Subsistence Homesteads Division, Dept of Interior; Edward F. McGrady, Ass’t Secy of the Dpt of Labor; Dr. Charles F. Roos, Division of Research and Planning, NRA.

⁹⁷ Department of Commerce, Washington, March 6, 1934, NNC Reel 2.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

themselves with the “universal” while naming members of minorities or women as too focused on “particular” issues. The African Americans working in the New Deal had to prove their ability to discuss problems relating to all manner of Americans, while pushing the administration to consider the needs of black folk and answering to black communities demanding swift change. It was a tall order.

Chapter 14

Du Bois Leaves and the Harris Report

While Walter White ramped up his Anti-Lynching campaign, something that had nothing to do with the economic concerns of the nation, and little concretely to do with the rank and file of the black race (if Congress did pass the legislation would African Americans' fear of violence decrease immediately?), Du Bois began to publish startling new opinions about segregation in the *Crisis*. He started in November 1933 with "Pan-Africa and New Racial Philosophy" and continued in January with "Segregation." All of Du Bois opinions expressed that winter were not exactly new; he had been fulminating for a long time over them. But they entered a new world context. Any support for voluntary segregation or separatism could be taken up by government officials and used to validate their own segregationist instincts. For example, Clarence Pickett a southern official in the same building as Byrd, used Du Bois's words in a fight with the JCNR. The Joint Committee protested Pickett's plan to set up segregated resettlement communities, but Pickett waved Du Bois' opinions in their face. Clark Foreman, more nuanced and understanding than Pickett, started to cite Du Bois as one of the "outstanding Negro leadership who advocated cooperation within the race to develop leadership."¹ Suddenly, segregationists could evoke the most powerful black voice of reason on their side.² Du Bois did not seem to predict these misuses, or perhaps he did

¹ As quoted in David L. Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: The Fight for Equality and the American Century, 1919-1963* (New York: Henry Holt, 2000), 338.

² *Ibid.*, 335.

not care (segregationists would find any excuse, after all). He thought it was more important that “The thinking colored people of the United States must stop being stampeded by the word segregation.”³ African Americans needed to realize that segregation was not going away. Du Bois had fought it for more than thirty years and he decided finally to accept it and build up a strong black community, economically, politically, and culturally, that could rival whatever whites threw at them. Integration was a nice goal, but too far away “It is impossible...to wait for the millennium of free and normal intercourse before we unite.”⁴ He also wanted his readership to openly discuss segregation and planned to open the pages of the *Crisis* to the debate.

Shocked, angry, offended, White could not believe that Du Bois would publish the exact opposite of the NAACP’s official stance on segregation within the NAACP’s own organ. How could he continue to push white legislators and financial backers to support the NAACP when one of its own major officials did not support the party line? Then, to add insult to injury, Du Bois refused to publish White’s own opinions on segregation in the next issue, calling them too childish to be taken seriously. Du Bois’ editorials pushed the already chaotic national offices into insanity. Streater and Wilkins fought over the day to day management in the *Crisis* offices. Streater, confident in his managerial abilities, wanted to work for Du Bois, not for people he distrusted. “Three months at the NAACP had been enough to show that White was a liability and Wilkins was a ‘liar and a coward.’” he told Spingarn.⁵ The president, trying always to funnel

³ W.E.B. Du Bois, “Segregation,” *Crisis*, January 1934.

⁴ Du Bois as quoted in Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: The Fight for Equality*, 337.

⁵ Ibid.

black opinion rather than dictate it, felt pulled in all directions. Du Bois emotionally leaned upon him, while White expected him to follow his leadership. When the board gave a lot more power to White and Wilkins without consulting him, Du Bois wrote Spingarn that “He was tired of being humiliated, tired of ‘having continually to threaten severance of all connection with *The Crisis* and the NAACP.’”⁶

The debate over Du Bois’ editorials spread far beyond the pages of the *Crisis*. As David Levering Lewis notes, “Twelve thousand *Crisis* subscribers, fifty thousand NAACP members, and hundreds of thousands of readers of *The Defender*, *Courier*, *Afro-American*, *Amsterdam News*, and scores of other black newspapers assimilated Du Bois’s new racial philosophy in reactions varying from bafflement to apoplexy.”⁷ Particularly alarmed was William Hastie, newly hired counsel in the Department of the Interior. Every day he suffered glares in the hallways, questioning his presence and his abilities. In the *Afro-American*, Hastie said he had been unable to believe reports about the editorials “until my own eyes had convinced me. Du Bois, William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, himself—or not himself—making a puny defense of segregation and hair splitting about the difference between segregation and discrimination! Oh, Mr. Du Bois! How could you?!”⁸

A few weeks into the full outburst at the January editorial, Walter White had a meeting set up with Eleanor Roosevelt to discuss the Anti-Lynching Bill. He wanted to bring her whole-heartedly into the campaign so that she could sway her husband to

⁶ Ibid., 336.

⁷ Ibid., 338.

⁸ As quoted in Ibid.

support the bill. White feared that a filibuster would end the bill without a strong statement of encouragement from the president. Eleanor Roosevelt was as shocked as many of the “white friends of the Negro” were by Du Bois’ editorial. If the solution to the entire problem was voluntary segregation, where did that leave them? Where did it leave interracial work, so carefully developed and philosophized over the past thirty years? Mary White Ovington took the first “Segregation” editorial almost in stride. From the perspective of her Southern tour, she could see the sense in it. Yet it broke a piece of her heart to see whites seemingly flung out of the movement she had helped found as an interracial project. “It isn’t only what it says, which is bad enough, but it is so tragic in being spiritless,” she sighed to Pickens. He knew more about Communists than she—did he think the radicals could achieve practical results? Where should she turn without Du Bois?⁹

Du Bois did not restrict his criticism of the NAACP’s past and future only to discussing segregation. He also tore at the character and the intentions of Walter White, in a way remarkably similar to Garvey’s attack of Du Bois ten years earlier. “Walter White is white. He has more white companions and friends than colored. He goes where he will in New York City and naturally meets no Color Line, for the simple and sufficient reason that he isn’t ‘colored.’”¹⁰ Perhaps Du Bois knew that White once confessed to Spingarn at a private dinner party that he thought unmixed blacks inferior to those of

⁹ Mary White Ovington to William Pickens, February 12, 1934, Reel 20, NAACP I papers microfilm.

¹⁰ Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: The Fight for Equality*, 341. David Levering Lewis writes, “As for the secretary of the association, Du Bois declared him to be as irrelevant as Garvey had once asserted that Du Bois himself was—and from the same shameful *argumentum ad hominem*.”

black and white heritage. Nevertheless, personally attacking White made Du Bois seem petty.

White responded to Du Bois' attack on his character, his leadership, and his ideals by turning to his own network. In particular, he turned to two increasingly close friends—Charles Hamilton Huston and Frances Williams. For her superior at the YWCA, Williams carefully drafted a memorandum on her (formal) perspective on the situation. In it, she emphasized how common it was for older leaders to struggle to make way for the rise of younger ones, and how strong men tended to fight. Also, she explained how, with so few avenues of leadership, black men tended to be at odds. This memorandum she handed to Henrietta Roeloffs, secretary of the YW Committee on Public Affairs, even before she had asked Williams opinion, because she knew her superior would be handed clippings from the controversy by someone. Williams hoped that this tactful approach to the problem would become the YWCA's public approach. She scattered the letter throughout the YWCA building. Williams also sent a copy of the memorandum to Walter White, who eagerly used it to explain the situation to his network, including sending a copy to Houston.¹¹

The board tried to carefully consider Du Bois' opinions—as carefully as they could given that most on the board felt a visceral repugnance for the plan, including Du Bois supporter Abram Harris. After Spingarn modified Du Bois statements to be a bit more digestible, the board debated. It stuck to the NAACP's prior perspective—rejecting all segregation. In its formal announcement, however, it emphasized that it was fighting *enforced* segregation and did not deal directly with Du Bois' call for *voluntary*

¹¹ Williams to White, May 8, Reel 16, NAACP Papers 2a.

segregation. After Du Bois published a second ringing endorsement of “Segregation” in the *Crisis* in May, the board finally accepted Du Bois letter of resignation that he had run up the flagpole repeatedly over the years.¹² He offered it in June and the board accepted it in July.

Spingarn was not satisfied to hand the association over to White in the wake of Du Bois’ departure. He assembled a Committee on Future Plan and Programme balanced between younger and older members in May. To give the young radicals a bit more power, he handed chairmanship over to Abram Harris. The economist had added to his national prestige with tenure on the NRA’s Labor Advisory Board that spring (he found the meetings frustrating and ineffective).¹³ When White started to make a fuss about the composition of the board, of which he was not an official member, Spingarn sent a letter assuring him that they were both on the board ex-officio.¹⁴ Harris was reluctant to cooperate with any of the members of the committee, though he did talk to some extent with Sterling Brown and Rachel Du Bois. The others on the committee include Ovington, James Weldon Johnson, and Louis Wright. Harris took himself to New York for the summer and sequestered himself in libraries researching his plan. In August, Spingarn invited the committee to Troutbeck to discuss Harris’ conclusions thus far. Both Ovington and Johnson were at their summer homes just down the road from Amenia. Harris, though, did his best to avoid the journey north that he had taken a year before for the Amenia Conference. Spingarn hoped in August 1933 that his home would be an

¹² Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: The Fight for Equality*, 342.

¹³ Landon R. Y. Storrs, *Civilizing Capitalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

¹⁴ J.E. Spingarn to Richetta Randolph, July 12, 1934, Reel 23, NAACP 1 papers microfilm.

untrammeled space for discussion. In August 1934, Harris avoided Troutbeck precisely because the committee would not be “free and untrammeled there,” as he wrote to White.¹⁵ (It is interesting that he felt free enough with White to express this unvarnished opinion). Harris convinced the committee to meet in New York City, a drive that neither Johnson nor Ovington decided to make.

Harris’ Report had two primary contentions in it—one to make the NAACP more like the interdisciplinary educational outlet that he had discussed with Du Bois the previous winter, and two to democratize it.¹⁶ He wanted to divide up the power and place it across several different branches focused on gathering data and educating the masses. He truly believed that with education would come action. All of the committee approved of democratization in theory, but some were unsure what exactly it would look like.

Spingarn worried to White that

There is no question that in some way we ought to democratize the Association. All of us have felt this to be necessary for years, but for some reason or other nothing has been done about it. But to do it by giving the South representation in exact accordance with its Negro population would completely disorganize the whole work of the Association and reverse its ideals beyond recognition. And to confide all elections to the Annual Conference would mean chaos. I am sure we can arrive at a solution that will work well.¹⁷

Harris suggested moving most of the elections to the Annual Convention—a meeting of the entire membership in the summer—instead of the Annual Meeting—a small meeting of the leadership in January. Ovington mused to White, “I have been thinking a lot about

¹⁵ Jonathan Scott Holloway, *Confronting the Veil: Abram Harris, Jr., E. Franklin Frazier, and Ralph Bunche, 1919-1941* (Chapel Hill [N.C.]: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 94.

¹⁶ “As scholars August Meier and John Bracey have stressed, ‘advocated such sweeping changes to the Association’s organization that it foreclosed any possibility of being adopted.’”

¹⁷ J.E. Spingarn to Walter White, July 20, 1934, Reel 23, NAACP 1 papers microfilm.

Abe Harris' program. It is very important. Isn't it something that should be decoded at the Annual Meeting. I wish we might democratize by making the Annual Meeting, this year anyway, the most important event of 1935."¹⁸ Ovington was urging that White think about Harris' plan longer than he wanted to. By the October board meeting, he was ready to throw out Harris' plan, and Harris was getting too tired and depressed to fight for it. Ovington could not make the meeting and hoped to postpone discussion till the Annual meeting, which she could make.

It is often assumed that Ralph Bunche and Abram Harris were tightly knit at Amenia and the findings that came out of it was equally an expression of both. Some make the "Harris" Report into the one true outcome of Amenia and make Harris' conclusions a stand-in for all those who attended the conference.¹⁹ The gross simplicity of this statement is illustrated in the simple fact that Ralph Bunche and Charles Houston got together in September 1934, in consultation with William Hastie and John Davis, to offer an alternative to the Harris plan. In previous interpretations, Bunche is allied with Harris and they are both opposed to Houston (particularly his legal approach to civil rights). But with this generation, nothing was ever that simple. Boundaries were fluid and easily crossed. Enemies and friendships were made and broken. There were simply too few black intellectuals to burn bridges quite so easily. (It is assumed, too, that Bunche and the other Young Turks entirely abandoned the NAACP after Amenia, particularly

¹⁸ Mary White Ovington to Walter White, Fall 1934, Reel 20, NAACP 1 papers microfilm.

¹⁹ I would put Holloway, Lewis, and Ross in this camp. Less so Eben Miller, who discusses Juanita Jackson's youth movement as another outcome of the NAACP following Amenia. David L Lewis, *W.E.B. DuBois--Biography of a Race, 1868-1919*, 1st ed. (New York: H. Holt, 1993); Barbara Joyce Ross, *J. E. Spingarn and the Rise of the NAACP, 1911-1939*, 1st ed., Studies in American Negro life NL 32 (New York: Atheneum, 1972); Holloway, *Confronting the Veil*; Beth Tompkins Bates, "A New Crowd Challenges the Agenda of the Old Guard in the NAACP, 1933-1941," *American Historical Review* 102, no. 2 (April 1997): 340-377.

with the development of the National Negro Congress, yet Bunche spoke at the 1936 NAACP Convention, Frazier worked with the association throughout his life, and Brown continued to serve on committees. Really only Harris left entirely.)

Bunche and Houston raised thirteen different items with the Secretary. First of all, the association must remain “a protest organization,” and not be distracted into purely economic or purely educational work. The group also needed to avoid “too close affiliation with radical organizations, because such would kill off its work before it got started in the South.” The South needed to be handled like the North had been at the birth of the organization, so education was essential, just like it had been in the north. *The Crisis* could play an important part in this education, but the men were not entirely agreed. They all knew with no doubt in their minds that “The literary phases of the Crisis are over.” There was absolutely no more space or budget for “literary stories.” No, “the Crisis has to be a straight out propaganda magazine, interpreting present conditions. Hastie and John Davis want to keep the Crisis; Ralph and I question whether the Crisis budget could not be more effective if turned over to pamphleteering.”²⁰

There was a danger that Harris’ plan would too closely ally the NAACP with the Democratic Party. Houston and Bunche argued that the work must be about “men and measures as distinguished from parties.” Part of the reason that they wanted to remain unaffiliated was that they desired the association to move into more and more lobbying activities, like the work begun by the JCNR, and away from just from individual cases. This seems at first a bit of a surprise from Houston, architect of the Road to Brown. The next point made clear his intent. The association needed to build “up local strength and

²⁰ Charles Houston to Walter White, September 2, 1934, Box 24 Folder 12 H, Bunche Papers UCLA.

resistance wherever possible, by laying down in advance lines of procedure to be followed by local branches in anticipation of well known situations,” particularly what to do in the cases of all white juries and school differentials.

In order to transform the association into a more effective political lobby, the men suggested moving the headquarters to Washington. They did not want to destroy the organization. By no means; “All agreed that Association has unique chance to interpret present conditions to Negro; and Negro’s position to Nation. No other Association doing it, or free to do it without strings attached.” In one important way, the young men agreed with Harris. The Association must become more about the “rank and file” than it was about the national office. “Must gather strength of membership if its protests are to carry the maximum weight and influence. While it may not be able to go radical whole way, graver dangers lies in its becoming reactionary.”²¹ It was in these last two lines that White found his objection. He largely dismissed this report as he had Harris’, though Houston continued to work with the organization to implement some of his ideas—particularly those around school desegregation cases.

Another discussion alive that spring was whether or not to bring the Joint Committee completely under the control of the NAACP. The Association was already the Committee’s primary funding source and White believed in the work the JCNR was doing. Davis, however, was a worry. As Ovington pointed out, he was not a man to be controlled. “I have a great admiration for Davis but I feel it ‘in my bones’ that he would sacrifice the NAACP any time for his own more radical ideas. I think he is an all around communist. The others are more playing with it, but not he. He has seen the absurdity of

²¹ Ibid.

the Social Welfare present method of relieving labor and he knows there must be something drastic.”²² Williams also pointed out the concerns she had about the future of the Joint Committee. She was not sure personally that the effort was worthwhile; it seemed like the New Deal was in danger of being overthrown in the courts anyway and perhaps their energy should be directed elsewhere. As for the other YWCA women, most of them, according to Williams, “still feel that the work of the Joint Committee must continue. However, their experiences with John have led them to be decidedly uncomfortable. They do not feel that they can trust him to deal above board and honorably with them.”²³ Her comments represented one of her last official acts as a liaison between the NAACP, the YWCA, and the JCNR. Later that week, Williams left for Chicago to study for a year. She believed she had so arranged things within the YWCA that the executive secretary, Henrietta Roelofs, would not be able to retreat from working with racial issues, even as her own interest waned (as Williams knew it would). These arrangements gave her “a great sense of respect for myself and I would be one hundred per-cent OK,” she wrote Houston, “were it not for a continual sense of personal defeat and of personally not counting in this world.”²⁴

White and Davis danced around each other until the next spring and a Social Science Conference at Howard University gave birth to the National Negro Congress, a fully fledged competitor to White’s NAACP.

²² Mary White Ovington to Walter White, October 6, 1934, Reel 20, NAACP 1 papers microfilm.

²³ Frances Williams to Louis Wright, March 20, 1935, Reel 28, NAACP 1 papers microfilm.

²⁴ Frances Williams to Charles Houston, March 20, 1935, Reel 28, NAACP 1 papers microfilm.

Charles Hamilton Houston spent the rest of the 1930s pursuing two kinds of cases, opening the democratic primaries in Texas to African American voters and picking the educational cases that would open up segregated educational systems. He started with graduate and professional schools, proving that southern states were not providing equal education because there were often no graduate schools open to blacks in the states. Law schools and graduate schools had to find a way to accommodate a single black student. Some tried to pay them to go out of state. Another placed a chair outside the classroom so that the black student could listen in, but not actually participate. Finally they began to realize that they had to actually set up entirely separate institutions (as one did for a single law student) in order to be equal as well as separate or else admit black student. It was two decades of that logic that led to Houston's protégé, Thurgood Marshall's winning defense in *Brown v. Board of Education*.

Another successful campaign begun in the 1930s, though brief, was the Youth Movement with Juanita Jackson as its guiding light. In a symbolic move, Mary White Ovington finally departed her office for retirement in the Berkshires and Juanita Jackson moved in. The youngest person at Amenia, Jackson was already very accomplished. Her mother trained her to be a commanding presence and a major leader in the Baltimore community. For a few years before she married, she extended that influence nationwide through the Young People's Campaign. She held meetings all over the country and attempted to woo a younger generation into the NAACP. For example, on one day in 1936, NAACP Youth Councils all over the country held simultaneous protests demanding equality in education and showing support for Houston's legal cases.²⁵ White

²⁵ "Launches Protest Against Inequality," *New York Amsterdam News*, November 7, 1936.

explained to Harris why he wanted to invite Jackson to join them, an invitation Harris told the Board he thought was unwise (officially he objected to her youth, but given prior remarks, he probably also disliked her gender). White believed Jackson's charisma would draw in "the masses of people," whose support the NAACP currently lacked.

I do believe that Miss Jackson's youth, energy and enthusiasm can be of great value in selling the NAACP's program to a greater number of people, especially after she has had opportunity to work here in the office for awhile and particular when she has had to go up against some of the tougher, unpleasant phases of the problem. Or, to quote Charlie Houston regarding Miss Jackson:

'The more I think of Juanita, the more I think she has the makings. But she should be put up against the working class, and shown some of the sordid conditions Negroes and poor whites live in so she will have more than an academic approach. She has plenty of guts and will fight. But in my opinion her eyes have not been fully opened. You remember how fast she came along those two days she was coming from Oklahoma City to train time in Memphis. Well she needs a lot more of this in huge chunks. Then she'll be a whirlwind.'

At any rate, this is no bridge which we won't be able to cross for six months or so as Miss Jackson has decided that she would be of greater value to the Association after she gets her Master's degree from the University of Pennsylvania next June. Incidentally, her thesis is on the exploitation of Negro women workers in Philadelphia industries."²⁶

Never before had the NAACP so directly targeted the young, in the way that the YWCA had or the NNC did contemporaneously. It proved successful at bringing in new members, but not necessarily re-conceiving the nature of the NAACP itself. That was firmly in the hands of Walter White and Roy Wilkins.²⁷

²⁶ White to Harris, November 27, 1934, NAACP 2a papers, Reel 17.

²⁷ For further discussion of Juanita Jackson, see Eben Miller, "Born Along the Color Line: The Second Generation of the Talented Tenth and 'The Problem of the Twentieth Century'" (Ph.D., Brandeis University, 2004); Prudence Cumberbatch, "What 'the Cause' Needs is a 'Brainy and Energetic Woman': A Study of Female Charismatic Leadership in Baltimore," in *Want to Start a Revolution?: Radical Women in the Black Freedom Struggle*, ed. Jeanne Theoharis, Komozi Woodard, and Dayo Gore (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 47-71.

Chapter 15

National Negro Congress

“Negroes among themselves sometimes declare that we are the most disjoined and discordant group in the world, but I judge that we are, after all, merely human. If we could achieve the superhuman state of complete unity on an intelligent plan, not all the forces arrayed against us would be able to block our march forward.”¹

--James Weldon Johnson, 1933

¹ Johnson, *Along This Way*, 408-09.

In 1936, John P. Davis realized that the Joint Committee on National Recovery had lost its financing and its mission. The New Deal seemed to have ended with the Supreme Court ruling many of its operations unconstitutional, so it no longer made sense to urge it to keep African Americans in mind. Davis also realized that he wanted a larger role for himself, something that went beyond attending code hearings and lobbying politicians. He began to envision what African Americans could do if they united all their organizations under one leading body. He turned to several Americans with his vision and together they created the National Negro Congress. Though short lived, the Congress was a major force in national black politics for the four years from 1936-1940. Its two main goals became increasingly in tension with each other. The first and primary goal was to unite all organizations working for and with African Americans. Its primary method of approach was through workers' rights and the unions. Many in the NNC suggested creating the interracial workers' alliance that the Americans had urged in their Findings Document. As more and more white Communists joined the NNC as part of this push, they began to try to take over the Congress. With anti-communism rising, the NAACP's refusal to cooperate, and attention being redirected towards the World War, the struggle over leadership within the NNC between black liberals and white communists broke apart the Congress' tentative alliance.

The National Negro Congress was born out of the academy. To get a sense of the kind of accepted scholarship that Davis worked against, consider a conference, "Problems, Programs and Philosophies of Minority Groups," held at Howard University the same spring (1935) as the conference that gave birth to the NNC, "The Negro and the New Deal." Putting the two conferences in conversation shows the academic and

international impulses of Amenians at Howard. The private meeting at Ralph Bunche's house after the New Deal conference, which is considered the informal beginning of the NNC, was the culmination of the rebellion expression at the Second Amenia Conference.

The Minority Conference gathered over two weekends in April many prominent white and black professors to focus not just on African Americans' conditions, but also the experiences of Jews, colonial subjects, and East Indians. Locke appealed to Robert Park to join them from Chicago; "The immediate purport of this is to ask if you can and will 'come over to Macedonia to help us'. The 'we' isn't editorial—Frazier joins me in the plea, having nerved me up to ask you to come for the inadequate consideration of travel expense. ... In spite of serious handicaps, I do think we have hold of the tail of something that must be pulled out of its academic burrow."² Locke and Frazier wanted this conference to lead to more than more academic conversation; the desire and the actualization were two different things. They did not offer many ways that the ideas propounded at the conference would extend beyond the academy. One thing they suggested was publishing the major papers in Howard's *Journal of Negro Education* to extend the influence of the conference.

This conference brought together many individuals and organizations introduced in previous chapters. Friday afternoon, April 5, Raymond Buell chaired a session on "The Political Position of Minority Groups;" he spoke on "Autonomy and Self-Determination," Leifur Magnusson of the International Labor Office (the organization Mabel Byrd worked for in Geneva) on "Assimilation," Ralph Bunche on "Colonial Status: Mandates and Indirect Rule," and E. Franklin Frazier on "Bi-Racialism in the

² Alain Locke to Robert Park, March 12, 1935, 164 Box 76 Folder 20, Locke Papers MSRC.

U.S.” The next afternoon, Francis Henson, executive secretary of the International Student Service (the international group that Juliette Derricotte and Mabel Byrd visited in Europe and on whose planning board Marion Cuthbert served) chaired the panel on “Minority Tactics and Techniques of Minority Assertion.” Du Bois, Rabbi Jacob J. Weinstein, and Mordecai Johnson followed with a discussion on Minority Tactics among Jews and Blacks, and on militant and non-militant tactics. That evening, Harris was scheduled to introduce economic problems, but Locke took over in the official program. Joining him was Joshua Kunitz, an editor at the *New Masses*, Du Bois, and Bertram Wolfe, Director of the Workers’ School in New York.³

The next week brought another distinguished group, including Otto Klineberg of Columbia University (he had been instrumental in the creation of the Quaker sponsored Swarthmore Institute of Race Relations), Robert Park, Benjamin E. Mays of the Howard School of Religion, Horace Kallen (a philosopher friend of Locke’s who had developed ideas about pluralism with the Howardite) and others.⁴

Bunche’s scratched notes on his program indicate some of his frustration with the language of the conference, as well as his ability to sift through the chaff for something useful. He heard some indistinct musings on economics, “Black babes in the capitalist woods,” and others talking about the benefits of “pacifism vs. social justice.” Another speaker suggested that religion was an escape because when the “ruling ideas controlled by ruling class,” religion fails. Did Bunche, whom some scholars label as a proto-communist in this ear, agree with the speaker who said “Revolution is a white man’s

³ “Problems, Programs and Philosophies of Minority Groups Program,” Box 43, Bunche UCLA.

⁴ For more on Kallen and Locke’s relationship, see Louis Menand, *The Metaphysical Club*, 1st ed. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001).

instrument”? As to the preeminent African American intellectual, Bunche wrote only “W.E.B. Du Bois; goatee wobbler.” He also noted that while social palliatives like interracial conferences were often necessary and of real benefit, “their employment and advocacy should never blind us to fact that such devices have nothing permanent to offer” and we “must not be deluded by them, nor permit them to seduce the possibility of effective solutions of our problems.” This precaution is “particularly essential in [regards to] problems attributable to imperialism.”⁵ Conferences like these brought major professors, religious leaders, and public intellectuals together on Howard’s campus. The conversations and networks they created contributed to the success of Howard’s Social Science department in this era. Mordecai Johnson had worked hard to preserve freedom of opinion at the university. At the same time, professors found they appreciated the theoretical nature of the discussion at different levels. Some wished for more action. They posed the question of what to do now at the next conference that spring.

A month later, May 18-20, 1935, Howard University and the Joint Committee on National Recovery co-hosted a large gathering to reflect upon the status of African Americans under the New Deal, “Critique of New Deal Social Planning as it affects Negroes.” Government executives joined scholars in a mesh of practical and theoretical discussions. Many of the prominent names in the era attended this conference as they had many others and gave speeches they had practiced many times. They found that black workers bore a disproportionate burden of the economic depression and that the New Deal, whether through its national creation or local administration, did not administer aid

⁵ Bunche, notes on his program, Box 43 UCLA; Ralph J. Bunche, “A Critical Analysis of the Tactics and Programs of Minority Groups,” *The Journal of Negro Education* 4, no. 3 (July 1935): 308-320.

fairly to African Americans. Several of the speeches were published in the January 1936 edition of the *Journal of Negro Education* printed on Howard University's press.⁶

While preparing for the conference, Ralph Bunche, Chairman of the Program Committee, and John P. Davis mailed an explanation of their hopes for it. They asked people across the country to send data which would then be analyzed by committee in preparation for the conference. Only with this "unselfish cooperation of those experts or with first-hand knowledge of certain aspects of the subject" could they "amass and analyze a really representative body of data."⁷ By sending these letters throughout the country, they hoped to elicit a much wider range of case studies and "treatment" suggestions than if they relied on scholars alone. They particularly wanted to know about "Negro domestics, industrial, and agricultural workers. What are their labor conditions,

⁶ Albion Hartwell, "The Need of Social and Unemployment Insurance for Negroes," *The Journal of Negro Education* 5, no. 1 (January 1936): 79-87; Mary Anderson, "The Plight of Negro Domestic Labor," *The Journal of Negro Education* 5, no. 1 (January 1936): 66-72; W. E. B. Du Bois, "Social Planning for the Negro, Past and Present," *The Journal of Negro Education* 5, no. 1 (January 1936): 110-125; Ralph J. Bunche, "A Critique of New Deal Social Planning as it Affects Negroes," *The Journal of Negro Education* 5, no. 1 (January 1936): 59-65; J. Phil Campbell, "The Government's Farm Policies and the Negro Farmer," *The Journal of Negro Education* 5, no. 1 (January 1936): 32-39; John P. Davis, "A Survey of the Problems of the Negro Under the New Deal," *The Journal of Negro Education* 5, no. 1 (January 1936): 3-12; Emmett E. Dorsey, "The Negro and Social Planning," *The Journal of Negro Education* 5, no. 1 (January 1936): 105-109; James W. Ford, "The Communist's Way Out for the Negro," *The Journal of Negro Education* 5, no. 1 (January 1936): 88-95; George Edmund Haynes, "The American Negro in the Changing Economic Order," *The Journal of Negro Education* 5, no. 1 (January 1936): 13-19; T. Arnold Hill, "The Plight of the Negro Industrial Worker," *The Journal of Negro Education* 5, no. 1 (January 1936): 40-47; Edward Lewis, "The Negro on Relief," *The Journal of Negro Education* 5, no. 1 (January 1936): 73-78; Ernest Rice McKinney, "The Workers Party's Way Out for the Negro," *The Journal of Negro Education* 5, no. 1 (January 1936): 96-99; A. Howard Myers, "The Negro Worker under NRA," *The Journal of Negro Education* 5, no. 1 (January 1936): 48-53; A. Philip Randolph, "The Trade Union Movement and the Negro," *The Journal of Negro Education* 5, no. 1 (January 1936): 54-58; Olive M. Stone, "The Present Position of the Negro Farm Population: The Bottom Rung of the Farm Ladder," *The Journal of Negro Education* 5, no. 1 (January 1936): 20-31; Norman Thomas, "The Socialist's Way Out for the Negro," *The Journal of Negro Education* 5, no. 1 (January 1936): 100-104; "Editorial Comment: The National Conference on the Economic Crisis and the Negro," *The Journal of Negro Education* 5, no. 1 (January 1936): 1-2.

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Ralph Bunche and John P. Davis, Form Letter, March 1935, Reel 1, NNC papers.

hours of work, wages, annual labor income?”⁸ Also, they asked their correspondents to make suggestions for local experts who should attend the conference. Like Spingarn and Du Bois while planning the Second America Conference, Bunche and Davis tried to reach beyond the regular conference folk to find dynamic leaders already in motion. Unlike the older leaders, Bunche and Davis wanted a large contingent of conferees.

The minority conference also proposed solutions, but remained within the world of scholarship. With John Davis’ influence in the planning stages, this conference was determined not to be about “research for research’s sake. Our purpose is to find out the present social and economic condition of the Negro in America, to determine its effect on our whole national economy and to act on the basis of this data.”⁹ Though they wanted their work to extend beyond scholarship, they planned to base it on a “thoroughly scientific” foundation. Bunche continued to believe that social science and careful could offer solutions to the problems African Americans faced.

Despite their high hopes, many of the usual conference goers appeared and offered many of the same solutions they had already heard. On the last day, Bunche and Davis, tired of all this sameness, invited the younger attendants to gather at Bunche’s house. Over sixty men and women sat around the house and gardens all afternoon trying to decide what to do. Unlike most of the other meetings discussed in this dissertation, this one was not carefully planned or rehearsed. Nor was it guided or shadowed by the Progressive Era leadership. The young (ish...some were reaching their late 30s) men

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

could gab and drink and be a bit irresponsible without anyone glaring at their mannerisms, like Du Bois had done at Amenia.

Davis introduced his idea for a unified black organization fighting for workers' rights. The group enthusiastically responded to all of Davis' ideas. They agreed that their fight was dispersed too widely among too many groups. Perhaps bringing everyone together under one organizing body would lead to real change. After they dispersed, he sat down to pen "A Call for a National Negro Congress." He sent the call "to over 4,000 church, trade union, civic professional and fraternal organizations throughout the country, urging them to send delegates to the meeting."¹⁰ The call urged "race organizations to join together in one effort to end discrimination against the black man in the ranks of organized labor, for relief to every needy race family, for concrete aid to an impoverished farm population, for an end to the national crime of lynching, for complete equality for race women and youth, for complete civil liberty including the right to vote in the South, and for the defense of Ethiopia from imperialist aggression."¹¹ All that summer and fall, Davis travelled on Joint Committee business, but spoke most compellingly about the National Negro Congress. He passed out his thirty one page pamphlet "Let Us Build a National Negro Congress," with Frederick Douglass emblazoned on the front in all his leonine glory, and urged his listeners to attend the first Congress to be held February 14-16, 1936 in Chicago to celebrate Frederick Douglas' 120th birthday.¹² While John Brown visited the second meeting of the Niagara Movement, "Douglass's Spirit

¹⁰ "4,000 Groups Contacted for Race Congress," *Chicago Defender*, December 28, 1935.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² John P. Davis, "Let Us Build a National Negro Congress" Reel 2 NNC Papers microfilm. See also the correspondence on Reel for his travels representing the JCNR and the NNC in 1935.

Dominate[d] National Congress.”¹³ (At the same time that Davis was travelling, several black leaders in different cities set up their own branch of the NNC in preparation for the Congress. Arthur Huff Fauset, husband of Crystal Bird Fauset and sister of Jessie Fauset, led the organizing campaign in Philadelphia).¹⁴

This Congress was the utter opposite of Amenia. Davis wanted to draw as many people as he possibly could, from as many different opinions as he could. He blanketed black newspapers with information and many articles appeared throughout the months leading up to the congress.¹⁵ Eight hundred and seventeen delegates arrived from far and wide in Chicago in the cold days of February. Students from Hampton College brought a gavel with them that they had created out of wood from one of the last slave ships. The conference did not ban white people, but the focus was primarily on the black participants. The Ameniens active in the organization of the NNC were Bunche, Moran Weston, Frank Weston, Channing Tobias, Frances Williams, Marion Cuthbert, Sterling

¹³ “Fred Douglass's Spirit Dominate National Congress,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, January 4, 1936.

¹⁴ See the letters between Fauset and Davis in NNC Papers, Reel 5.

¹⁵ Some of the articles just from January through the middle of February include “Congress Will Meet To Probe Negro Problems,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, January 2, 1936; “Fred Douglass's Spirit Dominate National Congress,” “Fred Douglass Work Inspired Negro Congress,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, January 9, 1936; “Set Up Negro Congress Committee in New Haven,” *The Chicago Defender (National edition)*, January 11, 1936; “Sigmas Elect Lewis: Launch New Program,” *The Chicago Defender (National edition)*, January 11, 1936; “Groups Push Plans for Negro Congress,” *The New York Amsterdam News*, January 11, 1936; “Negro Congress Idea Challenged,” *The New York Amsterdam News*, January 11, 1936; “Sigmas Re-Elect Lewis President,” *The Pittsburgh Courier*, January 11, 1936; “Congress Planned for February,” *Atlanta Daily World*, January 12, 1936; Jack Williams, “Why We Need A National Negro Congress,” *Atlanta Daily World*, January 13, 1936; “Tenn. Group Joins Nation Wide Negro Congress,” *Atlanta Daily World*, January 13, 1936; “Local Citizens Will Consider Negro Congress,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, January 16, 1936; “Delegates for Congress To Be Selected,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, January 23, 1936; “Women's Club Leaders Meet,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, January 23, 1936; “Plan to Send Delegates to Race Congress,” *The Chicago Defender (National edition)*, January 25, 1936; “Ethiopian Envoy in London here to Push Cause,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, January 27, 1936; “Local Delegates Will Meet Tonight To Choose Negro Congress Representative,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, January 30, 1936; “Sponsoring Committee In Meeting,” *The Chicago Defender (National edition)*, February 1, 1936; “Negro Congress Plans Soar As February 14 Date Nears; Over 1,000 Delegates Loom,” *Atlanta Daily World*, February 3, 1936; “To Sponsor Meeting for Negro Congress,” *The New York Amsterdam News*, February 8, 1936; JOHN EVANS, “National Negro Congress Will Open on Friday,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 9, 1936.

Brown, and Louis Redding. From the beginning, when he asked Nannie Burroughs to be treasurer of the incipient organization, Davis was conscious of the need to include club women in the organization. This desire was reflected when he soon replaced Burroughs with Marion Cuthbert as treasurer of the official organization. Cuthbert “was most deliberate in [her] acceptance of the position,” though she meant to hold it for a limited time only. She wanted to show that she was “intensely interested in it” and encourage the black women she had influence over to join the work, but knew that her YWCA demanded so much of her time that she would not be able to offer the position her full concentration.¹⁶ The conference elected the head of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, A. Philip Randolph, as president, and confirmed Davis as executive secretary and Cuthbert as treasurer.¹⁷ By this time the Joint Committee had mostly died. The National Congress rose up to take its place, maintaining the same headquarters and the same executive secretary, but drastically changing its focus. One of the major disappointments

¹⁶ Marion Cuthbert expressed her frustration with the way African Americans were treated in the U.S. in an article published in 1936. She wrote that though African Americans had begun to move away from the Republican Party to the Democratic and third parties, “the Negro is still forced to think largely in terms of his racial group and its welfare. This is an unhealthy condition for democracy. Why should the Negro think so much in terms of his own group? The answer lies in the denial of his basic citizenship rights. Were he equally a citizen he could forget his race.” Cuthbert was not a black nationalist. She also tended to write about African Americans as she were outside the group, starting her article with “The Negro continues to be one of the greatest question marks on the American scene. No matter whether the issue turns on economics, politics, or some other phase of our culture, up comes the question of the Negro.” She explained why the U.S. democracy failed for blacks: “It does not adequately prepare him for citizenship through education; It does not protect him in the exercise of his basic rights as a citizen; It does not give him equality before the law; It does not encourage his entry into the industrial economy of the country.” In her overview of organizations that struggled to overturn this situation, she mentioned the NNC. She seemed skeptical of its potential, describing it as “An organization which may gather together all the forces in Negro life for a telling drive for their rights as workers and citizens.” Marion Cuthbert, “Democracy and the Negro,” *Social Action* 2, no. 14: September 15, 1936.

¹⁷ “Official Proceedings of the National Negro Congress, February 14, 15, 16, 1936, Chicago” Reel 2 NNC Papers microfilm.

of the assembled gathering was the relatively few number of Southerners in attendance.¹⁸

The congress did attract a large variety of organizations:

Representation by Organizations

Churches and religious organizations	81
Fraternal Societies	71
Trade Unions	83
Farm Organizations	2
Youth Organizations	26
Civic Groups and Societies	226
Political Groups and parties	46
Women Organizations	23
Educational Organizations	14
Professional Groups	6
Business Organizations	2
Newspaper groups	5
Total Organizations Represented	585 ¹⁹

Discussions were divided into morning sessions for similar organizations to meet together: “trade union, youth, women’s, civic, farm, church, etc. In the afternoon, the sessions [were] topics, for the discussion of social security, civil liberties, industrial labor, lynching, etc., and the evenings [were] devoted to the General Sessions when the entire Congress will meet as a body and legislate and pass resolutions and adopt a program of action.”²⁰

In A. Philip Randolph’s keynote address, he named fascism as a new enemy on the horizon (something Max Yergan supported in his address about Italy’s recent

¹⁸ “Congress Background” Reel 2 NNC Papers microfilm.

¹⁹ John P. Davis, “The Official Proceedings of the National Negro Congress” (Chicago, February 14, 1936), MSU Special Collections, American Radicalism Collection.

²⁰ Davis to Forrester Washington, January 29, 1936, Reel 8, NNC Papers microfilm. Richard Wright targeted, among many others, as someone Davis wanted to speak—from Chicago. Asked to serve as chairman of the special topics session on Negro Culture and History on Sunday February 16. “The subject for discussion will be, ‘The Role of the Negro Artists and Writers in the Changing Social Order.’” Davis to Wright, January 29, 1936, Reel 8 NNC Papers microfilm.

invasion of Ethiopia): “Observe, too, tendencies toward Fascist growth and development in existing countries with democratic governments, such as America, France, and England. These are signs of grave and sinister portent to the world of workers, lovers of liberty and minority groups.”²¹ Ralph Bunche agreed. At the NAACP annual conference the next summer, he spoke about “Fascism and Minority Groups” and argued that knowing about fascism was important to African Americans “not only because we are racial minority group, but because of our identity with working masses. Every capitalistic country in world either Fascist or is threatened with imminence with it.”²²

Randolph explained that many popular ideas had proven that they offered no solution: The New Deal, Republican rule, Father Conklin’s currency scheme and many others. Randolph offered a six step solution, based around workers fighting for their rights—the central idea that had arisen out of Armenia. He suggested:

the struggle of the workers against exploitation of the employers. Next, the struggle of the workers against Fascism and for the prevention of democratic institutions, the arena in which alone their economic power may be built. Third, the struggle to build powerful Negro civil rights organizations. Fourth, the struggle against war which wrecks the organizations of the workers, and stifles and suppresses freedom of speech, the press, and assembly. Fifth the struggle to strengthen the forces of the exploited sharecropper and tenant farmers. Sixth, the struggle to build mass consumers’ movements to protect housewives against price manipulation.²³

This list succinctly captured all the major trends of the recent years, but with a twist.

These remedies could only be achieved, in Randolph’s estimation, “through industrial and craft unions, with the emphasis on the former” or even an “independent working

²¹ Davis, “The Official Proceedings of the National Negro Congress.”

²² Bunche, “Fascism and Minority Groups” July 2, 1936 NAACP 27th Annual Conference, program notes, Box 43, Bunche UCLA.

²³ Davis, “The Official Proceedings of the National Negro Congress.”

class political party” (James Ford, black Communist Party vice-presidential candidate spoke about a “Farmer-Laborer Party” on a different day).²⁴

This fight needed to attract a wider mass base than anything yet proposed nationally by African Americans; they would secure that support through “parades, mass meetings, and publicity.”²⁵ Rather than start from scratch, the National Negro Congress would bring together “the various Negro organizations, church, fraternal, civil, trade union, farmer, professional, college and what not, into the framework of a united front, together with the white groups of workers, lovers of liberty and those whose liberties are similarly menaced for a common attack upon the forces of reaction, backed by the embattled masses of black and white workers.”²⁶ Though Randolph invited white allies, he emphatically did not want white co-leadership. His plan would only work as long as African Americans did not “place their problems for solution down at the feet of their white sympathetic allies which has been and is the common fashion of the old school Negro leadership for, in the final analysis, the salvation of the Negro, like the workers, must come from within.”²⁷ He ended with a slogan that must have rang throughout the assembly hall.

Forward to complete economic, political and social equality for Negro peoples. Forward to the abolition of this sinister system of Jim-Crowism in these United States! The united front points the way. More power to the National Negro Congress! The future belongs to the people!²⁸

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

Randolph's message was received with enthusiasm. The trade union section was the most widely attended and enthusiastically debated at the congress. They voted to support the American Federation of Labor's and the Congress of Industrial Organization's efforts to organize black workers. Lawrence Wittner points out, "With a strong commitment to organized labor, and with its president the leading spokesman for black unionism, the National Negro Congress was poised and ready to act when the C.I.O. began its dramatic drive to unionize the steel industry."²⁹ The NNC began to organize black laborers across the country. Wittner points out "Before its establishment in 1936, barely one hundred thousand Negroes were members of American trade unions; by 1940, there were roughly half a million. Although the work of the Congress alone cannot account for this increase, there is little reason to doubt that it played a significant role in achieving it."³⁰

Unlike America, which entirely neglected the particular concerns of black women, in the General Resolutions produced from the Congress, black women had an entire section devoted to the difficulties they faced. The resolutions recognized their "three-fold exploitation as women, as workers, and as Negroes" and that black mothers strove to "combat higher prices and inadequate housing, health, recreational and educational facilities for the family." The Resolutions suggested organizing domestic workers to fight their labor conditions and organizing housewives and mothers to fight price inflation. At

²⁹ Lawrence S. Wittner, "The National Negro Congress. A Reassessment," *American Quarterly* 22, no. 4 (Winter 1970): 891.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 897. "If the steel drive and subsequent organizing campaigns did not result in salvation for black labor, they did produce higher incomes, better working conditions and some measure of job security for hundreds of thousands of black workers. Moreover, Negroes also secured a strategic vantage point in influencing labor's social policies."

Amenia, the women conferees had desired to discuss women's issues, but had been sidelined by strong male personalities like Abram Harris. Here they could speak out, to an extent. The Resolutions urged women to unite with each other (i.e. not with the men of the organization): "to pledge themselves to unite all Negro and white housewives in their home cities or towns—to bring together clubs, church groups, women's auxiliaries, and all possible organizations, in united groups of women with one aim in mind, THE FORMATION OF WOMEN'S LEAGUES AGAINST THE HIGH COST OF LIVING" (emphasis in original).³¹ Women in addition to Cuthbert took a leading role in the organization. Louise Thompson, who had travelled to the Soviet Union with Langston Hughes on their aborted movie making expedition, was a major speaker at the Congress. Dean Lucy Stowe had keynoted a mass meeting of 500 sponsored by the NNC Washington DC steering committee in February 1936 for those who could not travel to Chicago for the national meeting.³²

The Committee on Women's Work was not one of the more active NNC committees. Chicagoan Thyra Edwards, chairman of the Committee on Women's Work, was frustrated when John Davis seemed to take over her role when he solicited opinions from twenty leading black women without consulting Edwards. Furthermore, Davis had neglected to send her information she asked for: "I have repeatedly requested from you suggestions, plans, and program of work for the Committee. I would still be glad to have them."³³ When Cuthbert resigned as treasurer in April 1937 (something she had

³¹ Davis, "The Official Proceedings of the National Negro Congress."

³² "Dean Stowe Advocates Moulding of Public Opinion," *Atlanta Daily World*, February 17, 1936.

³³ Thyra Edwards to John P. Davis, February 23, 1937, Reel 9, NNC Papers microfilm.

envisioned since accepting the post), she identified the biggest problem of the NNC as “there has not been the closing of a leadership group in the Congress cementing the gains which your pioneering efforts have made and in general acting as a planning and counseling group”³⁴ Cuthbert offered to continue to serve on National Executive Committee, because she still believed in the NNC’s work.³⁵ Davis replied that he struggled to find the funding for the stenography to keep everyone updated with what the national office was doing but also that he planned to consolidate leadership in the upcoming months.³⁶

Davis tended to act alone, because he felt he was the only one who could get things done the right way. Like many in these pages, Davis felt lonely in his pursuit, abandoned by other intellectuals. In the summer of 1936, he wrote to Charles Wesley, history professor at Howard and president of the Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity that “I need not tell you that I have faithfully devoted the last three and a half years to the labor movement among Negroes at great personal sacrifice. Nor need I tell you that always our work has been handicapped because of lack of support from that large group of Negro intellectuals who should have seen most clearly the need for such work. Only your fraternity has an unmatched record of understanding and support. I am anxious that this record be continued.”³⁷

Another difference between Amenia and the NNC was the way that the NNC leadership attempted to embrace black churches as potential affiliates and organizational

³⁴ Marion Cuthbert to John P. Davis, April 13, 1937, Reel 9, NNC Papers microfilm.

³⁵ Marion Cuthbert to John P. Davis, May 12, 1937, Reel 9, NNC Papers microfilm.

³⁶ John P. Davis to Thyra Edwards, April 1, 1937, Reel 9, NNC Papers microfilm.

³⁷ John P. Davis to Charles Wesley, August 13, 1936, Reel 8, NNC Papers microfilm.

powerhouses. Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. (who would take over from his father as pastor of the Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem in 1937) was chair of the presiding committee. At the conference itself, James Ford had stood up and demanded the end to the Christian church, spurring the ministers in the audience to stand up and yell out their disagreement. In the Resolutions, Davis attempted to smooth over the conflict by speaking more positively of churches. Rather than condemn black churches for being too focused on the afterlife, the Resolutions recommended “that our Ministry, with renewed courage and uncompromising conviction shall preach an economic and social gospel as well as a spiritual gospel.” It suggested that churches “hold week-day schools and institutes to instruct Church members to develop a consciousness of conditions and the best means of meeting them for general welfare [sic].” Finally, it asked churches to find a way to cooperate with non-Christian groups “whose economic and social ideas are of value to the solution of our economic and social problems, without comprising the fundamental principles of the Christian Church.”³⁸ Davis realized what a bad idea it was to alienate black ministers, some of the most powerful local leaders. It was difficult to overcome the initial insult that Ford gave at the first Congress.³⁹

The leadership of the congress put off some of the attendees. One woman remarked afterwards that she felt like she knew as much about the NNC afterwards as she had known before. She did not think she was alone in this: “My impression was that there was many a person in the audience that had a look of utter blankness and apprehension on his face.” She laid some of her confusion on “the various continuous comments made by

³⁸ Davis, “The Official Proceedings of the National Negro Congress.”

³⁹ “Ministers Decline To Express Their Views At National Negro Congress,” *Norfolk New Journal and Guide*, February 22, 1936.

some of the brainiest big-wigs of the Negro race.” One of Louise Thompson’s comments did excite her: “The emphasis laid on the Negro woman’s work and need of organization for domestic workers were extremely significant. I feel that the domestic workers are the most exploited working people of this group.” Then William Thompkins, a Recorder of Deeds in Washington DC both praised the Congress and condemned it: “The congress was made up of cross sections of some of the finest brains of the black and white races. I’ve never seen a group of people work together with more sincerity of purpose, from the surface of things. Finally, this congress will not have the creative interest next year, because it is made up of many selfish people who came to espouse their political causes rather than join the purpose of superlative degree of race loyalty.” She asked the readers of the *Chicago Defender’s* Women’s Page: “Now I leave it to you, ‘What’s a lowly scribe to think?’”⁴⁰ Davis and other leaders of the NNC wanted the Congress to be more relevant to the domestic workers, sharecroppers, steel workers, and other working class African Americans it was trying to help. They had to be aware of the way that their language and the ideological infighting that tended to arise in a situation with so many different groups under one roof would alienate those very people they wanted to help.

Another article in the *Chicago Defender* questioned the role of intellectuals at the Congress. “Uncle Eph and Tootsie Wigfall” (normally an advice columnist) noticed that there were young leaders taking over from “the old-timers, who usually do all the talking.” The older leaders “seem to have been shut out this time. Uncle Eph, You know the people are through with the meat-hound type of leadership; they don’t want to be bothered with the orators, just words, you know just words.” They also recognized the

⁴⁰ “A Woman’s Eyeview of the National Negro Congress,” *Atlanta Daily World*, February 26, 1936.

communist influence on the meeting, but welcomed it because “Don’t you know all oppressed people have something in common?” and because without the Communists “you would have forgotten the names of the Scottsboro boys by this time.” However, the Communists did not dominate the conversation, as some rumors had suggested; “No, everything was under control.” Though these two noticed the change in leadership to younger folks, they also realized that some of the younger folks had good jobs they could be afraid of losing:

I noticed one thing, Uncle Eph, there was a lot of BRAIN Trust Boys there.

Who you mean, the Boondogglers.

Well, those BOYS were sent here to observe the action of the conference.

What do you mean, kind of political PATTERN-ROLLERS?

Well, I wouldn’t call them that, but you know they have Jobs, and some of them have good ones.

Yes, that’s right, and without them Jobs some of them would go NUDIST.

Well, Uncle Eph, that wouldn’t be so bad, most all of us started to going NUDIST in ’29; well this conference brought together a lot of thinking people, if they were not all so well known.

Yes I saw Louise Thompson, Dewey Jones, Forrester B. Washington, David M. Grant, Langston Hughes, Marion Cuthbert, Lester Granger, John W. Philips, George E. Cohron, Joseph H. B. Evans, Lieut. L. O. Oxley, and the flying colonel, Hubert Julian.

Of course, I haven’t named all the outstanding men and women because I do not know all of their names.

Well now, Uncle Eph, will the congress help any?

Certainly it will help; those people who came here meant what they were doing.

Well I hope you are right.⁴¹

These two were not quite sure whether they disliked all the intellectuals at the conference, or whether they were impressed by the appearance of “outstanding men and women.” Rumors of Communist infiltration dogged the Congress from the beginning. By

⁴¹ “Uncle Eph And Tootsie Wigfal Talk Of Doings At National Congress,” *Chicago Defender*, February 22, 1936, 23.

the time Harold Cruse wrote *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*, he dismissed the whole effort as a Communist front organization. Lawrence Wittner reassessed this conclusion by pointing out the wide variety of support that the Congress received: "Among the prominent non-Communists who spoke at or sent messages of greeting to its meetings were Franklin Roosevelt, Eleanor Roosevelt, Fiorello LaGuardia, John L. Lewis, Norman Thomas, Walter Reuther, Philip Murray, Walter White, Ralph Bunche and A. Philip Randolph."⁴²

Unity is the chimera of African American social movements. It is ever longed for, but so difficult to achieve. Power comes out of unity. Comprising only ten percent of the nation, African Americans need the power of numbers to sway public and government opinion. Yet unity is rightly difficult. Especially in that era, African Americans had few places to air their opinions except in their own organizations. Why should they homogenize those opinions behind one or another leader or set of ideals? Even when a single leader has arisen, like Marcus Garvey or Martin Luther King Jr., they held onto their powerful sway for only a few years before being challenged either by more powerfully placed intellectuals or rising, angry youth.

The National Negro Congress ran into two major hurdles. In its openness, it welcomed Communists, white and black. Davis genuinely wanted to see everyone working for African Americans together in one room. After Scottsboro, it did not seem that anyone could deny Communists' attention to African American rights.⁴³ But many black organizations, like the NAACP, avoided the CP fiercely, attempting to separate

⁴² Wittner, "The National Negro Congress. A Reassessment," 883.

⁴³ "Uncle Eph And Tootsie Wigfal Talk Of Doings At National Congress."

themselves from the foreign taint. Yet the political reality was that anyone—no matter how economically or politically conservative—who applied themselves to progressive race relations came under the scrutiny of the national government as a potential subversive. This was not as strong in the mid-thirties as it would become by the end of the decade or especially in the wake of WWII, but it was still present. Indeed, by the end of the decade, William Pickens—by then a kindly old soul who could still give a rousing speech—was called in by the House Un-American Activities Commission for being a communist (he was a devout socialist, and at times contributed to Communist causes, but had often preached against its radicalism as not the right thing for African Americans).

The NAACP also battled the NNC throughout its existence. Walter White sent emissaries among the organization (probably Frances Williams or Marion Cuthbert) to find out what the group was doing. When it started to fight lynching, White felt like Davis had invaded his personal territory. It was hard for the NNC to build unity when the largest civil rights group opposed it on principle and out of personality conflicts.

The Communists showed up at the National Negro Congress enthusiastic and in number. A. Philip Randolph wanted the congress to be a union of *black* organizations.⁴⁴

The National Negro Congress, as the name plainly expresses, is a Negro movement, and it has projected to fight for Negro rights. It was not, is not and will not be dominated by either Communists, Republicans, Socialists or Democrats.”

Yet the NNC would welcome anyone who came to them because African Americans “the victims of the ‘black scare’ by the Ku Klux Klan and Negro-phobists, North and South” could not “afford to raise the ‘red scare’ bogey in these United States.” African

⁴⁴ “Randolph Says Race Congress Not Communist: Resents red Label; Refutes Charge as False,” *Chicago Defender*, February 29, 1936.

Americans had the right to become communists. "It is guaranteed by the federal Constitution. Communists are not criminals. The Communist party is a legitimate political party and has city, state and national tickets like Republicans and Democrats." Randolph encouraged blacks "who are sincerely fighting for race rights" not to worry "when they are condemned as 'reds,' even if some well-meaning, but misguided, innocent Negro leaders or men of the cloth do so" because "It's gotten to be a regular indoor sport now to damn most movements and individuals who resolutely and aggressively fight for human and race rights and the rights of the workers and minority groups by branding them as 'red.'" Randolph recognized that the "red" label was something thrown around to scare folks away from working for human rights, rather than a legitimate critique of different organizations. Yelling "red" was "a trick, a red herring, which is practiced by labor-hating capitalists, Negro-hating whites or by morons, halfwits or persons who are good enough all right but who just don't know the differences between a 'red' and heliotrope."

Randolph refused to apologize for welcoming communists into the NNC, but also made very clear that "the National Negro Congress is not Communist. ... "I am not a Communist. John P. Davis, the moving spirit of the Congress and secretary, is not a Communist. Marion Cuthbert, treasurer, is not a Communist." The National Negro Congress was "epoch making" and deserved "the reverence and support and not the ridicule and opposition of Negroes of high degree. Make no mistake! Negroes are massing together with their white working brothers and they are taking the march, and if I know them as I think I do, they are in no mood to be taunted with meaningless labels by

those white or black who fail to sense the deepening and swelling tide of discontent and the gathering wrath of the people abroad in the land.”⁴⁵

It soon became a union of *worker* organizations. In that it would seem to have fulfilled Abram Harris’ dream so fiercely articulated at Amenias. Yet as the white Communists came in greater and greater number to the annual meetings of the NNC, African Americans felt pushed out. Finally the Communists had the numeric advantage to start taking over the leadership. Even before that, Randolph resigned in anger at the new direction of the group at an explosive 1940 convention. World War II and the focus on patriotism and the Double Victory campaign struck the final nail in the group’s coffin.

After the first conference at Ralph Bunche’s house, the Howard Amenians seem to have fallen out of active participation in the NNC. Why? I found no letters to or from Abram Harris in the NNC papers, despite the similarity of his statements at Amenias and the goals of the NNC. Perhaps this was because of the scholarship and international travel they were involved in, discussed in the next chapter.

The Amenias women involved in the NNC also moved out after initial enthusiasm. Frances Williams became primarily Walter White’s inside ears. Marion Cuthbert was willing to help the organization get started, but then wanted to return to her YWCA duties and began to consider studying for a Ph.D. at Columbia. Anna Arnold Hedgeman remained friends with A. Philip Randolph and helped him plan the March on Washington that convinced FDR to create the Committee on Fair Employment in 1941, which then hired Frances Williams.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

The National Negro Congress accomplished several things in its brief flame of a life. It brought the rights of workers to the forefront of black organizations large and small throughout the nation. It encouraged hundreds of thousands of African American workers to join unions. When its membership shrunk down to just the communists and the beginning of the war started the national recovery, attention shifted away from economic rights. Though black leaders in the Civil Rights Movement after the war acknowledged economic structural problems, their attention was focused on opening barred opportunities, on pushing the United States to live up to its promise of equality, not to fundamentally change the economic and political nature of the country.

Chapter 16

The Amenians

Global Network of Professors

While they supported John Davis in the National Negro Congress, debated William Hastie over the racialism in the “Don’t Buy Where You Can’t Work Campaigns,” interacted with the NAACP, and fielded frequent requests for speeches, the Young Turks who became the Second Amenians spent the majority of the late 1930s devoted to scholarship. Their work took flight in many different pursuits, not all academic. Dorsey and Harris both went to the Soviet Union. Dorsey alone became increasingly politicized as he dove into anti-Stalin and Trotskyist activities. Bunche spent two years in post-doc research, studying ethnography at Northwestern and the London School of Economics before traveling throughout the African continent and to Java. He returned with plans to turn his seemingly countless research notebooks into a book, but his energies turned first to recovering his family life, then to reporting about his travel, and then to the Gunnar Myrdal Study, for which he was a major researcher.¹

Their determination to focus first on their personal studies, believing full well that scholarship and ethnography fulfilled whatever responsibility they had to their “race,”

¹ Sterling Brown took several extensive research trips throughout the South, while leading the WPA Federal Writers Project African American Division and editing the travel guide to Washington DC. One of the most important to him was when he went with Gus Auzenne, Howard accountant, to his hometown in New Orleans. Sterling Allen Brown, *A Son's Return: Selected Essays of Sterling A. Brown* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1996).

separated them from the ideal race leaders Du Bois had envisioned since the 1890s. They rejected the sentimentalized interracial unity emphasized by the early NAACP and YWCA, but they did not envision the race-based protests and sit-ins two or so decades in the future. They were trying to live the future where they would be examined for the content of their character, not the color of their skin, long before that was even a remote possibility for most African Americans. Staying within academia, black and white, and taking frequent trips abroad, gave them enough just enough space to live this hope, even while they did not escape the frustrations and humiliations of Jim Crow. Eventually Bunche and Harris both slipped into their visions of the future, the former by moving into an important position within the United Nations and moving to New York City, the latter by accepting a position at the University of Chicago and turning his considerable energies to theoretical economic studies, not specific investigations of African American economic conditions.

Throughout the years after Amenia, Howard professors and administrators were trying to build up a Graduate School. It would bring prestige to the campus and also let professors interact with more advanced students. Even so, some of the professors worried about already being overstretched. They also believed that the institution did not have the resources to support a graduate school. In 1937, Abram Harris described the situation to the traveling Ralph Bunche. Harris was getting ever closer to leaving Howard, so his interpretation must be taken through the lens of someone perpetually frustrated by the university. "School is of course over and let me tell you that I was never so happy that a school term has ended. This year it seems that Howard was a plain night-mare. Whatever little perspective the administration may have had it has lost. We are getting buildings

and we are putting on a great show at commencements and charter days but the spirit and enthusiasm have fled.” Harris felt stretched between undergraduate and graduate education. “In spite of the fact that we persistently call the administration’s attention to the impossibility of doing respectable graduate work and research in two men departments in which undergraduate work is heavy, nothing is done about it. All we get in reply to our complaint is that funds are inadequate, that we have come a long way in the past ten years, and that we have got to continue making bricks without straw.” Harris even complained about small signs of desegregation in the south; “Meanwhile, the southern schools are taking our undergraduates from us and such schools as the American University and the Catholic University in Washington are making serious bids for our graduate students. And, if we don’t watch out we will be left high and dry with the new buildings as the only evidence that [we] are a university.”² In order to make a really effective graduate school, they needed fellowships and assistantships to support students.

Harris felt abandoned by the administration. He, Frazier, Dorsey, and Wesley developed an Introductory Course in Social Sciences for the new Social Science section of the university. He was assured that there would be money for the course before they devoted extensive time to planning it. But when they finished the preparations, the “Board of Trustees authorized that it be given by made no provision for the necessary instructor and assistants. Davis told me that the professors in the social sciences would have to cooperate in giving it. My reaction was that if the Trustees think that the course

² Abram Harris to Ralph Bunche, June 21, 1937, Box 10 F 14, Bunche Papers Schomburg.

should be given but did not see fit to find the money for financing it, they should try to give it themselves. We have our hands full.”³

Mordecai Johnson also attacked his professors' research. Harris and Frazier pointed out that Howard did not financially support their research and pointed out that even the SSRC criticized the school for its faculty support. In reply, Johnson ridiculed Harris' work as Marxist propaganda; that it was “a book which attempts to prove one little point, namely, that there is no hope for the black man under capitalism. He further said, ‘if Harris had come to me after writing that book and asked me for financial help to do another study, I would not have given him a nickel.’” Johnson further said “that he did not intend to abdicate his position of intellectual criticism to become an administrative flunkey whose job it is to go out and raise money for us to do research on. Frazier, then pointed out, that the position taken by the president was that of the average president in Negro colleges, that of looking upon competent scholars as immature children and employees. Frank said that if, as professor of sociology, he can not work out a satisfactory research program for his department, then the president surely cannot.” During the same meeting, he criticized Bunche for leaving the country to find problems to study when the United States provided plenty of problems. Harris concluded; “He was simply disgusting in his ignorance and his contempt for what he calls the Negro intellectual.”⁴

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

Frazier

As indicated in the above quotes, Frank Frazier had finally arrived at Howard University in August 1934, after many conversations with the administration over the years. One of Frazier's last acts at Fisk was chiding a young John Hope Franklin, who was at the end of his junior year. Franklin was musing aloud to another undergraduate about his options for the summer—either to take an offered position as research assistant to Charles Johnson or return to his family. Before the other undergrad could respond, Frazier interceded, declaring that it was “typical of undergraduates to be ‘unable to make up their minds about anything!’” Franklin “was shocked and embarrassed, he remembered. “On the spot, I declared that I would take the job to work with southern black tenant farmers. It was a memorable summer, and I silently credited Frazier for it.”⁵ eagerly participating in frequent “gab fests.”

Frazier arrived as Head of Sociology to replace Kelly Miller after his retirement. He and Marie fit into the group smoothly, like a final cog sliding into place. The Howard bunch already knew him well from Amenia. They accepted his personality quirks because he was so brilliant and because they fully recognized their own. Brown was excited to see him return to their childhood home. He had followed Frazier's career since he was a young boy looking up to the big man on Howard's campus, remembering when he returned from Denmark in his early twenties, “swinging his cane in a jaunty manner that I thought quite European. But he put on no airs, as so many who took the European cure in those days did; he was still easy to know; he talked uncondescendingly,

⁵ John Hope Franklin, p 18 John Hope Franklin, “E. Franklin Frazier: A Memoir,” in *E. Franklin Frazier and Black Bourgeoisie*, ed. James E Teele (Columbia, Mo: University of Missouri Press, 2002), 18.

stimulatingly; he was poised for the future.”⁶ Bunche was always happy to make a new friend interested in similar intellectual pursuits. Frazier might have greeted Harris with some skepticism. The economist had sent cordial letters Frazier’s way for several years, but was still close friends with Herskovits—Frazier’s primary academic adversary.

Frazier is remembered for being an iconoclast and having an acerbic wit.⁷ During the Howard memorial service for Frazier in 1962, Sterling Brown captured some of the key aspects of Frazier’s personality and their friendship. He told the gathered mourners that Frazier was ever in demand as a lecturer; “if ever there was a peripatetic pedagogue it was he. But he certainly thrived on it, until the end. And the collegiate audiences thrived.” He engaged his listeners with a manner that “was unorthodox, challenging, at times as prickly as a hedgehog. He wanted no frills. Putting on airs was beneath his contempt. Pedantic word-mongering was his bane. But his passion for truth shone out clear and bright.” He, like all the Amenians, strove for an “objective” truth based in social science. “One of his major concerns” Brown noted, “was the duty of the intellectual to lead in the struggle for human betterment. As strange as it may sound, there was a reformer in Frazier, the sociologist.” Like Bunche and Harris, he avoided “racial chauvinism,” but more than them, maintained a real sense of “race pride.” Sterling Brown thought so, but Brown may have felt like he needed to emphasize this trait in the early-1960s when racial pride was sustaining the civil rights movement. Harris, Bunche, and Frazier were in the minority in the 1930s among educated African Americans in not

⁶ Sterling Brown, “Frazier Memoriam,” 1962, 166 Box 50 Folder 3, Logan Papers MSRC.

⁷ For a thorough discussion of Frazier as part of an iconoclastic tradition with Carter Woodson, see Pero Gaglio Dagbovie, *The Early Black History Movement, Carter G. Woodson, and Lorenzo Johnston Greene* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007).

emphasizing racial pride, but they were not condemned for its lack in the way they were later.

More than any other Armenian, Frazier combined his scholarly pursuits with pungent satire. “In his most controversial book, *Black Bourgeoisie*, Frazier exerted the satirist's license. But the essential reality, he always insisted, was grounded upon careful observation and thinking.”⁸

Frazier also brought out his “gift of satire” at social gatherings. Brown remembered that he “was an excellent mimic,” particularly of a dense Southern judge he had had to appear before, and was a “great yarn spinner in the best tall tale tradition.” Bunche, Brown, and Frazier all loved to tell vibrant stories of their varied experiences and were quite good at captivating their audience while talking. They also enjoyed sharp intellectual exchanged; Brown remembered, “To some, Frazier was noted for brusqueness, even for acerbity. I believe that this aspect is far from the complete man and, taken alone, is misleading. It is true that he did not suffer fools gladly. In the give and take of intellectual battle he might deliver sharp blows, but he expected them in return and could take them.”⁹ Given the different disciplines and different perspectives represented among the Armenians, one can imagine lively and fierce battles over different points of fact, opinion, or Howard Administration.

Strangers and acquaintances might think of Frazier as “an *enfant terrible*,” but friends of Frazier like Brown knew that he “could be a *bon vivant*, that he loved company, good people, good food, and that he even sought the truths and oracles that

⁸ Brown, “Frazier Memoriam.”

⁹ Ibid.

inhered in the grape and the grain.” His house testified to his dedication to these loves. “In his home, rich with paintings and sculpture, some of them by his friends, with phonograph recordings, with a well-stocked library always growing, there with his wife Marie he established a haven of warm friendliness, of excellent conversation. It was an enlivening experience to visit them.” Frazier often papered over his softer attributes because he feared “being considered sentimental.” Brown knew better, though; “after the shock I had when I heard him talking, man to man, friend to friend, with his Siamese cat, I lost my fear of Frazier’s invectives against sentimentality.”¹⁰

John Hope Franklin, who became Frazier’s colleague at Howard after WWII, agreed with Brown’s estimation of Frazier’s softer side. The men and their wives soon became friends, despite the twenty year age gap. The Fraziers loaned the Franklins their house for two years at no rent while Frazier led the social sciences division of UNESCO. When the Fraziers returned to the United States and met the Franklins first child, “The only remark made by childless Frazier, who loved children with a passion, was that it was obvious that the huge library he had left in my care was not sufficiently large or challenging enough to take up all of my time,” Franklin remembered, “To that remark, I had no rejoinder!”¹¹

Frazier remained connected to the NAACP more thoroughly than some of the others. In 1935, he was appointed to commission by Mayor LaGuardia to study social conditions in Harlem following the race riot and worked closely with the NAACP during

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Franklin, “E. Franklin Frazier: A Memoir,” 19-20.

his research. He also continued to contribute financially to the institution and serve on boards and committees.

International

Sam Dorsey was the first professor to travel abroad after the Amenian Conference. He spent the summer of 1935 traveling through Europe to the USSR. He got stranded in Russia and sent urgent messages to Bunche, Harris, and others for emergency cash. Harris was annoyed by the presumption of the telegrams. "What in hell is he thinking of? He wired me for \$60.00 last week—rather peremptorily. We have no money this summer, what with Callie in summer school (she is now Mrs. Harris, B.S.) and her diploma costing \$25.00 along with other incidentals! At any rate, I had to spend \$3.70 replying to him. The whole ... sure is a bit silly!"¹² Harris seemed to think Bunche agreed with him, yet the political scientists sent a \$100 loan to his junior colleague. Dorsey sent Bunche a jubilant report of his summer when he returned in September.

Boy was this a summer! Got some hot stuff on the Comintern, the USSR, Germany, Le Front Populaire, etc. Want to see you soon to spill the dirt. Got the low down of the self determination Tactic of the C. P. Met all of the big shots of the Union except Stalin. Those boys in Russia have got the stuff. You've got to go there, if there's any thing left of the place by that time. If they don't have a war within a year everybody in Europe will be surprised.¹³

Despite his urgent need for American currency to get out of Russia, he suffered no wants in the country itself. Indeed, he had enough to be generous. He told Bunche, "I sent you from Kiev the five volumes of Lenin and the two volumes of history of the Communist Party. They will be along soon. I wrote a gang of articles for Russian papers. Got paid in

¹² Abram Harris to Ralph Bunche, Summer 1935, Box 1, Bunche Papers UCLA.

¹³ Emmett E. Dorsey to Ralph Bunche, September 5, 1935, Box 1, Bunche Papers UCLA.

Rubbles. Spent them buying you guys books. Tell Dutch the history of the C. P. is coming to him.”¹⁴ This was not entirely beneficent. Dorsey came home a committed Trotskyist and wanted his friends to follow him.

After he returned to Howard, Dorsey became “110% Trotskyite” in Gus Auzenne’s words, filling many lectures with anti-Soviet messages. Stolberg applied to him and Harris to chair the Hippodrome Trotsky Defense Meeting in New York City. Auzenne suggested he was asked simply because “the Trotskyites wanted a Negro front.” Harris did not attend, but Sam eagerly took up the post as chair and read a letter from Harris. “Sam commenced his speech with protestations of friendship for the Soviet and ended up by out-Hearsting Mrs. Dilling, all of which the Metropolitan press gobbled up.”¹⁵ During one of his class in spring 1937, he told seniors that “the salvation of the oppressed masses and downtrodden minorities’ lay in the establishment of a new world order based upon Marxian principles.”¹⁶

Harris followed Dorsey to Europe the following summer. He spent a few weeks in London meeting academics. He wrote Bunche, “I have been to the London School of Economics on two occasions for ‘tay.’ (I am afraid that I shall leave England more prejudice than you are to these tay-sippers.) The atmosphere that surrounded us almost stifled me.” Some of the professors he talked with took a dim view of American economists, who needed nothing so much as to attend seminars at the LSE or Oxford. Harris found himself in the strange position of defending his old advisor and the honor of

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Gustav Auzenne to Ralph Bunche, March 11, 1937, Box 25 Folder 1, Bunche Papers Schomburg.

¹⁶ Clifford L. Jr. Muse, “Howard University and U.S. Foreign Affairs During the Franklin D. Roosevelt Administration, 1933-1945,” *Journal of African American History* 87, no. 4 (Fall 2002): 403-415.

the American academy. “Even Wesley C. Mitchell is included in this! That erudite Viennese Economist, Dr. Frederick Von Hayek, thought Professor Mitchell pretty bad stuff. As much as I might criticize my dear old teacher, I could not keep my peace in face of this slur, especially since Mr. Hayek, in my opinion, is doing very little (not as much as Mitchell) to further the understanding of economic processes.”

Harris wanted to stir up the staid island just a bit, but Callie feared he would get into trouble he could not get out of. “I was at Buckingham Palace last Sunday. No. I didn’t go in. I bet Callie a ten shilling note that I’d ask one of the guards how long had he been in the Communist party. She would [not] bet for fear I’d land in GAOL.”¹⁷ While in London, Harris established firm relationships with a tailor and cobbler, whom he recommended when Bunche went to London the next year. Bunche told his diary; “Went to bank and then downtown—bought a pair of semi-broques at Randall’s Haymarket store. The Clerk had made a pair for Abe last spring—remembered Abe and called him ‘a proper gentleman’. Said Abe had a hard foot to fit.”¹⁸

A weekend at Oxford in May passed in a whirlwind of meetings. Harris talked with Margery Perham, a British historian Bunche had suggested he call upon, and derided her as a “sentimental bi-racialist” ignorant of the “forces that are molding the modern world.” Harris thought she was ignorant of the way British interests motivated the government’s actions in Africa and towards the Italian invasion of Ethiopia. Harris hoped Bunche understood his frustration with someone Bunche professed to admire; “You can readily understand my irritation with such an exhibition of futile humanitarianism.” I

¹⁷ Abram Harris to Ralph Bunche, May 1936, Box 1 Folder 14, Bunche Papers UCLA.

¹⁸ Ralph Bunche, “Diary,” April 10, 1937, Box 62, Bunche Papers UCLA.

mention this because the way Harris describes Perham—bi-racialist and humanitarian—sounds very much like some of the YW women described in Chapter 2. Harris came at everyone with a critical eye, yet his derision for Perham seems more emotional somehow. Perhaps it was because he was criticizing a friend of Bunche's, or perhaps it was because he assumed Perham would be less analytic because she was a woman. He offered as further evidence of the rightness of his opinion that "the people who are in the know don't share Miss Perham's attitude. I was talking with Sir Alfred Zimmern, director of the Geneva School of International Studies and the position which I took in my conversation with Perham was exactly the one he took." The pseudo-humanitarians who had claimed to be helping Ethiopia out of the goodness of their heart, rather than in Britain's own interest, had been called to account by Mussolini's actions, yet they remained "afraid to come out in their real colors. This is clear to every one who follows the discussions in Parliament."¹⁹

Harris spent four days at Oxford, during which he was given a personal servant and attended many formal meals. Professor E.M. Hugh-Jones gave a luncheon in his honor on Friday, inviting many distinguished professors, including "A.D. Lindsay, Master of Balliol and Vice-Chancellor of the University, G.D.H. Cole, Sir Alfred Zimmern, Cassons, the archeologist, and [Bunche's] friend, Professor Macmillan." During his speech to economic students at Keble College, he took "several cracks at Hole, some of his students were present, because of his misinterpretation of Marx in several places in his book, What Marx Really Meant. I imagine we will have a clash Sunday." A few social climbers (in Harris' estimation) invited the Paul Robesons to his

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Abram Harris to Ralph Bunche, May 13, 1936, Box 1 Folder 10, Bunche Papers UCLA.

speech. “Paul, by the way, is very nice in spite of his confused mixture of communism and African nationalism. He did not get much of a chance to display his new confession of faith because I kept the discussion in the realm of technical economic theory. Mrs. Robeson was a little more difficult. She just had to say something about the economists’ lack of anthropological understanding. I understand that she is studying with Malinowski.”²⁰

The formality annoyed Harris as much as it amused him. All the dinners and speeches required tuxedos of visitors and academic gowns of faculty. “You see I have been forced to buy a damn suit as much as I dislike these things,” he griped to Bunche. “I forgot to say that at Keble I was given a three room suite for the weekend, a servant who drew my bath, served “tay,” cleaned my boots, and pulled the covers of my bed before I retired. It was pleasant while it lasted—But I could not work in such an atmosphere—too formal and graceful.”²¹

In 1936, Ralph Bunche won a Social Science Research Council (SSRC) grant to travel to South Africa, Kenya, and Indonesia. For this research project, he wanted to incorporate ethnography into the political science he concentrated on in his dissertation. The SSRC, controlled by Donald Young, required that he spend a year studying ethnography with two of the most prominent professors in the field, Melville Herskovits at Northwestern and Bronislaw Malinowski at the London School of Economics, before it

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

would let him go to Africa. Herskovits was a close personal friend of Donald Young and had helped persuade him to give Bunche the grant. Bunche had met Herskovits four years previously, when they shared a meal at Abram Harris' house near Howard University. He felt a bit frustrated at spending a year away from the field doing what he considered remedial work, though it did make sense given that all of his prior training was in political science. For his part, Herskovits was thrilled to spend the semester with the smart black political scientist who was one of the few scientists to have also spent time in Africa.

Bunche went to Northwestern reluctantly. It followed what had already been a frustrating summer directing the Swarthmore Race Relation Institute (he did not like the Quakers' sentimental interracialism, as he termed it). He did not agree that he needed a year of further study under white professors before being allowed to pursue his post-doctoral research. He was also not sure of Herskovits' intentions. The white Jew thought of himself as a great friend of the Negro; Harris would have agreed. Bunche and other black students he befriended saw too much hypocrisy in Herskovits' overtures to be entirely satisfied; in his diary he described one evening of scotch and soda at the Herskovits's house after one of Bunche's talks—"Mel and Frances drooled all over me, Frances stating that she and Mel would have to make me a 'big man' when I returned—e.g. pres. of H. U."²² He already knew emphatically that he did not want to be president, after his one year as assistant in that office, and he did not want to be so manipulated by whites behind the scenes. He spent the next several days complaining about the

²² Bunche, "Diary," January 6, 1937.

Herskovitses, or “Herskobitches” as he called them once, with friends who agreed.²³

Bunche befriended another black man studying with Herskovits that semester, George Simpson, a teacher at Temple University who had received an SSRC grant for a study of Haiti (and had also been required to study at Northwestern before embarking). Having someone to commiserate with over Herskovits’ craziness helped him survive it.

Yet, Bunche also respected Herskovits’ power to open doors and his extensive international experience, if not his scholarship. His diary is filled with both anti-Mel gab fests and careful recordings of what Herskovits thought of this or that piece of his work. For instance, the day before he described the Herskovits’ drooling, he recorded that Mel liked his phrase “an individual being drowned in his culture.”²⁴

While at he was at Northwestern, Leo Hansberry, Howard University’s resident Africanist, visited the campus and spoke about his research on Africa. Bunche was not impressed; “Leo Hansberry came out and talked dumbly on Africa until 1:30 am. Nobody in U.S.A. can criticize his stuff [unreadable] he advances a biological theory of race psychology—religion, laughter, singing, dancing etc. He’s worse than ever!”²⁵

In some ways, Northwestern professors treated Bunche as a junior colleague rather than as a student (a bit like a more formalized post-doc position). He gave several talks in and around Evanston. Bunche’s first appearance on the radio came when Herskovits and he discussed “the Negro in America” over the airwaves. Several friends wrote him congratulatory letters on the successful way he handled himself. One white

²³ Ibid., January 17, 1937.

²⁴ Ibid., January 5, 1937.

²⁵ Ibid., January 14, 1937.

professor or grad student, Willard Park entered Bunche's friend group, staying up late conversing, seeking out music clubs further south, and driving around the Chicago streets less than sober.²⁶ Park arranged with Bunche to get his final revenge on Herskovits the day before Bunche returned to Washington DC. Despite Herskovits' abundant praise for Bunche, and his attempt to appear completely at ease around the young black man, he had never invited him to lunch in the Faculty Club. That last noon, Park and Bergar Evans, another white professor, took Bunche to the Faculty Club for lunch. In his diary, Bunche gleefully noted that they arrived right on time "Mel was there so the 'plot' was perfect. [...] Mel came over red and shame-faced after his meal was finished."²⁷ Bunche and fellow black post-doc George Simpson then spent the afternoon buying goodbye presents for the Herskovitses and the Robert Parks. It was a complicated relationship.

In this milieu, Bunche delivered a very strange speech to Angus Campbell's class in Social Psychology at Northwestern University in December 1936. Campbell was a first year professor at Northwestern who sat in on Herskovits' classes with Bunche and Simpson because he had been given a class in social psychology to teach rather than the experimental psychology he had been trained in.²⁸ Teaching the class and learning from Herskovits convinced him to switch to social psychology. Bunche, then, was not the only young faculty member sitting at Herskovits' feet.

²⁶ Bunche never actually states Willard's race, though he does list him and Bergar Evans as the men who get him into the Faculty Lunch Club. But it could be that Evans was white and Willard was black.

²⁷ Bunche, "Diary," January 19, 1937.

²⁸ http://books.nap.edu/openbook.php?record_id=897&page=44 "He went to Northwestern expecting to teach experimental psychology, but as Franklin Fearing had just moved from Northwestern to UCLA, Angus was asked to teach Fearing's course in social psychology. In so doing, he came into contact with Melville Herskovits, a social anthropologist at Northwestern, and attended his courses and seminars. In a very short time this influence, along with his own experience teaching social psychology, completed his transition from an experimental to a social psychologist. It was the track he was to follow for the remainder of his career."

Bunche's speech illustrates a psychological difference between the older generation of Du Bois and Spingarn and the younger Howard professors. Contemporary scholars like Jonathan Scott Holloway and Beth Tompkins Bates settle the primary difference between the old and new generations on the ideological differences between people focused primarily on race as the progenitor of racial conflict and those focused on an economic foundation. I argue that there were many other components to the difference. Bunche's speech indicates a psychological and professional difference. Ralph Bunche, Abram Harris and others of the New Negro generation wanted to be identified by their profession first, before race, and, for perhaps the first time in American history, they thought that such an identification might indeed be possible.

In the speech titled "Some Historical and Psychological Factors in Status of Am. Negro," for which we have speech notes not a formal transcript, Ralph Bunche declared African Americans' individuality and then divided them into "types." It is an odd document. Bunche began by immediately confronting the expectations of his white audience; "The assumption may be that as a Negro I can give you some 'inside information' about the psychology of the N[egro] group. I wish to dispel any such illusion at the outset by pointing out that I am a Political Scientist—not a psychologist."²⁹ Bunche demanded to be known by his professional identity, not his racial one. The other professors at Howard knew well the frustration of being asked to discuss some random aspect of the quote-unquote Negro Problem that was not within the realm of their specialty. Yet, Bunche was still prepared to speak as a representative of "his race," as he had been expected to for most of his life.

²⁹ Ralph Bunche, "Some Historical and Psychological Factors in Status of Am. Negro," Speech Notes (Northwestern University, Class in Social Psychology, December 9, 1936), Box 43, Bunche Papers UCLA.

Campbell had asked Bunche to speak on “What the Negro thinks,” to which Bunche at first replied “I only wish I knew.” Despite his frustration with such a question, he endeavored to answer it. “Offhand I should say ‘too little’—which seems to be a typical American attitude toward our most vital problems.”³⁰ Though this was a side remark perhaps to elicit laughter, I’d like to compare it to a definition of intellect I found among Spingarn’s papers. Maxwell Bodenheim, “king” of the Greenwich Village poets, published the definition and mentioned Spingarn as one of those who fit it, so the newspaper clipping ended up in Spingarn’s scrapbook. Bodenheim wrote that the intellect “is the exquisite, skilful, and at times almost venomous attack on the mental inertia, and emotional complacency which appeals to a majority of human beings.”³¹ Bunche’s criticism thus fit neatly within this definition of the intellect. Yet think what boundaries Bunche crossed by publicly criticizing the majority of African Americans for not thinking enough, to an all white audience. When the NAACP was founded, most scientists believed, or failed to challenge, the idea that people of African descent were at the bottom of a long chain of existence that placed northern Europeans on the top. One of the fundamental characteristics of this hierarchy was the ability for abstract thought—scientists denied Africans’ ability to think. Yet by the time Bunche delivered his speech, it was a different world. Du Bois explained in the *Crisis*, in 1909, “[f]ew reputable scientists dared to assert the equality of the races” but by 1929, “[n]o reputable scientist

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ibid.

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Maxwell Bodenheim, “Who are the Young Intellectuals? A Symposium Edited by Walter Holbrook.” *Dallas Texas News*, July 20, 1924.

or public speaker [...] denies the essential equality of all races.”³² Was Bunche so confident in this change within the academic worldview that he could make a joke about the way most African Americans did not think? Did he identify himself so much more with the intellect than with the race that he could honestly make this statement? Or did he attempt to woo his audience by stating something that he may or may not have agreed with, but that he thought would bring the audience to his side?

After his joking observation, Bunche reiterated the individuality of African Americans. “Negroes neither think alike nor feel alike. [yet the] Question [is] often raised as to how it ‘feels’ to be Negro”—an absurd question in Bunche’s estimation.³³ More important than pressing his audience to accept his ability to think abstractly—which at least Campbell did implicitly when inviting him to speak to his students—he wanted these students to understand the variations among African Americans. He also wanted them to realize that African Americans often subconsciously adopted “‘white’ standards of thought, beauty” and accepted “prevailing patterns of white behavior toward the N. without thinking—e.g., N[egro] taxicab driver taking N[egro] to side entrance of hotels in D.C.”³⁴ Without the mass movement that would arise in another ten-twenty years, Bunche felt he needed to explain why many African Americans did not seem to resist their situation. Students should not take this to mean that the persecution was acceptable, just because many blacks accepted it. Bunche also here foreshadows Franz Fanon’s

³² Ibid. “Bunche did not want to talk about what it felt like to be black; to him, there were no such things as “Negro feelings.” It was, however, possible to describe how it felt to “be poor, or underprivileged, or disenfranchised, or undernourished, or humiliated, or economically exploited.” These were things to which both blacks and whites could speak.” Holloway 165

³³ Bunche, “Some Historical and Psychological Factors in Status of Am. Negro.”

³⁴ Ibid.

concept of the “colonized mind” that was popular with the Black Power Movement of the late 1960s and 70s.

While he could not talk individually about all 10 million black Americans, Bunche could offer several “types” that African Americans fell into, according to their reaction to the persecutions he had already sketched earlier in the talk. He suggested that African Americans’ “psychology [is] a confusing intermixture of three attitudes: (a) Accommodation (b) Escape; (3) Resentment” (but not resistance—there was no “weapons of the weak” or hint of a mass movement brewing in Bunche’s typology).³⁵ Different combinations of these led to six “types.” Social Science often skates alongside stereotype, offering a burden of evidence as justification of its proximity to prejudice. Scientific racism had only recently been overturned by Herskovits’ mentor, Franz Boas, and others. Today discussions of evolutionary biology or gendered minds rely upon gendered expectations that are then tested in the laboratory (would the questions asked and answered received be the same without those initial expectations?). Bunche’s notes record the following definitions of different types of African Americans. Are they stereotypical or scientific or somewhere in between?

(a) Uncle Tom: humble, bending obsequious N. who deliberately humiliates himself before whites. But often endowed with a shrewd perception for personal benefits to be derived from such conduct. He plays up to the white man’s ego—‘Soft talks’ him, as they call it—and derides himself. Often a tragic jester.
--an art frequently perfected by personal servants—partic. in So.
--The ‘sophisticated’ Uncle Tom—modern version of plantation darkey. He often writes books on race relations which are designed to offend no one [Bunche and Harris often talked about these types of men in their DC “gab-fests”], or he holds public office and plays the role of stooge by making speeches upholding and rationalizing crude policies of Jim Crow initiated by his white chief.

³⁵ Ibid.

(b) Super Race-Conscious Type: obsessed with idea of race prejudice to such an extent that they see it manifested in everything. Blind, unreasoning sensitiveness. If a white man addresses a N. Ph.D. as Mr., then it is because the white man refuses to give N. credit for having brains enuf to merit a Ph.D.; if white man calls him Dr., then white man is a 'cracker' who will always call a N. anything but Mr. and Mrs.

--Chauvinistic; intense race pride. N. History, N. business.

--Garvey—... Black men built the Great wall of China, etc.

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(c) 'White-Conscious' or 'Ostrich' type—Also sensitive about race, but without intense racial pride. Seek to escape race by playing social ostrich.

--uneasy at mention of their race; squirm when they hear term 'Negro', - much prefer to be called colored (a very weak term); have an emotional spasm or faint when they hear references to 'wooly' or 'kinky' hair, or 'nigger'.

--they avoid and resent discussions (before mixed or unmixed audiences) of Africa, slavery, the Civil war. They find N. spirituals distasteful, and are mortified when they hear them sung before white people. Insulted if a white man invites them to discuss N. problem. Shy away from watermelon, pork chops etc.

(d) The 'Loud and Wrong' type: another defense mechanism: seek compensation for feeling of inferiority induced by prevailing racial attitudes by exhibitionism, raucousness and clowning. Assertiveness; belligerence; bellicose (same often attributed to Jew)

(e) The 'Bad' Type: (often found in South). Masked under a placid exterior—which is a forced development of the individual's desire to survive in hostile surroundings. But a boiling resentment against the whole situation and white people, underneath. This resentment comes to surface under stress and when favorable opportunity presents itself;—liquor, after dark in Negro community (where white police often fear to tread), incidents of unusual brutality, etc.

'This type fearless, willing to die fighting—dynamite in So. A type overlooked in literature, or distorted as 'brutes', beasts, morons, criminals, etc.

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(f) Objective or Intellectual or 'Detached' Type: attempt to view problem in its social perspective and entirety. Do not keep an active, alert, ever-present consciousness of race with them. 'Emancipated' Can be insulted, but only by deliberate, personal insults, not abstract ones.

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No acceptance of situation as is, but an understanding of its underlying causes and therefore a sounder basis for resisting and attacking it. No resentment against whites in general or particular; sees similarity between his own problems and those of many in other groups. Sees problems as considerably more than prob. of a 'race'.

This attitude may also be a form of accommodation?³⁶

³⁶ Ibid.

In giving these types, Bunche wanted the Northwestern students to recognize that African Americans “don’t all look alike, nor do they think alike, feel alike, have the same status or aspirations. They run the whole gamut of emotions, feelings, thoughts, and hopes.”³⁷ Most of these types arose out of Bunche and the other Amenians’ frustration with black leaders. Charles Johnson could have fallen into that “sophisticated Uncle Tom type” with the research Harris believed lacked analysis and with his many connections to the white foundation world. Many of the socialites in New York and DC may have fit into the “ostrich type” for Bunche.³⁸ He had been asked to deliver a speech outside his discipline, and as such relied upon personal impressions rather than careful research.

The final type is the one in which Bunche would have placed himself and his Howard friends. Note that at first the whole description is positive—he uses words like “Emancipated,” emphasizes the way the intellectual sees problems in their entirety and so develops solutions as no other type did. Bunche had only recently written his pamphlet “A World View of Race” that argued that economics was behind international conflicts that seemed racial. He also argued that persecuted groups shared more experiences than they did not; i.e. African Americans’ suffering was not unique.³⁹ He also argued that

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ “Bunche understood that a certain psychology of hysteria lay behind the formation of race-based theories. Nevertheless, he fit this psychology of race and racialism into his political and economic interpretation of the world order. ‘The theory of race, endowed with a false dignity by pseudo-scientific treatment, thus serves to justify economic policies, to bolster up political ambitions, to foment class prejudices and many other types of social antagonisms among both groups and nations.’” p 164 Holloway

³⁹ For a thorough discussion of this pamphlet see Jonathan Scott Holloway, *Confronting the Veil: Abram Harris, Jr., E. Franklin Frazier, and Ralph Bunche, 1919-1941* (Chapel Hill [N.C.]: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 163-168.. Holloway argues that this pamphlet, though designed for an adult education series, needs to be considered “the most important publication of Bunche’s early years.” “Bunche saw race as a concept used to explain and justify a reality of economic, political and social oppression.” He “constantly reiterated the theme that race was a false, although convenient construction, fabricated by the powerful for economic advancement.”

people should stop focusing exclusively on race when trying to solve seemingly racial problems. His snide description of the “race conscious” type above indicates his utter disregard for those who emphasized race. He takes great pride in his friends’ ability to supposedly transcend abstract insults and to maintain some kind of “objectivity.” And yet that last line is haunting—“This attitude may also be a form of accommodation?” By this point, Booker T. Washington’s philosophy had been roundly discredited among black intellectuals, so accommodation would have conjured up many negative associations for Bunche (this was not true in black communities more generally).⁴⁰

Bunche could have been referring to several things here. His own presence at Northwestern that semester represented a form of accommodation; he had adapted himself to the academic requirements of the SSRC board in order to receive their grant money. The following semester he would have to emphasize over and over again to different government officials that his business in South Africa was purely scholarly so that he could even enter the country. This meant he had to promise not to give many speeches, because South African officials feared he would start to “missionize” while on stage. He and his friends had also had to adjust some of their scholarship so that it would be

⁴⁰ Margaret Walker’s 1932 essay, published in *Our Youth*, a magazine published by the Colored Juvenile Delinquent Rescue Association in New Orleans suggests at least one way Booker T. Washington was still appreciated. After arguing that higher education had failed her generation by pushing everyone, suited or not, into the professions, she raised Washington to support her position: “Moreover, a good and sure way to succeed in our various occupations is to apply our knowledge wisely in our own environment with a view to bettering conditions there. Thus, we follow the principle and words of our great teacher, Booker T. Washington, ‘Let down your buckets where you are.’ A further inference from these words may be summed up in this manner: The Negro has a bucket, the tool is in his hand, he has used it and given it to others all over the world; his manual labor has brought enormous profits and stupendous results to nations who have used him as the tool to realize their dreams and ambitions, to materialize their ideas and plans. Now he must use what is his own for himself, he is putting his brain to school daily, it should and it must supply him with the idea, the scheme, and the plan. And now the two together—his brain and his brawn—must work out his own salvation.” Margaret Walker, “What is to Become of Us?,” in *On Being Female, Black, and Free: Essays by Margaret Walker, 1932-1992*, ed. Maryemma Graham (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1997), 176.

published by mainstream presses and in academic journals. Finally, by not resenting “whites in general or particular,” Bunche and the Howard Amenians had made it possible for them to be individually accepted by certain whites, like Herskovits, who were gatekeepers to power and influence. Bunche was already successful at moving into white spaces, but he would become even more so over the next decade, until he finally won the Nobel Peace Prize for his work with the UN in brokering peace between the Arabs and Israelis in 1948. Bunche could have meant any of these types of practical concerns while explicating the psychology of the black intellectual.

He could also have meant a more epistemological accommodation. Bunche and the scholarly Amenians accepted that objectivity and science was “the good.” They accepted that it was possible to view problems from a “social perspective” and in their “entirety.” In other words, they accepted--they accommodated themselves--to the academic worldview that had arisen in the West. Bunche recognized this, yet still believed that social science was the best way to attack and resist persecution. It was this total dedication to social science that distinguished him and the Amenians from the Progressive leaders that came before and the Civil Rights and Black Power leaders that came after.

One of the things that separated the Amenians from the NAACP founders was their focus on profession and discipline rather than racial identity. The actions they took as young men made it possible for their older selves to be professionals, rather than activists. They took the tools and materials that the NAACP founders offered, but transformed them into what they personally wanted. In that way, they laid the behind-the-

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scenes groundwork in academia and in the government that opened these sectors to a greater black presence.

During his Christmas break, Bunche had several “gab-fests” with the other Amenians. Abe Harris came over for dinner on New Years Day, complaining about Mordecai Johnson “spending all that money on Temporary housing for the [Charles] Johnson’s—and justifiably.”⁴¹ Dorsey and the Browns dropped by later for drinks. The next day, Bunche played ping pong with friends and then stayed up till 5:30 a.m. working on his psychological types paper for Herskovits. He also spent the break trying to convince Ruth to accompany him, with the girls, on his trip around the world. When she finally agreed, he wrote “That pepped me up plenty. She’s a sweet girl.”⁴² Bunche’s continued treatment of her as more “girl” than co-equal partner frustrated them both on their journey. Ralph attended many events without her, because she had to stay at the apartment with the girls, and did not give a time when he would return. Ruth had to leave behind her own profession (teaching elementary school) to follow her husband, who then took her presence a bit for granted.

After he returned from Northwestern at the end of January, more parties ensued. At one “the ‘ugang’ was present: Abe and Callie, Dutch and Daisy, Sam, Harold [Lewis] and “Frank.””⁴³ Other friends, including Gus Auzenne—Howard’s treasurer and a new

⁴¹ Bunche, “Diary,” January 1, 1937.

⁴² Ibid., January 10, 1937.

⁴³ To explain who Lewis was, let me quote a letter of recommendation from Dorsey to John Barton of the University of Wisconsin on Lewis: Miss Thyra J. Edwards requested that I submit the name of some young man who is qualified for and interested in a scholarship at the International People’s College at Elsinore, Denmark. There is a young man at Howard University who would make an ideal student at the International People’s College. His name is Harold O. Lewis. He is an instructor of European and economic history. He is a keen student and a very effective teacher. He is deeply interested in the labor movement.

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member of the “gang”—helped Bunche pack “all day and most of nite.”⁴⁴ Harris accompanied the Bunches during their stop-over in New York before boarding the boat. Ralph and Abe visited the SSRC, during which “Young divulged prospects for big research directing job. Highly confidential and may mean my release from this jaunt before its completion,” Bunche noted. In a few years, this research turned into the *American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* study not directed by any of the professional black social scientists (though most they conducted much of the research). The SSRC deemed them too interested in the outcome for objectivity and instead hired Gunnar Myrdal, who hailed from a European country without colonies (Sweden). The men also tried to call on Raymond Buell, but he was out of town, and connected with Max Yergan after several missed connections. Bunche agreed to serve on his African Committee; they discussed it with George Padmore when Yergan traveled to London in March. Their business completed, Bunche took the young woman who was taking care of the Bunches’ business in their absence and Harris to a show. Afterwards, “Abe picked up Ruth Birch, and we all went to the Ubangi Club. Saw Leonidas Summons and her sister entertaining. Back to hotel at 3:30 a.m. Ruth awake waiting.”⁴⁵

Bunche moved in many circles in London. On the boat over, he and Ruth befriended Ellen Wilkinson, a Labor MP. They stayed up into the wee hours one night

He taught at the Atlanta Worker’s School, Atlanta, Ga., last summer. He helped organize and teaches in our Washington Worker’s School. Mr. Lewis is a young man, twenty-five years old. I know of no young man who would profit so much from the training your school affords and who would have so much to give his school mates. Lewis could arrange a leave of absence from Howard University if he were elected to this scholarship. He would like very much to go. I have asked Dr. Abram L. Harris, whom you know, and Dr. Charles Wesley, Professor of History, to send you a word about Mr. Lewis.” Lewis got the scholarship and attended the International People’s College. Bunche, “Diary,” January 26, 1937; Emmett E. Dorsey to John Barton, December 10, 1934, Box 24 Folder 4, Bunche Papers Schomburg; Harold Lewis to Ralph Bunche, January 7, 1934, Box 1 Folder 8, Bunche Papers UCLA.

⁴⁴ Bunche, “Diary,” January 31, 1937.

⁴⁵ Ibid., January 34, 1937.

talking on the boat and Bunche read some of Sterling Brown's poems, to great acclaim. In London, Wilkinson invited him to several luncheons and even a couple weekend trips with powerful people. He attended these events, but it is unclear whether he enjoyed being among the British high brow—starstruck at first, he quickly tired of the rigmarole. Though Ruth was also invited, she often had to turn down the invitations to take care of the girls. Their first apartment was cold, dirty, and cramped, so they spent the first week trying to find better housing (Ralph called up Lorenzo Turner for advice, because he had been in London for quite some time). The girls soon caught colds and then the measles. Ralph took to wandering the London streets late at night, ostensibly on household errands, but also to stop in at gambling parlors. After Ruth got mad at him for being gone so late one night he was supposed to be getting medicine, he complained to his diary,

At 9 I took tube to Boots Chemicals at Piccadilly to get a refill on Jane's prescription. Had to wait an hour so walked around window shopping. Didn't feel like playing Beano so just watched the others play. Home at 11:30 and Ruth started raving at me. She is upset over kid's illness, I guess. But I can't stand nagging and she made me so angry I packed up and started to walk out—would have too if kids weren't sick. She seems to delight in trying to get me riled by petty, nasty remarks. Keeps me upset and my mind troubled and makes it doubly difficult for me to do any work. She cooled off later but that sort of experience leaves me cold for days.⁴⁶

Ruth's stress at trying to live in a foreign land was exacerbated by the girls' frequent illnesses. Childhood illness is certainly not uncommon, but Ruth was separated from her support network and from doctors she trusted. The first doctor who treated Joan for measles wanted to take her to an isolation unit, away from her parents and quarantined. Both the Bunches were scared to give their child to an unknown physician in a land with a spotted history of caring for people of color (especially given the cold reception that the

⁴⁶ Ibid., April 13, 1937.

doctor seemed to give to their race). When Kenyatta arrived to teach Ralph and observed the parents' fears, he suggested a West Indian doctor who was more obviously unprejudiced and willing to listen to the parents of the child. Both girls (Jane got ill after Joan) recovered at home.⁴⁷

Many of the gang kept Bunche apprised of news from Howard. Harris wrote that that President Johnson had chided those who needed to go overseas to find a problem to study when there were so many in the United States. Bunche was not named directly, but everyone in the room assumed he was the man Johnson attacked. Many of the Amenians interacted with Johnson in a similarly frustrating way. He had a tendency to tell Frazier and Harris the kind of sociology or economics they should be writing. Rayford Logan called this tendency Johnson's "Messianic moments."⁴⁸

Bunche turned their apartment into a social center like their place had been in DC. Many of the African students he met through the London School of Economics dropped by. A few Americans were also in town, including Lorenzo Turner, Arthur Davis, and Paul and Essie Robeson (the latter, Bunche sought out rather than them dropping in on him). These gatherings were multipurpose. In part it was to complain about Bronislaw Malinowski's functionalism. Bunche's first impression of Malinowski had turned sour over the weeks. His first meeting with the anthropologist occurred in February: "Had conference with him (young lady student also present) in his bed-room—which resembled a shambles. Cans of tomato juice particularly evident. He's a very interesting

⁴⁷ Ibid., April, 1937.

⁴⁸ Rayford Whittingham Logan, *Howard University: The First Hundred Years, 1867-1967* (New York: New York University Press, 1969), 249.

personality—obviously vain and dogmatic, but extremely able.”⁴⁹ Within a few weeks of sitting under him, Bunche started to deplore Malinowski’s approach toward his research and the way that he obliterated individual subjects by being blindly attached to his theory of functionalism. Every society was approached first through that lens, seeking out the way that each cultural artifact and ritual functioned, rather than attempting to understand the culture as it stood (as Bunche hoped to do in Africa). This necessarily presumed that the armchair anthropologist knew more about a society than the people living in it (in Bunche’s estimation, Malinowski had turned into an armchair, or bedroom, researcher, despite his years on the Trobriand Islands in Papua New Guinea where he was stranded during WWI).

George Simpson, the other SSRC fellow at Northwestern, recognized Bunche’s frustration with a bit of sarcasm; “I conclude from your letter that British anthropology is worse than the race relations program of the Society of Friends. Paraphrasing a paragraph in a recent magazine article, I screamed, stamped my feet, tore my hair, foamed at the mouth, and cursed when I read your remarks about the futility of my field work. I almost burned all of my notes, but before I struck the match it suddenly occurred to me that maybe your friends, those British sons-of-bitches, don’t know everything, and that out of the miscellaneous facts about life that I have picked up here [in Haiti] I might be able to salvage something of value. You can be sure that I am going to integrate everything. If I find any odds and ends that don’t fit in with my conception of the Haitian cultural machine, I shall just throw them out. Damned if I want any unnecessary hunks of data to interfere with the smooth functioning of Haitian functionalism. If I were to spend three or

⁴⁹ Bunche, “Diary,” February 22, 1937.

four years in this country I am sure that the only place that I could function satisfactorily would be some kind of nut house. Maybe that is the trouble with Broni. He just functioned so much in Trobriandland, and saw so much functioning, that he and everything else have been functioning ever since.”⁵⁰ Simpson mixes up disdain for Malinowski’s theory applied to everything, especially when it discredits fieldwork, but at the end criticizes him for doing too much fieldwork.

The drop-in chats and planned parties also allowed Bunche picked the other students’ brains about Africa. Among those who attended were Jomo Kenyatta, Mbiyu “Peter” Koinange (a South African at St. John’s College, Cambridge), Akiki Nyabongo, and N.A. Fadipe, Yoruba from Abeokuta in Nigeria. After one of the first get-togethers, Bunche wrote “The Afr. Boys were intelligent and apparently living well—a couple of them are sons of chiefs.”⁵¹ (7 March 1937) He spent the most time with Kenyatta, became the Kikuyu started coming a few times a week to give Bunche Swahili lessons in preparation of entering Kenya. Bunche went through a range of feelings toward Kenyatta. He, who had so recently praised black intellectuals for not being uniformly disgusted with whites, was a little unsettled by the anti-white feelings expressed by many of the African students; “All, particularly Kenyatta, evidenced strong anti-white feelings.” (Feb 11, 1937.) Nonetheless, at one of the first parties, he “had a jolly time. Talked Africa, anti-imperialism, and pan-blackism. Group left at 11:45. Mtimkulu (especially) and Kenyatta were impressive. Kenyatta’s going to teach me Swahili and Mtimkulu offered

⁵⁰ George Simpson to Ralph Bunche, August 23, 1937, Box 10 Folder 13, Bunche Papers Schomburg.

⁵¹ Bunche, “Diary,” March 7, 1937.

to travel around with me in So. Afr.”⁵² Yet, after a few lessons, Bunche started to get frustrated with Kenyatta’s bluster. He got frustrated with the way he loved the USSR seemingly without a proper theoretical background. “Kenyatta loves Russia and the Scandinavian countries and their people. But he seems to be an intense racial chauvinist rather than a Marxist tho he spent a year and 4 mos. in school in Russia. Said he was treated royally. He was obviously given all sorts of special privileges—a room to himself, 700 rubles per mo., etc. He also attended worker’s school at Elsinare (where Harold [Lewis] was) for 3 mos. Claims to hate the British and to trust few, if any, white man. He was walking around town with a spear the other day—(exhibitionism?)”⁵³ This was common treatment of Africans and African Americans in the USSR. Rarely were official guests shown the nastier parts of the nation.⁵⁴

Nyabongo seemed to annoy those around him because he constantly brought up his work that needed a publisher and his desire to get a teaching position in the United States. Bunche noted that “Nyabongo [was] dumb, but sly and dangerous” and “Nyabongo called this evening and sat around talking about his books and how Europeans are so frightened of him and he doesn’t see why, etc.”⁵⁵ Harris, who had met Nyabongo the previous summer at Oxford, had warned Bunche; “Nyabongo is rather disgusting, I think. His book, which has been rather well received has gone to his head. He is made out of quite inferior stuff! and prattled to me for two hours about his being a

⁵² Ibid., March 16, 1937.

⁵³ Ibid., April 7, 1937.

⁵⁴ See Allison Blakely, *Russia and the Negro: Blacks in Russian History and Thought* (Washington, D.C: Howard University Press, 1986).

⁵⁵ Bunche, “Diary,” March 21, April 3, 1937.

‘prince.’ He is now writing five books. He seems to think he confers an honor on one by looking one up.”⁵⁶ Fadipe gave Bunche a large manuscript on East Africa to read, which he appreciated and devoured. He later tried to get Fadipe hired at Howard, encouraging the rest of the gang to send letters of recommendation to Mordecai Johnson. His opinion of Eric Williams varied as he got to know him better, first describing him as an “Earnest studious little chap, working for B. Litt at Oxford, West Indian” and later as someone less than intellectually astute.⁵⁷ I repeat all of Bunche’s private opinions because it is important to recognize that Africans and African Americans did not meet as some kind of lost brothers. Personalities got in the way of cooperation. Furthermore, the “Africans” were from many different areas of the continent and many different cultures, though they shared a place in the ruling class and a connection to Britain. Regardless, this is a distinct moment when so many future leaders of independent African nations gathered in London and it deserves more analysis than I have space for here. Bunche’s description of an “African Party” he threw illustrates the differences:

Big group present—10 Africans,—Mtimkulu, Mbanefo, Addo, Kenyatta, Cassey, Afuriata, De Graft Johnson, Koinange, Mjanja, Nyabongo, and Davis and Turner. Very riotous—Gold Coast natives Addo, Afuriata, and Johnson and Cassey contending vs. Mbanefo that Nigerian natives are cause of all Gold Coast troubles. Claim that Gold Coast natives are much more independent and aggressive; that they do not suffer from direct taxation as in Nigeria; that they will not fight for British (claim that Br. afraid to give them guns and lance no Ashantis in Br. Mil. Service; that Ashantis refuse to work for white man, etc.)

Cassey bet that educ. African is too much of an individualist and self-centered to be of help to his people. They don’t see much possibility in any attempt at Pan-Africanism or unity among all Africans. Mbanefo thinks that problems must be solved locally. Several of group drank too

⁵⁶ Harris to Bunche, May 13, 1936.

⁵⁷ Bunche, “Diary,” March 23, 1937.; Harris had sent a letter of introduction to Williams for Bunche after they met at Oxford. He was enthusiastic about the addition Williams could make to the social sciences at Howard. Abram Harris to Ralph Bunche, May 1936, Box 1 Folder 10, Bunche Papers UCLA.

much—Kenyatta laid them all out for their lack of discipline and courtesy—said that if a white man were present and asked if Afr. was ready for self-govt, he'd have to say No! Storm of protest. Kochange, Mtimkulu and Nyabongo very reserved. Johnson admitted that he must be very careful in what he says as a Gold Coast Civil Servant). They devoured everything in sight. The lawyers among them (Addo, Afuriata and Mbanefo) very verbose and rhetorical but not too sound. Nyabongo brot me an autographed copy of his book: 'Africa Answers Back.'⁵⁸

Many of Bunche's diverse friend networks came together for a protest on March 24, 1937. They met at Memorial Hall on Farrington Street to protest massacres in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Bunche brought Arthur Davis with him. George Padmore presided. Several Members of Parliament spoke, including Ellen Wilkinson and a communist MP. Wilkinson proved "a fine rabblouser," while Sir Stafford Cripps was "an excellent analyst and intellectual radical." Bunche approved of Cripps' criticism of British and Italian imperialism, especially when he "pointed out the inevitability of exploitations and atrocities under fascism and imperialism. Compared present day imperialism with feudalism. He and Padmore warned that black troops would be used against Britons by Br. Fascists. All argued necessity for solidarity of working class peoples, black and white. Cripps and E.W. apologized for and described shame of [British] people for English gov'ts. Treacherous role re Abyssinia. False prosperity of white workers based on exploitation of black (Cripps)."⁵⁹ Bunche was excited enough by the similarities in his and the speakers' analysis to contribute six shillings when the hat passed, but was upset when Padmore read out his name to the assembled meeting, "since gov't detectives were assuredly on hand." Sure enough, a government agent asked Padmore to produce his identity papers after the meeting.

⁵⁸ Bunche, "Diary," March 31, 1937.

⁵⁹ Ibid., March 24, 1937.

Bunche spent the rest of his time in London working with Padmore and Yergan to develop the International Committee on African Affairs and working to get permission to enter South Africa, even though he had a visa.⁶⁰ When he filled out the South African Immigration form, he had to name his race from the choices European, Hebraic, Oriental or Africa. In answer he “wrote “American” as I had done for nationality.”⁶¹ Was this a functional way to answer the form to give him a greater chance of acceptance, or an expression of his self-conscious identity?

The Bunches traveled to the continent at the end of July, swinging through Holland to discuss Java and the Dutch colonial system with Professor J. J. Schrieke. The professor explained the positives he saw in Dutch colonial rule and warned about educating people beyond their economic and social status. “Educ. must keep pace with but not get too far ahead of econ and social advancement of peoples. Said Amer. Negro would understand this.”⁶² From his diary entry it sounded like Bunche kept quite in the face of this onslaught because he needed letters of introduction to people in Java. He was soaking up information for his later book, rather than immediately confronting ideas he disagreed with (as Harris was more wont to do). Bunche also asked different people he met, including a black Dutch Guiana waiter in a nightclub, of their impressions of the colonial system.

From Holland, the Bunches traveled through Brussels to Paris. There, he had meals with many friends and acquaintances, including Louis Achille and Carter G.

⁶⁰ Ibid., April 12, 1937.

⁶¹ Ibid., April 5, 1937.

⁶² Ibid., August 4, 1937.

Woodson (at one luncheon, Bunche recorded that Woodson “claims he’s a communist really – “as every Amer. N. must be”. Thinks France is best place in the world.”)⁶³ Leon Shereshefsky, a professor at Howard who sometimes attended Amenia gatherings, and his wife spent time daily the Bunches, strolling and conversing. After a couple of long days going to the Paris Exposition and entertaining the girls with goat car rides and new hats, Bunche wrote an aside, “It can’t be ignored that these black boys in Paris stroll about with as much confidence and ease in white sections as Negroes in U.S. do in Harlem or on Beale Street.”⁶⁴ One Saturday they got to see Josephine Baker perform; “Carter Woodson came by at 8:30 and we took a cab to the Folies Bergere, starring Jo Baker. They spotlighted her to the extreme, but she showed very little, except a beautiful brown body still and a finely chiseled slender figure. Sang some typical ditties in her small, sweet voice. Cry Frenchy, but cooked slight applause. Show just so so. We stopped at Café Madrid before taxiing home. Marie Louise kept kids.”⁶⁵

Aileen came over for this part of the trip and often took care of the children so that Ruth and Ralph could spend some alone time before being separated for many months. They attended shows and sat in sidewalk cafes watching the people. Ruth did not want to attend any of the “*boites de nuit*” so Bunche’s time was a bit tame. Also, Aileen traveled home with Ruth so she would not have to travel alone. The separation was hard on the couple. Ruth struggled to parent the girls, work, and keep the home together on the small income they had. Conversation was difficult with Ralph. Once he was in Kikuyu

⁶³ Ibid., August 22, 1937.

⁶⁴ Ibid., August 24, 1937.

⁶⁵ Ibid., August 28, 1937.

land or on his safari, letters may or may not arrive because he moved around so much. Telegrams were too expensive on their limited income. It was hard on Ralph as well, who came to deeply miss his family. On the last night in Paris, he would have cried had a guest not been there. In the middle of the night, he poured out his emotions; "Joan and Jane are sweet children and I don't realize often how deeply I love them. As I write this at 2:30 a.m. Ruth is asleep beside me and I dread the thought that tomorrow night and for many more nights she will not be there."⁶⁶ Though he recorded his sexual longings for his wife often in his diary (as he had their trysts in London), he managed to avoid liaisons with other women, even though it would have been easy. One woman followed him from South Africa to the Kikuyu area and crawled into his tent late at night. He pushed her out. When he arrived in Indonesia, prostitutes and pimps tried to entangle him every few feet it seemed. His boat companions indulged, but he was horrified by the offer.

Bunche spent all of the fall in South Africa, alternating his time between the University of Cape Town, where he worked with Isaac Shapera, and research excursions into the countryside. He befriended a large group of Indians, with whom he played ping pong and tennis. In January he traveled north to Kenya, where he stayed with Koinange's father. While there, he witnessed a circumcision ceremony that had him running across hills to capture everything on the tape recorder Eslanda Robeson had let him borrow. From there, he took a safari into the Congo in an old Ford he had bought in Koinange's village. A local man, "George" went with him as a travel companion and helper. They often had to stop to repair the car in the course of their journey. At one point they stayed in a hotel that would give the light-skinned Bunche a room, but not his dark-skinned

⁶⁶ Ibid., August 30, 1937.

companion. Bunche worried what to do, but George simply climbed up the exterior of the building, through the second room window, and slept in the chair all night. All during his trip, Bunche took copious notes and made more films, sending periodic reports to the SSRC.

Bunche sailed from East Africa aboard a fancy cruise liner. The other passengers frequently tried to engage him, but he was torn at the invitations. He could make friends with anybody, as he had shown over and over again during the past eight months, but would he want to? Despite his reluctance, he ended up spending much of the rest of the journey with one man. They stopped in Indonesia, where Bunche kept getting annoyed at the tour guides. He had been on his own traveling Africa, but now he had to mind a guide. He managed to slip away on the island of Bali and interview a few residents. He got back to the boat with a hair's breath margin of time. The boat stopped in China and Japan before landing in San Francisco. Of all the places he had seen, the poverty in China was the most shocking. In Japan, he interacted with academic colleagues that kept up regular correspondence for a few years. He managed to talk Ruth into joining him in Los Angeles, so she was there when his train finally arrived. He could hardly contain his excitement at seeing his family again, though Ruth was a bit put out over having to travel across the country to see him (at least as he recorded it). The trip around the world had kept him from his family for more than a year. He gathered extensive research notebooks that he planned to turn into a book, but never did. The experiences proved an excellent training ground for his later work in the United Nations, however.

When he returned, Bunche was in immediate demand as a speaker for academic and non-academic audiences. Local black clubs in DC and elsewhere wanted to hear all

about Africa, and particularly African American connections to the continent. He balked at describing any inheritances black Americans may or may not have kept, promising to speak only about current political situations in both areas. At the same time, his expertise was in demand by the Carnegie Mellon Study then being conducted by Gunnar Myrdal. All the Amenians were brought in for advice and counsel, but Bunche in particular wrote much of the material. In 1939, he traveled through the southern states on a research trip for this project.

After Harris and Bunche left Howard, the Amenians morphed into the “Thinkers and Drinkers” group led by Frazier, whose only requisite was that members did not know how to play poker and refused to learn (and that they were men). Frazier invited John Hope Franklin to join soon after the historian had joined the faculty. Franklin remembered,

The only thing we did was meet, have drinks and dinner, and talk, talk, talk. Frazier was the senior member, joined by two of his colleagues in sociology, Harry Walker and G. Franklin Edwards, and anthropologist Mark Hanna Watkins. There was also a poet, Sterling Brown, a political scientist, Sam Dorsey, Harold Lewis, and myself. We met in our respective homes or at our favorite restaurant, Harrisons, on Florida Avenue. None of the members’ wives played poker, except Marie Frazier, and I have no doubt that Frazier’s antipathy for the game and Marie’s devotion to it had something to do with his insisting that no poker player should belong to the ‘Thinkers and Drinkers.’ During our meetings, there were no-holds-barred discussions of a variety of social and intellectual topics, but we would invariably end up in a discussion of Howard University and its need to improve its intellectual and educational health. At the end of the meetings, usually held once a month, we felt as those we had solved all or at least most of the problems the various members had introduced.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ Franklin, “E. Franklin Frazier: A Memoir,” 18-19.

Towards a Conclusion

College women are not satisfied with the leadership which *they* are giving to the Negro group as a whole. Twenty (55.5 percent) of the thirty-six college women who made general comments about college graduates, in addition to giving answers and comments on specific items, mentioned outright the college woman's lack of interest in the welfare of her community; in other comments the accusation was there by inference.

Typical of these comments are the following:

'The Negro college woman of today increasingly is taking less and less interest in her community—or at least that is true in my sphere of travel. Colleges train them away from the uneducated woman.'

...

The charge of indifference does not square with the stated participation in civic welfare and with indications of concern for practically every aspect of the total group life.

--Marion Cuthbert, 1942¹

¹ Marion V Cuthbert, *Education and Marginality: A Study of the Negro Woman College Graduate, Educated women* (New York: Garland, 1987), 86.

In her 1942 Ph.D. dissertation for Columbia University, Marion Cuthbert studied whether black women college graduates had difficulty reintegrating into their home towns after graduation. In her own experiences, she knew some of the difficulties that college graduates faced in relating to less educated African Americans, but she wanted to turn her impressions into social science. With the encouragement of Charles S. Johnson, she distributed a questionnaire to about a group of 172 “college women” and 58 “non-college women.” She found a persistent loneliness among college graduates because they existed partially in two different worlds and “There is no complete returning to the world they have left,” while “there is no complete entering into the new world” because of the many barriers between themselves and their professions.² Five situations contributed to their sense of marginality: a feeling of aloofness from the “total racial group,” their high status, “competition and severe criticism” within black communities, difficulty combining work and marriage, limitations due to race and sexual prejudice and inadequate vocational guidance, and a degree of personal isolation within their interracial and intraracial relationships. In addition, Cuthbert noticed an “unusual amount of tension between Negro men and women” because of competition between the two genders and “the status accorded Negro women” challenged black men’s place in society. Quite often this resulted in delayed, childless marriages or no marriage at all among college educated black women.

In one of her chapters, she probed the assumption aired by many college graduates that their generation was not active enough in their communities, especially in

² Ibid., 117.

comparison with earlier generations. She discovered that black women graduates consistently criticized themselves and their generation, even while being very involved in civic welfare, socio-religious interests, and religious activities, particularly through the YWCA, the NAACP, the National Association of College Women, the National Association of Club Women, their sororities, and their churches. At the same time, many obstacles challenged these women's levels of commitment. Many were already working in civic work or social work for their profession and so hesitated to do it also after work. They all had to balance work, family, and personal commitments (there was no leisure class of wealthy black women who could take on the bulk of volunteer leadership like in white communities). There was also a tremendous amount of things to be done, and a limited supply of women to do them.

When told about the extensive commitment of black women as well as the difficulties facing them, most of the graduates dismissed these points as just so many "excuses, believing that the case made in their behalf, although fair, is weak."³ Cuthbert suggested that part of the reason for the feeling of this great burden was because "The very great expectancy within the Negro group that the wise leader will arise to show an oppressed people the way out of its troubles is one that has been long over-nurtured."⁴

Cuthbert's final conclusions give me an opportunity to reflect back on some of the ideas present in this dissertation. One was the sense of responsibility to community that followed African American intellectuals throughout their life. Some eagerly accepted this mission and others were more reluctant. Abram Harris kept resisting becoming a

³ Ibid., 92.

⁴ Ibid., 84.

community leader, but also reveled in being treated like a respected intellectual. Anna Arnold Hedgeman embraced her role as leader and kept moving to find a place where she and her ideas fit. All could sympathize With Juliette Derricotte when she ached with the burden of this responsibility, wishing for a time when she could just be a family woman, laughed at the irony and hypocrisy of the racial situation in the US, and also gathered her resolve to go back and fight again.

In her conclusion Cuthbert urged black college women to do four things for themselves and their communities. The first was to build a strong emotional support base within their family and not depend upon the places of stress--their profession, education, or volunteer work for their "emotional security."⁵ Throughout my dissertation, men and women have proven the wisdom of that insight. Strong black families stood behind the success of each individual in these pages. Sometimes this meant families who were wealthy or financially secure, and other times it meant single grandmothers with very few economic resources. In every case, though, the parents provided their children with books and urged the importance of education upon them. However, the children did not keep everything their parents passed on. Some parents, like Anna Arnold Hedgeman's father, told their children about the beauty of southern culture and that individuals could achieve anything they put their minds to. Arnold Hedgeman, though appreciating black southerners, fled the South after experiencing racism and eventually shed her father's ideas about individual power, preferring instead the power of group resistance. Other family members, like Ralph Bunche's grandmother or Abram Harris' parents, urged their children to adopt a strong Christian faith. Bunche ascribed to what faith he needed to

⁵ Ibid., 118.

publicly, but in his personal life preferred science over religion. Harris never resisted the urge to criticize the church for its passivity and gaps of logic.

Cuthbert's next suggestion was that college-educated women "should take as a great challenge the opportunity to work in interracial situations, especially with liberal, enterprising white women on matters of community welfare, being concerned to learn early the elementary ways of functioning successfully interracially, but giving special attention to the improvement of these ways."⁶ A central part of such successful functioning was realizing that black women had "many instances to be a teacher of white people, not only concerning those things about the Negro group that should be made matters of more general knowledge, but sharing whatever wisdom for living is hers—a fresh wisdom winnowed from many hard experiences to be contributed for the use of our evolving society."⁷ Though the familial strength of each Amenian set them up to succeed, each one still had to realize for themselves what they had to offer. The country as a whole denigrated black Americans and disparaged black culture. Amenians had to find and trust their own wisdom so they could share it through scholarship or through social work. Some did this purposefully through the formal interracial dialogues established by the YWCA and affiliate organizations. Others worked on interracial relations as they moved through their degrees, published their scholarship, and depended upon networking for the success of their grant applications. Amenians had to keep asserting their ability to lead and contribute; even good white friends could surprise them with a sudden infusion of the color line into their relationship, like when Melville

⁶ Ibid., 119.

⁷ Ibid.

Herskovits never invited his black students and “friends” to eat with him in the faculty dining room. Given how much one would expect this era of the highest membership of the KKK in the nation’s history to contain only negative interracial interactions, it is surprising how many Amenians had at least a few positive relationships with whites.

Certainly, not all the Amenians agreed with Cuthbert’s emphasis on race relations. This points to another dividing line between those who ascribed to a slightly older kind of Progressive work that directly emphasized whites and blacks meeting together and developing relationships as a way to improve the status of African Americans in the United States (this was common among the whites of the YWCA and the Quakers; Marion Cuthbert, Lillian Alexander, Juliette Derricotte and a few other blacks accepted this as a beneficial way to work). Most Amenians rejected this as an old-fashioned and ineffective way to work. They preferred social science, lobbying, litigation, and/or unionization. The Young Turks—Harris, Ralph Bunche, E. Franklin Frazier, and Sterling Brown—believed that social science and objective research could explain the current way race relations worked and with this information, governments, unions, African Americans and white could transform the political and economic structure of the nation. Some combined the race relations and the social science impulses, like Marion Cuthbert herself, as well as the Quaker sponsored Swarthmore Race Relations Institute.

“Third,” Cuthbert wrote, “it behooves the Negro college woman to be actively concerned for the growth of opportunities and the betterment of the status of all Negro women; to fight to free the Negro group itself from stereotyped thinking of all kinds as well as the white world from stereotypes of the Negro, and particularly of the Negro

woman.”⁸ Many Amenians mentioned at some point during their career the frustration they had with African Americans who accepted what the whitestream culture said about them or those who did not give back to their society. This critique was not limited to a few iconoclasts, but a frequent refrain among black leaders and a self-criticism (as Cuthbert pointed out). Those leaders knew that to start a mass movement they needed the majority of African Americans to understand their rights, the pervasive stereotypes infiltrating American culture, and the best ways to fight back. This is why so many Amenians continued to emphasize the importance of education. Even when frustrated by the outcome of that education or the flawed transporter of the ideas (schools and universities), the Amenians returned to the power of dialogue, social science research, and words to change people’s opinions and minds. This tendency to turn to education first was one thing that marked this generation apart from those who came after WWII and began to think about protest first. Cuthbert imagined the role of education affecting African Americans in many areas in addition to the fight for civil rights:

The Negro college woman has given evidence of balance, practicality and positivism concerning the role of education. From her knowledge of the special problems of her group she can work toward a better knowledge and understanding of the special problems of other groups and so help break the stereotype of education as mere mass production. She can know also from her own experiences how fundamental deeper insights into personality are as a real basis for reform in education. In particular, within college situations and without, she can work for better relationships in marriage and the home; for better physical and mental health; for greater community in emotional life, especially among Negro people; she can encourage this racial group to have a better knowledge of itself, freed of undue ethnocentrism; she can lead in cultural cooperation.⁹

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., 120.

Cuthbert, like Abram Harris and Ralph Bunche, criticized black communities who emphasized race in every aspect of their lives. This was not true of every American, which is why the conferees hotly debated black nationalism.

Cuthbert finished her list of the “full implications of leadership” with a challenging call; “Fourth, [the black college woman] should be particularly concerned for Negro men and the special social and psychological problems confronting them, thereby learning better the art of supplementing men where the role of women demands that relationship.”¹⁰ It has been in some ways easier for black women to transition into the post-Civil Rights Movement world than it has been for black men. Black women outnumber black men in colleges. A much publicized and discussed statistic is that there are more black men in prison than in college. A pressing question for the twenty first century is how to care for boys’ and men’s mental health without losing the advancements made for girls and women.

It is a mark of Cuthbert’s era that this woman putting the finishing touches on her dissertation, who had held a major administrative role in one of the largest women’s organizations in the nation, still felt like she needed to couch the role of women in the terms of helpmate and urge black women to find a way to help men rather than challenge their egos. That she may have been uncomfortable with this statement is indicated in her last caveat—it was only true where the role for women so demanded that relationship.

Cuthbert’s acknowledgement of or concession to the current state of gender relationships succinctly captured something that has arisen throughout this dissertation. The Americans were products of their time. Even as they decried the way African

¹⁰ Ibid., 118-9.

Americans continued to hold on to stereotypes, they did not always view race from some far away objective place. Americans neither protested the racial regime at every minute nor accommodated it every minute. They chose what would work in that place and time based on their own information and ideals (some in a more pragmatic way and some in a more idealistic way). Episodes from Sterling Brown's and Ralph Bunche's early years illustrate the complexities that can be read into their psychologies. Brown may have produced a minstrel show in high school as an ironic flouting of the show's convention because he had been raised in a black community that understood the ugly power of the stereotypes conveyed in that medium. Ralph Bunche may have appeared in a minstrel show in his high school on the other side of the country as a way to access the culture of a race he felt tied to genetically but unmoored to culturally. Or perhaps for Brown minstrel shows were one of many things that gave him his love of folk culture. And perhaps Ralph Bunche used the minstrel show and a darky story in his speech criticizing Los Angeles' proposal to segregate a swimming pool for his own subversion of current stereotypes. Most likely it was a mixture of all of these. Narratives take pride of place in each chapter in order to help many conflicting threads such as these hang together, in tension, rather than tease them apart into constituent, independent strands.

In her final words, Cuthbert foreshadowed the movement she saw on the horizon, an interracial movement to challenge American democracy to live up to its promises in which African American women would play a leading role: "The admission is made on many sides that the Negro will provide the most severe test of democracy in this country. How well that test will be met must depend on the willingness of both Negro and white people—indeed, all people—to strive consciously and strive mightily for a better living

together. In such living the educated Negro woman has a significant role to play. She has played some part of it well; she will play a greater part better as she understands the need and her own capacity to meet it.”¹¹

The Amenians from Here Hence

The Amenians were still rather early on in their careers by the early 1940s. Several moved into temporary or permanent international, federal, and local governments (Ralph Bunche to the UN, Frances Williams to the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission). Others continued to be scholars at Howard University (Sterling Brown, E. Franklin Frazier, and Rayford Logan). Some became the “firsts” hired at whitestream universities (like Marion Cuthbert herself, who joined the Brooklyn College faculty after completing her dissertation; Abram Harris and Allison Davis joined the University of Chicago as teaching faculty). And some transitioned from education and social work into protest. Mabel Byrd, after raising a family, took over directing a People’s Theater in St. Louis. When she wanted to put on plays in support of the Civil Rights Movement, the board of directors resisted and she fought. Anna Arnold Hedgeman was one of the first Amenians to protest. Her protests are transition narratives, capturing something of the spirit of the interwar era and something of the dawning civil rights era.

“To my husband, Merritt, who has never permitted the fact that I am a woman to color his judgment of me or his support of my work. He has continued in my life the gentle

¹¹ Ibid., 120.

understanding qualities of my mother, Ellen Parker Arnold, and the intellectual toughness of my father, William James Arnold.”¹²

After several years in New York City government, overseeing equal employment and providing for the basic needs of hungry, unemployed, and homeless New Yorkers, Anna Arnold Hedgeman returned to the YWCA. In 1938, Arnold Hedgeman took over the directorship of the Brooklyn black YWCA and was praised in the *New York Amsterdam News* as “a woman of tremendous energy, extraordinary vision and fine intelligence.”¹³ The main branch for African Americans in Brooklyn, Ashland Street Branch, was markedly different from her previous two YW’s in Harlem and Philadelphia. This one screamed segregation—it was ill-equipped, not within a black neighborhood and was only a few blocks from the beautiful white woman’s branch. She despaired at the physical conditions of the branch that rarely drew people in. Indeed, some Brooklynites traveled the forty minutes or so by subway to the Harlem YWCA rather than enter the one in their area.¹⁴ She told the *Amsterdam News* journalist that Brooklyn was the most exciting place she had ever worked because, “there is so much to be done here. My

¹² Anna Arnold Hedgeman, *The Trumpet Sounds: A Memoir of Negro Leadership* (New York: Holt, 1964), frontispiece.

¹³ Marvel J. Cooke, “Woman of Tremendous Energy is Behind Guns at Ashland Place: Anna Hedgeman Gives 1st Close-up on Social Problems in Brooklyn,” *New York Amsterdam News*, May 13, 1939, 14..

¹⁴ Hedgeman, *Trumpet Sounds*, 72-75.. She did not admit this until writing her autobiography years later. At the time, she told journalists that the location of the Ashland Street Branch was a “gold mine” for how close it was to public transportation stations. “This would mean that when we get increased facilities, we will be able to reach out into the entire Negro community of Brooklyn. People coming from East New York, Flatbush and the Stuyvesant-Bedford sections all must pass through Ashland place when they go shopping or to the theatre.” This suggests that Arnold Hedgeman still thought the primary YW demographic was middle class. Cooke, “Woman of Tremendous Energy is Behind Guns at Ashland Place: Anna Hedgeman Gives 1st Close-up on Social Problems in Brooklyn,” 14..

constant prayer is for time and physical energy so that I might be able to meet the demands of the community.”¹⁵

At the same time, she had many different personalities and populations to work with and mediate between. The Old Brooklynites—white and black—wanted things to remain the same—separate and segregated. They also did not want to deal, according to Arnold, with the massive wave of black migration from the South which was so transforming the neighborhoods. Yet, Arnold Hedgeman also felt a burden to help these new migrants settle in, acquire job skills, and have a place of refreshment and culture to retreat to.¹⁶

The women to whom she felt most closely attuned were the young professionals who had few job prospects despite their education. Though their groups were called “Business and Professional Women’s Clubs,” the young women “were for the most part college students, for business opportunities were rare. A few of them had stenographic jobs in churches and small businesses, but very few worked even in city government. These young women were ambitious but somewhat insecure, for they had already been rejected enough times to be unwilling to venture into new programs.”¹⁷ Arnold Hedgeman began to counsel them on ways to protest their situation. These protests represent a transition from the Amenians to the protest generation by elucidating the different reactions these women faced than protesters did in the late fifties and sixties, when protest involved whole communities.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Hedgeman, *Trumpet Sounds*, 72-75..

¹⁷ Ibid., 75..

A local ten-cent store catered almost exclusively to African Americans, yet had no black clerks. They started by trying to negotiate with the manager, but he refused even to see them. Then they decided to put up a picket line in front of the store, in order to draw the manager's attention. Arnold Hedgeman was acutely aware of the potential danger this might pose to the young women and decided to be present every day in case "any negative reaction developed." Black and white YW board members were disturbed by "the sight of their Executive Director leading a picket line" because that "was not their idea of suitable leadership for the young people of the community." The manager never did give them the interview they sought and many black parents "refused to allow their young people to stay on the line. We were also deeply chagrined that many Negroes crossed our picket line to buy in the store."¹⁸ In order to keep her followers from feeling defeated, she urged them to bring the problem to church leaders.

To prod her YW women into another action, Arnold Hedgeman suggested they apply to a local department store for the Christmas rush. The women at first refused to even try, knowing that they would be refused. Arnold Hedgeman convinced them of the value of trying. They practiced exactly what they would say to each question and how they would respond to unasked assumptions; several went to apply. The outcome was what they expected, but they had left behind managers and clerks in shock over their poise. Arnold Hedgeman brought these women to the next meeting of the Race Relations Committee of the Federal Conference of Churches.¹⁹

¹⁸ Ibid., 75-76.

¹⁹ Ibid., 76-77.

Many wealthy women attended this committee. "When the [black women] had finished their account of their visits to the personnel managers of some of the most influential department stores in Brooklyn, there wasn't a dry eye in the room. One member of the Committee commented to me, 'They are so young and so poised, and I found myself thinking of my own children who are about their ages.'"²⁰ These white women decided to take action. First they visited the managers in interracial teams that Arnold Hedgeman set up, but that had no effect. Next they decided to use their formidable economic power. Many were very good customers of these department stores. When their next bills came in, they returned them with letters explaining that they would stop shopping at those stores until black clerks had been hired because "as Christians we must patronize those stores which respect all human beings."²¹

Soon after this positive display of interracialism, whites grasping power led Arnold Hedgeman to leave the YWCA for the last and final time. She had often encountered the unequal power relationships between white and black women in the YWCA and despised the way whites treated blacks. Her year just after the Amenia conference among Philadelphia whites, who were "above average" in race relations, had finally helped her to again "speak honestly and without rancor to white people."²² Despite all the change she had witnessed from the first day she entered YWCA work because she could not teach in the north, some whites were still unwilling to recognize African Americans' right to have a say in the control of their own organizations.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., 78.

²² Hedgeman, *Trumpet Sounds*.

When Arnold Hedgeman's young YW women despaired of their lack of power within the YW, she urged them to try out the democratic process. They campaigned for board members sympathetic to their cause with eager enthusiasm and swayed enough members to vote for many of their candidates. When Arnold Hedgeman reported the results of the election to her executive, the white woman said,

'The president of the General Board does not wish a change in Negro branch leadership this year.' [Arnold Hedgeman] answered, 'Branch members have been discussing this election for months. They are determined to choose their own leadership. The president cannot make a decision about their free election or in any way determine the results.' My executive answered, 'I am sorry you feel this way.'²³

Hedgeman fought with her boss until she witnessed a mixture of old and new leadership installed in their positions; she then submitted her resignation.

Many black members of the board urged her to stay, but Arnold Hedgeman was firm in her resolve. She remembered years later that "it was hard to leave that branch, because I knew that it was now ready to give leadership on a larger scale to a seriously disturbed community. On the purely personal side, I had no idea of my next step. If the Christian Association in a large Eastern urban city could not practice its avowed purpose to build a fellowship of women and girls committed to the ideals of Jesus Christ, where could I go?"²⁴

Her confusion did not last long. The Sunday after her resignation, she spoke before a crowded audience in Brooklyn about the impending war. She urged people to continue picketing a local defense plant which refused to hire African Americans, despite holding government contracts. To prevent any criticism of blacks as anti-patriotic, she

²³ Ibid., 79.

²⁴ Ibid.

also called on the audience to volunteer for the civilian defense. Crystal Bird Fauset, appointed to the National Office of Civilian Defense by Eleanor Roosevelt, heard about Arnold Hedgeman's enthusiasm and invited her to come to Washington for an interview. During her interview, Arnold Hedgeman frankly addressed the discrimination practiced in most communities in relation to African Americans and the war. Her criticism did not prevent them from hiring her.²⁵ She spent the war years fighting discrimination within and outside the department, as well as building support for civilian defense.

This vignette encapsulates several themes from the interwar period and the transitions into its end. In each stage of Arnold Hedgeman's final years with the YW, there were blacks and whites who feared change and instigated it. Arnold Hedgeman introduced direct action techniques like picketing and boycotting that would become so important after the war. Her goal throughout was dialogue—to simply have a conversation with the dime store manager, something that he refused. Her actions fit the polite exterior of the YWCA in many ways—interracial bourgeois women visiting the hiring managers of department stores, sending letters about an intended economic boycott, practicing democracy—and yet still she felt abandoned by most of the community who failed to support her protests.²⁶ There were not yet the weight of

²⁵ Ibid., 80.

²⁶ The lack of community support and failure of the management to listen did not always happen in protests during this era. The Crown Heights Unemployment Council succeeded in persuading a Brooklyn store to hire a black woman clerk, because an owner of the store came to the protest meeting and saw that the whole neighborhood was involved, so he capitulated to their demands. "Race Clerks Employed By N.Y. Store," *Chicago Defender*, September 19, 1936. Juanita Jackson led student protests in several major cities calling for "equal school salaries, equal school terms, and expenditures in proportion to the school population. The struggle to secure high schools will be recounted and the plight of rural schools taken up." These attracted many protesters and provided needed support for Charles Hamilton Houston's legislative battles over education. "Launches Protest Against Inequality," *New York Amsterdam News*, November 7, 1936.

individual events that pushed each other like dominos across regions till students, workers and professionals were leading marches and sit-ins.

Another theme that appears in this story is the way individual egos are involved in civil rights work and protest. Arnold Hedgeman realized soon into her work with the Civilian Defense department that “The complexity of unsuspected rivalries among our supporting organizations presented us with other problems. This was as true of Negro organizations as any others. In my concern for the [Equal Opportunity] bill I had been naïve enough to assume that there would be a unity of support among Negroes, both for each other and for the legislation. I had not yet learned that human beings, regardless of race, creed or color, have within them the same power urges, the same need for ego recognition and the same quality of commitment to a particular organization and its structure.”²⁷

Strong egos pushed Howard University into its excellence, led to some of the excellent community there, but also made the place difficult for some faculty members. Black academics had strong personal opinions about how the way the world should work, but had fewer avenues for turning those opinions into reality than did white academics. This enforced closeness intensified divisions and rivalries. But at the same time, African Americans’ inability to be hired at white institutions grouped together many blacks with impressive minds and abilities. Abram Harris, for a time, found comfort in that grouping because he had spent so many years feeling so lonely, caught between a world of white intellectuals who did not understand his race and black communities that did not understand the heart needs of a New Negro and an intellectual. The demands of

²⁷ Hedgeman, *Trumpet Sounds*, 93.

administrative rivalries, anger over his treatment by President Mordecai Johnson, and a daunting teaching load ultimately led Harris to leave Howard for a position at the University of Chicago, even though he had to accept a job that allowed him only to work with undergraduates. Franklin Knight, an important member of the Chicago economics department and a friend to Harris, apparently once claimed Harris was the “foremost intellect on Chicago’s campus,” but his status as a member only of the undergraduate faculty never changed.²⁸

The Arnold Hedgeman vignette also touches upon the extent and strength of relationships among African American leaders during the interwar period. She had directed the Philadelphia YWCA for two years while Crystal Bird Fauset was in charge of the volunteers. Then when Arnold Hedgeman decided to leave the YW, Bird Fauset could suggest a position in the government. It has been difficult to get at the quality of friendships within this dissertation. For the women, it was difficult because there are so few personal sources, like letters or diaries. One of the strongest records was left by Juliette Derricotte, in part because her tragic death encouraged people to reflect upon her life and to keep her letters.

Relationships among African Americans sometimes sustained them through hard times, encouraged them to pursue greater achievements, and encapsulated family love and support. At other times, relationships led to rivalries, misunderstandings, and frustration. Segregation sometimes forced African Americans together who might not have chosen to be together otherwise. For intellectuals, especially, segregation made the perennial question of their relationship and responsibility to the “masses” a difficult one.

²⁸ William Darity, “Abram Harris: An Odyssey from Howard to Chicago,” *The Review of Black Political Economy* 15, no. 3 (December 1, 1987): 6.

Like the women mentioned at the beginning of the conclusion, black intellectuals criticized themselves and each other for not giving enough, even while pushing their bodies to the extreme to give all that they could to themselves, their families, their communities, their nations, and their world. It was good to find moments of peace and fellowship like that they shared in the “grass grown cathedral” of Troutbeck in Amenia, New York.²⁹

²⁹ “Troutbeck, the Home of Poets,” *Garden Magazine and Home Builder*, February 1925, 390.

Appendix One

Cast of Characters

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People

Brief Biography

Rachel Davis DuBois	White Quaker, ally of W.E.B. Du Bois during his conflict with Walter White
W. E. B. Du Bois	Fisk, Harvard, University of Berlin. One of NAACP's founders. Longtime <i>Crisis</i> editor
Jessie Fauset	Literary editor of the <i>Crisis</i>
James Weldon Johnson	Executive secretary in the 1920s, poet, lyricist, novelist, ambassador.
John Nash	Executive Secretary, resigned after being beaten in Texas relative to Association work there.
May Child Nerney	First executive secretary.
Mary White Ovington	One of those with the idea for the Association. Involved from its inception till the late 1930s in varying capacities, from executive secretary to president and chairman of the board
William Pickens	Dean at Morgan College, Longtime field secretary, frequent columnist for the Associated Negro Press
Amy Spingarn	Personal wealth allowed J.E. Spingarn to quit his job at Columbia and pursue the NAACP full time.
Arthur Spingarn	Long time lawyer for the NAACP; Columbia J.D.
J.E. Spingarn	Literature professor at Columbia before resigning and joining the NAACP. President of the NAACP in the teens and again in the 1930s

Garrison Villard	Journalist, one of the powerful whites who helped found the organization
Walter White	Assistant secretary in the 1920s, Executive secretary from 1929 until his death
Louis Wright	First black chairman of the board, medical doctor

Amenia Attendees (location at time of conference)

Brief Biography

Dr. Virginia Alexander, Philadelphia (1900-1945)	Public Health doctor, graduate of the University of Pennsylvania and the Women's Medical College. Director of health clinic. During World War II, she worked with bituminous coal miners before dying in 1945 of lupus.
Anna Arnold, (1899-1990) Philadelphia	Author; Executive Secretary of Brooklyn YWCA; Several positions in the National government in the 1940s from which she fought for greater civil rights. 1945 Woman of the Year.
Wenonah Bond, New York	Dunbar Graduate 1924; Studied in Europe 1930-1931 on scholarships; YWCA
Hazel Browne, Louisville	Graduate of the University of Kansas and a school teacher. Second recipient of the Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority foreign scholarship. She used this to study at the University of Berlin in 1930.
Sterling Brown (1901-1989), Washington	Howard University English professor (1929-1969) and prominent poet (published first major book of poetry in 1932, <i>Southern Road</i>). Emphasized folk rhythms in his poetry. Graduate of Dunbar High School, B.A. from Williams College, M.A. and Ph.D. studies from Harvard.
Ralph Bunche (1903-71), Washington	B.A. from UCLA (1927), MA (1928) and Ph.D. (political science, 1934) from Harvard University. In 1932-1933, he traveled to Europe and Africa on a Rosenwald grant to research European colonialism in West Africa for his dissertation. Chaired the department of political science at Howard University from 1928-1950 before leaving

	to permanently work for the United Nations. Received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1950.
Mabel Byrd, Chicago, Washington	Soon after the Amenia Conference, she joined the National Recovery Administration's division of economics and planning. After her investigation into "displacement of Negro labor in the South" she was removed from her post and it was decided that northern African Americans would not be sent to investigate southern conditions.
Elmer Carter, New York	Editor at the National Urban League's <i>Opportunity</i> after Charles S. Johnson moved to Fisk.
Marion Cuthbert, New York	University of Minnesota 1913-1915, BA Boston College, 1920, Columbia University Masters (1931), Ph.D. (1942), ISS board member, YWCA
E. E. Dorsey (Sam), Washington	Member of the Howard University's political science faculty, helped Du Bois research <i>Black Reconstruction</i>
Roy A. Ellis, Chicago	Attorney and assistant clerk on the Committee on Labor in the House of Representatives.
E. Franklin Frazier (1894-1962), Nashville	Howard University (BA 1916); Traveled to Denmark on an American Scandinavian Foundation Fellowship (1921-1922). University of Chicago Ph.D. in sociology in 1931. In 1933, he was teaching at Fisk University. Directed Howard University's Department of Sociology (1934-1959).
Henry W. Greene, Institute, W. VA.	West Virginia Collegiate Institute. Eager to learn methods in which educational opportunities for blacks could be expanded.
Abram L. Harris (1899-1963), Washington	BA at Virginia Union University in 1922; M.A. in economics in 1924; Ph.D. in 1930 from Columbia University. Collaborated with Sterling Spero on <i>The Black Worker</i> (1931). Director of the Economics Department at Howard University.
Truly Hayes, Hampton, VA.	A carpentry teacher at Hampton Institute. He was killed in 1937 in a shop accident.

Charles H. Houston (1895-1950), Washington	Dunbar HS, Amherst Univ. Army officer during WWI. Entered Harvard Law School 1919. First black editor of the Harvard Law Review. Post-doc at the University of Madrid. Howard University Law Professor. Became NAACP special council in 1935 and was the leading member of the legal team that won many of the Supreme Court decisions "on the road to Brown." A mentor of Thurgood Marshall.
Juanita Jackson, Baltimore	Educator, Helped lead a 1931 citywide Young People's Forum in Baltimore that concentrated on various political social and economic problems confronting blacks
Edward Lovett, Washington	Attorney, Student of Houston
Louis L. Redding, Wilmington, Del.	Delaware Lawyer. Most thorough sketch of the Amenia Conference afterwards. Significant in desegregating Delaware during the Civil Rights Movement.
Ira DeA. Reid (1901-1968), New York	Director of research for National Urban League, sociologist.
Sara Reid	Librarian. Sister of Ira Reid, Sam Dorsey's friend.
Howard D. Shaw, Chicago	In the New York Times in 1952, Shaw was listed as an Engineer and active in the National Urban League. On the handwritten list of suggested attendees, Shaw was listed as an electrician that was recommended by George Arthur.
Thelma L. Taylor, Cleveland	Librarian
M. Weston Moran, III, New York (final list lists him as M. Moran Weston, II)	Theology student who had Marxist leanings and worked for labor organizations. Became an influential Harlem priest who helped African Americans find equitable housing.
Frances Williams, New York	YWCA secretary for the Laboratory Division, YWCA and NAACP liaison to the Joint Committee on National Recovery. Personal friends with Walter White and Charles Hamilton Houston
Frank T. Wilson, New York	YMCA, traveled with Juliette Derricotte to Mysore

India for the WSCF conference

Roy Wilkins (1901-1981), New York

Journalist and NAACP assistant secretary from 1931. Executive secretary of the NAACP in the 1950s.

Pauline Young, Philadelphia

B.S. University of Pennsylvania, Bachelor of Library Science from Columbia University School of Library Sciences. Taught for ten years, librarian for 20 years. President of NAACP Delaware Branches after her retirement. Niece of Alice Dunbar Nelson.

Hosts

J. E. and Amy Spingarn, assisted by their children Stephen J., Hope, Honor, and Edward D. W. Spingarn

Joel E. Spingarn was a professor of comparative literature at Columbia before joining the NAACP. He served as chairman of the board during the 1910s, treasurer during the 1920s, and president during the 1930s.

Arthur B. Spingarn, and Marion Spingarn

Arthur Spingarn, J.E.'s younger brother, gave his legal services pro bono to the NAACP from 1911 till the association developed the Legal Defense Fund in the mid-1930s. Collected one of the largest libraries of books about and by people of African descent, which he donated to Howard University.

Visitors

Lewis Mumford, Sophia Mumford

Architect and social critic

Dr. Ernest Alexander, Lillian Alexander

Ernest was a prominent Harlem dermatologist and Lillian an influential Harlem society woman. Lillian was a long time board member of the NAACP Board of Directors and on the NAACP Women's Auxiliary.

Other important figures (not at Amenia)

Will Alexander

White Secretary of the Interracial Commission of Georgia, later Interracial Commissioner of the South and powerful white man in the national discussion of race.

Gus Auzenne	Accountant at Howard University, from rural Louisiana; Sterling Brown visited his family there several times. Wrote long juicy letters to Bunche in London.
Helen Bryan	White Field Secretary for the Race Relations Committee of the Arch and Race Street Yearly Meetings of the Society of Friends (Philadelphia). Helped plan the Swarthmore Race Relations Institute.
V.F. Calverton	White Journalist, founder of <i>Modern Quarterly</i> , Abram Harris' close friend (1923-1925)
Myra Callis Collson	Sociologist. Byrd stayed with her during her DC interview. She researched workers codes and situations for the Joint Committee on National Recovery. In the later 1930s, she began a course for worker education that Bunche took away from her.
Allison Davis (1902-83)	Graduate of Dunbar High School (1920s). B.A. Williams College. Graduate work at Harvard and the London School of Economics. Ph.D. at the University of Chicago (1942). Cultural Anthropologist and future University of Chicago professor.
Dorothy Davis	Graduate of Dunbar High School (1920s) and Wellesley (1932). Wife of Allison Davis
John P. Davis	Harvard graduate, founder and executive secretary of the Joint Commission on National Recovery and the National Negro Congress.
Juliette Derricotte	Talladega graduate. YWCA student secretary. Member of WSCF general board and attended meetings in Europe and India. Killed in a car crash 1931.
St. Clair Drake	Became major sociologist just after my story closes. Scholarship student of the Swarthmore Committee on Race Relations 1931

Yolande Du Bois	W.E.B. Du Bois and Nina Du Bois's daughter. Attended Fisk. Briefly married to Countee Cullen. Delta.
Arthur Fauset	Jessie Fauset's brother, Crystal Bird's husband, principal of Singerly School, Philadelphia, in the National Negro Congress leadership
Crystal Bird Fauset	Spearheaded idea for an Institute of Race Relations at Swarthmore College, worked closely with Helen Bryant for the Quaker Committee on Race Relations. Married to Arthur Fauset
William H. Hastie	Howard University law professor, Harvard classmate of Ralph Bunche
Charles Johnson	Sociologist, Editor of <i>Opportunity</i> , and Professor and Director of major research projects at Fisk University
Mordecai Johnson	Minister, First black president of Howard University
Alain Locke	Philosophy Professor at Howard University. Tried to be a mentor to the Young Turks. Often considered the father of the Harlem Renaissance.
Rayford Logan (1897-1982)	Dunbar High School. Williams College, AB 1917. WWI soldier. He stayed in France during the 1920s and was a key administrator of the Pan-African Congresses. 1929 MA Williams College; Harvard University AM, 1932, PhD 1936. In 1933 he was head of the history department at Atlanta. Later joined Howard University faculty.
Kelly Miller	Head of Sociology at Howard University; frequent columnist
Eslanda Robeson	Anthropologist, member of Delta Sigma Theta, loaned Ralph Bunche the camera she used to take ethnography videos in West Africa
Paul Robeson	Actor, singer, college football star, internationalist
Juanita Sadler	YWCA student secretary, Juliette Derricotte's close friend

Lucy Slowe	First Dean of Women at Howard University; Friend of Juliette Derricotte and Marion Cuthbert
Benjamin Stolberg	White Journalist, Abram Harris' close friend (1929-1933 or so), Trotskyist
Lorenzo Dow Turner	Linguist of the Gullah language. Friend of the Young Turks.
Forester Washington	Replaced E. Franklin Frazier as director of the Atlanta School of Social Work. Joined FERA in 1934, part of the New Deal.
Robert Weaver	Ph.D. in Economics from Harvard University. Helped start the Joint Committee on National Recovery with John P. Davis before leaving for a job in the Roosevelt administration.
Max Yergan	YMCA missionary to South Africa before becoming an economic radical. Interacted with Juliette Derricotte and Marion Cuthbert through YWCA activities. Won the Spingarn Medal in 1930.

African and Caribbean Connections

Benjamin Nnamdi Azikiwe	First President of Nigeria, later known as Zik, student at Howard University, instructor at Lincoln University before returning to Africa
N.A. Fadipe	Economist, friend and student of Bunche and Logan
Jomo Kenyatta	First black president of Kenya, gave Bunche Swahili lessons in London
Peter or Mbiyu Koinange	Part of the Kikuyu nation in Kenya; Bunche tried to get him a position at Howard after his graduation from the London School of Economics. Bunche stayed with his father in Kenya

Akiki Nyabongo	Author of two books: <i>Africa Answers Back</i> , and <i>The Story of an African Chief</i> . Another of Bunche's acquaintances at the London School of Economics.
George Padmore	Born Malcolm Ivan Meredith Nurse, student at Howard University in the 1920s, <u>Trinidadian</u> , Communist, leading <u>Pan-Africanist</u> , knew Bunche in London
Eric Williams	First <u>Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago</u> ; at Oxford while Bunche was at the LSE

White Scholarly Connections

Jacob Billingskopf	Member of Howard University Board of Directors
Franz Boas	Columbia anthropologist. Overthrew the way scholars thought about race. Wrote that it was a cultural concept rather than a biological one.
Raymond Buell	Harvard professor before becoming Research Director of the Foreign Policy Association
Maud Carney	Columbia Teachers College. Worked with Derricotte and Lucy Slowe on Dean of Women education. Member of executive council for Swarthmore Race Relation Institute
Abraham Flexner	Progenitor of accreditation of medical schools; spent a year at Howard assessing and suggesting improvements. Founder of the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton
Melville Herskovits	Famous anthropologist, worked with Franz Boas at Columbia. Could not find work at first because of anti-semitism. Arrived at northwestern in 1928 and became a gatekeeper for many black scholars' access to funding
Arthur Holcombe	Bunche's thesis advisor at Harvard University
Thomas Elsa Jones	Quaker, President of Fisk University 1926-46
Thomas Jesse Jones	Director of Rockefeller Foundation

Bruno Lasker	Swarthmore Race Relations Institute, Institute of Pacific Relations
Otto Klineberg	Board of Swarthmore Race Relations Institute
Robert Park	Sociologist, Worked with Booker T. Washington before moving to the University of Chicago and founding the famous Chicago School of Sociology
Isaac Schapera	Professor in South Africa with whom Bunche worked closely.
John Sly	One of Bunche's professors at Harvard, became a close personal friend
Donald Young	Director of the SSRC, close friend of Herskovits

Appendix Two

Individuals Nominated for the Second Amenia Conference

Invited and Attended

Amenians

Virginia M. Alexander

Anna Arnold

Wenonah Bond

Hazel Brown

Sterling Brown

Ralph Bunche

Mabel Byrd

Elmer Carter

Marion Cuthbert

Roy A. Ellis

E. Franklin Frazier

Nominators

Ira Reid, Sadie Alexander, Raymond
Pace Alexander

Ira Reid, Lillian Alexander

Carolyn Bond Day, Juanita Saddler

John L. Love

G. David Houston, T. E. McKinney,
Charles Wesley, James A. Cobb,
Abram Harris, Otelia Cromwell,
Emmett Dorsey, Rayford Logan

Ira Reid, Mason A. Hawkins, James
A. Cobb, V. D. Johnson, Abram
Harris, George Arthur, Emmett
Dorsey

Ira Reid, George Streater

Abram Harris

Ira Reid, Juanita Saddler, Mildred
Bryant Jones, George Crawford,
Lillian Alexander, Frank T. Wilson

Ira Reid, Tobias, Charles Wesley,
Abram Harris, W. A. Robinson,
Mabel Byrd

Henry W. Greene

Abram Harris

Truly Hayes

Jesse Heslip

C. H. Houston

Juanita Jackson

Rayford Logan

Edward P. Lovett

Louis Redding

Ira Reid

Sara Reid

Howard Shaw

Thelma Taylor

M. Moran Weston

Roy Wilkins

Frances Williams

Frank T. Wilson

Walter White

Pauline Young

Ira Reid, Charles Wesley, V. D.
Johnson, Mabel Byrd, Juanita
Saddler, F. S. Horne

Thomas W. Turner

Harry E. Davis

V. D. Johnson, Sadie Alexander

Katrine White, Mason A. Hawkins,
William H. Wright, Randolph
Edmonds

Ira Reid, G. David Houston, Charles
S. Johnson, Charles Wesley, James
A. Cobb, Abram Harris, Otelia
Cromwell, George Streater, Victor
Daly, F. S. Horne

Walter White

Harry H. Pace, Pauline Young,
Sadie Alexander

C. H. Tobias, Abram Harris, George
Arthur, F. S. Horne

George Arthur

Arthur Fauset

Ira Reid

C. H. Tobias, Juanita Saddler,
George Arthur

C. H. Tobias

C. H. Tobias

Invited but did not come

Invitee

Bullock, R. W.

Davis, W. Allison

Dunham, Albert

Hastie, William

Hughes, Langston

Mays, Benjamin E.

Thurman, Howard

Thurman, Sue Bailey

Young, P. B. Jr.

Nominators

Ambrose Caliver, Frank T. Wilson,
Arthur Davis

Otelia Cromwell, Arthur Davis,
Rayford Logan

Charles S. Johnson—he only
nominated two people, other person
Logan

Mrs. J. S. Heslip, James A. Cobb,
W. R. Valentine, Mason A.
Hawkins, Otelia Cromwell

C. H. Tobias

Ira Reid, C. H. Tobias, Frank T.
Wilson, Juanita Saddler, F. S. Horne

C. H. Tobias, Frank T. Wilson,
William Lloyd Imes

G. David Houston, James A. Cobb

G. A. Steward, Harry H. Pace

Sample of those Not Invited

Nominee

Alexander, Raymond P.

Alexander, Sadie

Auzenne, Gustav Jr.

Bond, Horace Mann

Nominator

Harry E. Davis, William Lloyd Imes,
Harry H. Pace, Sadie M. Alexander

William Lloyd Imes, Raymond P.
Alexander

G. A. Steward, Raymond Pace
Alexander

James W. Johnson, George Arthur,
George Streater, Juanita Saddler

Carrington, Glenn

Cayton, Horace (Mr. and Mrs.)

Davis, Arthur

Davis, John

Day, Carolyn Bond

Fauset, Arthur

Fauset, Crystal B.

Greene, Lorenzo

Hansberry, Leo

Jenkins, Joseph

Johnson, Campbell

Powell, Adam Clayton Jr.

Saddler, Juanita

Saddler, Juanita

Schuyler, George

Streator, George

Washington, Forrester

Weaver, Robert

Henry K. Craft

Abram Harris

George Streator

W. A. Robinson

Otelia Cromwell

Abram Harris

Abram Harris (It's interesting that he did end up nominating a woman after protesting he did not know any one worthy—and that he nominated someone well known for cooperating with the YWCA and the Quakers.)

Charles Wesley, Arthur Fauset

Carolyn Bond Day

W. A. Robinson

Rayford Logan

Ira Reid

C. H. Tobias

Frank T. Wilson

Abram Harris, Harry H. Pace, F. S. Horne

Ambrose Caliver, Mabel Byrd

RPA, F. S. Horne

Mason A. Hawkins

**Letters [Asking For Nominations]
Have Been Sent To The Following Persons:**

March 14, 1933

[Basically Du Bois suggestions for the conference]

Mr. Harry Davis, Cleveland, OH
George Arthur, Chicago
Joe S. Brown, Des Moines
Mabel J. Byrd, Chicago
John S. Brown, NY
William C. Craver, Houston TX
Henry C. Craft, NY
Leroy Cox, Dayton OH
Otelia Cromwell, DC
Fritz Cansler, Colored YMCA, Dallas
Ambrose Caliver, DC
W.P. Dabney Cincinnati, OH
Rosoe Dungee, Oklahoma City
Emmett E. Dorsey, DC
Carolyn Bond Day, DC
Victor R. Daley, DC
Eugene Davidson, DC
Arthur P. Davis, Richmond
Randolph Edmonds, Dillard University, New Orleans
T.E. McKinney, Charlotte NC
James T. Cater, Talladega Alabama
Dwight V. Holmes, DC
Arthur H. Fauset, Philadelphia
Montgomery Gregory
Mason A. Hawkins
Constance R. Heslip, Toledo
L.M. Hershaw, DC
Leslie Pinckney Hill, Cheyney, Penn
F.S. Horney, N.Y.A. DC
William Lloyd Imes, NY
Lincoln Johnson, DC
James Weldon Johnson, Nashville
E.B. Jourdain, Evanston IL
V.D. Johnston, DC
Miss K.M. White, Baltimore Maryland
Mr. Rayford Logan Cambridge Mass
John L. Love, Kansas City, Missouri
W.A. Robinson, Atlanta Georgia
Vada J. Somerville, Los Angeles
G.A. Steward, Columbus

Letters [Asking For Nominations] cont.

George Streater, Greensboro, NC
Virginia Alexander, Philadelphia
Juanita J. Saddler, NY
Dester S. Scruggs, Detroit MI
Thelma-Louise Taylor, Cleveland, OH
C.H. Tobias, NY
Thomas W. Turner, Hampton VA
W.R. Valentine, Bordentown, NJ
J.H.N. Waring Jr., Dowingtown Penn
Charles H. Wesley, DC
Frank T. Wilson, NY
Archie L. Weaver, Chicago
Pauline Young, Phila
George Crawford, New Haven
Sadie Tanner Alexander, Phila
Abram Harris, DC
Allison Davis, Boston, Mass (Crossed Out, Dillard Written In)
Clarence Bacote, Atlanta
John Hope, II, Atlanta
Mildred Bryant Jones, Chicago
Mr. Curtis, St. Louis, Missouri [Is That Byrd's Future Husband?]
Mr. Raymond Cannon, Minneapolis, Minn
Mr. James Whitaker, Atlanta, Ga.
Ira Reid, NY
Walter White, NY
Roy Wilkins, NY
William Pickens, NY

Names Suggested By Ira Reid

Dr. Sadie T. M. Alexander
Dr. Virginia Alexander
Miss Ann Arnold
Max Bond
Ralph Bunche
Miss Mabel Byrd
Miss Marion Cuthbert
Hubert T. Delany
Rudolph Fisher
E. Franklin Frazier
Harry W. Greene
Abram L. Harris

Edward S. Lewis
Rayford W. Logan
Henry Jared McGuinn
W. C. Matney
Benjamin Mayes
Thomas E. Posey
Adam Powell
Roy Wilkins
Albert Sidney Beckham

Suggested By John S. Brown Jr.

Francis Ellis Rivers
James C. Thomas

Suggested By Katrine N. White

Howard L. Cornish
Clarence M. Mitchell
Miss Elsie Bevans
Miss Geneva Rainey
Attorney W. A. C. Hughes, Jr.
Miss Juanita E. Jackson
Mrs. Katrine N. White

Suggested By Wendell P. Dabney

Clyde E. Sampson
Dr. B. A. Rose

Suggested By Fritz Cansler

Mr. Herman Washington
Rev. S.M. Riley, Jr.
Miss Es Cobedo Sorreals
Mr. Clarence F. Holmes, Jr.
Mrs. Geraldine Lightner
Mrs. O. Jimmy Cansler
O. O. Morris
Howard C. McKinney
W. H. Mitchell, Jr.
Baxter Scruggs
Prof. J. A. Atkins
W. C. Woodson
Miss Eunice Matthews
Loren Miller
Herbert Henegan

Suggested By C.H. Tobias

Ira De.A. Reid
Frank T. Wilson
Miss Juanita Saddler
Miss Frances Williams
Rev. Wm. Y. Bell
Howard Thurman
B. E. Mays
Walter F. White
Langston Hughes
E. Franklin Frazier

Suggested By Thomas W. Turner

Mr. William Miner
Mr. Eugene A. Clarke
Mr. Truly Hayes

Suggested By G. David Houston

Mr. H. N. Pope
Mr. Sterling A. Brown
Mr. Rayford J. Logan
Mrs. Susan Bailey Thurman
Miss Bellmira Nunes
Miss Emma Gilbert
Miss Frances Male
Mr. Manuel R. Roque

Suggested By Mrs. J. S. Heslip

Albertus B. Conn
William Hastie

Suggested By T. E. McKinney

Bertram W. Doyle
Alfonso Elder
Ambrose Calliver
Bertram L. Woodruff
Charles W. Florence
W. T. Gibbs
R. A. Wilson
David O. Jones
H. L. Trigg
R. O'Hara Lanier
G. W. Gore, Jr.
R. A. Carter
R. T. Weatherby
David A. Lane
Rufus E. Clement
Sterling Brown
J. B. Brawley
Norman R. Bolden
J. W. Seabrook
L. S. Cozart
Miss C. A. Dewitt
Miss Alice Taylor
Miss Nina Roberts
Mrs. V. G. Dope
Mrs. Myrtle R. Phillips
Henry W. Baumgardner

Suggested By Charles S. Johnson

Albert Dunham
Rayford Logan

Suggested By Henry K. Craft

A. A. Smith
C. D. King
Nathaniel A. Burrell
Hubert T. Delany
Floarda Howard, Jr.
George Gregory
Glenn Carrington
Fred Demendez
Dr. Norman Pritchett
Quentin R. Hand
John L. Wilson
John G. Jackson

Suggested By Ambrose Caliver

F. O. Nichols
Charles S. Robert
Dr. C.H. Thompson
H. C. Trenholm
George W. Streater
J. Andrew Simmons
Dr. R. W. Mance
Forrester B. Washington
N.P. Tillman
C. W. Hayes
J. P. Brawley
Wm. M. Cooper
Jas. B. Browning
Dr. C. W. Florence
R. B. Atwood
Dr. R.E. Clement
Edward S. Lewis
G. D. Brantley
Eillis Cozart
H. L. Trigg
Dr. R. P. Daniel
R. O'Hara
Harry W. Greene
Ennis Powell
Miles W. Connor
Herman J. Dave S
R. W. Bullock

Suggested By Mason A. Hawkins, List
Sent To Him By Richard H. Hill

J. H. B. Evans
John Bussey
Charles Matthews
J. W. McGregor
James Porter
Sanders Heading
William. Pickens, Jr.
Waring Cuney
Paul B. Miller
J. S. Jackson
R. E. Turner
William E. Harrison
Neal Herriford
W. Edward Farrison
J.H. Harmon
George Goodman
Ralph Bunche

Suggested By Charles. H. Wesley

H. H. Long
Dr. A. L. Harris
Professor Sterling Brown
Dr. Charles H. Thompson
Harold O. Lewis
Dr. Thomas I. Brown
Dr. Jane Mcalister
Rayford Logan
W. M. Brewer
Miss Juanita Howard
Lorenzo J. Greene
Dr. R. P. Daniel
J. P. Murchison
Dr. E. Franklin Frazier
Miss Sadie Daniel

Suggested By W. R. Valentine

John Redmond
James Williams
William Hastie
Miss Lola M. Wilson

Suggested By James A. Cobb

Frank W. Adams
Henry L. Johnson
Thurman L. Dodson
Ralph Bunch
William H. Hastie
George Murphy
Rayford Logan
Miss Dorothy M. Houston
Sterling A. Brown
Mrs Susie Bailey Thurman
Miss Velmira Nunes
Emanuel Roque

Suggested By V D Johnson

Ralph Bunche
Walter Daniel
Mrs. Myra Colson Callis
Dr. C. H. Houston
A. L. Harris
C. H. Thompson

Suggested By G. A. Steward

Edward E. Murrell
J. F. Morning
Dr. N. L. Bernett
R. W. Findley
Lamont Gould
Gustave Auzenne, Jr.
P. B. Young, Jr.

Suggested By Thelma-Louise Taylor

Miss Aileen Echstein
Miss La Verne Gregory
Everett Harris
Sidney A. Jones, Jr.
Miss Myrtle Kelso
Miss Sarah Martin
Miss Louise Matthews
Dr. Ralph H. Soull
Orrin Suthern
Mrs. Eva F. Warfield
Robert Weaver

Suggested By Abram Harris

George Schuyler
Ira Reid
Sterling Brown
E. Franklin Frazier
Henry J. Mcguinn
Ralph Bunche
W. C. Matney
Elmer Carter
Rayford Logan
E. E. Dorsey
Arthur H. Fauset
Mr. And Mrs. Horace R. Cayton
Miss Dorothy Peterson
Crystal B. Fauset

Suggested By J. H. N. Waring, Jr.

Raymond A. Lemmon
Caroline A. Silence
Donald Wyatt
Tanner Ducker

Suggested By W. A. Robinson

Joseph H. Jenkins
Melvin D. Kennedy
Jessie M. Wyche
Miss Margaret Singleton
Miss Jessie Quarles
Miss Hallie Mae Beachem
Forrest O. Wiggins
Miss Anne Cooke
E. Franklin Frazier
John Davis
Hubert Delaney
A. Elder

Suggested By John L. Love

Raymond Marshall
James A. Jeffrees
Dr. Earl W. Rentroe
Miss Hazel Brown

Suggested By James Weldon Johnson

Horace Mann Bond
George Streater
Randall Leroy Tyus

Suggested By Frank T. Wilson

W. G. Daniel
W. H. Pope
R. W. Bullock
John Dillingham
B. E. Mays
J. M. Ellison
Howard Thurman
Marian Cuthbert
Celestine Smith
Juanita Saddler

Suggested By Harry E. Davis

Charles W. White
Jesse S. Heslip
David Pierce
Alonzo Grace
Raymond P. Alexander
Earl B. Dickerson
R. W. Jelliffe

Suggested By Leroy Cox

George E. Demarr
James A. Parsons

Suggested By Mason A. Hawkins

Miss Juanita E. Jackson
Howard Cornish
Clarence J. Roberts
Richard Hill
Joseph Hill
William Hastie
Robert E. Weaver
Everett Knox
Loren Miller

Suggested By S. Joe Brown

Mr. A. A. Alexander
Margaret Esters
G. R. Bradford
Miss Rachel I. Taylor
Alfred Dudley

Suggested By John Hope II

W. J. Trent, Jr.
M. H. Watson
James Clements
C. E. Knox
Alfonso G. Morron
Theodore Berry
E. A. Jones
B. B. Brazeal
C. Bacote
S. M. Nabrit
C. L. Reynolds

Suggested By Arthur Fauset

Milton Weston
John Caswell Smith
Alphonze Heningburg
Lorenzo Johnston Green

Suggested By Carolyn Bond Day

Dr. Montague Cobb
Mr. Fred S. Phillips
Miss Wenonah Bond
Miss Myra Logan
Mr. Leo P. Sinkie
Leo Hansberry
Frances Grant
Raymond Cornett

Suggested By George Arthur

Howard D. Shaw
J. F. Morning
Dewey R. Jones
Mrs. Myra Callis
Miss Beatrice Taylor
Ralph Bunche
T. Arnold Hill
Ira De A. Reid
Mrs. Frances McLemore
Albert M. Dunham
Horace Mann Bond
Charles S. Johnson

Suggested By Mrs. Otelia Cromwell

Mr. W. M. Brewer
Mr. Sterling Brown
Mr. Allison Davis
Mr. William Hastie
Mr. Emile Holley
Reverend William Lloyd Imes
Mr. Rupert Lloyd
Mr. Rayford Logan
Mr. Madison Tignor
Mrs. Carrie Lee Blanchet
Miss Nellie Bright
Miss Dorothy Davis
Mrs. Carrie Bond Day
Miss Annette Hawkins
Dr. Jane McAllister

Suggested By Charles S. Duke

Mr. Horace W. Carter
Me. Leroy Hilliard
F. W. Spann
H. R. Lewis
J. C. Morgan
Maurice Guy

Suggested By B. Pierce Hurst

Dr. Walter Garvin
Dr. Robert S. Jason

Suggested By Arthur P. Davis

Dr. Robert H. Daniel
Professor H. L. McGuinn
Allison Davis
Dr. Welter Daniel
Ralph W. Bullock

Suggested By William Lloyd Imes

Howard Thurman
Attorney And Mrs. Raymond P.
Alexander
Rev And Mrs. Charles R. Winthrop

Suggested By Henry Lincoln Johnson Jr.

Thurman L. Dodson
Wiillam H. Hastie
Ralph Bunche
Larue Dramond
Alfred Hughes

Suggested By William H. Wright

Mr. John W. Haywood
Mr. Clarenoe Mitchell
Miss Juanita Jackson
Dr. E. French Tyson

Suggested By Harry H. Pace

Mr. Raymond Pace Alexander
P. B. Young, Jr.
T. G. Nutter
John W. Davis, President W. Va.
Mr. Louis L. Redding
Mr. George S. Schuyler
Editor of Boston Chronicle
Mr. Carl Murphy
Rev. Ray Henderson
Roscoe Dunjee
John C. Dancy
A. T. Spaulding

Suggested By T. K. Gibson

Edward E. Wilson
Clayborne George
Bernice Sanders
Wilson Lovett

Suggested By Pauline Young

Alice L. Benton
Louis L. Redding
Mrs. Bella Taylor Mcknight
Mrs. Rosa Moore

Suggested By L. M. Hershaw

Jesse S. Heslip
Henry L. Johnson, Jr.
Reverend William Herbert King

Suggested By Leslie Pickney Hill

Mrs. Marjorie Devere Tucker
Miss Doreen Jolly

Suggested By Sadie T. M. Alexander

Charles H. Houston
E. Washington Rhodes
Mr. G. Tanner Duckery
Mrs. Vivian O. Marsh
Mr. Allan R. Freelon
Raymond Pace Alexander
Mr. A. A. Taylor
Francis Ellis Rivers
Dr. Virginia M. Alexander
Louis L. Redding

Suggested By Raymond Pace
Alexander

Raymond Pace Alexander
Mrs. Sadie Moselle Alexander
Aldrich Burton
V. D. Johnston
Robert P. Daniel
Earl B. Dickerson
Clarence A. Jones
Edward W. Browne
Joseph G. Lecount
Rufus B. Atwood
David D. Jones
Henry Lake Dickerson
Jesse S. Heslip
Riley A. Hamilton
Reverend Russell Brown
W. Ellis Stewart
James A. Parsons
Miss Zelma E. Watson
Dr. W. Roderick Brown
Rev. Stanley E. Granum
Dr. Charles H. Garvin
F. T. Jamison
Oscar W. Baker
L. Simington Curtis
Mrs. Lorraine Greene
Miss Isabelle Lawson
Herman B. Moore
L. F. Palmer

RPA suggestions cont.

Ivliiss Leona Davis
Mr. C. Clifford Washington
Mr. James R. Dumpson
Dr. Laura Lee Allen
James B. Cashin
I. Myrtle Carden
Mrs. Bella Taylor
R. L. Bailey
Claude L. Jones
W.M. Caliman
Oscar C. Brown
Julian P. Rodgers
Charles W. Florence
H. Reginald Smith
H.L. Trigg
Clarence Harvey Mills
Dr. W. H. Ballard, Jr.
W. F. Jerrick
Dr. Charles H. Wesley
Thomas R. Davis
George B. Kelley
Perry D. G. Pennington
I. T. Gillam
Reverend Harold M. Kingsley
Roscoe Conklin Giles
Dr. R. S. Fleming
A. D. Nurse
Arnett G. Lindsay
Charles W. Greene
J. Harvey Kerns
Claybourne George
Dr. Virginia Alexander
Gustav Auzenne, Jr.
Forrester B. Washington
J. E. Mitchem
Julian Lewis
Dr. H. A. Merchant
G. Leonard White
John H. Williams
Dr. W. B. Davis
Dr. L. L. Patton
Wilbur C. Douglas
W. C. Pyant
George W. Gore
Burt L. Mayberry

RPA suggestions cont.

V. E. Daniel
Rev. O. H. Brown
John O. Blanton
George W. Reeves
H. Councill Trenholm
Miles Jefferson
F .D. Williams
Emmer Martin Lancaster
Silas E. Garner
Joseph L. McLemore
Robert P. Watts
D. K. Cherry
W. Ellis Burton
D. N. Crosthwaite, Jr.
Archie Alexander
A. P. Tureaud
Dr. William Fountain
J. J. Andrews
James A. Scott
A. D. Manning
O. Wilson Winters
W. A. Robinson
J. A. Shelton
Lloyd A. Hall
Henry Von Avery

Suggested By Mabel F. Byrd

Samuel Stratton
George Streator
Bennie Mays
E. F. Frazier
Abe Harris
Myra Colson Callis

Suggested By John P. Turner

Miss Clotild S. Ferguson
Miss Sunie M. Steele
Miss Sarah Strickland
Miss Idabelle Yeiser
Mr. Walter Gay
Warren Mcdonald
Bryon Lee
Theodore Spaulding

Suggested By George W. Streator

Horace Mann Bond
Dr. Lawrence Foster
W. F. Farrison
Rayford Logan
Arthur Davis
Wm. Leroy Hansberry
Prof. Wm. C. Matney
Miss Mabel Byrd
Mr. Ennis Powell

Suggested By Victor B Daly

Rayford Logan

Suggested By E. Thomas Demby

Harry H. Pace
William Stewart Nelson
James H. Hubert
George Edmund Haynes
Carrington Lewis Davis
E. D. Hamilton
John W. Davis
C. H. Calloway
Robert L. Vann
A. O. Wilson
Sheridan A. Bresseaux

Suggested By Juanita Saddler

Horace Bond
Abram Harris
B. R. Brazil
Mr. Jones
Hollis Price
Andrew Allison
John Streater
Bennie Mayes
John Dillingham
Miss Fleming Kittrell
Miss Frances Williams
Miss Marion Cuthbert
Miss Viola Lewis
Mrs. Emma Penn
Miss Winona Bond
Misses Louise And Myra Logan
Miss Lucille Allison
Mrs. M. S. Douglass

Suggested By Mildred Bryant Jones

Dr. Harrison Ferrell
Edward W. Beasley

F.S. Home cont.

Miss Marion Cuthbert
Miss Ida Jackson

Suggested By Emmett E. Dorsey

Sterling Brown
Ralph Bunche

Suggested By George W. Crawford

Miss Marion Cuthbert
Richard Hill

Suggested By Rayford W. Logan

Major Campbell Johnson
Reverend Harry Richardson
Arthur Davis
Sterling Brown
Allison Davis

Suggested By F. S Home

Alve Tabor
Mr. Dent
Alphonse Henningburg
Loren Miller
Ben Mays
Mr. And Mrs. Wallace Thurman
Council Trenholm
R. O'Hara Lanier
Dr. Winifred Nathan
Rayford Logan
Dr. Wesley
Jesse O. Thomas
Abram Harris
Charles S. Johnson
Forrester Washington
Vincent Harris
T. M. Campbell
Ira Reid
W. H. Robinson
Dr. Hutto
George S. Schuyler
Thomas N. Roberts
L. S. Malette
Miss Camilla Weems
Prof. V. Edwards
H. A. Hunt

Samples of Letters

Sent to Du Bois nominating people to attend the Second Amenian Conference
Letters in Du Bois Papers microfilm Reel 39

Ambrose Caliver, March 25, 1933

“On an inclosed sheet I am sending the names of persons whom I know and who might make a contribution to and be helped by such a conference as you have in mind. The list, of course, is too long, and it also has the disadvantage of being made up almost entirely of school people.”

Senior Specialist in the Education of Negroes, United States Department of the Interior, Office of Education

Raymond W. Cannon, Law Offices, Minneapolis, MN

March 30, 1933

“From your letter I infer that the formulation of a program may result from this conference I have been guided by this thought in my selection of names of persons to send to you because any national program the conference may devise will have to be carried on through and with the co-operation of the leaders of thought and action in the communities throughout the country. So I have taken several days to prepare a list of qualified persons as specified in your letter.

Only a few on the enclosed list are nationally known. But everyone on this list is a strong influence in his or her respective community. I know all of them personally; they are qualified, able and capable, their judgment is sound and they have courage; and, for the most part, they are quite intelligent as to the present situation of the American Negro. I have worked with many of them on various projects.

Where possible I have tried to give you a glimpse of those named.”

Fritz Cansler, Executive Secretary, YMCA Denver

March 22, 1933

[offered local names] “The distance from Denver is so great that it would be difficult for many to attend, so I have been thinking of some of the younger men in the YMCA work, such as”

[checks next to Baxter Scourgs, and Loren Miller]

James A. Cobb—Judge, Municipal Court of the District of Columbia

March 25, 1933

“I am quite sure that all of the above named young people will be interested in the program you have indicated for this conference. Personally I believe this is a splendid idea and if I can be of any assistance I shall be glad to co-operate with you.”

George Crawford, Counselor at Law, New Haven

April 6, 1933 "A lot of names occur to one; but after all since the number is to be limited to twenty-five, great pains should be taken to get the twenty-five most significant personalities in the younger group. For the life of me I cannot think of but two people whom I would care to recommend. They are Miss Marion Cuthbert who can be reached through the national office of the YWCA and Richard Hill, at Howard, who served part of this year as assistant to the President."

Victor Daly—DC. April 3, 1933

"Unfortunately, most of our young folks upon leaving college are immediately absorbed into one school system or another, and forever thereafter they must hold their tongues to hold their jobs. That is a point that I hope the conference will discuss at length.

Outside of Rayford Logan, not another name occurs to me at the present writing, of an upstanding young person who has the courage of his convictions, and the ability to express himself."

Shelby Davidson Law Offices, DC
April 13, 1933

"To date I can only suggest a very few who impress me as being of the proper type. These are Major Campbell C. Johnson, Secretary of the Washington YMCA, Rayford Logan, Joesph H. Greene, former Assistant Cashier of the Prudential Bank, Emmett Dorsey, Howard University. Mr. Dorsey, in case you do not know him, is an instructor in Political Science and an 'economic radical'. I think his views might be profitably listened to at such a conference."

Arthur Davis, studying in New York Mar 26, 1933

W. Allison Davis "Mr. Davis is in England now, but will teach at Hampton this summer."

"Mr. Bullock is National Boys' Work Director of the YMCA, but is not the usual 'y' type."

Caroline Bond Day
March 26, 1933

Howard University Department of English

"I am greatly interested in the proposed conference at Amenia this summer. Most of my recent associations, however, have been with undergraduates, and I shouldn't wonder if to get really 'untrammelled thought' you would not have to reach back eventually to this very young group.

At any rate I shall send the names of three person who have been out of school a few years and two who are still pursuing law and medical courses respectively."

[Montague Cobb—first year at Howard]

I am suggesting Wenonah and Myra [Logan] because they both think squarely and I think each might have a contribution to make. Wenonah of course had the

year and a half in Europe and has some vision and experience regarding racial and inter-racial and international problems and policies.

Emmett Dorsey, April 4, 1933

"I have been out of town for about two weeks at the funeral of my father.

I will be glad to participate in the conference. Abe Harris has already given you the names of nearly all the men who I think would fit in. I might suggest, however, that Sterling Brown and Ralph Bunche both of Howard have something to offer.

I am in the market for a General Education Board scholarship. Since you know something of my work I have given your name as a reference. I read an article in the Crises a year or so ago about the number of recommendations that you are asked to give for people whom you know little or nothing about. Nevertheless, I am asking that you send a word about me to [...]

I think this conference is a splendid project. We certainly need to get together. With no publicity and three days of discussion I believe we can get somewhere."

Randolph Edmonds June 21, 1933 (maybe why he wasn't invited? So late?)

"I hope the conference will be very successful. I hope, also, that the widest opportunity for free discussion will be given to those who come. I observe that this was not given to those who attended the last Crisis Literary Dinner, even after many had gone to the trouble and expense to attend."

T. K. Gibson, Chairman Supreme Liberty Life Insurance Company March 30, 1933

[one person checked] Miss Bernice Sanders, graduate of Wilberforce University, A.B., Radcliffe College, A. B., Ohio State University, A.M., Auditor and Accountant. Was professor of Mathematics at Wilberforce for 5 or 6 years, and for a similar period since has been engaged in the auditing and the accounting of corporations of our group, gaining an experience and acquiring a view-point of great value in discussions and movement such as you propose."

Montgomery Gregory Atlanta City Public Schools, August 2, 1933 [late reply]

"As you know, anything that has to do with you or Dr. Spingarn, always has my hearty interest and support. I hope you will be generous is[sic] judging my delay in replying to your letter and I shall hear from you very soon."

Appendix Three

Enrollment in Black Colleges in the 1920s

Enrollment according to the Slater Fund

	1922	1927
Total	3264	9740
Atlanta University	91	288
Clark University	44	
Lincoln University, MO	68	280
Wilberforce Univ	249	531
Lincoln University, PA	220	
Fisk University	273	531
Virginia Union U.	135	493
Howard University	895	1688
Talladega College	121	210
Morehouse College	135	302
Tougaloo College	11	57
Wiley College	177	352
West Virginia Collegiate Institute		382
Tuskegee		110

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