THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

KNOCK ON ANY DOOR:

THE RISE AND FALL OF INTEGRATION IN AMERICAN CULTURE, 1911 - 1972

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO

THE FACULTY OF THE DIVISION OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

BY

KOREY GARIBALDI

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

JUNE 2016

Table of Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

More people, places, and organizations have contributed to my graduate studies at the University of Chicago than I can possibly give proper credit to here. Generous financial support for my research and writing in recent years has been provided by the University's Division of the Social Sciences; the Center for the Study of Race, Politics, and Culture; the Center for the Study of Gender and Sexuality; the Department of History's John Hope Franklin Research Travel Grant; and the Pozen Family Center for Human Rights.

The departments of History and English at Chicago were important supplements to the many generative conversations and engagements made possible by the CSRPC, the CSGS, and the Social History Workshop. My dissertation committee deserves special thanks for both listening to my ideas and guiding my research from my first year of coursework onward. Kenneth Warren was gracious enough to help direct a dissertation that has greatly benefited from his literary expertise. Thomas Holt inspired me to ground my ideas by paying closer attention to institutions and within the traditions of the historical discipline while never asking me to abandon my focus on writers or fiction. Before I even arrived as a graduate student in the Department of History, Adam Green's scholarship provided a model for my research. As the chair of my committee, Adam has read many more drafts than I care to admit, and asked many more questions than I have been able to answer.

A number of new and old friends and colleagues have remained steady interlocutors both in and away from graduate school. A special thanks to: Emilio Comay del Junco, Diana Schwartz, Tessa Murphy, Chris Dingwall, Ricardo Rivera, Audun Hellemo, Phillip Henry, Renata Limón, Emma Broder, Kate Wulfson, Kai Parker, Ashley Finigan, Oliver Cussen, Katy

Schumaker, Dan Webb, Keith Hernandez, Jason Ruiz, Corey Rateau, Morgan Ng, Eli Davidow, Jackson Davidow, Swathi Reddy, Gautham Reddy, and Patrick Dexter.

Of the many things I have counted on from my mom and dad, their patience and encouragement have been important sources of strength over the past seven years. Love and thanks to you both for reminding me to enjoy myself.

ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the generations of popular black writers that initiated the process of desegregating the U.S. publishing industry from 1919 – 1972. The study argues that by exploring their and others' myriad, fitful efforts to produce "universal" American culture between these years, an historical genealogy for "African American literature," created by African Americans, emerges. Because modern black cultural nationalism would not take off—or be appreciated or supported in earnest—until the mid-1960s, the bulk of the study traces the shifting and capricious "raceless" media landscape African American writers navigated from 1940 through the 1950s. By working against popular and scholarly works that consider "Negro literature" in racially segregated terms, the dissertation questions how black writers, who increasingly sought white Americans as possible audiences between these years, developed new techniques as they established, validated, and asserted their humanism.

The dissertation seeks to fill an historiographical gap in knowledge on popular African American writing between the 1920s "Harlem Renaissance" and the 1960s Black Arts Movement in its exploration of how white editors and publishers prepared to bring new voices into American culture, but only conditionally. Better remembered black writers such as Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison are put into conversation with writers that are less celebrated today—even though they were equally, if not more famous at mid-century—such as Frank Yerby and Willard Motley, the author of *Knock on Any Door* (1947). The study demonstrates that focusing on a loose cohort of popular black writers during the mid-twentieth century enables the recovery of the mechanics by which black voices were integrated across American culture, even when they were not always affirmed as such. In sum, the dissertation argues that black writers that succeeded in meeting the "universal" cultural standards white Americans demanded, such as

Lorraine Hansberry and James Baldwin, emerged as intellectual leaders in establishing higher standards for how African Americans should be engaged as fellow citizens.

ns moved in this direction over these years.

INTRODUCTION

> "I do not doubt but there are some in this audience who are a little disturbed at the subject of this meeting, and particularly at the subject I have chosen. Such people are thinking something like this: 'How is it that an organization like this, a group of radicals trying to bring new things into the world, a fighting organization which has come up out of the blood and dust of battle, struggling for the right of black men to be ordinary human beings—how is it that an organization of this kind can turn aside to talk about Art? After all, what have we who are slaves and black to do with Art'"
>
> —W.E.B. Du Bois, 1926

This dissertation examines the history of African American inclusion in the nation's avant-garde letters, children's literature, popular novels, and Hollywood films from the early 1910s through the Black Arts Movements in the early 1970s. It argues that between these years, a broad cohort of black and white writers, publishing professionals, periodicals, books, and films were sizeable—and often key—forces in the reconsideration of interracial conduct and racial pluralism in the United States. Offering somewhat of a challenge to historians that have emphasized political and physical interactions as predominant factors in the struggle for civil rights in the U.S., this study follows literary scholars in questioning how texts and virtual representation figured into this struggle. [1]

The study's commitment to a broad racial lens in its narratives and analyses of cultural phenomena related to the fitful segregation and desegregation of American and African American thought over the twentieth century is somewhat unusual. Until recently, commentators on and scholars of African American literary history in particular have often failed to adequately interrogate how and why a remarkable number of authors and texts are either included or excluded from this curiously rigid canon. Most prominently, popular and acclaimed black

[1] For a recent survey of developments in scholarship that have led to an increase in the "rigor and precision of *how* black literature and culture operate in the political realm," and its consideration of "how this cultural production, which some commentators frame as almost teleologically emancipatory, sometimes serv[ing] reactionary ends," see Vaughn Rasberry, "Black Cultural Politics at the End of History," *American Literary History*, Vol. 24, No. 4 (Winter 2012), 796 – 813.

American literary figures such as W.S. Braithwaite, Jean Toomer, Willard Motley, and Frank Yerby are often framed and described as distinct from—rather than representative of—the African American literary tradition. More frequently than not, these writers have been accused of avoiding racial protests, celebrations, and African American literary themes more broadly. As such, their professional endeavors have generally been categorized as different from the literary productions of their widely acclaimed black colleagues and contemporaries such as W.E.B. Du Bois, Richard Wright, James Baldwin, and Amiri Baraka. Both historically and more recently, these binaries have also given the misimpression that racial protest and easily identified commitments to black communities were static characteristics of authors usually represented—or seen as representative—of the Africa American cannon. Thus comparatively little attention has been given to the resistance Baldwin encountered in attempting to publish his now widely-celebrated *Giovanni's Room*, Wright's "white-life" novel *Savage Holiday* (1954), or Baraka's critical sponsorship of the Beat Poets. [2]

The study historically situates these and dozens of other writers, texts and literary initiatives that transcended racial boundaries from the 1910s through the early 1970s by examining how and why the structures of the publishing industry changed between these years.

[2] Recent scholarship in the literary field has explained how black literary production changed and increasingly incorporated new themes, especially following World War II (e.g. "white life novels). Yet there are still many questions surrounding the shifting ideologies within the white publishing world that enabled the corporate and institutional support of black writers and literature related to racial themes more generally. Literary analysis addresses the issue within the context of related work, but historical studies are better suited for uncovering the broader context. A number of recent works by literary scholar Gene Jarrett have inspired increasing interest in each of these areas, but especially two of his earlier works. Gene Jarrett, *Representing the Race: A New Political History of African American Literature* (New York: New York University Press, 2011) and Jarrett, *Deans and Truant: Race and Realism in African American Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008). For an important new work on mid-20th century "white life" writing by African Americans, see John Charles, *Abandoning the Black Hero: Sympathy and Privacy in the Postwar African American White-Life Novel* (Rutgers: Rutgers University Press, 2012). For a literary history that has moved in the direction of incorporating whites as well as blacks in the production of "Negro Literature" in this same era, even though its efforts are focused primarily on understanding the social conditions within which black writers produced, see Lawrence Jackson, *The Indignant Generation: A Narrative History of African American Writers and Critics, 1934 – 1960* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

By doing so, it builds on a growing field of scholarly works that have called attention to the interracial underpinnings of American and African American cultural history rather than de-emphasizing what in practice were their multiracial roots of these developments.[3] As historian Albert Camarillo has recently observed in his 2013 president address, edited and published in the *Journal of American History*, historians now have a "reasonably good" understanding of labor, social, religious, and political histories of America's immigrant and black populations. In contrast, Camarillo points out that historians know far less about how Americans "adapted their lives in segregated settings by moving across color lines." Camarillo's address focuses primarily on the consumers of popular culture and how their interests in entertainment fostered their cross-racial engagements. He thus argued that non-literary entertainment was a successful venue through which young African Americans, Asian Americans and Latino youth transformed American "borderhoods" into "multiracial settings, sometimes without their parents' knowledge and sometimes despite it."[4]

This dissertation answers Camarillo's call for more historiographical work on culture and racial segregation by thinking about how countless white writers, editors, and publishers both joined and contested African Americans in experimenting with the literary craft. Indeed, its situation of racial "integration" as an analytic tool with which to explore the broader literary profession and its professional practices uncovers how texts and authors were often used and perceived as critical vehicles for social transformation. From the early 1910s onwards, black

[3] For two of the most important histories of the publishing industries shifting racial ideologies and practices, and increasing interracial cultural collaborations between blacks and whites, see George Hutchinson, *The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995) and Ann Douglas, *Terrible Honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1995). A recent study by Carla Kaplan of white women participants in the Harlem Renaissance has reemphasized the interracial history of 20th century "black culture," with unprecedented scholarly attention to gender. Kaplan also critiques studies of American "myth-making" that have left blacks out. Carla Kaplan, *Miss Anne in Harlem: The White Women of the Black Renaissance* (New York, Harper Perennial, 2013).

[4] See: Albert Camarillo, "Navigating Segregated Life in America's Racial Borderhoods, 1910s – 1950s," *Journal of American History*, vol. 100, No. 3 (Dec. 2013).

writers and dynamic black protagonists were at the center of the American project, even though it would take decades for either to transform and influence thinking enough to make viable the political demands to adjudicate the dismantling of Jim Crow. Nevertheless, between these years, African Americans were increasingly present in the mainstream of American life, appearing in forms and venues that often and increasingly refused stereotypes.

My inquiry and analysis of a wide range of literary forms, writers, and Hollywood films supports a key claim of this study, namely that changes across the cultural profession gesturing toward "integration" mattered, regardless of how ambivalent and incomplete those were. In focusing on desegregation and integration in particular, the following case studies highlight the deep engagement that many disregarded African American writers and cultural professionals had to civil rights that is all too often dismissed or overlooked. If anything, prominent African American literary figures such as Braithwaite, Toomer, Motley, Lorraine Hansberry, and Yerby were often ahead of the curve in terms of understanding the internal contradictions of their professional inclusion on unequal terms.

Indeed, in the decades leading up to the well-documented Black Arts Movement of the mid-1960s, there were a host of cultural predicates that foreshadowed the frustration, cynicism, and skepticism widely evidenced by white America beginning in the late 1950s. Many if not most of these sentiments emanating from black writers and activists from the 1910s onward called into question the capacity of "radical," intellectual, and educated whites to encourage, sustain, and affirm either racial integration or equality. That inability represented somewhat of a paradox for black writers seeking to contribute to avant-garde and "American letters" before World War I through the 1960s, and one that frequently paralleled the political and social edifice of Jim Crow writ large. Hubert Harrison's withdrawal from the Socialist Party of America and

increasing focus on Harlem's black community, culminating in his editorship of the *New Negro* magazine in 1919 is perhaps the earliest example of that dissent with direct ties to this generation.

When those African American writers who were still alive in the late 1950s and the early 1960s increasingly spoke out about their experiences with white publishers and editors in these years, they were among the first prominent blacks to openly criticize postwar racial inclusion. As a number of midcentury African American scholars maintained, black writers across a variety of genres—including fiction—not infrequently performed similar work, even though the most prominent of the post-World War II cohort did so inconsistently. Even with his reservations with the narrative, in 1946, Carter G. Woodson argued that the "rewriters of Southern history" [would] not like" Yerby's first best-selling historical novel, *Foxes of Harrow*. "The Negroes [in the novel] are saying that their race is given merely a subordinate part in the narrative. To be truly historical the author could not give Negroes any other role, for they were hopefully submerged in that social order."[5] Indeed, far from seeing *Foxes* as a "white life" novel, before he became one of Frank Yerby's most vociferous black critics Blyden Jackson described its publication as "a great moment in American publishing for Negroes. It is likewise, one can say in all sincerity, an event of the first magnitude in the fulfillment of American democracy."

Virtually from the day *Foxes of Harrow* and Motley's *Knock On Any Door* (1947) appeared in bookstores together, the two novels were celebrated by African Americans as the most prominent exemplars of "a significant trend in race relations."[6] Describing Motley's *Knock* with these words in 1949, Mozell Hill, the editor of *Phylon* asserted in a letter to the author that

[5] C.G. Woodson, "Reviewed Work: The Foxes of Harrow by Frank Yerby," *The Journal of Negro History*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (July 1946), 353 – 354.
[6] Mozell C. Hill to Willard Motley, February 25, 1949, Box 10, Folder 12, Willard Motley Collection (hereafter referred to as WMP), Rare Books and Special Collections, Northern Illinois University.

his work represented "the dropping of racial chauvinism among young Negro writers and becoming sensitized to problems of people per se." Auguring an expansive African American literary and social future, for Hill the book reflected "the launching or reaching out of the young Negro novelist into broader and fresher and indeed more significant fields for fiction writing."[7] Motley would only affirm these general sentiments in his response to Hill, explaining, "I have felt for a long time that the Negro writer must, he wishes to create lasting work, broaden his sensitivity to the other 'little Fellow's' problems.[8]

Increasing authorial challenges by both black and white writers to reductive portrayals of stigmatized white ethnics, racial minorities, and the lives of Americans far from its cosmopolitan coasts can be traced from at least the early years of the 1910s. In the first years of the new decade, that shift was based in new novels with extremely limited circulation, such as Gertrude Stein's *Three Lives* (1909) and James Weldon Johnson's *The Autobiography of An Ex-Colored Man* (1912). These shifts in the nation's avant-garde literature were also promoted in print anthologies and periodicals by W.S. Braithwaite's nation-wide dominance of American poetry and Harriet Monroe's *Poetry* magazine, the publication responsible for Vachel Lindsay's wide acclaim from 1914. The primary difference between the earliest works representative of these sensibilities, and those that appeared during the civil rights era, is that the former represented unprecedented disruptions to the monopolies Protestant Victorians had on American print culture. As the first chapter of the dissertation argues, Braithwaite's advocacy for American poetry at the beginning of the century was arguably one of—if not the—most important factor in expediting related shifts. His efforts were especially influential to other black Americans writers that sought to become powerful literary voices advocating not only for desegregation, but also

[7] Ibid.
[8] Willard Motley to Mozell C. Hill, February 26, 1949, Box Folder 12, WMP.

for pluralism, racial freedom, and not infrequently, equality more broadly. Although it is often dismissed in the present day, white and black writers and editors whose actions implicitly supported both desegregation and pluralism were viewed as critical emissaries to and for African Americans when other resources were insufficient and lacking.

Not only did their most popular of the works they published and sponsored assist African America with contemplating the possibilities of social and cultural integration, they also proposed for many what an expansive future of African American humanism might look like. Commentators that defended their activities sought to emphasize the significance of black intellectuals that could speak as if they were a part of all people rather than being dismissed or ignored as only representing the interests of African Americans.

And yet in their emphases on the "nadir," Jim Crow, scientific racism, and the instantiation of an affective structure of racial hierarchies, scholars have often overlooked the ways white and black Americans fostered moral and intellectual lives that moved closer together. With his invocation of "The New Negro History" in the aftermath of *Brown*, John Hope Franklin was among the first modern historians to consider African American history in integrated rather than segregated terms. As August Meier explained in 1983, Franklin's historiographical approach departed from prior emphases on "reciting racial achievements and sought to place the history of American blacks squarely in the mainstream of American history." Meier further points out, "Franklin insisted that he was engaged not in writing of a separate Negro historical experience but in the task of integrating blacks and racial relations into the broad study of the American experience."[9]

[9] August Meier, "Whither the Black Perspective in Afro-American Historiography?," *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 70, No. 1 (June 1983), 101. Meier cited John Hope Franklin's "New Perspectives in American Negro History," *Social Education*, 14 (May 1950), 196- 200; and John Hope Franklin, "The New Negro History," *Journal of Negro History*, 42 (April 1957), 89 – 97.

Willard Motley's best-selling *Knock On Any Door* (1946) is just one of several examples of bestselling novels almost unequivocally celebrated by African Americans in the era surrounding their success, only to be increasingly written off as "white" by the late 1960s. Central to black Americans' distress with the "universalism" Motley practiced, and that was often demanded of black writers seeking to contribute to "American culture" before the end of the 1950s, were the racial ambiguities and elisions haunting these works. Somewhat curiously, commentators and scholars have overwhelmingly blamed the authors for these shortcomings rather than considering or acknowledging these shortcomings as reflective of the era's well-documented racial and social inequalities.

Suggestive of how inhibiting these challenges were in the 1940s, Motley's efforts to publish *Knock on Any Door* were curiously in line with his inability to secure a publisher for the novel. He thus explained in an interview broadcast by a Human Rights radio program after the novel's release that he had a difficult time "toning down" his story to the satisfaction of prospective publishers. "Publisher number one thought that the day of the realistic novel was over. Publisher number two and his wife felt that the book was too 'outspoken' but held on to the manuscript for over two years while I did two revisions both cutting and trying to tone the story down." And more rather than less typical for black writers in the 1930s through at least the 1950, his latter efforts were futile. "At the end of this time and this second revision he still thought the book was too outspoken. I sent it to Appleton-Century and they immediately accepted the book and made plans for publication."[10]

Motley was the third best-selling black author of the 20th century after Richard Wright and Frank Yerby, yet he remains largely absent from scholarly texts. It was not until 1947 that Motley was able to publish the naturalist novel that he had worked on for years, *Knock on Any*

[10] Latimer-Motley Interview, Human Rights Program Transcript, Box 17, Folder 1, WMP.

Door. Nevertheless, he would receive an enormous outpouring of support for *Knock* after its release, and quickly: 47,000 copies of the book would sell within three weeks of its publication day. By 1950, 350,000 copies of *Knock* had been sold by the book's publisher, Appleton-Century; by 1979, this number would rise to 1.8 million copies. And yet the science and statistics of circulation, as it does in relation to avant-garde works from the 1910s, remains somewhat ambiguous. One fan letter, written by a soldier that claimed to never write them, explained that one copy of *Knock* had circulated well beyond one reader. "On the island of Guam there is one copy and that one copy has circulated among several hundred army officers and civilians. All of them thought it an excellent piece of work."[11]

Knock, Motley's most celebrated and consumed work, was a "raceless" novel set in a Chicago slum that follows a troubled youth, Nick Romano, the son of Italian immigrants, who prostitutes himself to men. Nick was depicted as eventually killing a policeman and is executed in an electric chair at the age of 21. At the time, the novel's publisher fastidiously assured the public of its abstract and fictional nature, in an effort to ameliorate any conflicts with the city of Chicago:

> "KNOCK ON ANY DOOR is essentially an American story; there are many aspects of it which happily have no parallel in this country—the brutality of the police, the impassion and to us, inhuman court procedure. But that the story of Nick Romano has its implications for us it only too clear from the above citation from the Antiquis case. The whole subject of juvenile delinquency in this country is engaging and *must* engage more and more attention."[12]

In a diary entry less than two months after the book's publication, Motley wrote, "Amazing the different types of people from different stratas of society who are reading my book. Even the people from the Skid Rows."[13] In a response to one female fan, Motley noted, "One of the things

[11] Meta Trent to Willard Motley, November 19, 1948, Box 10, Folder 10, WMP.
[12] Printed sales text for *Knock On Any Door*, No Date, Box 17, Folder 3, WMP.
[13] Willard Motley, Diary entry, July 1, 1947, WMP.

I wanted to do most with my book was to let people know some of the things that go on in neighborhoods like Madison and Halsted. I wanted particularly for young people to know. So I hope that now it's partly your fight too." Readers in the U.S. and Europe—where the book was translated into several languages—were touched by Motley's sympathetic portrayal of Nick and other deviant characters in *Knock*.

As a consequence of readers' outpouring, including an endorsement by Eleanor Roosevelt, Motley was quickly established as a public expert on troubled youth and slums. After Motley participated in a panel on juvenile delinquency on CBS's radio show, *The People's Platform*, one female fan wrote,

> I think this is the first time CBS ever had a really representative panel discussing a public topic. They, like the other radio companies, usually exclude women and colored people. I must say that they always excluded Negroes except on questions involving the race problem. Maybe a new day is dawning.[14]

Curiously, there have been surprisingly few efforts to produce more capacious histories that account for the significance of Motley's and other "universal" and "raceless" fictional narratives from the mid-1940s.

---

[14] Alma Booker to Willard Motley, circa July 3, 1947, WMP. Booker's letter to Motley opens with this positive statement but is in fact a letter of protest. Her sentiments merit quoting at length: "The whole program was highly enjoyable and I most admired your part in it. The only thing missing was the one thing that almost is never mentioned on such panels. I refer to women and their rights as human beings. Their old bitternesses and grief's are so very old and familiar that we are used to them and often feel irritated when women start talking about their 'rights.' Knowing that wives and other women share the wealth and power of men—white men—we wonder what the complaint is. Even the average woman is ignorant of her own situation as the member of a ill-treated minority. Frenchwomen seem not to have made any loud objection to their contemptible legal position before World War II. Now they can travel without a signed permission from their nearest male relative and they can vote. Were they so content, after all? If so, why take away the chains now? Negroes especially, I think, ought to be angry and sore about the way women are treated by religion and the law. The highest proportion of 'illegitimacy' is among colored women. Yet we hear nothing of Negroes demanding a reform in the laws in order to abolish that status from the human race. Negroes tell me 'women's rights' just for white women, yet such a reform as this would benefit more colored women in proportion than it would white women. Proportionately more colored children would be saved from the stigma than white children. White and Negro foundling hospitals, white and Negro abortionists, white and Negro adoptions, would all be virtually unnecessary if women were free at last. I believe the Constitution itself should contain an amendment giving equal rights to women plus motherhood guarantees. Then, speaking of opportunities in America, no unmarried mother could be thrown out of a schoolteaching job or any other job on grounds of moral turpitude. I realize, however, that even liberals may feel doubtful about surrendering enough of their male superiority to make life decent for women. Even a liberal may feel it too much to expect him to question the oldest discriminations and segregations of all."

A letter Frank Yerby wrote to the writer John S. Cousins in 1944 illuminates the general contours of the disconnection between black writers and publishers that they were forced to contend with in this era. "I wrote a novel in which the chief character is a Negro Ph.D. The publishers suggested that I have him quit school in his early high school days and become a prize fighter! They know that there are fine, well-educated, clean, intelligent, moral Negroes. But the book buying public—which is 99 percent white doesn't [know] and doesn't care to. Publishers make money. So unfortunately, must writers."[15] By the 1950s, Yerby would craft a private document for himself laying out some "basic rules" for novel writing that retreated from his fictional narrative of a black academic and the suggestion that he transform that character into a stereotypical African American hero. One of the major themes across his five pages of rules was what might be best summarized as the need for universality as opposed to particularity. He wrote, "[c]haracters must be human beings, not types or symbols…Never Vice, Virtue, Honor, the Capitalist, the Worker, the Negro, the Jew; but individual men and women with individual human problems."[16]

The five case studies in this dissertation question how social and racial universalism shifted from the early 1910s through the early 1970s by focusing on the mechanics by which black writers and protagonists were included in—if not desegregated—American literature. As Yerby's and Motley's personal and professional experiences, and the racial demographics of the publishing industry suggest, a thorough account of this history would be incomplete without considering the stigmatizations and literary elisions of black Americans. The first chapter, "The Strange Career of the American 'Literary Renaissance,' 1911 – 1933," interrogates the black-led, interracial underpinnings of the growth of the nation's publishing sphere from the second decade

[15] Frank Yerby, letter to John S. Cousins, May 14, 1944; quoted in Gene Jarrett, *Deans and Truants*, 149.
[16] Frank Yerby, "Some Basic Rules For Novel Writing," Frank Yerby Collection, Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center, Boston University.

of the century. Close to five decades before Yerby became the first black author to pen a novel that sold over a million copies, W.S. Braithwaite began building the literary infrastructure in the U.S. that enabled the growth and popularity of "American literature" from the 1910s onward. Reflective of the concessions younger generations of white writers, intellectual, and radicals made to the racially segregated worlds in which they lived, his enormously popular contributions were increasingly written off. By the 1920s, black writers, intellectuals, and activists increasingly came to view black writers and writing as "Negro" in a manner that challenged writers like Braithwaite, Toomer and Claude McKay who refused racial classifications both personally and professionally.

Chapter 2, "Some of My Best Friends are Books": Children's Literature, World War II, and the Problem of Social Tolerance," looks at the midcentury origins of mass-produced books that challenged understandings of racial, ethnic, and national hierarchies in American children's literature, by focusing on the policies and practices sponsored by the professional women affiliated with the Children's Book Council (CBC). Beginning with the tremendous growth of the children's literature business from the late 1930s onward, the women affiliated with the CBC spearheaded the process of reforming racial and ethnic imagery in children's literature, especially in books devoted to foreign nations. Exploring the social and professional tensions that accompanied mid-1940s debates over how minorities in the U.S. were represented in children's books, as the group was increasingly pressured to support anti-prejudice cultural activities in the "domestic" realm, uncovers how and why the racial reform of children's books would be a decades-long process.

Chapter 3, "*Knock On Any Door*," returns to the "universal," or "white-life" fictional narratives increasingly produced by African American authors in the years immediately

following World War II. Special attention is given to Frank Yerby's *Foxes of Harrow* (1946) and Willard Motley's *Knock On Any Door* (1947), two of the best-selling novels written by black Americans—and American authors of any race—up until these years. In addition to both books' unprecedented commercial success with white and black Americans, both works became the first African American-authored stories purchased and adapted for production as major Hollywood films. While both works were widely considered "raceless" by most white Americans, most African Americans maintained hope that the racially and socially sharp perspectives of both works in novel form might impact the civic behavior of new audiences. The chapter examines the process by which both works were emptied of their social content and commentary, and how these developments were perceived as in conversation with each other. In addition to exploring how these events were reported and lamented by blacks, the chapters examines how these concerns dovetailed with reports of unequal laboring conditions for the African Americans that worked on these films in Los Angeles.

Chapter 4, "Who and What, Was 'Negro Literature,' in the 1950s?" most fully takes up the post-World War II era's challenges for African American writers as they increasingly sought evaluation as both professionals and creators of "universal" American and African American culture. As an investigation of the increasing visibility of African American writers that pursued an increasing range of subjects, this chapter also sheds further light on the social, institutional, and cultural conditions that supported and challenged new authors. Fictional works such as Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952) and Lorraine Hansberry's "Raisin in the Sun" (1959) are put into conversation with "pulp" paperback novels such as Richard Wright's white-life novel *Savage Holiday* (1954), and Avon's paperback reprinting of Carl Van Vechten's *Nigger Heaven* in 1951. Linking the literary histories of works that fell under a broad, ambiguous category of

literature that once regularly described books "by and about Negroes" helps explain the aims of cultural products by and about Africans Americans that improved black cultural representation by the end of the decade.

Chapter 5, "The Fall of Integration in American Culture," explores the tensions surrounding the social, cultural and civic progress of the race, from the end of the 1950s through the early 1970s. Rather than following the dominant scholarly trend of tracing increasing cynicism and mass unrest evident in African America from the mid to late 1960s, this chapter charts an earlier and extended history of related phenomena. It does so by attending to the social and cultural evidence of African American writers as they turned away from previous professional orientations directed toward encouraging the creation of "universal" cultural works that often eschewed racial distinction. One key finding is that many of the trends anticipating and contributing to the turn toward black cultural and political nationalism date much earlier than is usually acknowledged in historical research. As a result, the chapter reinforces the dissertation broader argument by establishing how and why the philosophical grounds for reimagining cultural nationalism should be considered systematically over the twentieth century, rather than as an abrupt shift that encompassed changes in literary habits. Including professional changes evidenced from African American popular novelists like Frank Yerby (who would generally be treated as antagonistic to the radicalized black politics of the 1960s, both then and now) assists in my analysis of how black Americans of different political persuasions moved in this direction over these years.

CHAPTER ONE
The Strange Career of the American "Literary Renaissance," 1911 – 1933

> "My book [*The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*] is creating quite a small sensation here [Corinto, Nicauragua]. Judge Shoenwhich, who is a refugee here, picked it up one day and read it through without stopping; he then spoke of it to Judge Thompson, who is here, and he read it through. Judge Thompson was so enthusiastic about the book that he made almost everybody anxious to borrow it that is among the Americans…They are all either kidding me, or think it is a wonderful story. Judge Thompson has already written to some of his friends in the States about it."
>
> —James Weldon Johnson to Grace Nail Johnson, September 11, 1912

> "For the first time in many years we may venture to point out signs of a literary renascence [sic]."
>
> —*The American Library Annual*, 1913

> "A strange thing happened to Paul. Suddenly he knew that he was apart from the people around him. Apart from the pain which they had unconsciously caused. Suddenly he knew that people saw, not attractiveness in his dark skin, but difference."
>
> —Jean Toomer, "Bona and Paul," *Cane* (1923)

If James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) in its serialized and book forms "protested" too viscerally on behalf of Ireland, and that nation's subjugated subjects, three years later, it was virtually impossible to accuse F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* of similar activism. In fact, following *Gatsby*'s release, fans and critics alike remarked that the novel barely raised a hand in defense of anyone or anything, which was a line of criticism that even came from those who were otherwise supportive of Fitzgerald's writings, like H.L. Mencken.[1] In the summer of 1925, in a style that is suggestive for its typicality, one of the more sympathetic reviewers of the book praised *Gatsby*, but conceded, "[w]e may bewail the waste of so much talent upon such trivial subjects."[2] And even if Fitzgerald would depict J. Gatsby as a self-made, materialistic Irish-American, albeit with an obscured background, for the nation's literary establishment, the author himself was by and large an American—rather than a "hyphenated" American—in these years.

[1] H.L. Mencken, "Scott Fitzgerald and His Work," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 3, 1925, E1.
[2] McAlister Coleman, "The Gin Age: The Great Gatsby. By Scott Fitzgerald. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons," *New Leader*, Vol, 2, No. 25 (June 20, 1925), 11.

If Fitzgerald was a part of any "renaissance" in the 1920s, it can only be described accurately as the dissent many East Coast Protestants—and sympathizers—feared was emanating from the "hinterlands," and in particular, the Midwest. But representative of the era's increasing paradoxes, Fitzgerald was not only Irish-American, he was also a Minnesotan and a Princetonian. Indeed, Victorian Americans would fear and seek to repress his rebellious generation through at least the mid-1920s. In June of 1925, the *New York Times* would report that "[w]ithin the past few weeks four student periodicals in the Northeastern States [had] felt the administrative axe after publication and at least one other [had] been stifled before birth."[3]

Student publications at Harvard, Princeton, in addition to both written and actualized vociferous students protests at Yale were all covered in the story. If Fitzgerald's *This Side of Paradise* (1920) fit the stereotypes of this indignant generation, albeit with poor writing, *Gatsby* (1925) was described as masterfully written, but without the content.[4] Two decades later, the best-selling African American novelist Frank Yerby would win over hundreds of thousands of Americans with *Foxes of Harrow* (1946), a novel much more popular than Fitzgerald's *Gatsby* immediately following publication.

While African American critics hailed *Foxes*, virtually every Yerby published in the years following alienated his white and black fans alike. In 1946, those critics that hailed *Foxes* were aware that, like Richard Wright, Yerby's craft was honed by his literary contributions to proletarian "little magazines," before these men "achieved success in wider fields."[5] Gwendolyn Books, Willard Motley, Ann Petry, and Chester Himes were similarly recognized as African American writers that had managed to depict successfully depict a universal, "dark American

[3] Evans Clark, "College Youth in a Flippant Revolt," *New York Times*, June 7, 1925, SM3.
[4] H.L. Mencken, "Scott Fitzgerald and His Work," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 3, 1925, E1.
[5] Jack Conroy, "Off The Book Shelf: About Young Writers," *The Chicago Defender*, July 13, 1946, 15.

rather than the exotic immigrant" alienated from American values[6] As prominent representatives of African American-authored literature that managed to push beyond the disavowed "so-called 'Negro Renaissance' of the 1920s" based on its alleged exoticism, in many senses these black writers had finally accomplished what Fitzgerald had with *Gatsby*. For many literary optimists, it finally seemed as if black writers might further the African American integration or assimilation.

It remains rare, however, for scholars to consider parallels and relationships between what in practice were multiple early twentieth century American literary renaissances. The United States, of course, had witnessed sizeable changes in its cohorts of writers, printed matter, readers and consumers in the years that proceeded the second decade of the 20th century. But rarely would these shifts in the nation's literary sensibilities result in a sustained, heterogeneous movement longer than or similar to the one that began in the early years of the 1910s. Among its key players, periodicals, and publishing firms, this momentum would only begin lessening in force around 1928—the first year that a decline in sales and revenue were noted across the publishing industry before the trade was further hindered by the Depression.

The broad range of forces that played key roles in restructuring U.S. literature and publishing between these years included: changes in text distribution (e.g. increased usage and reliance on the postal service for the shipment of periodicals from the 1910s; and by the 1920s, books); as well as new avant-garde social and cultural interest and engagements with Europe that were only temporarily disrupted during World War I. These and several other factors led to an unprecedented diversification and enlargement of the nation's letters, including how they were advertised, discussed, written about, and endorsed from the early 1910s onward.

In book publishing alone, the first decade of the American publishing industry experienced its decade low for the production of books in 1906, with 7,139 titles printed that

[6] No Author, "Negro Era in Books Dawns," *New York Amsterdam News*, June 8, 1946, 11.

year. By 1910, that number almost doubled to a reported 13,470, a figure that would change very little before World War I. The publishing trade's diversification of subject matter also extended to increased attention to black writers and African American life—both positive and negative. Summing up the growth of the African American experience from the vantage point of 1950, one social scientist claimed, "the Negro was represented in 1904 by [only] two books on slavery, but in 1926 we find fifteen titles, covering social, historical, and economic relations of the race." The growth and flourishing of non-academic letters in these years was as if not more substantial—and for decades, this would be what the early 1910s were best remembered for. For instance, by 1912, American poetry was described in the *American Library Annual* as more frequent and stronger in offerings than it had been since the turn of the century.

The following year, writers and publishing industry professionals in the U.S. were declaring ever more confidently that a national "literary renascence" was taking shape. By no means limited to the publishing fields that had experienced the largest growth, these observations were echoed across literary and publishing communities that otherwise had little or no connection to one another. The eclectic cohort that declared a renaissance ranged from the professionals responsible for analyzing year-to-year changes in the American and international book trades, to critics who were sympathetic to the young "radicals" responsible for the proliferation of "little magazines" in the 1910s.

This chapter seeks to reconsider and synthesize these developments in an effort to better understand the influences on what was increasingly described as "universal" African American-authored literature beginning in the early 1940s. What happened to the American literary renaissance? Was its characterization, name, and acclaim thwarted by the increasing prominence of black Americans writers associated with the "Negro renaissance" increasingly hailed and

debated in the years following World War I? This chapter investigates the "strange career" of the American—and what became African American—literary renaissance that was widely celebrated in the 1910s, and described as a "New Negro" phenomenon by the final years of the 1920s. Among the provocations driving this reconsideration of the growth of avant-garde letters in the U.S. that began in the early 1910s is the curious position of its first and foremost leader, William Stanley Braithwaite. Braithwaite was a poet, editor, essayist, anthologist, and publishing head for the entirety of the 1910s and 1920s. He was widely credited as one of the business's top players before 1920, and was often perceived as having the capacity to make or break a poet's career by giving or refusing sponsorship in his annual poetry anthology and elsewhere. These commitments extended to his mentorship and sponsorship of African American writers over both decades. And it was Braithwaite, who was also among the handful of editors of *The Crisis* from its appearance in late 1910, who would author "The Negro in American Literature" essay for Locke's famed anthologies of *The New Negro* that were first published in 1925.

Indeed, a number of additional authorial and editorial challenges to reductive portrayals of stigmatized white ethnics, racial minorities, and the lives of Americans far from its cosmopolitan coasts can be traced from the early years of the 1910s, and they would only grow during and after World War I. To be sure, considering the value of the "reconciliation of the races"—the name of Fenton Johnson's interracial activism from 1916—was far from new or lost among African Americans writers in the mid-1920s. By that era, for over two decades, Charles Chesnutt, W.E.B. Bois, and Braithwaite had published poetry, essays, short stories and novels that often demonstrated authorial mastery of these genres while also serving as influential, intellectual emissaries for African America.

In the first issue of *Stylus*, the literary journal published in 1916 by the Stylus Society at Howard University, the publication's editors credited these men as establishing a path "in the field of letters among the younger generation of our race." In structure, the organization was modeled after Yale College's literary society, which was also certainly in line with the literary sensibilities of their elders, despite the fact that both Braithwaite and Chesnutt lacked a formal education. With an awareness of their advantages in comparison to previous generations, the group hoped "that the work so splendidly done by Dunbar, Du Bois, Chesnutt, and Braithwaite may be completely continued by the young men and women who follow them." Two faculty members at Howard, Montgomery Gregory and Alain Locke, would assist these efforts as the designated faculty mentors for Stylus. Locke's harrowing service as the first black Rhodes Scholars at Oxford six years earlier would have likely been very impressive to them. But is also highly unlikely that they would forget that their efforts to produce the first issue of *Stylus* preceded Locke's first draft of the widely acclaimed *New Negro* anthology by almost ten years.

The first section of this chapter traces how predominantly white, modern, and regional renaissances unfolded in the U.S. from 1911 through the publication of *Native Son* (1940). Wright's novel would only gain success and acclaim with white America following an endorsement from Canby and Dorothy Canfield Fisher. And yet this story is only rarely considered in conversation with other expanding—but also hotly contested—literary gestures toward universalism that appeared in the U.S. in the 1910s, such as Joyce's *Ulysses*—which was burned by the postal service. The second section similarly revisits this general time frame and some of these interlocutors in attempt to outline a longer, interracial history of what Locke described in 1928 as the multiple phases of "Negro self-expression," which he traced "from 1912 – 15 on…" He then explained, "[p]reviously, we must recall, except as singer or rhymester poet,

the Negro as artist was not taken seriously."[7] The final section considers what black writing looked like after African American-styled modernism ended somewhat abruptly beginning in the late 1920s. Rather than ceasing their professional activity, black writers experimented with new forms, including the Motley's extremely popular *Knock on Any Door* (1947) and *Foxes of Harrow* (1946). As Motley would affirm in his response to the editor of *Phylon*'s praise in 1949, "I have felt for a long time that the Negro writer must, he wishes to create lasting work, broaden his sensitivity to the other 'little Fellow's' problems.[8]

***

Unlike the various human rights initiatives in the years during and following World War II that were primarily devoted to challenging the underlying tenets of Jewish and "colored," anti-prejudice, related social problems were perceived as much broader in previous decades. But even if promotions and contestations of "Americanization," "Americanism," and Protestant superiority were major themes in American life by the mid-1920s, literary challenges to New England's culture dominance can be traced from at least 1911, if not earlier. Indeed, although he is more commonly treated as a villain in narratives of U.S. nationalism and continental conquest, Frederick Jackson Turner might even be thought of as signaling this move for intellectuals beginning in the 1890s.[9] The increasing production of regional literature that literary historians date from 1911 and 1912 in the East and Midwest then, might even be thought of as influenced, if not inheriting, the geographically expansive impulses Turner began inspiring two decades earlier. As historian James Banner has recently argued, "The founding of the OAH a few years

[7] Alain Locke, "The Negro's Contribution to American Art and Literature," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 140 (Nov., 1928), 242 – 243.
[8] Willard Motley to Mozell C. Hill, February 26, 1949, Box Folder 12, WMP.
[9] As has been well documented in the field, this "new direction" was most famously promoted by Frederick Jackson Turner's 1893 address and subsequent essay on the frontier's then-unexamined influence on American history, culture, and perceptions of social possibility.

later drew upon the same impulse that actuated Turner—to separate American history as taught in schools and pursued by the then few…from its fixed focus on the East Coast."

Beginning in the early 1910s, regional shifts, both in the production of literature and the nation's migration patterns, were increasingly remarked upon as important factors in the nation's changing literary sensibilities, as well as its relationship to the East Coast publishing industry. But any regional independence the country witnessed can only best be described as short-lived, especially given the predominance East Coast publishers had previously maintained on the reading habits of Americans far from it through the first decade of the 20th century. Indeed, the 1910s represented somewhat of an unusual opening. [10]

Indeed, the growth in the regional production and distribution of literature in the U.S. was widely evidenced by 1911 and 1912, except for in the southern U.S., where a similar "literary revival" was described in 1946 as not taking firm root in the South until around 1920."[11] From the vantage point of 1937, a writer for the League of American Writers boasted, "TODAY in America there are signs of a literary revival that may resemble or surpass that of the period from 1912 to 1916—the period of the 'poetry renaissance."' Asserting that these years were equally marked by a "'revolt against the genteel tradition,' the League's bulletin also noted that "[t]hose of us who remember the hopeful activity of those years can also remember how it was cut short by the War."[12]

---

[10] In the early 1920s, Henry Seidel Canby, a professor at Yale who was also served as an ambassador for U.S. government during World War I, argued that in the years before the conflict, the nation's literary centers were isolated, and operated as "literary republics of their own." As such, he described them as "sovereign like our states, yet highly federalized also in a common bond of American taste and ideals which the war made stronger." Henry Seidel Canby, "On the American Tradition," in Canby, *Definitions: Essays in Contemporary Criticism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1922), 118.

[11] Frederick Hoffman, Charles Allen, and Carolyn F. Ulrich, *The Little Magazine: A History and a Bibliography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1946), 10.

[12] No author, "League of American Writers" Bulletin, April-May 1937, Box 5, Folder 133, Claude McKay Collection (hereafter CMC), Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

The historical significance of these early movements, which were fitful in growth, in no small part due to challenges from various local and federal governmental censorship efforts designed to suppress these publications, continues to be challenging to assess. *The Masses*, the premier socialist magazine in the 1910s, had an average monthly circulation that had topped over 14,000 after 1912. Not only was the magazine's success by the mid-teens later explained as a stark break with an extremely difficult beginning and lack of popularity in 1911 and 1912, *The Masses* was also described as finding its footing by "radiat[ing] sparkle and humor along with its biting criticism."

But its popularity would do the publication more than less harm. By February 1916, "*The Masses* was no longer allowed on New York's elevated subway newsstands, for the howling winds of war chauvinism were lashing ever more furiously at the magazine's socialist-pacifist point of view." And in August 1917, "the Post Office Department succeeded in barring the periodical from the mails." After its staff decided to publish the periodical despite this latter setback, the Department of Justice then charged its editors, publishers, and business manager with "conspiracy against the government" and "interfering with enlistment." And while these individuals emerged victorious against the government's accusations, the popularity and acclaim that *The Masses* had enjoyed prior to the war never recovered.

The federal government was even more aggressive—and successful—in its objections and actions against Margaret Anderson's *The Little Review* during and after the war, even though it only had a subscribed base of 2,000 before moving from Chicago to New York in March 1917. The year 1917 is also noteworthy as marking what was described in 1946 as the first year "experimentalism" exploded in western literature. Regardless of its popularity and outsized influence, both before and after Anderson moved the publication to New York, she found it

nearly impossible to meet the publication's day-to-day expenses without overreliance on donations and philanthropy from its subscribers. "With the exception of the first two or three issues the magazine never garnered much advertising. Businessmen do not advertise in an anarchist magazine." After the publication serialized and printed James Joyce's *Ulysses* for American distribution beginning in 1918, the United States Post Office Department confiscated and burned four of these issues over the three year period *The Little Review* published the story.

During and after the war, many of the intellectuals affiliated with *The Masses*, *The Little Review*, and other avant-garde publications either fled to Europe—if they were not forcefully deported from the U.S.—in efforts to distance themselves from aggressive censorship. In addition to an aversion to the era's censorship practices, many of these individuals also felt that the majority of Americans were oblivious to the many causalities resulting from total war, which were comparative abstract in the United States. And this form of disinterest and unwillingness to engage the American population led many critics then and after to describe this cohort of intellectuals as "railing against American civilization primarily from an esthetic point of view." In the 1930s, one of the nation's leading proletarian writers, Jack Conroy was likely responsible for this statement, and he would sum up "little magazines" like *Broom, The Little Review*, and dozens of others as "edited in Rome, Paris, Vienna and half the capitals of Europe." Attempting to contrast these works with the literary publications of the 1930s, like *The Anvil*, which he was responsible for editing, he argued that publications like his broke with these expatriate geographic sensibilities by returning to the America's heartland(s). "These new arrivals, preaching the international revolution, hail from such plain American addresses as Mt. Hope Place, Brooklyn, and Moberly Missouri."[13]

[13] Advertisement for *The Anvil*, No Date, Box 2, Folder 152, Harry Hansen Papers (hereafter HHP), Roger and Julia Baskes Department of Special Collections, The Newberry Library.

In contrast to both the first generation of modernists and the Protestant backlash against these individuals, over the 1930s, Conroy and countless other progressive writers imagined their labors as including responsibilities to the general population. Langston Hughes, Willard Motley, Jessie Fauset, Richard Wright, and Frank Yerby would be just a few of the African American writers that rallied behind related causes in these years. And because attention to the Spanish Civil War and Italian and German Fascism were perceived as three of the pressing issues in these years, it would be concerns over anti-Semitism rather than segregation and African American inequality that commanded the most attention. In 1937, the League of American Writers argued that if it failed to focus its energies in broad rather than narrow terms, the prospective audiences for books and plays would become even smaller, because "[u]nder a fascist regime, literature would fare no better than labor."

> The growth and diffusion of leisure, wealth, taste, education—until they reach the whole people—are to the advantage of writers both individually and as a profession. The interests of writers are identical with those of the innumerable people who compose their potential audience. Further than this, literature has always been deeply enriched by reflecting the social hopes and passions of its own time.[14]

In addition to pointing to the "Western pessimism" they found central to the writing emanating from younger generations of Americans, because of their promotions of "Popular Freudianism" in the 1920s, conservative critics like Stuart Sherman were disgusted. Writing for *The Atlantic* in 1922, he quoted the nineteenth century English poet, Matthew Arnold, "The life which you celebrate is not beautiful, not healthy, not satisfying. It is ugly, obscene, devastating. It is driving us mad. And we are going to revolt from it."[15] While Sherman wasn't compelled to dwell on specific new authors who were agitating him with their works, he still managed to

[14] No author, "League of American Writers" Bulletin, April-May 1937, Box 5, Folder 133, CMC.
[15] Stuart Sherman, "The Point of View in American Criticism," *The Atlantic Monthly*, Vol. 130 (1922), 627.

provide an authorial citation for these literary sentiments such as these—he did—he did manage to provide *The Atlantic*'s readership with a remarkably of where these individuals hailed from.

> This pessimism comes out of Wisconsin, Minnesota, Illinois, Indiana, Missouri, Kansas, and California; from the sons and daughters of pioneer farmers, country doctors, small-town lawyers, and country editors; from the second generation of immigrant stock, German, Swedish, Scotch, Irish; from the hungry, nomadic semi-civilization of the West.[16]

In his rail against their threat to "Puritanism—[and] its deep human passion for perfection," Sherman warned that these literary practitioners sought "to destroy the one principle [cultural Puritanism] which can possibly result in the integration of the national life."

And while Canby indeed rebuffed the least inclusive social practices in the war years that are suggested above, his difference from Sherman and other conservative white men of his generation was not as sharp as one might think based on their public statements. In fact, these men had more rather than less in common during and following the World War I years than might be expected. To be sure, these similarities were by not unidirectional, nor should they be considered predictable. In what was only the magazine's second competition by the year of his death, Sherman nominated one of Claude McKay's short stories for first prize in the category, but lower rankings from other judges would keep him from being represented among the finalists.[17]

Somewhat more predictably, Canby, who served along Sherman as a fellow judge in *Opportunity*'s literary contest, was more committed to conservative conceptions of the American nation-state than his published sentiments on the power of cosmopolitanism suggest. In 1920, Canby claimed that one of the most important recent changes in the nation's literature had been "the rise to intellectual influence and cultural and social power of aliens." And he summarized

[16] Ibid.
[17] Claude McKay to Charles S. Johnson, November 12, 1926, Box 5, Folder 164, CMC.

his list of new contributors by acknowledging "Irish, German, [and] most of all Jews—who, unlike the earlier immigrants do not cherish as their chief wish the desire to become in every sense American." Canby would assert for years that contributions from these ethnic groups were important if the nation hoped to foster a robust "universal" American literature.

As such, he maintained that their refusals of American conformity and materialism had the strongest potential of inhibiting crass, conformist commercialism that was evident in and well beyond the nation's popular writing. "[T]he thoughtful mind finds little to console it in the clever, sentimental writing which, with sewing-machines, dental pastes, ready-made clothes, and cheap motor-cars, has become one of the standardized products of America."[18] Nevertheless, the "peasant immigrant working toward" these goods, and the "wide-ranging intellectual working away from" these sensibilities, convinced Canby that even if the U.S. would not have "an un-British" culture, the national movement was "[c]ertainly not…merely neo-English." Indeed, the nation's prior orientation toward regional literary spheres led him to argue that "American writers [were] already recording, the multifarious, confused development of racial instincts working into a national consciousness." He thus counseled that if the country could manage to "escape provincialism and yet remain local, all will be well."

Canby first delivered this essay as an address at the University of Cambridge in 1918. And he had done so because during the war, his literary and social commitments had not prevented him from aligning with Wilson's plans for a transatlantic partnership with England. He thus served as an American ambassador in England to promote the President's democratic agenda to British elites who remained skeptical in relation to these prospects. One of Canby's letters of introduction explained that the process was doing "missionary work to promote mutual

[18] Henry Seidel Canby, "Literature in America," in Canby, *Everyday Americans*, (New York: Century Company, 1920), 165.

understanding between the United States and the Allies…"[19] In the final year of the war, he would spend six months in England working on this curiously ambiguous agenda.[20]

In an effort to narrow in on the social demographic in Britain he believed was especially important to reach during his time there, Canby asserted that younger elites would definitely benefit from the type of diplomacy he had been enlisted to promote. "A Mission of some kind sent over to visit and talk at these schools throughout Green Britain would, I think, accomplish more for genuine mutual understanding than any other agency I can think of."[21] Others he sought to include were the "upper sections of the middle class, especially the business men of the North who are most suspicious of American sincerity, and who have had little done for them so far, and also the Conservative group in the upper class who are not intellectuals." In contrast, individuals and groups like H.G. Wells, "the Labor group," and other "Radicals in England," Canby felt, were already "pro-American," and therefore required little introduction or persuasion in standing behind the merits of progressive national and international governance.[22]

If Canby's intended audiences held any doubts as to whether or not the U.S. and England held the capacity to shape, incorporate, and acculturate new citizens, he took great pains to assure them that these problems were by no means new phenomena. Criticizing the "Pessimists" like Sherman who viewed the "the social" problem of Eastern states as "mere congeries of all the white races, and some not white," Canby's narrative of the nation's history argued against thinking of these challenges as new and abrupt. He thus argued, "[b]ut the racial problem has

[19] Sender Unknown to Joseph Adams, January 23, 1918, Box 2, Folder 64, Henry Seidel Canby Papers (hereafter HSCP), Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.
[20] Author Not Noted, Department of Labor to Hon. E.M. House, September 11, 1918, Box 2, Folder 64, HSCP.
[21] Henry Seidel Canby to Harvey O'Higgins, October 16, 1918, Box 2, Folder 65, HSCP.
[22] In 1918, Canby claimed that "not enough men representing Mr. Wilson's point of view have been sent to England, and he accepts my definition of what is needed, as a man who can answer questions when heckled, as to the relation between America's past history and the President's International ideas." The person in question would "be glad to further the success of Americans abroad who are, are Mr. Wilson says, 'forward looking men,' and will be glad to use his best offices." Henry Seidel Canby to Harvey O'Higgins, October 16, 1918, Box 2, Folder 65, HSCP.

always been with us, nor has it by any means always been unsolved...our blood has always been mixed even in Virginia and New England" Invoking the country's age-old racial eclecticism enabled Canby to see the problem as "just as [it had been] at the turn of the eighteenth century [when] enthusiasts were clamoring for a new literature from America, in which freedom and liberty should have their apotheosis."[23] His point was that these cultural imperatives in the colonial era were direct descendants of "the awakened consciousness of Americans of the older stock [that was] clamoring for the expression of what they vaguely dominate, and still more vaguely describe, as Americanism."[24]

By the time "Americanization" initiatives increased in the mid-1920s, these efforts also coincided with sharp increases in the number of whites that were obtaining advanced degrees, alleviating at least some of the anxieties educated Americans held concerning mass education.[25] Because older periods like *The Atlantic* had relatively stagnant readership numbers in previous decades, even in the mid-1910s, it remained uncertain whether or not these publication had the power to influence new constituents. In 1914, Canby published a nonfiction essay in *The Atlantic* titled "Redwood Canyon," which sought to convey the beauty and spiritual restoration this natural resource provided, while also informing the periodical's readership that it was being "utterly destroyed" by industry. "This spring the lumbering railroad was pushed around the headlands…Saw and axe have fallen upon its trees; the redwoods have crashed down, smashing the forest and themselves."

And while those readers who were sympathetic with Canby's philosophies on the environment welcomed the eloquence in this essay, the limited circulation of lessons like these

[23] Canby, "Literature in America," in *Everyday Americans*, 164.
[24] Henry Seidel Canby, "Literature In a Democracy," *The Century*, Volume 99 (1920), 399.
[25] For a discussion of higher education attainment in the 1920s, and how these development increased the demand and interrelated with publications like *The New Yorker*, see Mary F. Corey, *The World Through a Monocle: The New Yorker at Midcentury* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999).

also inspired fear from white elites. In an effort to assure Canby before broaching more ominous concerns, one reader noted that it had pleased him "greatly, and has pleased several others whom I have heard say so. It was done in such a charming way that sympathetic souls simply couldn't help warming to it…" The unresolved challenge, however, remained the question of how to reach and engage new audiences with these ideas such as these advocating for environmental protection. "As it is likely that practically every reader of the Atlantic agrees with you already, it seems rather a pity that the majority of our people, who read not the Atlantic, should not learn of the dangers that threaten our heritage; should not be taught that real economy." The reader then invoked the Hearst Corporation's newspapers and periodicals as more exciting but relatively vapid resources that were much more popular with less educated readers, which they would be much more prone to pick up instead. "If such work as yours in Redwood Canyon could be brought closer to the majority it would benefit them vastly, and through this broader appreciation of real values would come genuine conservation of the things which are more excellent."[26]

Many of Canby's projects from the World War I era onward would in fact take up challenges similar to the ones raised by this reader, and his establishment of the *Saturday Review of Literature* in 1924 as a separate publication was easily his most prominent example. But his peers and younger generations of writers would soon accuse Canby of fostering an increasingly vapid national literature rather than promoting dynamic texts through this publication, and this criticism would only increase during the 1930s, as Americans shed their Protestant roots. Writing to Canby in 1933 from San Francisco, one female critic that sought to represent the opinion of a new generation with an essay in the *Saturday Review* posited that Canby's generation had done the power of literature a disservice. Her frustration with him and his peers also suggests her lacking awareness or lack of concern with the efforts and philosophies he had sponsored years

[26] Elmer Garnsey to Henry Seidel Canby, July 29, 1914, Box 2, Folder 79, HCSP.

earlier that had previously set him apart from white conservative peers like Sherman. "We most emphatically do not like the world we find, but we are too realistic and perhaps too energetic to feel that the 'way of escape' is our way and lots of us don't think we have any right to escape. I have been trying for years to think this out and it isn't easy."[27]

But even if Canby was an easy target based on his outsized influence on mass-marketed literature, in addition to signifying what an older, conservative generation of white America looked like, he nevertheless also represented early changes this generation's racial sensibilities. Almost two decades after he sought to explain how regional and ethnic instincts and literary productions were contributing to the formation of an American literary canon, he sought to convince white America of how African American writers fit into this national project. In a gesture that was seemingly much more powerful than judging "Negro"-authored literature for *Opportunity* beginning in 1925, years later, Canby co-sponsored Richard Wright's *Native Son* with Dorothy Canfield Fisher for distribution to the Book-of-the-Month Club. Less than two years earlier, Wright's *Uncle Tom's Children* had won "a nation-wide contest for the best fiction produced by a WPA writer," which was described in a sales brochure designed for booksellers as "immediately establishing him as our foremost Negro writer."[28] When *Uncle Tom's Children* was released in 1936, it was situated as a prospective return to the prominence African American literature was known for years earlier but had all but dried up in the mid-1930s. "NEGRO LITERATURE was tops in the late twenties." The contest Wright won for that book of short stories was sponsored by *Story* magazine, which was also the sponsor of the O. Henry Awards, which Frank Yerby received in 1944. His success in that competition would Yerby to establish a firm connection with his first literary agent Muriel Fuller, as well as her friend that would

[27] Elsa Gidlow to Henry Seidel Canby, May 18, 1933, Box 2, Folder 80, HCSP.
[28] Sales Text for *Native Son*, Box 46, Folder 573, Richard Wright Papers (hereafter RWP), Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

become Yerby's editor for approximately the next two decades, Helen Strauss. By the mid-1950s, Strauss would also represent James Baldwin, and the two would continue working together until she suggested that he burn the manuscript for *Giovanni's Room*.

Decades earlier, and in somewhat of a continued consolidation of the power he had amassed within New York's publishing world, Canby assumed the editor-in-chief position when the Book-of-the-Month Club was established in 1926. But rather than being the sole person responsible for promoting Wright's book on the eve of its publication, Canby, along with Fisher, shared credit for being two of Wright's most important endorsers. Indeed, both of these major players in the American publishing industry were crucial to the novel's broad distribution, as well as white Americans' willingness to engage the story. One of Wright's most acclaimed biographers, Hazel Rowley, has pointed out that Fisher, who wrote the introduction to *Native Son*, was considered by Eleanor Roosevelt to be among the top ten most influential women in the United States.[29] Rowley has also pointed out that even though Fisher and Canby were the dominant members of the Book-of-the-Month Club selection committee, Fisher was the only woman represented among this group. While detail is little more than suggestive, although it has been all but forgotten in comparison to Fisher's introduction, Canby's written endorsement was shipped to readers who would were much more likely to have been unfamiliar with Wright.

And Canby would go to great lengths to assure prospect readers that the book was complex, and far from mere protest. "Let me repeat, this novel is no tract or defense plea. Like *Grapes of Wrath*, it is a fully realized story of unfortunates, uncompromisingly realistic, and quite as human as it is Negro."[30] Whatever the book was, it was extremely exciting to readers

[29] Hazel Rowley, *Richard Wright: The Life and Times* (New York: Henry Holt, 2001), 184.
[30] Henry Seidel Canby, Book-of-the-Month Club Newsletter, February, 1940, Box 46, Folder 573, RWP.

after its release, and would sell out three hours after it was published.[31] As countless white Americans would initially, Canby's letter framed *Native Son* as a universal, American story, rather than an emphasis on "hyphenated" national identity, or any other characteristic that would make it as particular to the African American experience.

> This powerful and sensation novel is very difficult to describe so as to convey its real purpose and its real strength. But it is important to describe it accurately, because it is certainly the finest novel as yet written by an American Negro—not that it was chosen by the Book-of-the-Month Club just because it was written by a Negro. It would have been chosen for its deep excitement and intense interest whether written by white, yellow, or black. Yet, nevertheless, this is a novel which only a Negro could have written whose emotion is the emotion of that native born American under the stress of a social situation difficult in the extreme; whose point and purpose are not race war or propaganda of any kind, but to show how a 'bad nigger' is made from human material that might have become something very different.[32]

***

If this has been a somewhat unusual history of the de-homogenization of U.S. literature, the connections explored here are not intended to suggest that one white man—in this case, Canby—was responsible for this wide-ranging activity during and between the two world wars. More pointedly, but no less diffuse, this chapter's inquiry does mean to suggest that more attention be give to how the literary "assimilations" of white ethnics related to the growth of African Americans in American literature from the 1920s onwards.[33] It bears noting that even if Fitzgerald was indeed inspired by Henry James, blacks were almost entirely absent from that earlier novelist's stories and books, and when they did appear, these depictions were by no stretch flattering or dynamic. In contrast, even if his links to African America remained lose—and perhaps looser—by the mid-1920s, Fitzgerald's Irish background, and his critiques of

[31] *Native Son* Advertisement for Booksellers, Box 46, Folder 573, RWP.
[32] Henry Seidel Canby, Book-of-the-Month Club Newsletter, February, 1940, Box 46, Folder 573, RWP.
[33] For an important study that has considered issues related to this history, see: Carla Cappetti, *Writing Chicago: Modernism, Ethnicity, and the Novel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

Protestants and racial science anticipate just a sampling of the many concerns that animated the "Negro renaissance."

To be sure, these indices alone are too little to claim that Fitzgerald had a significant relationship to African America by the 1920s. For instance, in contrast, Carl Van Vechten's abiding interest in African Americans dominated both his public and private lives, even though his commitments to blacks were certainly balanced with other pursuits. And while he was certainly an exemplar in this regard, and approximately the same age as Canby, Van Vechten's interests in blacks and interracial fraternity was much more heightened in comparison to most of his generational peers. Of these individuals, Gertrude Stein was among the most sympathetic white American writers to Van Vecten's interests.

Van Vechten's slang for "Negro" was indeed offensive to most African Americans in the mid-1920s, although this era also marked a moment when some white modernist writers made a case for rehabilitating the term. The poet Carl Sandburg had done so to some consternation in 1922, but rather than understanding him as hostile, the 1925 - 1926 *Negro Year Book* reported that he was nevertheless "decidedly friendly and sympathetic."[34] Regardless of what they hoped it would mean, the prospect of rehabilitating "Nigger" for popular use and engagement with white Americans was a relatively new phenomenon. For instance, in 1897, the American publishing firm Dodd, Mead and Company insisted that Joseph Conrad manuscript, *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"* be published as *The Children of the Sea: A Tale of Forecastle* in 1897. They did so not because of any particular offense in relation to the title, but because they feared that readers would not purchase the novel if they knew that one of its primary characters was black, or worse still, that the text was about blacks. Twelve years later, Stein would have to pay to have

[34] Monroe N. Work, ed., *Negro Year Book, 1925 – 1926* (Tuskegee, Alabama: Negro Year Book Publishing Company, 1926), 82 – 83.

her first book, *Three Lives* (1909) published. Even if its depictions of African Americans were regressive, her extended focus on Baltimore's African American community was not welcome by publishers.

Van Vechten's *Nigger Heaven* (1926) is somewhat complicated in that it appeared after increased interest in blacks from white Americans, even as it popularized the white "slumming" craze in Harem due to its extraordinary success in novel form. It was also unique in that Van Vechten suggested that he had little or no resistance from his publisher on what the final manuscript looked like, even though black writers especially consistently received resistance from their publishers and interlocutors before publication.

> Dear Langston, Call me up when you arrive in town and we'll make arrangement. I'm out very little now as I am writing about 6,000 words a day. Nigger Heaven is progressing rapidly and I think you'll like at least parts of it. I only have to write it once more after the current draft is complete…[35]

But rather than an intentionally exotic emphasis, Knopf, Van Vechten's publisher sold the novel based on its ability to break with traditional white writing that incorporated African American life to offer a serious text.

> In "Nigger Heaven" Carl Van Vechten abandons the field of satirists to create an unusual cycle of events of contemporary Harlem life. From a position "inside looking out" he analyzes the fascinating and inscrutable drama that takes place in the gallery of the vast theatre of New York—from which the white world below can be seen, but which it cannot see. "Nigger Heaven" is published by Alfred A. Knopf on August 20th.[36]

As Brent Hayes Edwards has masterfully demonstrated, literary contributions similar to there and other works affiliated with the "Negro Renaissance" were by no means limited to

[35] Carl Van Vechten to Langston Hughes, January 24, 1926, Box 159, Folder 2939, Langston Hughes Papers (hereafter LHP), James Weldon Johnson Collection, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.
[36] No Author, *New and Views Of Borzoi Books*, August 5, 1926, Box 2, Folder 132, HHP.

African Americans in the late 1920s and early 1930s.[37] One document from Jamaica substantiates this general framework while also cautioning against thinking of pan-African culture in teleological terms. Because of how conservative these movements were perceived during the 1930s, in some ways they might even be thought of as anticipating the strategies of popular African American in the years following World War II. Written by one of Jamaica's leaders in the "little group of coloured intellectuals," in 1937 he asserted in a letter to McKay, a fellow Jamaican, that "colour prejudice" continued "sapping the very lifeblood of the country." Not only would he claim that younger generations of Jamaicans had "no guts and are afraid to fight for something out of the ordinary," he reported being met "with much objection when I tell people in my addresses or writings that we must be proud of the fact that we are Negroes."[38]

Indeed, while narratives of American expatriation more often than not situate white American writers in Europe as a post-World War I phenomenon, and the movement of black writers to France as occurring in the World War II era, these movements were more diffuse. In fact, re-considering what that expatriation looked like suggests an overlap between black and white moderns, in addition to providing further evidence of the vagaries of the African American post-World War I renaissance.

Sinclair Lewis was among the white moderns sympathetic to McKay's reasons for expatriating, and suggested in a letter to a white benefactor that intended to help support McKay in 1925 that he had a more compelling reason to be in Paris than in comparison to other American writers. "About his coming home. It seems to me that that is something he must decide. There is no general rule. Personally I should not want to stay here too long, and I am quite sure that many American writers have been enfeebled by it." Lewis pointed out, "[a]s he is

[37] Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003).
[38] Rupert Meikle to Claude McKay, June 19, 1937, Box 5, Folder 140, CMC.

a negro, he has here an ease, a chance to forget social problems and consider the vast material he has already accumulated, which he would never have in America…This whole matter of writers abroad is complicated…"[39] And indeed, these complications seem to be both confusing and amusing to black writers at the time. In Hughes's 1929 letter to Thurman, who was forced to move frequently due to his lack of financial stability in the late 1920s, he jokingly suggested that whites across the Western Hemisphere were clueless about the literary and physical movements of African Americans. Hughes noted, "…so I got a grand article on Blues today from Brussels in which my and Clara Smith are hailed as products of the renaissance and no other native blacks are mentioned but they are all in Paris passing for Matiniques." According to Hughes, they were passing for pleasure and surpassing white moderns, "because they can out-shimmy all the other living Negroes and even Snake Hips bowed down in envy before the Beguin…and which I am sure poor Gertrude Stein could never do re-do o-o-o-o-od do…"[40]

Thurman, in fact, did not plan to return to Harlem, and as these movements away from Harlem would haunt Hughes through at least the late 1950s, in 1929, he lamented his friend's choice even as he showed signed of respecting it. In fact, and somewhat flippantly given his irregularity in dating his letters, Hughes dated his letter and its location as "Monday July 29, 1929 (full date for benefit of literary historian) Lincoln University, Pa., Box 36, (full place, ditto)." The interest in African Americans, it seems, was clearly agitating Hughes. "…Nella Larsen is right for more and more we are passing and now even you say that you won't live in Harlem upon your return. That's right, desert the race that made you what you are today…" And Hughes was likely sympathetic due to how Harlem had changed after Van Vechten's *Nigger Heaven*. "And as for Harlem, alas, all the cabarets have gone white and the Sugar Cane is closed

[39] Sinclair Lewis to Roger Baldwin, June 19, 1925, Box 5, Folder 135, CMC.
[40] Langston Hughes to Wallace Thurman, [circa 1929], Box 1, Folder 3, Wallace Thurman Collection (hereafter WTC), Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

and everybody I know is either in Paris or Hollywood or sick. And Bruce [Nugent] wears English suits!....."[41]

And of course, Nugent wasn't the only one accused of exaggerated—or of exaggerating—life in Harlem in these years. As many of his African American friends did, with Langston Hughes as an important exception, Thurman was highly critical of Van Vechten's *Nigger Heaven*. To be sure, one of Thurman's definitive qualities was his literary fastidiousness, and he would find fault with virtually every novel he came across. And yet this should not be confused as an aversion to white writers: virtually all of the fictional works he favored most and desired to read in the late 1920s had been written by white writers, and a list he jokingly summed up as "Thurman's course in novel reading."[42] In the same letter, he explained, [o]ne cannot very well experiment until one has a conventional foundation and rigid training." And it would be standards like these that would influence Thurman's rejection of *Nigger Heaven*. "I did not like Carl's latest effusion. Frankly I believe it to be his worst novel to date. All of his limitations are relentlessly exposed. His superficiality…in this novel does not serve its purpose as it did in The Blind Bow Boy or in Firecrackers." With the exception of one of two characters, overall, Thurman pointed out that Van Vechten's protagonists "were much too fantastic or shadowy."[43]

***

As virtually all black writers of the 1920s would find out much too quickly, "fantastic or shadowy" would dominate the production of popular black culture and African American writing from the late 1920s through at least World War II. But most accurately, the "vogue," for African

[41] Langston Hughes to Wallace Thurman, July 29, 1929, Box 1, Folder 3, WTC.
[42] "Such things as Point Counter Point, the Counterfeiters. A School for Wives which I do not like, Death in Venice, Madame Bovary, The Idiot, which just about cover my favorite novels of all times. All I need to do now is read Upstream, the Case of Mr. Crump, Winesburg, Ohio…your log awaited Magic Mountain, Of Human Bondage, and Penguin Island." Wallace Thurman to Harold Jackman, [circa 1928 #1], Box 1, Folder 4, WTC.
[43] Wallace Thurman to Harold Jackman, [circa 1928 #2], Box 1, Folder 4, WTC.

Americans, and African American writing, while not entirely dried up, was of much less interest to writers and producers in 1929. Even though Thurman was considered by many writers and cultural professionals as leading, avant-garde, black writer from the mid-1920s, this would be less valued on the eve of the Depression. Robert Harris, a writer and production head at Metro Goldwyn Mayer Studios informed Thurman that summer, "I have read your play HARLEM. It is a fine piece of work, but I regret that at the present time we are not contemplating doing any negro plays."[44] The honesty in this letter is instructive, especially in comparison to the conspicuously veiled rejections that Willard Motley would receive after sending short stories to popular magazines following World War II, not to mention the broader racial structures he navigated. And Thurman's letters indicate that this was no mere exception in 1929. In a letter to William Jourdan Rapp, a close Jewish friend and artistic interlocutor, he enclosed Harris's letter, and noted bitingly that "the big mogul of the story department has finally said his piece…I have had final 'noes' from M.G.M., Pathe, Fox, and James Cruze."[45]

Black writers and cultural professionals in the film business were unfortunately in the position of not only being fiercely unwelcome labor competition, but also in a holding pattern where their fortunes closely, and perhaps inextricably, tied to the success of one film, *Hallelujah*. Thurman explained, "Negro movies are at a complete standstill however. The fate of *Hallelujah* will decide all. And until this Equity business is straightened out there will be little experimenting or new production plans."[46] Although *Hallelujah*—an MGM film—was celebrated for its authentic representations of African Americans, and was indeed commercially successful, its all black cast in 1929 was considered so risky that the company required the director to invest his own salary to make it. But in combination with other factors, including the

[44] Robert Harris to Wallace Thurman, August 2, 1929, Box 1, Folder 2, WTC.
[45] Wallace Thurman to William Jourdan Rapp, [circa 1929], Box 1, Folder 8, WTC.
[46] Wallace Thurman to William Jourdan Rapp, [circa 1929 #2], Box 1, Folder 8, WTC.

Depression, this did not make things better for black writers, entertainers, or actors in the coming years. Most damning was African American identity, which Thurman didn't want to overdetermine the possibility of having his work accepted, but still could not fail to ignore. "Moreover there is actually a deal of resentment among the white movie contingent at the working of Negro actors. They want to black up. God save us." Even as an off-screen writer, racial prejudice could not be escaped in this era. "Another item: I was told at M.G.M. that were it possible for me to pass for white, i.e. should I happened to be a mulatto, I could possibly have become connected with their staff…They did not mind me being a Negro, oh, no, it was just that I was too obviously one."[47]

While white progressives regularly lamented the sensationalism and vapidity promoted by the publication owned by the William Hearst family outlets like these were more reliable in their willingness to publish black authors. In 1929, Thurman asked Rapp, "[i]s not Hearst a possible purchaser of serial and syndicate rights? To me he seems like the best bet. His papers run such things and Harlem would be a novelty as well as sufficiently sensational to intrigue his editors and readers."[48]

As Hughes and others would joke about and indicate over their correspondence with one another, figures like Du Bois, White, and Locke were controlling stakeholders and intermediaries in relation to whether or not black writers would be published and how. And while they couldn't always determine what happened across publications, they were forces that writers like Thurman and McKay found it somewhat difficult to supersede. His analysis of these challenges, and the actors and publications he points in his correspondence explaining and seeking Rapp's help merits quoting Thurman at length.

[47] Ibid.
[48] Wallace Thurman to William Jourdan Rapp, [circa 1929 #3], Box 1, Folder 8, WTC.

> I am also about ready to arm myself with hand grenades and annihilate all magazine editors. I sent Frederick Douglass to Harpers. They sent it back with the regular rejection slip but with the words "too long for our purposes" underlined. High ho, said I, it must have possibilities, so I sent it to [Harold] Hersey's Famous Lives. They have just returned it without even a printed rejection slip. I told you that Mencken returned Garvey and Du Bois to the Century. Garvey to Plain Talk. The first was returned this morning and again no rejection slip. The second is still away. And Booker T. Washington is at Scribners…My own theory is that magazine editors being what they are and eternally accepting the men I have dared to interpret and criticize as the only ones capable of discussion Negro questions, dismiss me as a young upstart speaking without authority…The Douglass one is biographical rather than interpretative like the other three, mainly because so little is known of Douglass in comparison with Du Bois, Washington and Garvey.

Although blacklisting is often cast as post-World War II and Cold War era phenomena that affected American and African American letters, as William Maxwell has explained in relation to black writers especially, Hoover began this work at the beginning of World War I. During the war, this would mean arresting and identifying "suspicious" Germans in the U.S., and the Bureau of Investigation's "Radical Division" would only expand this work in 1919 during the nation's First Red Scare.[49] But governmental repression against artists and intellectual dissidents would of course come in many forms between the world wars. In 1929, while hoping that things would go well for *Hallelujah*, and thus hopefully increasing "demand for colored features," Thurman was also—and correctly—aware that Hollywood would have to support similar works "despite rumored blacklisting of Harlem by Czar [William] Hays."[50]

Thurman was almost a full decade ahead of most progressive writers and cultural professionals in recognizing the dangers of political censorship for African American writers. Sharon Musher has recently explained that, by the end of the 1930s, promoting "miscegenation" in popular culture easily fell under the category of "un-American" activities along with Communism. In her explanation of how the government increasingly questioned and began the

[49] See William J. Maxwell, *F.B. Eyes: How J. Edgar Hoover's Ghostreaders Framed African American Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015).
[50] Wallace Thurman to William Jourdan Rapp, [circa 1929 #2], Box 1, Folder 8, WTC.

process of dismantling funding for the Federal Theater Project, she pointed to Robert Reynolds's line of questioning and argumentation in 1937. Reynolds, the Democratic senator from North Carolina at the time asked, "Do you think the American taxpayer would approve of our financing" author Trudy Goodrich "in her pursuit of happiness with whatever condition and in whichever gutter might please her?"[51]

Tension had been growing against the "radical" and "Communist" activities of artists and writers, which some feared had infiltrated the FWP and its theatre program. Harry Hansen, one of the most popular book critics during the middle decades of the 20th century wrote an open letter to Martin Dies, who chaired the "Un-American Activities" Committee in 1937. "Your committee may assume that many authors, commentators and intellectual workers have sympathy with one of more of the objects for which these organizations stand, without necessarily being in the harness of Moscow…"[52] Hansen recommended that it would do Dies well to read a novel related that captured the spirit of the literature he was seeking to repress, and his specific recommendation was *The Summer Soldier* (1938), a fictional investigation of a Southern lynching.

As these events and exchanges suggest, these conflagrations over race, censorship, and literature that examined interracial life and sexual relations required assistance from white Americans, even though many would temper their activism at the beginning of the Cold War. Impressively, even Canby continued playing some role in these activities, and this difference between these tensions over the nation's literature as compared with what he began arguing for during World War I suggest how dramatically the nation's literature had transformed. In 1944, one friend of Canby's asked if he would be willing to come to Boston to "tell the Superior

[51] Sharon Ann Musher, *Democratic Art: The New Deal's Influence on American Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 193.
[52] "The First Reader," Harry Hansen, December 20, 1937, Box 16, Folder 2, MFP.

Court" that he regarded *Strange Fruit* "as a serious and decent novel." If he was willing to testify in support of the novel, it would be considered along with "the testimony of several literary critics, several ministers, and several psychiatrists or educators" that had been planned in defense of the novel.[53]

For financial reasons, personal reasons, and philosophical reasons, the newer generation of African American writers and artists avoided wading into the dramas associated with over two decades of African American culture by the mid-1940s. As the Counterpoise literary organization at Fisk University explained in its 1948 manifesto, they did not consider their own work avant-garde "in the accepted sense of the term." With the support of faculty advising by poet Robert Hayden, they expressed their belief in "experimentation" as "an absolute necessity in keeping the arts vital and significant in contemporary life." The organization's raison d'être went on to explain that Counterpoise supported the experimental and unconventional in fields as diverse as writing, music, and the graphic arts. What is striking, however, was not their faith in experimentation, or its prospective values across art forms. Indeed, unlike the prior impact artistic experimentation had on these very art forms in the 1920s, these students seem to emphatically remind that, unlike their predecessors, these practices should not be misconstrued as avant-garde in an "exotic" sense.

It was Muriel Fuller that was responsible for "finding" Frank Yerby, the first black writer to sell millions of copies of his novels to mainstream America, beginning with *The Foxes of Harrow*. She was also credited in the era for both introducing him to her longtime friend, famed-editor Helen Strauss, as well as attempting to sell Yerby's first novel to publishers. Fuller's generosity toward Yerby was seen by the author as so significant that he dedicated *Foxes*—the only novel for which he is widely cited as fighting American racism with—to her.

[53] Bernard De Voto to Henry Seidel Canby, May 12, 1944, Box 2, Folder 58, HSCP.

When Helen Strauss moved to William Morris, described by Fuller as "a large literary agency," she took Yerby's fiction with her, thus cementing his unprecedented success as an African American who sold millions of novels to mainstream America. In a *Christian Herald* essay she published in 1963, Fuller explained, "on the strength of 'Health Card' and the outline of a new novel [*Foxes of Harrow*], the late George Joel, then head of Dial Press, offered a contract." In closing, she debunked the notion that any other agent had the opportunity to turn down his first unpublished novel, suggesting that her professional recognition of that submission had been the author's only glimmer of hope. "His wife told me that if the contest novel had come back with a rejection slip, he would not have written anything else."[54]

***

Generally speaking, and as the widespread resistance to most fictional narratives with racial themes suggest, even the most serious novels touching on racial injustice and interracial life were considered sensational and worthy of vilification by the early 1930s onward. In fact, the Book-of-the-Month Club almost backed out of its sponsorship of *Native Son* in 1940 despite the previous excitement its leadership had for Wright's narrative. Rather than emphasizing the industry's hesitation to publish Wright's novel based on racial prejudice, this chapter instead questioned how Wright figured into a longer history of growth in American letters in the post-World War I era.

Even as black-authored literature defined as both protest and entertainment indeed followed much-older traditions of literary dissent, the following chapter explores how the children's book industry explicitly experimented with cosmopolitanism and racial tolerance. A industry-wide initiative largely fueled by the nation's participation in World War II, by the end

[54] Muriel Fuller, "Authors I Have Known," *The Christian Herald*, November, 1963, Box 9, Folder 1, MFP.

of the conflict, children's book editors rejected the initiative they had maintained a worthy commitment to during the war years.

CHAPTER TWO
"Some of My Best Friends Are Books": Children's Literature, World War II, and the Problem of Social Tolerance

"The purpose of books for children is, of course, to throw open new doors and wide portals, to give the child a vision of the world as it could be were men more understanding," Muriel Fuller reported in the E.P. Dutton trade newsletter in 1939. According to Fuller, a literary agent, published author, and sometimes-editor, if a child was given the appropriate literary tools to learn the lessons of international "neighborliness" and "brotherhood" early, they would attain and deploy these civic values much sooner than adulthood. As a bonus, they might even enjoy themselves in the process. "By reading of other countries, of other boys and girls of another color, race and language…he learns they are children like himself, whom it would be fun to know." Fuller's promotion of the prospective benefits of imparting international fellowship in children's literature couldn't have been timelier: E.P. Dutton published her headlining article introducing its junior catalogue in the same month as Germany's invasion of Poland. As such, her sales pitches for Dutton's children's books that actively promoted tolerance, brotherhood, and neighborliness across races and nations soon held meaning far beyond the consumer realm, as the world descended into a global, militarized crisis. Before this, Fuller warned: "We must learn understanding along with our scientific bridging of space as we run the girdle around the earth, so that at last we may learn to live with one another in harmony, or at least in tolerance."[1]

On one of its many lighter notes, Fuller's survey of cosmopolitan children's literature distributed primarily to book trade professionals also eagerly announced the commensurate theme of Children's Book Week for 1939: "Books Around the World." Having clearly submitted

[1] Muriel Fuller, "For Every Land, For Every Taste, For Every Age, A Book," *News of Books and Authors*, September 1939, Box 10, Folder 4, Muriel Fuller Papers (hereafter MFP), Archives & Special Collections, Hunter College Libraries, Hunter College of the City University of New York, New York City.

her copy for the newsletter in the days before Hitler's first memorialized belligerent action, Fuller proudly considered the theme of Children's Book Week, "in itself enough to make one tingle with all sorts of anticipatory thrills." A call from the throes of total war this was not. By 1944, the theme of Children's Book Week would shift to "United Through Books," a choice reflecting the United Nations' amorphous commitments to one another during the conflict, with no clear end in sight. Thus from the late 1930s onward, the trade's consumer project of "world-friendly" children's literature became vitally enmeshed in broader cultural efforts aimed at inspiring international unity among wartime "Allies," and eventually, a cosmopolitan peace.

This chapter looks at the mid-20th century history of the American publishing industry's efforts to produce and sell cultural products for white American children that were designed to promote social harmony across national boundaries. It does so by examining how these efforts were inspired by the international wartime alliances that would become known as the United Nations in 1942. The industry's efforts to publish children's books promoting ethnic and racial tolerance during the war not only addressed the global crises and conflicts of the era, but also coalesced with major social and consumer developments in the United States.[2] Unlike the general depravation marking the previous decade, the tremendous rise in employment in the U.S.

[2] While the extraordinary expansion of purchasing power during the conflict was a prerequisite for the war-era expansion of the children's book industry, both old and new firms' abilities to meet pressing consumer demand further enabled publishers' successes. Unlike some manufacturers during the conflict, not only did traditional publishers have consumer products to sell, new firms established during the war swelled the business by producing "low-priced picture books." Combined with the war sending the costs of producing children's books illustrated in color "sky-high," in 1947, Fuller estimated that fifty percent of American publishers "who had never been in the book business, leaped in and began getting out low-priced picture books for small children." This relative abundance in the publishing trade was dissimilar from other war-restricted consumer sectors, including toy manufacturers, who were unable to benefit similarly from increasing consumer demand. (Indeed, in 1947, Fuller also explained that during the war, "toys were non-existent.") Muriel Fuller, Speech to Women's Press Club, 1947, Folder 13, Box 10, MFP. And while toy manufacturing may have been restricted during the conflict, it would be a mistake to overemphasize a shortage of other consumer goods during World War II. Historian David Kennedy has argued that "[e]ven with a handful of…[government-imposed war] restrictions, Americans still enjoyed a consumer's paradise." This was the case even though Franklin Roosevelt had given a warning earlier in the conflict that America "could not afford to build a war economy on top of a consumer economy." David Kennedy, *Freedom From Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929 – 1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 645.

broadened the consumer market for these books, enabling families previously unable to afford books to consume them not only as library patrons, but buyers as well.[3] Growth in the consumer market also coincided with the efforts of white American writers, editors, literary critics, and journalists to sponsor and resist the earliest mass-produced children's books promoting international cosmopolitanism, and, sometimes, domestic multiculturalism.

Following World War II, much of this activity would be organized, implemented, and debated by members of the Children's Book Council (CBC), founded in 1943 to organize editors working in the trade, and to direct consumer outreach, including Children's Book Week. Significantly, the overwhelming majority of these editors were women until the 1960s, and were thus widely viewed as deeply invested in children's social habits based on their gender. Because CBC-affiliated editors often considered transnational cosmopolitanism and nation-bound multiculturalism in tandem from the early 1940s, the roots of promoting racial universalism in books designed for American children can be traced from these years. Exploring this history of the first efforts to promote anti-prejudice and racial liberalism on a mass scale in books designed for children and young adults enables a clearer understanding of how and when this activity complemented changes that were being sought civilly and scientifically.

While a cohort of publishing professionals increasingly reflected upon literature's capacity to illuminate social problems and social formations from the 1940s, the trade's leading racial reformers were often contained by accusations of 1930s-styled communism. Indeed, it was far from uncommon for business interests in the media industry especially to become somewhat of a foil for racial liberalism after the war. In deference to their efforts to remain competitive as new firms entered the children's book trade from the beginning of World War II, CBC members

[3] This distinction is important because Americans did not stop reading during the Depression; to the contrary, there was an increase in reading and patronage of libraries, but this trend was distinct from the growth of the publishing business during the war that enabled more Americans to buy books rather than to rent or borrow them.

often rebuffed calls to "define any policy or formulate any program" in relation to "books about racial subjects" from at least 1945. It would not be until the mid-1960s that substantive quantitative and qualitative moves beyond non-African cosmopolitan children's books would take off, and it would not be until the early 1970s that CBC's leadership unequivocally supported more writers of color.[4]

While racial representation, reform, and inclusion in children's books remain reoccurring, if not satisfactorily addressed, concerns in the present day, until recently, there have been few scholarly efforts to examine how the publishing industry addressed this problem historically.[5] And because issues related to race in children's books are often framed as a contemporary problem, the decades-long history of how the publishing profession developed an ability to confidently articulate a need to adequately serve diverse audiences is often overlooked. The transnational history of efforts to promote a fairer multiracial democracy in the U.S., while captured in our most prominent historiography on the Cold War, has yet to fully account for how children, and children's literature, figured into this history. As a result, historians and literary scholars know far too little about how, why, and under what terms the nation's publishing structures sought to engage white Americans at midcentury.[6] Indeed, the promotion of international cosmopolitanism dominated the trade's earliest conceptions of anti-prejudice and social tolerance in children's literature. Because cosmopolitanism was so widely perceived as

[4] Muriel Fuller, Meeting Minutes, Association of Children's Book Editors, January 21, 1946, Box 1, Folder 2; for a speech delivered by CBC president Velma Varner calling for more writers of color to write about the minority experience in children's books, see: Velma Varner, Speech "Publishing for Children and Young Adults in the 1970s, given at the State University of New York at Albany, no date, Box 24, Folder 22, MFP.

[5] Recent scholarship on children's books includes: Kristina Du Rocher, *Raising Racists: The Socialization of White Children in the Jim Crow South* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2011); Sharon Ann Musher, *Democratic Art: The New Deal's Influence on American Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015); and Zoe Burkholder, *Color in the Classroom: How American Schools Taught Race, 1900 – 1954* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[6] For examples of scholarship that emphasize international audiences, albeit with implications for U.S. civil rights struggles, see Mary Dudiziak, *Cold War Civil Right: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton University Press, 1997) and Penny Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004).

related to promoting domestic multiculturalism during and immediately following World War II, the intended social outcomes of these otherwise discrete habits were often discussed and considered in tandem.

The efforts of the women associated with the children's book trade to expand and experiment with cosmopolitanism beyond—but also in conversation with—the scholarly field of child development psychology were unprecedented. And their initial openness to translating this nascent science by producing and selling racial and cultural tolerance via mass-produced books during World War II contributed to a widely held perception of these women as beneficent social leaders in the postwar era. By the industry's account in the 1940s and early 1950s, these commitments were lacking—and perhaps not even desirable—in the adult trade. "We like to believe that a basic reason for healthier conditions in the children's field is…a sense of common cause among those who write, illustrate or publish, and those who review or who bring books to readers in homes or public libraries."[7] Commentators in and outside of the children's trade would thus credit those who spearheaded cultural works that promoted social tolerance and understanding as enabling Americans of all ages to encounter and learn from these books, regardless of their intellectual capacities.

Most frequently, white female authors that published sensational, but also acceptable, popular novels that explored "racial intercourse," such as Alice Tisdale Hobart in the 1930s and 1940s, avoided offending racial sensibilities if their works were set in foreign nations. In an unnamed, undated profile of Hobart's oeuvre preserved in Muriel Fuller's archive, the essay suggests that by the end of World War II, her fictional works set in the international sphere had the capacity of exploring otherwise socially taboo topics such as "intermarriage." Explaining that Hobart's *The Peacock Sheds His Tail* (1945) told the story of an "international [inter]marriage"

[7] "Editorial," *Publishers Weekly*, October 27, 1951, Folder 4, Box 9, MFP.

between a Spanish-American woman and an American man, her profiler claimed that the "central theme and the specific story" of Hobart's new book "merge[d] dramatically." "The broad problem of races learning to live together and the age-old problem of a man and a woman learning to live together fuse into a single great problem."[8] Given that this profile was likely written in the years immediately following the war, the acceptance and celebration of the interracial and intercultural fraternity Hobart depicted is particularly striking. During World War II, Lillian Smith famously sparked a nationwide racial controversy with her best-selling interracial romance novel, *Strange Fruit* (1944), which was set in the Southern U.S. but banned in Detroit and Boston for its alleged obscenity and lewdness.

According to Hobart's reviewer, popular novels like hers, which were published starting in the mid-1920s, could be summarized as delineating the "interplay and adjustment of different and often antagonistic races and cultures."[9] More broadly, the reviewer argued that, as popular and accessible cultural products, these books proved to their sponsors and audiences that cosmopolitanism could be recognized and addressed well beyond universities. "For many years Americans—most of them, at least—felt that the seas were wide and the problem of getting along with other cultures was on the whole academic." By establishing Hobart as a trailblazer, her profiler supported an argument that, by the mid-1940s, her novels had become highly valuable in an era "when our ability to live with our neighbors in a world of peace and justice has become an all-consuming necessity."[10]

Yet the exploration of similar intercultural and interracial themes set within the boundaries of fictionalized U.S. communities would not register anywhere close to this level of enthusiasm at the end of World War II. Indeed, it would not be until 1945 that the authors

[8] Profile of Alice Tisdale, Publication Unknown, Box 31, Folder 1, MFP.
[9] Ibid
[10] Ibid

Lorraine and Jerold Beim would publish what has recently been described as the nation's first "interracial" picture book, *Two Is a Team* (1945).[11] And when leaders of the Writer's War Board and the Child Study Association attempted to lobby members of the CBC in 1945 to recognize the value and urgency of applying "neighborliness" and racial tolerance to the "Negro Problem" in children's books, they were rejected. In sum, the short but powerful consensus achieved across the children's book trade to promote international cosmopolitanism was no longer possible when white activists sought to develop a robust multicultural children's literature that addressed domestic issues. While this history has been by and large forgotten, it was the geographic and racial shifts their demands called closer attention to that exposed the limits of liberal progressivism in the years immediately following World War II. Examining their postwar intransigence illuminates how far white publishing professionals were willing to extend themselves and their business interests in the rehabilitation of future generation's racial habits.

***

It was not until the early 1940s that children's book editors would begin the process of building a collective, trade-specific education and understanding of how books shaped children's social habits. But they were by no means late: their efforts to do so during World War II coincided with some of the earliest psychological research on racial prejudice as internal rather than external phenomena influencing the social behavior of white children. Even in 1944, the scientific consideration of children's literature, racial prejudice, and developmental psychology was so new that the singular scholarly essay on the issue that year required citing scholars who studied either literature or psychology, but rarely both.[12] And the outcomes and implications of

[11] Julia Mickenberg, *Learning From the Left: Children's Literature, the Cold War, and Radical Politics in the United States*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 128 – 129.
[12] Dorothy Shepard Manley, "Improving Racial Attitudes Through Children's Books," *The Elementary English Review*, Vol. 21, No. 7 (November 1944).

similar research into the material underpinnings of racial prejudice, text-based or otherwise, would still be contested during the cognitive revolution of the 1950s. Before this intellectual movement directed the nation's psychologists en masse in uncovering how mental states influenced and corresponded with the physical world, scholars working on the science of racism had indeed burgeoned, but still remained by and large uncoordinated.

This early lack of scientific coordination on what influenced racial prejudice before the 1950s also supported, if not enabled, the lag in civil adjustment for white Americans that were particularly threatened by prospects of racial parity and social integration.[13] When Mamie Clark, one half of the psychologist-duo whose "doll test" was used as evidence in the *Brown* decision, was pursuing her doctoral research at Columbia in the 1940s, the professor who sponsored her research, Henry Garrett, refused to believe that races were equal.[14] But the fact that a leading psychologist at Columbia could refute the scientific evidence supporting the uphill battle for racial equality was by no means a surprise to Clark. Indeed, the primary reason she chose to work with Garrett was because of his pernicious "racial attitudes," in the hopes that she could be challenged by him more than the racially liberal professors who directed her husband's doctoral research in social psychology at the university.[15] Even in the 1950s, Garrett, a former president of the American Psychological Association, would testify on the opposing side of Kenneth and Mamie Clark in Virginia's 1952 school desegregation case. Suggestive of the advancement made in the field of psychology by this era, his willingness to do so made him the only academic social scientist to offer testimony against the school desegregation cases that comprised *Brown*.

---

[13] Jean Piaget, the Swiss developmental psychologist best known for his epistemological research on children, would gain a small audience in the U.S. from the mid-1920s. But even in the 1930s, Harvard University stood alone among American Universities in recognizing Jean Piaget's pioneering leadership in clinical child psychology, and the nation's psychologists would only widely recognize his research in the 1950s during the cognitive revolution.
[14] Wini Warren, *Black Women Scientists in the United States* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 33.
[15] See: Gerald E. Markowitz and David Rosner, *Children, Race, and Power: Kenneth and Mamie Clark's Northside Center* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996).

Indeed, while disenfranchised blacks had waited generations for the educational advances the *Brown* victory promised, the time it took to develop scientific evidence effectively demonstrating how children internalized racism was much shorter by comparison. Before World War I, sustained intellectual and professional work on childhood development and social behavior was by and large absent, diffuse, and lacking in institutional support in the United States. The "child study movement" would not gain significant academic and scientific support in the U.S. until the founding of the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial Fund (LSRM) in 1918, which became a driving force in financing the institutional study of children from the 1920s.[16] John D. Rockefeller, Sr. established LSRM in his late wife's name "to further the welfare of women and children," but the organization would not begin systematically supporting the study of children in earnest until 1922, when Beardsley Ruml was appointed its director.

Ruml, who completed his doctoral research in psychology at the University of Chicago, redirected and organized LSRM's funding program by sponsoring three practical research areas that he argued were in urgent need of development within universities and research institutions. "(1) Social science and technology; (2) child study and parent education; (3) interracial relations. Each program was dominated by a practical motive, to achieve concrete improvement in the conditions of life and to contribute realistically to the public welfare."[17] A number of universities and institutions devoted to child development research and parent education would benefit from LSRM's substantial financial support under Ruml's direction. They, in turn, could support social research with these funds, which included granting "LSRM fellowships" to European graduate students and postdoctoral researchers who came to the U.S. to pursue work. As one prominent

[16] Yeh Hsueh, "The Hawthorne Experiments and the Introduction of Jean Piaget in American Industrial Psychology, 1929 – 1939," *History of Psychology* Vol. 5, No. 2 (2002), 167.
[17] Ibid., 175. Hsueh's quote of Ruml's research agenda for LSRM was excerpted from Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial, *The Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial: Final report* (New York: Rockefeller Foundation, 1933), 9 – 10.

example, with Ruml's assistance, Gunnar Myrdal secured his position with the Carnegie Corporation to produce *An American Dilemma* soon after his tenure as an LSRM fellow.[18] Another result of the professionalization and "validation" of "child study" research was that it significantly increased the number of male practitioners working on related issues. Before the 1920s, the consideration and practice of child development had primarily been under the purview of women reformers and activists, and was by and large not considered an area of "serious" scientific inquiry until its interwar codification as a social science.

The structural and social dynamics that accompanied the development of academic social science were even more complex when the study of racial, ethnic, and religious conflicts and "attitudes" were intentionally added to research on children from the late 1920s onward. While "interracial relations" and "child study and parent education" had been grouped together as two of LSRM's top commitments after Ruml assumed the fund's directorship, the two categories were rarely linked together in analytical terms by researchers before the mid-1930s. The first study of the psychological underpinnings of racism in white children would not be published until journalist and social reformer Bruno Lasker's *Race Prejudice in Children* (1929). And Lasker's work conceptualizing this problem was so "unscientific" that academic researchers who were inspired to build on his inquiry in the following decade did so by creating the organization and scientific analysis lacking in his case studies.[19]

But even these scholars would fail to adequately resolve or confirm how children learned racial prejudice, and their neglect of many avenues of inquiry cannot be contributed to scientific failures alone. As the racial and scholarly disagreements between Mamie Clark and Henry

[18] Patrick D. Reagan, *Designing a New America: The Origins of New Deal Planning, 1890 – 1943* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999), 154.
[19] See: Walter A. Jackson, *Gunnar Myrdal and America's Conscience: Social Engineering and Racial Liberalism, 1938 – 1987* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990).

Garrett over the 1940s and 1950s suggests, merging the academic fields of "interracial relations" and childhood psychology in the Jim Crow era would also be both personally and professionally difficult.[20] Early research on children and social prejudice was also remarkably diffuse. While much of this work from the late 1920s through the Depression was sponsored or supervised at the University of Chicago or Columbia, scholars ranging from psychologists to library scientists to education specialists conducted discrete studies.

Faculty and graduate students acknowledged for their research and publishing on "social epistemology" in these years at Chicago included Douglas Waples, who arguably inaugurated its relevance to literature with his widely celebrated *People and Print* (1937). Edward Thorndike, Daniel Droba, H. Warren Dunham, and Elmer Dumond Hinckley were all students at Chicago that worked on related research. L.L. Thurstone was another doctoral student at Chicago, and he would later join the University's faculty in 1924. By 1932, he would co-author *The Effect of Motion Pictures on the Social Attitudes of High School Children*.[21] The most famous scholars and graduate students working on the child psychology of racial prejudice at Columbia during the 1930s and 1940s often did so along with their spouses. This broad cohort over these years would include: Gardner Murphy and later, his wife, Lois Barclay Murphy; Ruth and Eugene Horowitz (later Hartley), who were both students of Gardner Murphy; and Kenneth and Mamie Clark.

Before the 1930s, psychologists in the U.S. had by and large been ambivalent about participating in social reform. Within the academy, their new work during the Depression thus

[20] Yeh Hsueh, "'HE SEES THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDREN'S CONCEPTS UPON A BACKGROUND OF SOCIOLOGY': Jean Piaget's Honorary Degree at Harvard University in 1936," *History of Psychology* Vol. 7, No.1 (2004), 20 – 44.

[21] See: Ruth C. Peterson and L.L. Thurstone, *Motion Pictures and the Social Attitudes of Children* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1933). Earlier versions of related research was first published as L.L. Thurstone, "Influence of Motion Pictures on Children's Social Attitudes," *Journal of Social Psychology* Vol. II, No. 1 (1931).

responded most directly to the findings of sociologists and anthropologists, who were the primary researchers of ethnicity and race before other disciplines diversified this work. One example from the earlier tradition can be evidenced from the sociologist Robert Park at Chicago. In the 1920s, he asserted that racial prejudice was a both a natural and necessary stage in the assimilation process.[22] But Daniel Katz and Kenneth Braly, two students of the experimental social psychologist Floyd Allport, challenged reigning perceptions of assimilation in 1933 by demonstrating how racial prejudice was a largely internal phenomenon. The two are regularly considered to have revolutionized the study of prejudice that year with their article detailing various national, religious, and racial stereotypes held by one hundred Princeton students.[23] Significantly, the majority of these students had little or no contact with these groups from which to form their perceptions. But Katz and Braly's study of "white" Princeton students was somewhat less unique, and representative of just one of the major problems with research on racial prejudice that enabled scientific impasses. Before Mamie and Kenneth Clark pioneered the systematic study of black children's racial attitudes from the late 1930s, psychological examinations of adults'—and by the mid-1930s, children's—cultural prejudices, were almost exclusively focused on white Americans.

The professional women associated with the children's book trade took these strands of research one step forward by debating how to translate the nascent, "increased awareness" that children needed intercultural knowledge represented among their "activities and interests."[24] During the Second World War especially, they would eagerly demonstrate allegiance with these

[22] Robert E. Park, "The Basis of Race Prejudice," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences*, Vol. CXXXX ("The American Negro"), November 1928.
[23] Daniel Katz and Kenneth Braly, "Racial Stereotypes of One Hundred College Students," *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, Vol. 28, No. 3 (October – December, 1933).
[24] Dorothy Shepard Manley, "Improving Racial Attitudes Through Children's Books," *The Elementary English Review*, Vol. 21, No. 7 (November 1944), 267.

inchoate scientific inquiries by promoting cosmopolitanism in the form of readily accessible children's books. In notes preserved from a CBC meeting in 1946, a brief history of the organization was offered due to the fact that an "ungodly number of new members" had joined over the past year. A small group first started meeting "occasionally and very informally" in 1938 to plan Children's Book Week. Explaining that attendees had found these meetings worthwhile, "when the war came there were other problems common to our work that we could discuss together profitably."[25] In 1943, the group organized formally as the Association of Children's Book Editors, with Alice Dalgliesh elected as the group's first president. It would not be until 1944 that the group would assume responsibility for Children's Book Week, and adopt its current name, the Children's Book Council. During the war, Dalgliesh became a key conduit for the group's forty members, thirty-eight of whom were women, to learn more about how books influenced children's social habits.[26] In her first year, Dalgliesh was described as directing their "attention to our responsibilities as editors to awareness of the influence of children's books in cultivating world understanding and friendship. She brought speakers to us and we had several discussions along this line."[27]

Because Muriel Fuller, Alice Dalgiesh, and dozens of their white colleagues in the book business were central to popularizing these efforts, they followed and contributed to popular, professional, and scientific discourses on the social implications of children's books. Their professional stakes in relation to these books included spatial mapping of books' placements in the American home, the quality of their physical matter, and how these consumer products

[25] Muriel Fuller, Meeting Minutes, Association of Children's Book Editors, January 21, 1946, Box 1, Folder 2, MFP.
[26] *Library Journal* [undated], Box 9, Folder 6, MFP.
[27] Muriel Fuller, Meeting Minutes, Association of Children's Book Editors, January 21, 1946, Box 1, Folder 2, MFP.

differed and were similar to other entertainment mediums.[28] The publishing industry's commitments in each of these areas suggest that editors believed that children's books that influenced children's racial and social habits deserved the same professional care as any other children book.

But when the CBC became a year-round organization by the end of 1944, publishing professionals were directing their efforts to sustaining their fortunes rather than alienating new consumers by radically reforming racial depictions in children's books. Relaying why expanding the power and organization of the children's trade was of the essence in 1945, an editorial in the trade's leading publication, *Publisher's Weekly* gave an overview of the many positive developments evident in the children's trade. "The time to take this step is certainly now, when the demand for children's books is at an all-time high and when it is especially desirable to weld into cooperation all the groups which are creating this great demand."[29] Equally if not more important, the editorial argued that consumer demand would only continue to grow "if we continue to serve up the books the children want in the way they want them and in the places

[28] A "comment" from the trade on "youth collections" in the 1953 report on teenage reading is just one instructive example from the era that affirms the broader trade's spatial and material awareness. "Both librarians and publishers are vitally concerned about child readers growing up to be adult readers. Don't we, then, have to consider young people's libraries or rooms or even shelves as bridges from childhood interests to those of adulthood?" The argument used here is that the production of more junior novels would enable young adults "to feel more at home" with the imagined "adult strangers" they would inevitably encounter as matured readers. The industry's concerns in this area are representative of what was widely seen as the difference between the children and adult trades. This was namely that, even though children's publishing was first and foremost a business geared toward increasing the number and sales of books, the subtrade also had responsibilities as a civic actor and producer. This widely held perception asserted that while adult book consumers by and large already knew what they wanted as consumers, the trade maintained the potential to positively shape and influence children's social behavior. Positive social behaviors such as lifelong reading could easily be fostered by this logic, as long as children were exposed to high quality cultural products. Vernon Ives, the author of the study's findings, was essentially arguing that there should be more junior novels to better connect children to the adult novels they would inevitably encounter later: "A bridge must have two ends. So a youth collection, made up of junior novels as well as adult novels, introductory non-fiction as well as more advanced factual material, gives teenagers a few familiar books to make them feel at home, side by side with adult strangers they are about to meet." "Teen-Age Reading: A report Based on a Survey Made by The Publishers' Liaison Committee," reprinted from the ALA Bulletin, October, 1953, and distributed by the Children's Book Council, Folder 4, Box 9, MFP.

[29] "Children's Book Council Established as a Year-Round Agency to Promote Children's Books," *PW* 147 (March 3, 1945), 1006 – 1007, Box 9, Folder 6, Box 9, MFP.

where they and their parents will most easily find them." While excitement in the field often hinged on increasing profit and demand, as this editorial suggests, it was the steady increase in national awareness of the power of children's books that served as another indicator that demand would not be fleeting. In other words, as Americans realized that books affected a child's social development in ways that differentiated this product from other goods such as toys, publishing professionals exhibited confidence that demand for children's literature would only increase. The staff at *Publishers Weekly* assured, "[w]e do not believe that this desire for more books in the home is going to die off like the passion for miniature golf."[30]

To be sure, popular books written and designed to introduce Americans to cosmopolitanism were by no means limited to children's literature, but neither were they as heavily emphasized or dominant in the adult trades. Unlike the children's trade, interracial narratives set in the Southern U.S., and various forms of racial protest novels pertaining to the nation scene, held more prominence on book lists geared toward adult audiences during the war.[31] Of course, children often gained surreptitious access to books such as these where they were only technically not considered the targeted audience. And with "adult" books, too, many professional critics, editor, and writers were not compelled by what they perceived as the racial and ethnic pleading evident from many of the popular works that were published in the 1940s. Towards the end of the war especially, in addition to sincere criticism, they made fun of them. In

[30] Ibid.

[31] Writing in the *Sewanee Review* in 1945, in an article titled "Uncle Sam's Other Province: Propaganda Novels About the South," writer and literary critic Brainard Cheney argued that Americans were inundated with these products in the form of shoddily produced historical novels. According to Cheney, also a fiction writer, several novels had been recently published in the U.S. that had come from "a cult which, having by now given up the Communist party line, has veered, when it has come South, towards a new line in the race problem." The "cult" Cheney identified referred to writers who he termed "anti-traditional, anti-historical propagandists," that "overhauled" history "to meet the specifications of some immediate political pressure." His complaint was that the "obvious aim" of these novels marketed to mainstream Americans was "to increase the force of their socio-political doctrine and to make it popular." He argued that, rather than ameliorating the country's racial problems, this would have the unintended consequence of disarming the critical thinking faculties of America's "'socially conscious' public." Brainard Cheney, "Uncle Sam's Other Province: Propaganda Novels about the South," *The Sewanee Review*, Vol. 53, No. 1, (Winter, 1945).

August 1944, Harry Hansen, the nation's foremost literary reviewer in the 1940s, wrote to Muriel Fuller summing up the reading on his docket. "I have read 3 books about the noble Negro that would wreck any movie house in Detroit; five books on anti-Nazi and anti-Semitic themes; and enough tales of youthful adolescents to teach me what goes on."[32] Reporting that he had also just finished reading Margaret Halsey's *Some of Best Friends Are Soldiers: A Kind of Noel* (1944), "based on the Negro situation in a canteen," Hanson joked that he now understood what kinds of popular novel manuscripts Fuller was accustomed to vetting.[33]

Two decades later, in a 1964 essay published in the *Christian Herald* titled, "Some of My Best Friends Are Books," Fuller observed that books "remain the only entertainment one can pick up and put down at will, without having to turn a dial, flick a switch, press a button, or watch the clock."[34] In her accounting, there was "always room in a brief case or suitcase for a book, and one is never lonely or bored when a book is at hand." Fuller's essay's title is of course a play on the line, "some of my best friends are black," which is still in use today. But African Americans were not the first racial or social group to populate or popularize this line. The first popular book—not national drama[35]—to incorporate the phrase was Robert Gessner's *Some of My Best Friends are Jews*, a history of anti-Semitism published in 1936.

And while this aphorism may seem abstracted—if not completely disconnected—from material histories and experiences of racial identity in the early 21st century, in the case of books

[32] Harry Hansen to Muriel Fuller, August 2, 1944, Box 15, Folder 6, MFP.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Muriel Fuller, "Some of My Best Friends Are Books," *The Christian Herald*, November, 1964, Box 9, Folder 1, MFP.
[35] The political use of the phrase can be traced back as early as 1908, when Democrat John Worth Kern, the party's nominee for vice president stated, "Some of my best friends are Republicans, and although we have had our political fights, we have never fallen out and quarreled." More famously, John Roach Straton used the phrase in a defense against ethnic discrimination. Straton was a nationally prominent Baptist minister who was accused of anti-Catholic bigotry in the personal attacks he used in his 1928 presidential campaign against Al Smith, a Catholic Democrat. He explained to the Associated Press "Understand I am not a foe of the Catholics. Some of my dearest friends are Catholic." See: Hillyer H. Straton and Ferenc M. Szasz, "The Reverend John Roach Straton and the Presidential Campaign of 1928," *New York History*, Vol. 49, No. 2 (April 1968); and Allen J. Lichtman, *Prejudice and the Old Politics: The Presidential Election of 1928* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979).

grappling with racial issues circa World War II, the two were inextricably connected. For instance, Jewish, African American, and Roman Catholic intolerance were put into conversation during the war with Halsey's *Some of My Best Friends Are Soldiers*. Halsey was inspired to write this quasi-fictive narrative after witnessing racist attitudes against black and Jewish servicemen at the Stage Door Canteen, a recreational center in New York. Even Eleanor Roosevelt's reflections on her own interracial fraternizing years later would emphasize their grounding in the imaginary with an essay published in 1953, titled: "Some of My Best Friends are Negro." Explaining that it was "neither unusual nor new" for her to count black Americans as among her "closest and oldest friends," she still admitted that her willingness to welcome blacks might seem "a bit odd" given that her first interracial encounters were with foreigners. Confessing to how racially segregated her world of immense privilege had been, she explained, "[f]rom my earliest childhood I had literary contacts with Negroes, but no personal contacts with them."[36]

Beginning during World War II, books, radio and other media opened up new venues and social perspectives for non-elite whites to comprehend racial identity, contact and relations, just as these forms of leisure were increasingly "domesticated" in private homes.[37] To be sure, while

[36] In her essay, Roosevelt claimed, "it was not until I was more than fifteen and in Europe that I actually saw a Negro." Eleanor Roosevelt, "Some of My Best Friends Are Negro," in Era Bell Thompson and Herbert Nipson, eds., *White on Black: The Views of Twenty-two White Americans on the Negro* (Chicago: Johnson Publishing Company, Inc., 1963), 3. While Roosevelt is documented as speaking out against anti-Semitism and race hatred from the mid-1930s, recent scholarship illustrate how personally and socially progressive these efforts were given the racist and prejudiced remarks she had privately articulated during World War I. See: Richard Breitman and Allen Lichtman, *FDR and the Jews* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013).

[37] As a number of scholarly works have explained, Americans' relationships to their social environments changed dramatically in the mid-1940s, in no small part due to the Second World War. One prominent way of thinking about these shifts has been the analysis of Americans' relationships toward their homes, and the ideal, the suburban home. Historian Chad Heap's analysis of this inward turn is useful for thinking about how Americans may have "encountered" race and sex both before and after this shift. His study of the earlier decades of the 20th century reflects how racial, gender, and sexual formations were challenged, solidified, and reconfigured by the commodities that took over the social function of "outward" leisure pursuits following World War II. Heap argues: "...to shore up their position atop American racial and sexual hierarchies and to distance themselves from the dangers associated with postwar U.S. cities, middle- and upper-class whites redirected their leisure pursuits inward—toward their own

physical interracial contact was further restricted by new residential patterns following the Second World War, racial and ethnic segregation and integration patterns in these years were not entirely new. From the 1920s onwards, as previously ostracized Southern and Eastern European whites increasingly "achieved" identities as "white Americans," many of these individuals and families elected to segregated themselves from blacks in racially exclusive neighborhoods.[38] By the mid-1930s, increasing social, economic, and political urban unrest only further contributed to governmental policies and social practices that both intentionally and unintentionally limited "white" contact with what many perceived as an inferior race.[39]

Richard Wright poignantly emphasized this private-home-driven racial separation and segregation in his essay "The Ethics of Living Jim Crow." Published in 1937, Wright reflected on his participation in interracial battles between black and white "gangs" who lived on opposite sides of the railroad tracks, dwelling on the fact that the white boys had trees and shrubs in their lawns to protect them, while his own lawn was barren. "Even today when I think of white folks, the hard, sharp outlines of white houses surrounded by trees, lawns and hedges are present somewhere in the background of my mind. Through the years they grew into an overreaching symbol of fear." As historian Jennifer Ritterhouse has pointed out in *Growing Up Jim Crow: How Black and White Southern Children Learned Race*, Wright's psychological anxieties from

---

increasingly suburban, racially homogenous, heterosexually oriented communities and homes." Chad Heap, *Slumming: Sexual and Racial Encounters in American Nightlife, 1885 – 1940* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009). See also: Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988).

[38] The latest scholarship addressing to most prominently address this racial and ethnic separation is from Albert Camarillo's presidential address delivered to the convention of the Organization of American Historians in 2013. The revised version of this talk has been published as "Navigating Segregated Life in America's Racial Borderhoods, 1910s – 1950s," *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 100, No. 3 (December 2013).

[39] On governmental policy favoring white home ownership, see: Ira Katznelson, *When Affirmative Action Was White: An Untold Story of Racial Inequality in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2005). On the increasing importance of homeownership as an equity strategy and how this influenced working class whites' political beliefs, see: Becky Nicolaides, *My Blue Heaven: Life and Politics in the Working-Class Suburbs of Los Angeles, 1920 – 1950* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Kevin Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

race-driven childhood fights were "the very opposite of the safety whites generally associate with suburbia."[40]

Historian Pete Daniel has pointed out how violent the World War II years were among Southern children whose families were uprooted by the war economy.[41] Because social problems were increasingly evident, feared and discussed across the U.S. after the war, and also in many European nations, the Western world became obsessive about finding solutions to the problem of "juvenile delinquency" from the mid to late 1940s.[42] Even within social and familial spheres of the nation's "progressive" media producers, the civic and social trajectory of the future generation remained uncertain in the years after the war. Corresponding with Federal Writers' Project veteran and popular fantasy writer Manley Wellman in 1951, Fuller queried the North Carolina resident on his knowledge of the increasing ubiquity of the Confederate flag in the South, as reported in national media. Wellman's report back blamed Southern youth, including his own child. "Here in Chapel Hill is a great focus on it, among the younger people," and his twelve year-old son Wade had been "steeped with it at school." Wellman then described himself as always having been a "lover" of the South and its traditions; but compared to his son, he considered himself "practically a black abolitionist."[43]

In 1943, Albert Crone, the director of Children's Book Week in the years before the CBC assumed control, announced that its theme for that year would be "Build the Future with Books." Qualifying that while the publishing trade had a lot to be proud of since its establishment of Children's Book Week in 1919, he warned that 1943 could not be "a year to rest on our laurels."

---

[40] Jennifer Ritterhouse, *Growing Up Jim Crow: How Black and White Southern Children Learned Race* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 171.
[41] Pete Daniel, "Going Among Strangers: Southern Reactions to World War II, *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 77, No. 3 (Dec., 1990), 909 - 910.
[42] For statistics on reported increased in delinquency, see: George A. De Vos and Hiroshi Wagatsuma, "Minority Status and Delinquency in Japan," in George A. De Vos, ed., *Socialization for Achievement: Essays on the Cultural Psychology of the Japanese*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 338 – 341.
[43] Letter, Manley Wallman to Olive Fuller, November 14, 1951, Folder 2, Box 22, MFP.

With fathers off to war or at home much less, and many mothers distracted by "important war jobs," Crone described the nation's children as having "more time to themselves with less guidance." These changes in familial and social conditions supported his conclusion that affiliates of the trade, such as librarians and teachers, had new responsibilities while the nation was pre-occupied by war duties. "Books and the reading habit can be a stabilizing influence while the normal conditions of childhood are disrupted, and of enduring value in the years to come." Representative of the trade's social logic throughout the war, Crone argued that social tolerance could be promoted via books that looked either internally or externally, to prevent "the barriers of racial and national prejudices from being raised in the minds of our young people." As many publishing professionals would during the war, he considered international cosmopolitanism and domestic multiculturalism in interrelated terms in a manner that suggests how valuable the trade found reflecting on their social benefits in tandem. "Books about America will develop strong convictions to carry on our democratic tradition. Books about other lands will enable them to regard our allies as individuals and to understand them."

While reflections on the ramifications of international and domestic-focused books that promoted social tolerance in combination suggests some type of parity between the two in these years, in practice, these commitments were imbalanced. During and after the war, editors associated with the children's trade were more apt to merge their business interests with groups such as the Council on Books in Wartime by sponsoring internationally themed books that taught cosmopolitanism. Even though Americans were aware of increasing racial and social conflicts within the U.S., avoiding another world war that future generations would be responsible for fighting remained a higher cultural priority for most white Americans. And even though challenging domestic racial prejudice was often implied via the themes of cosmopolitan

children's books, in the years following the war it would only become less common for editors to make these connections explicit. Indeed, propaganda from the Council on Books in Wartime suggests how unwittingly efforts to foster domestic multiculturalism could be forgotten when trade professionals sought to promote the children's literature of other nations.

The materials produced by the Council on Books in Wartime during the war were designed to introduce cosmopolitanism as an exciting but non-revolutionary activity that could be incorporated into any American child's life. In an introduction to one 1943 radio script preserved in the Council's archive at Princeton, Nan Taylor, the radio director for the group, assured that the story, an imagined conversation between an eight or nine-year-old child and an adult "would not be difficult to cast." The dialogue for the script was intended to introduce American children to canonical children's books widely familiar in foreign nations such as Russia and China. At the end of the fifteen-minute radio program, the child was scripted to ask the adult whether or not they had discussed all of the books the adult had on hand, which had been retrieved from the Council. The adult was scripted to follow this pitch by describing the organization as thinking "that children can understand the war and indirectly help us make a good peace after the war if they read about our allies and about the history of America…." But in this particular effort to link domestic and foreign literature, promoting international social tolerance remained so clearly the priority that script's author casually linked what the Council viewed as a key Russian text to a book that had been criticized as entertaining but racially offensive since 1932. Offering the significance of one Russian story, the adult character explained that the tale was "very old, and all Russian children like it…Every one of them knows it…The way you know LITTLE BLACK SAMBO….just about every American child knows that story."

In 1944, when the Children's Book Council was re-organized as a year-round organization, and the primary agency responsible for promoting children's books, there was widespread optimism that these women were invested in shaping children's social habits. But even they were surprised by how seriously they would be taken in relation to this charge, and across various endeavors. "Here at home [in the U.S.] the correspondence to the Children's Book Council has increased tremendously. The letters ask for material, ideas, suggestions. They are taking us seriously as an information center. It is staggering!"[44] Racial and ethnic organizations were at least hopeful enough that groups as diverse as the Bureau of Intercultural Education, the Jewish Education Committee, and the National Association of Negro Business and Professional Women all signed on as co-sponsors of the Council. A report on the 1944 Book Week noted, "unusually widespread participation and cooperation through the nation by bookstores, schools, libraries, and community organizations."[45] This included activities such as indirect mailings to 22,000 American women's clubs soliciting sponsorships of book programs, widespread radio and newspaper support, 3,400,000 book marks printed, and 50,000 "free manuals" distributed.[46] Beyond the U.S., *Publishers Weekly* report that the CBC's most important innovation was their development of the "simultaneous international celebration of Book Week around the world." This announcement lauded the fact that "England, Russia, Australia, South Africa, Brazil, Nicaragua, Panama, and Mexico," were all represented among participating countries.[47]

By 1945, twenty American organizations had signed on to co-sponsor the Children's Book Council. In New York City, beginning in 1947, the *New York Times*, the American

[44] Muriel Fuller, Meeting Minutes, Association of Children's Book Editors, December 10, 1945, Folder 2, Box 1, MFP.
[45] "Children's Book Council Established as a Year-Round Agency to Promote Children's Books," *PW* 147 (March 3, 1945), 1006 – 1007, Folder 6, Box 9, MFP.
[46] Muriel Fuller, Meeting Minutes, Association of Children's Book Editors, December 10, 1945, Folder 2, Box 1, MFP.
[47] "Children's Book Council Established as a Year-Round Agency to Promote Children's Books," *PW* 147 (March 3, 1945), 1006 – 1007, Folder 6, Box 9, MFP.

Museum of Natural History, and the Children's Book Council began sponsoring an annual "Boys and Girls Book Fair" that was held at the museum. The growth of interest in children's books continued to be phenomenal in these years. The first year of the New York fair, 25,000 people attended over a four-day period; the second year, 22,000 showed up on opening day, and an additional 28,000 on the second day of the four-day fair.[48] This data on the 1948 fair was published by the *Times* as the paper devoted daily coverage of the event and its broader significance.

In the report the *Times* offered on day one of the New York fair in 1948, the paper's front-page article opened with the following quote from an eight year-old boy in attendance. "When I'm angry and I think I'm going to hurt someone…I read a book and it quiets my nerves."[49] In a meeting reflecting on the fair's civic purpose also held on the first day of the event, the *Times* reported that "museum officials, publishers and juvenile editors" had all gathered to assess "the fair's function at a conference in Whitney Hall" at the museum. According to this report, they would all agree "that children's books play a vital role in maintaining the principles of democracy."[50] One meeting attendee, Sybil Jacobson, the executive director of the Children's Book Council, was noted as citing a recent finding that 11,000,000 children in the U.S. had no access to children's books other than standard textbooks. This would have been just over 27% of the children under 18 counted in the 1940 census; in 1950, the number of children counted in the census would rise to 47.3 million, only to increase dramatically to 64.2 million children counted in the 1960 U.S. census. Jacobson would follow the statistics she offered on the dearth of children's books by suggesting that the public could be

[48] "22,000 At Opening of Child Book Fair," *New York Times*, November 20, 1948; "Children Approve Second Book Fair," *NYT*, November 21, 1948, Box 24, Folder 8, MFP.
[49] "Children Approve Second Book Fair," *New York Times*, November 21, 1948, Folder 8, Box 24, MFP.
[50] "22,000 At Opening of Child Book Fair," *NYT*, November 20, 1948, Box 24, Folder 8, MFP.

awakened to the power of literature by "the medium of the Fair, an expanding library program, and the use of traveling bookmobiles."

Yet it would not be until the 1950s that the Children's Book Council would explicitly co-sponsor a book fair designed to promote a racially integrated learning environment. The event was held and hosted by Hampton University, a historically black university in Virginia. Summarizing a report on the book fair co-sponsored by the CBC and the library staff at Hampton, an editor at *Publishers Weekly* characterized it as "an illuminating account of inter-group cooperation in which the college extended its services to the whole community."[51] Minnie Redmond Bowles, a librarian at Hampton, and an alumna of the University of Chicago's library science graduate program represented the fair as an experiment in integration. However she argued that the fair was more important for providing urgently needed literary resources to the area's urban and rural communities. According to Bowles, "the transition to a fair planned for the general public was a natural one since the Library has served the public of the area—white and Negro—through the years without restrictions of any kind." But the area schools Bowles reached out to had "responded with varying degrees of enthusiasm." More positively, the CBC had agreed "to co-sponsor the fair by supplying an exhibit of 1,000 books for children." Also supportive of Bowles's endeavor were 17 out of 24 publishers "of adult books" she had contacted who sent books after her requests.

More central to Bowles's report on the book fair was the fact that many families in the region in and surrounding Hampton, Virginia had little access to books, which she described as a problem rural communities continued to have throughout the country in the mid-1950s. "Homes are still far apart in some areas; and, to some extent at least, despite the means of rapid

[51] Minnie Redmond Bowles, "A College-Community Book Fair And a Resulting Proposal," *Publishers' Weekly*, July 30, 1956, 466 - 469, Folder 6, Box, 9, MFP.

communication and transportation, the farm family is often removed from the rest of the world." Positing that the publishing industry had done the nation a disservice by predominantly conceptualizing book fairs as an "urban activity," Bowles argued that all families needed the intellectual, cultural and social support fairs could provide. She offered Hampton's telephone directory as proof of the insufficiency in regional literary resources: there were "only two book dealers," and "both specializ[ed] in religious books."

The fair Hampton University hosted thus enabled something quite different from extant literary resources. Attendees viewed exhibits on learned black figures such as the scholar J. Saunders Redding, and they also had opportunities to meet popular black authors like Ann Petry, who gave a talk at the event. But rather than emphasizing the racial exposure Hampton's book fair enabled, Bowles asserted that the project was most exciting because "it did succeed in directing the attention of the community to books and reading…" She then asserted, "[i]t is the conviction of this librarian that such exhibits would find a wide audience of ready, even anxious, buyers." Concluding that such endeavors should not be just about money, Bowles continued, "[t]his would certainly be a cultural project of great value; perhaps it would be good business."

***

In 1956, when Bowles suggested that valuable cultural projects like Hampton's book fair did not yet square neatly with what major publishers considered "good business" practices, her timing was less than opportune. While the market for children's books had increased dramatically from World War II onward, a number of factors also contributed to a marked rise in competition in the children's trade and throughout the publishing industry. Indeed, before it would become even more competitive in the 1940s, with even tighter profit margins, children's book editor Virginia Kirkus explained in 1936 that revenue in publishing had become "too

close," and "the chance for loss too ever-present."[52] In her description of the shrewdness she had witnessed in publishing during the Depression, Kirkus argued that the nation's economic conditions had moved the trade beyond its prior designation as the "drawing-room of the business world." She started her eponymous book review service in 1933 after the management at Harper & Brothers informed her that they would be suspending the firm's "Department of Books for Boys and Girls" that she directed due to its declining profits. While appreciative that an aura of the trade's former spirit—its artistry, and idealism—still existed, Kirkus argued that publishing houses in her day had "all faced the fact that publishing must be a business, first and foremost, if it is to survive the mad orgy of competition in this field."

To be sure, Kirkus, as one of the first women to enter the publishing trade in the 1920s, was a leading female executive in the field, and also a leader in promoting the centrality of women to the business of publishing. But by pressing their roles as consumers as well as entrepreneurs from the mid-1930s, Kirkus made an argument that women working in the trade would widely adopt by the end of World War II: that they, even more than men, knew publishing was a business, first and foremost. Indeed, Kirkus's emphases in her 1936 essay suggested that professionalized women could further publishing's shift away from the "drawing-room," and assist the industry with moving toward even greater profitability. In her accounting, women were the predominant purchasers of books during the Depression—and the survey data she marshaled

[52] In her essay, "The Women Back of Books," published in the edited collection, *Discovering My Job* (1936), Kirkus opened her piece by emphasizing the dominant place of female consumers in the publishing business. As the title of both the essay and book suggests, she used this fact to buttress her argument that professional women were more than justified in claiming professional positions in the industry. A sensitive argument to make during the Depression, rather than positing women's roles in the business as a given, Kirkus offered statistics on female consumers as part of a broader effort to lay out what jobs women had been successful at attaining. The imperative here was to prompt women to reflect on where they might fit into "what might be defined as the commercial side of books." Virginia Kirkus, "The Women Back of Books," in Ann Stoddard, ed., *Discovering My Job* (New York: T. Nelson and sons, 1936), Folder 13, Box 10, MFP.

to demonstrate this indicated that they were so by an overwhelming majority.[53] For professional women striving for professional—not secretarial, but perhaps at first—positions in the field, these facts more than justified the increasingly visible role of professional women in the industry. Offering these details in a book of collected essays on women's careers published in the middle of the Depression, Kirkus explained that women's subordinate position in the field was unlikely to change any time soon given the employment conditions in the country. But, "[a]fter all, doesn't that make it more of a challenge to us, doesn't it make it more interesting to see where girls and women do fit in, what they are doing now in the world of books, and what opportunities lie within their grasp?"[54] By 1936, the one place where women had already demonstrated their pre-eminence, dissimilar from other areas of the publishing trade, was "in the realm of books for boys and girls."

For the professionals producing children's books in the 1940s and 1950s, their hesitancy to take on racism in the domestic sphere following World War II was often framed as a business decision, dictated by a trade in which technological changes continuously shrank profit margins. As the CBC's first president, even as Alice Dalgliesh introduced editors to how children's books shaped social habits, she also emphasized the continued necessity of editor's staying vigilant about the profit imperative in the children's trade. A speech to her colleagues at a CBC meeting in early 1946 is representative of her framing of this issue. "Publishing houses being what they are, business organizations to produce books of all kinds and get them into the hands of the public, a house does not usually set up a sharply defined publishing policy, but may produce

[53] Explaining that she had used a "conservative" estimate based on a nation-wide survey, she rhetorically questioned her imagined reader if they were aware that women purchased 75% of all the books sold in the U.S, and "nine-tenths of the books rented." Kirkus did make the concession that many of these books purchased were for men to read, and that this qualification would also apply to "rental libraries." But for her, "the astounding fact remains that the vast majority of the reading public is made up of women." Ibid.
[54] Virginia Kirkus, "The Women Back of Books," in Ann Stoddard, ed., *Discovering My Job* (New York: T. Nelson and sons, 1936), Box 10, Folder 13, MFP.

books giving both sides of a question…"[55] Rather than positioning children's books as having the capacity to form habits independent of other cultural resources, or the ability to orient the American public toward distinct social outcomes, Dalgliesh argued that the CBC was "not a policy-forming organization." While acknowledging that publishing houses contributed to public opinion, she maintained that publishing was, "of course, often idealistic as well as commercial." In sum, her approach as the CBC's leader warned that profit inevitably trumped any social concerns professional women in the industry may have found themselves committed to. "Legally, we are perfectly free to discuss other matters of interest to all, but after the discussion each editor acts as an individual, and according to the wishes of her publishing house."[56]

This language, used to oppose requests from the Child Study Association (CSA) and the Writers' War Board the previous month calling for organizational and foundational support to combat racial prejudice in children's books. Among the frustrations that Dalgliesh and CBC members were responding to were what many of these women felt were the "trivial" nature of the rejections of books featuring African American and other racial protagonists from the CSA's "Intercultural Group." The report from the CSA was authored by Helen Trager, an academic psychologist that had conducted racial attitude tests similar to Mamie and Kenneth Clark, and who would also be represented among the small group of psychologists who offered testimony against segregation in *Brown*.[57] In the description of the Intercultural Group's activities at the CBC meeting in December 1945, they were reported as reviewing "353 titles and [accepting] only 61 books." And it was the—largely inhibitive—outcome of this effort that appears to have frustrated the CBC's leadership and membership tremendously. "It is very complicated; books

[55] Minutes, Children's Book Council, January 21,1946, Folder 2, Box 1, MFP.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Patricia Sullivan, *Lift Every Voice: The NAACP and the Making of the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: New Press, 2009), 37.

were censored for the most trivial things. It boils down to the fact that no opinions can be expressed. To be valid, a book must have opinions."[58]

By the end of 1945, Dalgliesh would also lead the CBC and its membership away from their war-era "propaganda" efforts to promote cosmopolitanism via children's books, although the market for cosmopolitan books would remain strong due to the pending Cold War. Before the trade recognized that it would continue sponsoring cosmopolitan children's books, Dalgliesh sought to redirect CBC editors to what she described as both the "fun" and fundamental sides of the business after the war. "[B]ooks and children. All-inclusive, yet, bring it back to the fun of reading, and understanding for pleasure and entertainment."

Yet postwar attempts to re-center children's literature also addressed an increasing bind publishers had found themselves in at the end of the conflict: too large a supply books promoting cosmopolitanism. Even though these works would not elicit the same level of public scrutiny, anxiety, or criticism that books promoting domestic multiculturalism would, Dalgliesh explained in 1945 that her own list of internationally-themed works did not meet her expectations as an editor. "Miss Dalgliesh said that only one of her United Nations' Series (a book by Dola De Jong), 'The Level Lad') was really good…She said the same thing about her Latin-American series." Dalgliesh continued her criticism by arguing that the consumer market had become oversaturated with these products. "The market for such books had been ruined (overcrowded) by such 'stimulation'—too many books, produced too fast."[59] While she still recognized the social significance of the books lists she was responsible for, the sharp change in market conditions suggested to Dalgliesh and her colleagues that they would be foolish to sponsor and produce them at the rates they had during the war.

[58] Minutes, Children's Book Council, December 10, 1945, Folder 2, Box 1, MFP.
[59] Ibid.

Dalgliesh's framing of this problem in children's publishing is reminiscent of how "social propaganda" novels focused on the American scene—especially novels set in the South—in the adult trade were described by industry professionals and literary critics in this era.[60] "She said her thesis is simple and obvious: in dealing with books about racial subjects, handled by people with creative ability, that they shouldn't be hurried."[61] "Balance," and the lack thereof, was a key descriptor industry professionals across trades used for measuring and critiquing literature that promoted racial and social "understanding" and tolerance. Dalgliesh and other members of the CBC would come to view their work in the children's trade after the war as creating or protecting a literary venue where white consumers might still find a so-called "balance" in America's rapidly changing media sphere. Citing what the editor of *Publisher's Weekly* in 1945 had described as "a period of restless experiment in publishing," Dalgliesh argued that CBC editors thus held a "real responsibility for keeping a balance in children's reading." "It is our responsibility to remember that publishing is merely an open door to public opinion, and that opinion, both with children and adults, is formed by all types of experiences plus all types of books." She then asserted that children's books had "the same rights as adult ones, and within the limits of good taste, the author must be free to create characters and present truth as he sees it."[62]

The solidification and expansion of the organizational structure of the CBC, as well as its sustained attention to promoting international ethnic and racial tolerance, from at least the 1930s, highlights an overlooked development in the history of American media. Indeed, the CBC, its membership, and the writers their publishing houses represented provides a more dynamic lens on the history of progressive mainstream publishing than is usually provided in literary or

[60] See, for example, Brainard Cheney, "Uncle Sam's Other Province: Propaganda Novels about the South," *The Sewanee Review*, Vol. 53, No. 1, (Winter, 1945).
[61] Muriel Fuller, Meeting Minutes, Association of Children's Book Editors, December 10, 1945, Folder 2, Box 1, MFP.
[62] Minutes, Children's Book Council, January 21,1946, Folder 2, Box 1, MFP.

historical scholarship.[63] Rather than a linear movement of "progressive" writers from the WPA to the corporate firms producing American popular culture in the war era, white women like Dalgliesh and Muriel Fuller that worked in children's publishing suggest a more complex phenomenon.[64] Neither of these women was racist, but nor did they consider themselves political or cultural activists. In 1943, Fuller informed one adult concerned about racial representation in children's books that while she was aware of rampant prejudice in both the nation's literature and real communities, she remained uncertain of how these interrelated issues might be resolved. "Lady, I see eye to eye with you on the situation in our country today. I am not politically or economically minded, but I keep hoping there is some way out of the mess. I'm afraid it is going to be a great deal worse before it is better."[65]

The Child Study Association and the Writers' War Board, the primary domestic propaganda organization during the war, were the first groups to seriously challenge children book editors' refusal to promote domestic racial tolerance toward the end of the conflict. The editors affiliated with the CBC, and publishing industry professionals more broadly, regularly accused the latter group especially of harboring communist influences. And contemporary criticism of the Board easily extended to the belief that the organization and its leader, popular writer Rex Stout, were preoccupied with winning popular acceptance for stigmatized interracial

[63] Hutner has made a similar argument in relation to the political novels of the late 1930s. He observes, "[t]he tendency of literary historians is too often to imagine politics in a strictly bifurcated way, pitting radical protest against conservative oppression, yet our national politics, as these novels suggest, may be just as accurately portrayed as performing the liberal project of developing compromise, achieving consensus, resisting alienation, and participating meaningfully, a vision perhaps too thoroughly middle class even to be articulated." Gordon Hutner, *What America Read: Taste, Class, and the Novel, 1920 – 1960* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 187.

[64] For an example of how this narrative is often treated, Michael Kazin observes Popular Front artists' incursion into the mainstream, arguing that "urban entrepreneurs and mangers" were "eager to sell what bright young engaged minds were producing." Rather than refuting that they entered and produced for the American mainstream, my point here is that they were not necessarily the core producers of the "vigorously democratic and multiracial movement in the arts and daily life" that reached the American mainstream from 1939 onwards. See: Michael Kazin's *American Dreamers: How the Left Changed a Nation* (New York: Random House, 2012).

[65] Muriel Fuller to Isabel Paterson, September 16, 1943, Box 17, Folder 1, MFP.

social and sexual encounters. Indeed, the casual links publishing professionals and white Americans more generally made between literary activism and illicit sex suggests how radical the racial reform of the nation's children's books seemed to many in the mid-1940s.

One unnamed children's book editor's reflections on attending a meeting sponsored by the group in January 1945 on "someone else's ticket" illuminates how an average recalcitrant editor might likely respond to the Writers' War Board's proposals. This particular forum the Board sponsored was designed to promote detecting racial prejudice in children's books. According to the unnamed editor's account of the meeting, Stout, the event's chairman, wanted to "call the evening 'How to Avoid Civil War in America,' but thought that a little frightening."[66] In an attempt to reframe issues that had previously been posed as problems stemming from a lack of cosmopolitanism, she reported that Stout's new claim was that "this White Anglo-Saxon myth is dynamite, [and] that racial tensions here are the most dangerous in the world, etc." The unnamed editor reporting on the forum did so in a personal letter to Harry Hansen, which Hansen then forwarded to Muriel Fuller. Suggesting the letter writer's comfort with Hansen's own skepticism of cultural activism on racial issues, she confidently relayed that she had "no intention whatsoever of representing [her firm's] juvenile authors" at the meeting, after deciding to attend out of curiosity.[67]

And while she had run into "a juvenile editor or two" she had known before the forum, the unnamed editor maintained that for the most part, she was unfamiliar with other attendees, suggesting further how unpopular these efforts were in the children's trade at the end of the war.

---

[66] Letter forwarded to Muriel Fuller from Harry Hansen, writer's name withheld, January 22, 1945, Box 15, Folder 6, MFP.

[67] "[Rex] Stout made a point of saying that the people invited were publishers, editors and writers, but I didn't recognize too many. They looked like the Same Thing. The Same Thing we had during the Thirties, I mean. In new form…" Letter forwarded to Muriel Fuller from Harry Hansen, writer's name withheld, January 22, 1945, Box 15, Folder 6, MFP.

Panel members at the conference, with the assistance of the meeting's general attendees, were reported to have played a strip tease game called, "Education, please." Overall, the game's questions related to "Intolerance," and were described as having only slight variations. "All had to do with racial tensions and religious intolerance. A typical one: Name five phrases in our common speech which unintentionally express prejudice. The answers: 'Nigger Heaven,' 'Jew somebody down,' 'Nigger Rich,' 'Injun giver,' 'Very white of you,'…" As many critics would claim over the 1940s and 1950s, the board's efforts to promote anti-prejudice literary activity in and related to the domestic sphere were described as reminiscent of the socially progressive cultural products of the 1930s. "[Rex] Stout made a point of saying that the people invited were publishers, editors and writers, but I didn't recognize too many. They looked like the Same Thing. The Same Thing we had during the Thirties, I mean. In new form…"[68]

While contemporary resistance and pessimism to rehabilitating children's books suggests that social and racial conservatism animated editors' recalcitrance, their sentiments and inactivity cannot be divorced from their views of postwar business and professional competition. Profits continued booming in the children's trade following the war, and the editors responsible for keeping returns high were aware that sponsoring new books that were racially progressive would be both difficult and financially risky. In the wide-ranging speech Muriel Fuller gave to the Women's Press Club in 1947, she explained that even though paper rationing had been lifted in 1946, "there still isn't any more paper than there was while rationing was going on, so it doesn't mean much."[69] This inhibited sponsoring books by new authors, because editors and firms still had contractual obligations "to authors already on [their] list" that were there first. Another challenge for sponsoring new books was that "[p]roduction costs ha[d] skyrocketed out of

[68] Ibid.
[69] Muriel Fuller, Speech to Women's Press Club, 1947, Box 10, Folder 13, MFP.

proportion, which means publishers are hard put to publish books today at prices the public will pay, and make any money."[70] By the early 1950s, the entire publishing business was experiencing even stiffer competition than it had in previous years as new firms continued joining the field, and rising production costs increasingly dictated what types of children's books were published, and how.

Yet accounting for these conditions did not mean that Fuller and other publishing industry commentators were not at least aware and somewhat supportive of cultural and political changes that enabled new, progressive social content in children's books by the mid-1940s. Perhaps most relevant is the fact that they came to support and appreciate some social developments more than others. For instance Fuller and her colleagues were well aware that books designed for older children and young adults were increasingly progressive with regard to how the romantic lives of heterosexual girls and young women were depicted. By 1947, these books could even feature two characters kissing, whereas similar intimate contact between teenage and college-aged protagonists would have raised "a storm" ten or fifteen years prior.[71] By the 1960s, however, she could still gossip with a friend and colleague about how foolish it was to publish a young adult book by Betty Cavanna featuring an interracial romance. Fuller was unforgiving in her sentiments, and argued that Cavanaa "writes trash – why Marjorie [Cavanaa's editor] is so sold on her, I don't know." Fuller then explained that "Marjorie feels she is doubly committed to Cavanaa, because they had to turn down her last one. 'I didn't feel our readers were quite ready for a story of a white girl who married a Negro boy.' Imagine!"[72]

Two decades earlier, Fuller would explain to the Women's Press Club that while she was not principally opposed to books that featured "Americanization themes," following the war,

[70] Ibid.
[71] Ibid.
[72] Muriel Fuller to El, August 12, 1965, Folder 10, Box 14, MFP.

neither would she be pressured to sponsor one. As an example, she used an award-winning children's book she had edited after the war that told the story of a Polish family. The book, Dorothea Dana's *Sugar Bush* (1947), featured an immigrant family that purchased a farm situated amongst multigenerational Vermont residents. The community's spirit and willingness to integrate the new Polish family in their community is demonstrated in the narrative by their willingness to teach their new neighbors how to produce maple syrup. Fuller explained to her audience that it had been the book's "swell story" that had captured her interests more than anything else, and that the book's civic and social messages, which were reminiscent of Depression and war-era "propaganda," were mere "bonuses."[73]

> And this brings me to propaganda. There's a lot of pressure being brought to bear these days on editors about books with a message. One would think there never had been any published before! As a result, too many poor ones are being brought out. I am firmly of the opinion that you have to have a story first and foremost in a children's book—just as you must in an adult novel—before you put your message in. Or rather, that the message or whatever should be an integral part of the story and not dragged in by the heels, any more than the book should be written primarily for the message. And this goes for any child, and any kind of message.[74]

***

A key concern of professional editors with similar views to Fuller's on "propaganda" was their ability to control and keep the nation's newfound interest in children's books high as demand for both new and older forms of consumer entertainment rebounded following the war. But rather than absolving themselves fully of a commitment to intercultural understanding, children's book editors continued to publish books that imparted knowledge and histories of

[73] Fuller's description of Dana's success in creating this book without being Polish herself further highlights how the role of the creator was imagined—and managed—for mainstream cultural products in this era. From this vantage point, Dana didn't need to be Polish; she just needed to get the general facts right in order to create a captivating story. "My secretary is Polish, and Miss Dana checked her Polish customs, words, etc., with her." Muriel Fuller, Speech to Women's Press Club, 1947, Box 10, Folder 13, MFP.
[74] Ibid.

different races, ethnicities, and nations—if they could do so in a "really painless way."[75] From the mid-1940s onward, this often meant hewing to prewar strategies of sponsoring books that did not radically threaten white consumers' domestic racial sensibilities.

While Fuller, Alice Dalgliesh, and other editors affiliated with the CBC would regularly claim otherwise, the children's trade was in fact quite dissimilar from adult publishing trades, and its membership would remain comparatively well organized in addressing social issues. To be sure, these racially ambivalent business women were by no means representative of America's Popular Front or "fellow travelers," as racial progressives were often accused of being in the years following World War II. But with or without their support, both the public and the publishing trade would continue perceiving their professional work as driven by promoting social progress that could positively affect future generations. In an editorial outlining how the children's trade suffered from many of the same problems that were affecting various sectors of publishing in 1951, the editorial staff at *Publisher's Weekly* explained that close collaborations and shared social imperatives had saved the children's trade. "We like to believe that a basic reason for healthier conditions in the children's field is…a sense of common cause among those who write, illustrate or publish, and those who review or who bring books to readers in homes or public libraries."[76]

Women in the industry demonstrated their "sense of common cause" in a number of ways, including their ongoing promotion of internationally themed cosmopolitan children's books during the Cold War, which continued through at least the 1950s and into the 1960s.[77] As

[75] Ibid. This was Fuller's description of a children's book devoted to teaching children "chief landmarks" of Mexican history, as experienced by a "young boy of modern Mexico" traveling back in time.
[76] "Editorial," *Publishers' Weekly*, October 27, 1951, Folder 4, Box 9, MFP.
[77] Even publishing professionals who did not publicly or explicitly address domestic racial tolerance in children's literature maintained an important—if not ambiguous—commitment to social tolerance and integration in theory, if not in practice. A *Publishers' Weekly* profile of Velma Varner written by Fuller, the juvenile books editor at World Publishing Company, suggests how industry professionals continued to perceive their commitments to social

they continued supporting these books, despite their increasing opposition to social propaganda of all types at the end of World War II, a few writers, editors, and publishing houses all managed to adopt new geographical frames for promoting social tolerance. In short, a small but growing number of children's books would tackle interracial, nation-bound, "neighborliness" projects from 1945 onward. These works, although quantitatively insignificant in comparison with the trade's cosmopolitan children's books, still deserve credit for initiating the longer project of more directly addressing America's domestic racial and ethnic challenges.

Indeed, for their work on these issues, often balanced in combination with the business acumen they demonstrated in an extremely competitive business, these women left a somewhat voluminous record of celebrating each other's successes from the 1930s onward. Among agents, editors, and writers working in the children's books trade at midcentury, Muriel Fuller was prolific across a number of publishing spheres, including her leadership in profiling dozens of colleagues across a number of publications. Between 1935 and 1955, she would publish thirty-nine "sketches" of children's books editors in *Publishers' Weekly*. But like many children's books editors in these years, Fuller's professional concerns were by no means contained within the children's sphere, and over her career she would either represent or profile a number of editors and authors that produced for the adult trades.

An examination of the editor and authorial profiles Fuller wrote before 1960 illuminates how intertwined and overlapping otherwise seemingly discreet spheres of publishing were in the

---

progressivism through the 1950s. Published in 1959, Fuller quoted Varner as describing all of the publishing staff at World as "increasingly fascinated with the idea that the interrelation of cultures and their dependence on each other…" By publishing books on international cultural "encounters," Varner saw the house as performing a vital service. "American youngsters today need to know not only what is happening now but what *has* happened, and until they do we cannot really expect to solve the problems that face us." An observation offered twenty years after the onset World War II, virtually nothing had changed in the industry leader's framing of "the problems." And a thorough reading of Varner's profile indicates that the company's socialization commitments, in this case directed at American youth, were more geographically specific—if not promiscuous—than she and the article's emphases on "the world" suggests. Muriel Fuller, "Velma Varner of World Publishing Company," *Publishers' Weekly*, July 27, 1959, Folder 5, Box 9, MFP.

middle decades of the 20th century. Not only did a number of white publishing professionals and writers regularly produce books for both children and adults, it was also far from uncommon for writers to work and write for different media outlets, including radio and popular magazines. Further, the fact that some editors and agents, including Fuller, were also published writers, suggests how fluid professional and authorial commitments often were in these years, and also why it is important to consider longer trajectories of popular writers, writing and publishing. Among the trends that emerge via a longer temporal lens on literary activity is how common it was for white writers and editors to maintain at least an ambiguous commitment to domestic multiculturalism before related concerns grew in force across the business from the mid-1960s. A broader look at the industry in the years after the Second World War also illustrates less positively how some trade leaders who had previously sponsored domestic multiculturalism abandoned these efforts as the nation embraced "raceless" universalism during the 1950s.

In a profile of children's book editor Ruth Knight published in the *Wilson Library Bulletin* in 1955, in somewhat typical fashion, Fuller described a businesswoman who was at the top of her game who also happened to be socially conscious. Like many editors working in the children's trade during this era, like Fuller, Knight was also a successful children's book author herself. The first children's book Knight authored was *It Might Be You* (1949), a collection of "eight stories dealing with intolerance through the ages."[78] The author's preface noted, "Whether you are black, white or yellow, Christian or pagan, Jew or Gentile, Catholic, or Protestant, conservative or radical, there was a time when you would have been made to suffer for that identification." A 1949 *Kirkus Review* that excerpted this quote from the book's preface then described Knight's work as "built around shocking moments in the lives of young people of several different centuries and countries."

[78] Muriel Fuller, "Ruth Adams Knight," *Wilson Library Bulletin*, March 1955, Folder 7, Box 9, MFP.

Knight was also the author of *Top of the Mountain* (1953), a book Fuller would describe somewhat contradictorily, as Knight's first book devoted to promoting "international understanding among young people." More tellingly, perhaps, is how common "raceless" descriptions of children's books became during the 1950s in reviews that would have been more likely to invoke racial relevance in the decade prior. In a 1959 *Publishers' Weekly* profile of Velma Varner, the juvenile books editor at World Publishing, Fuller offers a similarly vague description of the editor's commitment to "intolerance" and social "understanding." Fuller quoted Varner as explaining that World's publishing staff was "increasingly fascinated with the idea of the interrelation of cultures and their dependence on each other…" And somewhat similar to Knight's earlier portraits of "intolerance throughout the ages," supporting this increasing awareness would not require a children's literature based in the present. "American youngsters today need to know not only what is happening now but what *has* happened, and until they do we cannot really expect to solve the problems that face us."[79]

While women remained the dominant professionals responsible for directing children's departments until the 1960s, equivocation on monitoring children's books for inaccurate racial depictions or supporting multicultural narratives was by no means limited to women. While leading the Children's Book Committee housed in the Council of Books in Wartime during World War II, Vernon Ives prepared some of the Council's most popular book lists, including a work on the United Nations that sold more than 50,000 copies. By the time Ives assumed this position, he had worked in the publishing industry for almost a decade, and the trajectory of his career suggests how and why his literary conceptions of racial liberalism would narrow over the 1940s and 1950s. Beginning his career during the Depression, Ives founded Holiday House in

[79] Muriel Fuller, "Velma Varner of World Publishing Company," *Publishers' Weekly*, July 27, 1959, Folder 5, Box 9, MFP.

1935, which Fuller described in a 1947 profile of the publisher as the first American publishing firm devoted solely to children's books. The firm, which would struggle commercially during the 1930s, would only become highly successful in the 1940s, when it began publishing works that were described in the postwar era as teaching American children about "the world's trouble spots."[80]

The firm's earlier books, while widely praised and recognized for their artistry and social content, were also regularly deemed throughout the trade as too precious for bookstores or lending libraries. In Ives's own words, Holiday's first book list was "exotic," and even included a "realistic story of a West African native boy," *Boomba Lives in Africa* (1935). Written and illustrated by a married couple who described themselves as military pacifists, *Boomba Lives in Africa* was steeped in its creators' efforts to "understand" the ethnic heritage of African Americans. One of the book's co-writers and illustrators was Cyrus Leroy Baldridge, a white alumnus of the University of Chicago, who was also a regular, lauded contributor to *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life* in the years. Many years earlier, Harry Hansen, reviewing a book of Baldridge's illustrations, would describe his personal commitments from his college years onward as rivaling if not exceeding his professional acumen. "Men who knew [Baldridge at Chicago] will talk to you about him by the hour—but not necessarily about his drawing. They will tell you about his honesty, his candor, his sense of democracy, his unfailing good humor and his faith in his fellow men."[81]

By the late 1940s, Ives would move Holiday House away from racially and socially progressive sensibilities like those widely praised in *Boomba Lives in Africa* and his own children book, *Russia* (1943), in an effort to capitalize on the mass market for children's books.

[80] Muriel Fuller, "Vernon Ives of Holiday House," *Publishers' Weekly*, April 26, 1947, Folder 4, Box 9, MFP.
[81] Harry Hansen, "Roy Baldridge of Chicago," *The University of Chicago Magazine*, Vol. 12 (1919), 14.

"It took us quite a few years to live down the idea that we were a private press, publishing collectors' items! Today our books are less exotic in appearance and far more popular in content and appearance…"[82] In a profile of Ives published soon after Fuller's, Ruth Tooze would affirm Ives's own viewpoint that Holiday House's books published before the end of the war had been remarkable, but not marketable. Tooze noted that while the firm's earlier works could "delight" any child's heart, and "[o]f course, such publications landed in the selection of the Fifty Books of the Year…saleability was something else again."[83]

Yet between two profiles and the publisher's own reflections, none of these individuals would concede that there had been any fundamental change to the firm's programming. Instead, Ives asserted that the recalibration of the books Holiday House produced, while "less exotic in appearance," and "more popular in subject matter," still opened the "gates to the many kinds of beauty that may open some of the ways to peace, freedom and joy."[84] Holiday House's postwar *Lands and People* series, which Tooze described as books about another "country or part of the world that is a 'hot spot' in today's troubled world" were amongst the efforts Ives described as doing similar work to the firm's previous international lists. And it would be this later series that was described as enabling American children to gain an historical background and "concrete understanding for social studies and today's news."

But as a leader in the trade, Ives's move away from considering how a wider spectrum of children's books explicitly informed the trade's literary conceptions of multiracial democracy held implications well beyond his own firm. During the 1950s the publishing trade would develop a comprehensive literature on foreign nations designed for children and teenagers,

[82] Muriel Fuller, "Vernon Ives of Holiday House," *Publishers' Weekly*, April 26, 1947, Folder 4, Box 9, MFP.
[83] It appears that Muriel Fuller saved this profile of Ives published two years later because of how much of its text was copied from her own profile of Ives. Ruth Tooze, "Vernon Ives," No publication information, November 1949, Folder 4, Box 9, MFP.
[84] Ibid.

whereas books promoting domestic multiculturalism gained much less attention and sponsorship. And over the 1950s, Ives would continue supporting global cosmopolitanism, including enlisting his family in the international home exchange program sponsored by the Experiment in International Living.[85] Less apparent, however, at least from an outsider's perspective, was the decoupling of Ives's prior publishing endeavors, such as *Boomba Lives in Africa* that directly challenged racial depictions, and his Cold War-era commitments to "hot spot" cosmopolitanism. By the early 1950s, he would encourage publishers to develop a number of books designed for children and young adults to learn about foreign nations and governments, but these works generally held little explicit relevance to multiculturalism within the United States. These concerns were little more than a footnote in comparison to his suggestions for how children's literature on foreign nations should be written and categorized. Reporting on a comprehensive study of teenage reading led by the CBC in 1953, Ives explained, "[w]hen dealing with [domestic] racial problems, the informal approach is preferred, but there is a smaller need for serious treatment, too. In either case, the simpler the better."[86]

Although their numbers remained small until the 1960s, there were still a number of white editors and publishers who sponsored children's books directly addressing racial and

[85] This program allowed American children and adults from 16 – 35 to live in foreign homes with families during summer vacation, and vice versa. This structure of the exchange was described by American participants in a *Today's Living* article subtitled, "They *Really* Get To Know People Abroad." The following week the Ives family was profiled for welcoming foreign children into their home, furthering the organization's work that allowed "young foreign visitors to come and stay with interested American families." Author information unavailable, "Like a Summer Guest From Overseas?," *Today's Living*, February 15, 1959, Folder 4, Box 9, MFP.

[86] Ives reported this as the preference of booksellers and educators in what he called the first comprehensive study of the "reading interests and needs" of teenagers ever conducted. In this piece published in the *A.L.A. Bulletin* in October 1953, he described a study of teenage reading sponsored by a number of organizations, but spearheaded by the Children's Book Council. For Ives and his colleagues, the data collected indicated that useful subdivisions would be "comparative governments; secondly, international relations." His narrative of the "social sciences" field concluded by suggesting a casual strategy for addressing American racial inequality that would not require similar delineation. Tellingly, even as Ives and his colleagues steadily advocated different approaches to international and "domestic" social relations, professionally, they inevitably addressed them together in reports, meetings, speeches and essays. More often than not, it would be their domestic-oriented ruminations and recommendations that would receive short shrift in this era, with urges that the approach to American racial injustice and "understanding" be handled more informally.

interracial issues in the domestic sphere. And the trade did not ignore these works. Even though it was likely that these books commanded smaller audiences, publishing professionals with relatively ambivalent commitments to racially-themed works still praised and reported on them. Fuller's 1947 *Publishers' Weekly* profile of Ursula Nordstrom, the famed juvenile editor of Harper & Brothers, lauded Nordstrom's pioneering leadership in incorporating black protagonists and authors into her children's book list. In the years following the war, efforts like Nordstrom's to promote authors and books with dynamic depictions of race put her at the cutting edge of the field.

Yet for Nordstrom, Fuller, and other white Americans doing this work in the postwar era, there were few incentives to discuss their books promoting domestic racial tolerance in exceptional terms when addressing the trade.

> Like many children's book editors, Miss Nordstrom is not only deeply aware of the vital issues confronting the world today, but of the necessity of doing something constructive about them. "I insist that I do not force my ideas on any author," she says thoughtfully, "but by a happy coincidence our authors feel as I do, that tolerance is important."[87]

Nordstrom's list included her sponsorship of books by Jesse Jackson, the African American author responsible the children's book *Anchor Man* (1947) and *Call Me Charley* (1945), a book "for somewhat older children." Fuller described *Call Me Charley* as a novel about "a young Negro boy who finds he is the only member of his race in his community." She described Jackson's second book, *Anchor Man*, as taking this interracial theme one step further, by being "the first book to represent not only problems which concern Negroes and whites, but the more subtle ones of Negroes themselves."[88]

Around the time Jackson's first book was published, Harcourt Brace published Lorraine and Jerrold Beim's authored what has recently been described as the nation's first interracial

[87] Muriel Fuller, "Ursula Nordstrom of Harper," *PW*, October 25, 1947, Folder 5, Box 9, MFP.
[88] Ibid. Both books were illustrated by Doris Spiegel.

picture aimed at children younger children, *Two Is a Team* (1945).[89] In this book, the authors focus on two young boys, one black and one white, who are essentially the same, although they encounter and overcome difficulties within their friendship: "TED and Paul were the same age, the same size, and they liked the same things." Lorraine Beim would follow this work up with a similarly themed book in 1951 titled *Carol's Side of the Street*. The Harcourt Brace circular for this children's book describes Carol's "excitement at moving into a new house [as] almost spoiled by a neighborhood girl's prejudice against Jews. How Carol meets the situation makes an appealing story with unusual values."[90]

Beginning in 1943, the Child Study Association (CSA) offered an annual award to a children's book that "faced[d], with honesty and courage, real problems our children are meeting today" in its efforts to incentivize writers and the publishers to tackle these issues. The CSA's first award was given to John Tunis for his book, *Keystone Kids*, a young adult novel that addressed anti-Semitism in professional baseball. Tunis's accomplishment with the narrative after he was awarded the CSA award would be described in the *Wilson Library Bulletin* as "courageously handling…questions of racial and religious prejudice."[91]

As this award for Tunis's young adult novel suggests, the lines between topics and intended audiences were often blurred when books award winners are examined over time. In 1935, Edith Anisfield Wolf established a book award for works that contributed to a broader understanding of racism and diversity. Each year, two books, one fiction and one nonfiction, were given a "$1,000 Anisfield-Wolfe Award"—each award is close to $10,000 in the present day—for "the best book on racial relations in the contemporary world." In a 1956 profile of Worth Tuttle Hedden, Fuller described the author as having won the prize in 1953 with her

[89] Mickenberg, *Learning From the Left*, 128 – 129.
[90] Harcourt Brace Advertisement, Fall 1951, Folder 15, Box 24, MFP.
[91] Ibid.

novel, *The Other Room*. Fuller reported that consumers were still buying Hedden's book three years after its release, and that well over one million copies of the novel had been sold. But Hedden's work was by no means limited to books, and over her career, Fuller described the author's published writing as having a range similar to her own. Hedden's "articles and essays appeared in the *Atlantic*, *Harper's*, and other magazines—on [topics as diverse as:] the Negro, women, marriage, and careers." But even with the range of interests she pursued across literary spheres, by the mid-1950s, while she once identified as a feminist, she no longer considered her writing activity political. "Novels are the easiest writing a nonfeminist can do," she commented. "Like knitting, they can be put down and picked up without dropping a stitch."

Silences and ambiguities such as these, even for those white writers and editors who were in fact committed to racial and social change, were especially prominent before the mass cultural upheavals across the publishing industry beginning in the mid-1960s. Much more common in children's books and young adult novels published in the 1950s, however, were subtle social tensions set within the nation, but that did not include race. In their own private reflections, their unwillingness to explicitly address racial, religious, or other cultural tensions was not meant to imply a lack of interest in affecting children's social habits. Indeed, they believed their literary strategies were more effective. Marguerite Dickson's *Bennett High* (1953) is just one example of this mode. Designed for ten to fourteen year-olds, Dickson's novel focuses on a white teenager whose father headed the factory in her local town, but somehow manages to learn how to "overcome prejudice against people from different backgrounds." By an unexpected twist of fate, she ends up attending high school on the "wrong side of the tracks" where most of the factory employees send their children, only to fall in love with one of boy whose parents work there and are also European immigrants.

In 1952, just before the book was printed, Fuller assured Dickson of her approval. "I think you have a very good book to add to your growing shelf of teen-age novels. Not only is it readably written (Faint praise!) but it is the strongest kind of plea for tolerance. I sometimes wondered if it was too strong, and made its point too eloquently."[92] And from Dickson's view, her promotion of tolerance was more practical than similar works that she was familiar with that more explicitly challenged prejudice, such as Lavinia Davis's teenage love story, *A Sea Between* (1945). When a young girl who was a fan of Dickson's work asked the author why Davis had introduced anti-Semitism at the end of *A Sea Between*, months before she would finish *Bennett High*, Dickson confessed to Fuller, "I hardly knew what to say."[93] In this letter, Dickson reported that she had even read Davis's novel in an honest effort to better engage her fan, but she confessed that she still did not know how to answer the child. "There is the right attitude toward the wrongness of discrimination, but the final conclusion in the matter is pretty weak—'Well, you can't change human nature,' which seems definitely to condone."[94]

Summing up the vast cultural changes in the country two decades later from the vantage point of the early 1970s, publishing "veteran" Velma Varner observed that conceptualizations of "taste" had finally shifted in the U.S. to accommodate more racial and social diversity. "After the Sixties, is there anyone here who can be sure exactly what constitutes excellence or that he or she is specifically equipped with those qualifications that unerringly discern quality?" Varner raised these questions in a speech ruminating on a publishing industry that she argued had finally moved away from its roots in the nineteenth century "literary tradition of England."[95] Describing the spirit of the publishing trade before its professional practices were upended over the 1960s,

[92] Muriel Fuller to Marguerite Dickson, December 7, 1952, Folder 2, Box 14, MFP.
[93] Marguerite Dickson to Muriel Fuller, March 25, 1952, Folder 1, Box 14, MFP.
[94] Ibid.
[95] Velma Varner, Speech "Publishing for Children and Young Adults in the 1970s, given at the State University of New York at Albany, no date, Folder 22, Box 24, MFP.

she observed, "the white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant ethic prevailed and it was taken for granted by most people not only that it always would, but also that it was the only right one."

Varner's used these examples to clarify what the prior era's narrower conceptions of who American consumers were, and how they were generally served by the children's trade, had been fostered in print: "There was a 'right child' and he was recognizable to everyone." Her account described other protagonists that were depicted in most children's books as the "right" kind of people, and these persons almost always lived in the country or a small town—e.g. the "new" and old American farmers Dorothea Dana portrayed in *Sugar Bush*. "There were practically no stories about city children and certainly none about the inner city. We didn't know that phrase. Blacks rarely appeared at all except in stories set in the South, and then they were 'darkies.'" And these were just a few of the characteristics Varner limned from the children's literature that had dominated the trade in the decades prior to her remarks, which also included her ready acknowledgement of how poorly girls had been served by the nation's literature.[96] Varner's broader argument was that no one had seriously questioned the "virtues and values" of these structures, and thus they had been rarely subject to any real challenges from trade professionals.

This led Varner to conclude that organizations like the Council on Interracial Books for Children (CIBC), a nonprofit organization established in 1965, was "right," "in its own way." By the early 1970s, Varner concurred with CIBC affiliates that in order for the black experience to be represented, and represented with pride, blacks needed to assume authorship, "for I do agree with them that a white person cannot possibly write meaningfully of the black experience." As the CIBC had in its facilitation and promotion of high-quality children's literature, Varner also

[96] Working through the list of skeptics of the industry, Varner noted that a state commission on the status of girls in children's books was right to point out that female characters needed to have social statuses beyond the home. "[T]he time has come when women portrayed only as mothers in aprons or as eccentric spinsters cannot be tolerated in children's books."

acknowledged that books for other minorities, including Mexican-Americans, Puerto-Ricans, and American Indians were also a social need. But with increasing attention on America's minorities, Varner still wondered, "what kind of values are we going to impart"? She also questioned, "[w]hat reality is there to an educational system that cannot of will reform itself to meet the real needs of the millions of children imprisoned in that sprawl? Not just the children in the ghettos; all the children, and all young people." For Varner, it was clear that in a "a fragmented, contradictory, turbulently changing society they will not be the same in every book."

Finally, Varner reached the end of her talk by asking, "what has all this to do with children's books, and what has all this to do with the essential editorial ability, taste? A great deal, I think." Her advice was that writers and editors should promote practices that were modeling what "the kids" were saying in the era: "'[t]he author will have to tell it like it is, for whatever it is he is writing about."[97]

Given how thorough the codification of segregation was throughout the United States by the late 1930s in both public and private spaces, it is somewhat unsurprising that the World War II-era growth in popular demand for children's books inspired new debates over their contents. From the early 1910s when American books were much less popular and diverse, even if their impact was ambiguous, fictional narratives were viewed by educated white Americans as prospective tools for building and asserting a shared humanity across racial lines. The scientific investigation of children that began in earnest following World War I in the U.S. not only led to questions of how they were influenced by popular culture, but also how their social attitudes—both domestically and internationally—might be positively influenced.

No longer frivolous accessories by the Second World War, in addition to the windfall of revenue they provided for several publishing houses, mass-produced children's books were

[97] Ibid.

increasingly marketed as a means for unifying various cultures that otherwise had little contact. But it was precisely the financial gains at stake that would deter children's books editors from putting their professional energies behind ensuring that the lists they were responsible for were beholden to domestic racial problems. And it would only be the re-emergence of racial segregation and conflict as a central problem in American life from the mid-1950s that would once again challenge editors and writers to consider the lives of the nation's youth in African American and interracial terms.

If World War II was responsible for the heightened attention to both international cosmopolitanism and domestic multiculturalism, an examination of the children's book industry in the years following indicates how fleeting interest in the latter was in the years following. Not only were international racial and cultural frameworks easier due to their geographic abstractions, these protagonists were far less likely to directly challenge the anxieties, beliefs, and practices racial integration conjured for many if not most white Americans.

The extent of white Americans' fears of interracial fraternity were no less animate in other spheres of popular culture, and perhaps even more so in the case of Hollywood films, the primary concern of the following chapter. Even as Hollywood showed new commercial interest in black-authored narratives in the years following the war, anxieties that foregrounding the signification of racial authorship emptied and limited the racial and social content of these stories. As would be the outcome in other popular cultural genres, Hollywood's equivocation on racial inclusion would only further problematize for African Americans what it meant to invest in universal humanism built on racial and social elisions.

CHAPTER THREE
Whites Lives, *Knock on Any Door*, and *Foxes of Harrow*, Redux

> "Well, if Hollywood isn't going to have [the *Knock On Any Door*] premiere here I've cooked up a good idea if I can sell it to Mr. Chicago Theater Publicity. I'm going to suggest that we have a premiere with all the trimmings and one that will mildly kid Hollywood—a sort of rowdy, robust Chicago thing. Invite some of the Chicago artists and writers, theatre people (stage), and a few of the big wigs but also invite about a hundred, toughs, bums, young hoodlums and 260 girls from West Madison and North Clark."
>
> —Willard Motley, 1949[1]

> "These are films using Negroes in their casts. Some were written by Negroes. In the past, Negro authors who got their books bought by Hollywood were men like Frank Yerby and Willard Motley, who wrote of white people. Most books that sold of interracial note were written by white authors. In the past, authors like Richard Wright would have found it impossible to find an American producer to film 'Black Boy' or 'Native Son.' But films of interracial conflict are thought just the thing today. Quite a change since Sidney Poitier and Tony Curtis made 'The Defiant Ones [1958].'"
>
> —Bill Lane, "The Inside Story: Black Power," 1968[2]

Bill Lane clearly oversimplified and narrowed the author Willard Motley's decades-old conceptions of "white people," especially when compared with what the novelist had in mind for the Hollywood film adaptation of his best-selling novel, *Knock on Any Door* in 1949. More than likely, in fact, the premiere Motley was—not-jokingly—proposing to his white literary agent in New York would have included African Americans among the "toughs, bums, young hoodlums," and hundreds of women from the center of Chicago. But because memories and records of non-canonical twentieth century popular culture often lose strength not long after their consumer demand dissipates, it is rare to recover comprehensive data on these performances, material objects, and the discourses surrounding their production. And for non-historians, even when lay and professional commentators like Lane, a columnist for the African American newspaper, the *Los Angeles Sentinel* had the best intentions of accurately and objectively

[1] Willard Motley to Ted Purdy, March 2, 1948, Box 10, Folder 12, WMP.
[2] Bill Lane, "The Inside Story: Black Power," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, Apr 18, 1968, B11.

reporting on the history of black culture, their access to the past was much too limited, and one might easily claim too myopic, by the late 1960s.

Popular novels and films like Frank Yerby's *Foxes of Harrow* (1946) and Willard Motley's *Knock on Any Door* (1947) that circulated and were viewed by hundreds of thousands have of course left an abundance of detritus for future generations to investigate and ponder. But as Lane's observations above highlight, by the 1960s, it was rare for commentators of any race to adequately identify what previously led novels and film adaptations like *Knock* to be considered too rowdy and controversial for Hollywood. Nor would it be easy for these commentators to access or convey how "interracial," "multiracial," trans-temporal, and transnational the African American cultural imagination was in practice throughout the 1940s and 1950s.

Although scholars have recently initiated the work of examining how and where popular black novelists like Motley and Yerby were situated within the mid-twentieth century African American literary cannon, "white life" frames continue to dominate discussions of their output.[3] And while it would be an oversimplification to suggest that new scholarship has inadvertently reified such facile understandings of American literature as either populated—or written by—blacks or whites, discrete racial categorizations like those expressed by Lane remain common. As a result, especially in relation to popular black-authored culture in the 1940s, historical considerations of black writers and cultural professionals have yet to adequately assess how these individuals promoted racial desegregation; in some cases, even when this was not intended. This chapter revisits the novels, writers, actors, and critics that promoted—and not infrequently, rebuffed—racial and "social indictments" in the production of Hollywood films and broadcasts

[3] For an important new work that situates and examines African American "white life" novels and novelists in the post-World War II era, see John C. Charles, *Abandoning the Black Hero: Sympathy and Privacy in the Postwar African American White-Life Novel* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2012). Other significant work includes but are not limited to Stephanie Li, *Playing in the White: Black Writers, White Subjects* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015); Arnold Rampersad, *Ralph Ellison: A Biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007), 218.

from the 1910s through the early 1970s. It does so in an effort to rethink how racial integration, and the history of interracial life, functioned in relation to the production, adaptation, and reception of so-called "white life" novels, and what black Americans considered the stakes of these initiatives to be.

To be sure, there are a number of ways this admittedly broad inquiry into the American and African American history of Hollywood inclusion and desegregation might be framed. Related persons and topics range from the actors who performed in stories adapted from black writers, the studio personnel responsible for adapting novels to film scripts, and the authors and fictional characters that populated magazine pages. Choral backgrounds and musical accompaniments to Hollywood films, the bookstores that distributed black-authored texts, and the teachers responsible for sharing these works, represent only a few indices that might deepen a targeted focus on cultural desegregation. And yet, in the case of midcentury popular culture, with only a few recent exceptions, scholars are much more likely to remember these cinematic and literary histories as "white" or "black," rather than questioning how interracial, universal, or racially inclusive they may have been.[4]

For instance, even though Richard Wright's *Native Son* (1940) is one of the most cited and discussed examples of twentieth century black writing, rarely is it pointed out that the novel was once widely praised by its supporters as "universal." And because contemporary critiques dismissing Wright's novel as merely pat protest won out as common descriptors for *Native Son*,

[4] As historian Albert Camarillo has recently observed in his 2013 presidential address delivered to the Organization of American History, which was later edited and published in the *Journal of American History*, historians now have a "reasonably good" understanding of labor, social, religious, and political histories of America's immigrant and black populations. In contrast, he points out that historians know far less about how Americans "adapted their lives in segregated settings by moving across color lines." Camarillo argues that popular culture was a successful venue through which young African Americans, Asian Americans and Latino youth transformed American "borderhoods" into "multiracial settings, sometimes without their parents' knowledge and sometimes despite it."Albert Camarillo, "Navigating Segregated Life in America's Racial Borderhoods, 1910s – 1950s," *Journal of American History*, vol. 100, No. 3 (Dec. 2013).

we know all too little about the "white," Jewish, and wealthy underpinnings that have also influenced the narrative's murder mystery. Indeed, there are remarkable parallels between Wright's fictional South Side drama that starred Bigger Thomas, and the actual crimes committed in the same neighborhood by Nathan Leopold and Richard Loeb that had captivated the nation years earlier. In 1924, Leopold and Loeb, two wealthy University of Chicago Jewish students kidnapped and murdered a fourteen year old boy who was Loeb's second cousin, and also the son of a wealthy watch manufacturer. Because both young men were widely perceived by the press and casual commentators as extremely intelligent and precocious, after their actions were discovered, the murder they orchestrated was widely described as "the crime of the century."

More than a decade later, in an article and interview conducted with Wright, that was written by Edwin Seaver, the novelist offered that the material for *Native Son* had mostly come from "living nine years in Chicago."[5] Spotlighting where his idea for Bigger Thomas came from in an answer that he would deliver for years, Wright explained, "[b]ut particularly from working in a south side boys' club, where I came up against the type of boy I have pictured in my book." Yet there were several boys and girls featured in *Native Son*, including the book's young, wealthy white protagonists who lived in Kenwood, the affluent neighborhood bordering Hyde Park. Notably, this is also the neighborhood that Leopold and Loeb lived in, in addition to their victim. And while excerpts from Seaver's interview published in his article on Wright's novel did little more than briefly suggest connections between the two stories, it is worth considering how Seaver's article limited this relationship to the courtroom scene in *Native Son*.

> "Incidentally," [Wright] added, "I was about half way through the novel when a big case broke in Chicago that almost duplicated the story I was writing. I modeled the newspaper releases in the book on the actual new stories of this case." It is interesting to note, in

[5] Edwin Seaver, "Richard Wright," No Date, Box 46, Folder 573, Richard Wright Papers.

> passing, that the lawyer's plea for the accused, which is one of the high points in *Native Son*, was modeled on Clarence Darrow's famous defense in the Leopold-Loeb case.[6]

If making and remembering these connections was and remains as racially prescribed as Seaver's observations illustrate, it is of little surprise that Bigger Thomas was "born" African American, even though Wright would later claim that he was "not black all the time; he was white, too."[7] Along these lines, might *Native Son* have represented a different kind of threat to the racial and social order if Bigger Thomas's murder of the daughter of a real estate magnate—whose fictional assets dominated Chicago's black ghetto—was instead portrayed as "the perfect crime"?

***

Virtually from the day *Foxes of Harrow* and *Knock On Any Door* appeared in bookstores together, the two novels were celebrated as the most prominent exemplars of what the editor of *Phylon* magazine would describe in 1949 as "a significant trend in race relations."[8] In an attempt to convince Motley to contribute an essay to the literary journal, the novelist's writing was described by sociologist Mozell Hill as representing "the dropping of racial chauvinism among young Negro writers and becoming sensitized to problems of people per se." This move, which the novel *Foxes* had inaugurated even more prominently in 1946, reflected "the launching or reaching out of the young Negro novelist into broader and fresher and indeed more significant fields for fiction writing."[9] And while the processes and outcomes of the novel to film conversions of both films failed to live up to these expectations, the adaptations of both works would nevertheless anoint both men as Hollywood trailblazers among black writers. As such,

---

[6] Ibid.
[7] There were several versions of this essay. After *Native Son*'s release on March 1, 1940, within two weeks Wright had given two lectures in New York that were titled, "How 'Bigger' Was Born," which he would give several more times. A condensed version would be published in the *Saturday Review*, in *Negro Digest*, by Harper's as a pamphlet, and by Grosset & Dunlap when the novel was an inexpensive reprint of the novel was published in 1942. For an overview of this history, see Kenneth Kinnamon, ed., *New Essays on Native Son* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 2.
[8] Mozell C. Hill to Willard Motley, February 25, 1949, Box 10, Folder 12, WMP.
[9] Ibid.

these narratives were widely considered by African Americans as the foremost contributions from the race in the postwar racial desegregation of Hollywood, even though both texts then and now are regularly described and categorized as "white life" narratives. Indeed, through the late 1940s and early 1950s, *Foxes* and *Knock* were regularly considered contributions "along the lines that will eradicate undesirable films [that featured African Americans and interracial life]. We need more of their kind."[10]

In the late 20th and early 21st centuries, scholars often interpret teleological perspectives like the ones above on "white life" narratives, regardless of how diverse these were in manifestation, as products that refused dynamic portrayals of black protagonists. From the late 1960s until recently, most critics and observers would even consider this interpretation of these works too generous, and would instead argue that works like *Foxes and Knock* were "raceless," and did not feature black protagonists worthy of any analysis. Yet neither work nor subsequent film production sought to ignore or completely excise African American protagonists, and both narratives were hailed in the late 1940s as contributions to a range of protagonists and professions associated with major "white" cultural firms. For instance, in 1949, the *Chicago Defender* predicted that Hollywood films were on the cusp of embracing realistic portrayals of African Americans, and gave the film version of Yerby's *Foxes* credit as "the first of the current movie wave" to initiate the trend.[11] Two weeks earlier, the *Afro-American* had reported that with the addition of Motley's *Knock*, Hollywood was showing a "trend towards mixed cast pictures and novels by tan writers."[12] And finally, after *Knock* was purchased for film production in the Fall of 1947 by Mark Hellinger Productions, this accomplishment was described as marking "the

[10] E.B. Rea, "Encores and Echoes," *Afro-American*, March 26, 1949, 6.
[11] "Does Hollywood See The Light? New Pictures To Stick Closer to Facts," *Chicago Defender*, March 19, 1949, 18.
[12] "Hollywood Shows Trend Towards Mixed Cast Pictures and Novels by Tan Writers," *Afro-American*, March 5, 1949, 7.

second time that a Negro writer this year has received a fancy prize for a novel in Hollywood."[13]

Indeed, while *Knock* is usually described as a white life film and novel by literary scholars—on the rare occasions that it is referenced at all—the 1949 *Afro-American* cited above hailed the fact that the Hollywood version of the story required "an interracial cast."[14] And the racial integration *Knock*'s script called for would also lend itself to signs and acknowledgements of the 'very slight gains" African Americans were making in radio broadcasting by the late 1940s.[15] When Motley appeared on the radio program *Democracy, U.S.A.* to participate a short dramatization of *Knock* in 1947, its host closed the program—proudly, it seems—by announcing that the story had been "enacted by an outstanding company of white and Negro actors."[16] In the post-World War II years especially, racially integrated professional engagements like these remained rare, and were thus considered by African American strivers as major advancements in the late Jim Crow era.

At the very least, interracial casting for films like *Knock*, but especially *Foxes*, which required an unusually large number of black actors—for a film with socially progressive potential—signaled a new era for blacks who were optimistic about cultural employment. For instance, at the beginning of August 1947, Harry Levette, the Los Angeles representative for the Associated Negro Press, was published by the *New York Amsterdam News* proclaiming the fact that 130 black actors had been cast for the movie's final scene.[17] In the late 1940s, the African American press often served as a generally upbeat organ for African American actors and cultural professionals, although at least a couple Hollywood figures would claim otherwise. One

[13] "Motley's Book Bought for Film," *Pittsburgh Courier*, October 25, 1947, 17.
[14] "Hollywood Shows Trend Towards Mixed Cast Pictures and Novels by Tan Writers," *Afro-American*, March 5, 1949, 7.
[15] George F. Brown, "Business Dip, Wax Ban, Bias Fight Mark 1947: Year Marked by Fights…," *Pittsburgh Courier*, January 3, 1948, 15.
[16] Democracy, U.S.A. transcript, Sunday, September 14, 1947, page 15., Box 17, Folder 4, WMP.
[17] Harry Levette, "130 Negro Actors In Final Scence of 'Foxes of Harrow,'" *New York Amsterdam News*, August 2, 1947, 17.

of these dissenters, Suzette Harbin, was also one of two leading black actors in *Foxes*. In 1950, she would claim that the "Negro press…'should get behind Negro artists more. Many times, the press has been invited to visit sets, but failed to show up. They have run campaigns without investigating the facts.'" Like other African Americans whose livelihoods depended on conditions in Hollywood getting better for them, Harbin maintained that if the black press tried "to work closer with Hollywood, things would be better all around."[18] Nevertheless, the encouragement that Levette and other black journalists promoted in the postwar years was remarkably positive, especially in comparison to the relatively skeptical digests of cultural trends that would begin in earnest starting in the early 1950s.

In general, "sepia" stars, including the few African American writers who were popular with white Americans, were those who were considered to have the best chance at integrating Hollywood, even though these gains were reported as "very slight" on radio and on screen.[19] In the Spring of 1949, the *Defender* relayed that "[r]eports coming from the cinema capitol say that the years '49 and '50 will be banner years in the integration of sepia stars in productions to come which are now in the process of development among Hollywood's first string writers."[20] Equally important, the feedback the *Defender*'s staff had received from Hollywood insiders suggested that substantive racial integration was increasingly considered overdue given the interracial interactions an increasing number of middle class blacks were engaging in. "Hollywood itself is tired of portraying Negroes as maids, according to information coming from the writing rooms. It is believed, they claim, the public accepts and deals with Negroes in business and in the

[18] A.S. "Doc" Young, "What's Doing In Hollywood: No Negroes Under Contract To Major Studio Scribe Says," *Chicago Defender*, April 29, 1950, 21.
[19] George F. Brown, "Business Dip, Wax Ban, Bias Fight Mark 1947: Year Marked by Fights…," *Pittsburgh Courier*, January 3, 1948, 15.
[20] "Does Hollywood See The Light? New Pictures To Stick Closer to Facts," *Chicago Defender*, March 19, 1949, 18.

professions and in pictures there should be no exceptions."[21]

While these differences between the white-collar world and Hollywood were undoubtedly exaggerated, the fact remains that the history of interracial film productions worth consideration as such was sparse, and less than four decades old by the tail end of the 1940s. More damning still for prospective interracial collaborations, the first full decade of feature-length film productions was also marked by what was described across the mainstream entertainment industry for African Americans as the "seven lean years," from 1910 – 1917. During these years, black writers, producers, and performers described this era as one in which they were pushed off of Broadway, with the explicit aim of limiting interracial professional entertainment and production.[22] Yet this trend would not entirely inhibit the production of films that were in fact interracial collaborations, even if their distributions were hindered as a consequence. In 2014, the *New York Times* reported that curators at the Museum of Modern Art had recently uncovered what is likely the earliest surviving feature film with a black cast directed and produced by white film professionals in 1913. More surprising still was the fact that it did not appear to have the racially regressive African American imagery that is often associated with mainstream cultural productions in those years. The film scholar Jacqueline Stewart also affirmed the significance of the interracial collaboration. In one provocative statement published with the announcement, Stewart suggested that the fact that the recovered film was interracial in production had the potential of shifting how scholars of early black film analyze and explain these productions.

In some if not most prominent scholarship on early 20th century African American film,

[21] Ibid.
[22] Lillian Scott, "Broadway Welcomes The Return of Negro Lyricists and Songwriters," *Chicago Defender*, January 25, 1947, 10.

these productions are usually described in racially exclusive terms.[23] And as the business's undisputed figurehead from the years following World War I onward, black writer, producer, and director Oscar Micheaux and his prolific output dominates these narratives. Along these lines, Micheaux's first film, *The Homesteader*, released in 1919, is regularly considered to be the first African American feature-length film, and he would be credited for independently directing and producing dozens more before his death in 1951.[24] Although these films were extremely popular with black audiences and in theaters located in black communities, by the mid-1940s they were increasingly considered amateur and inferior by the African American press in comparison to Hollywood films. As such, they were also used as further evidence for the growing number of commentators in the postwar years who argued that Hollywood needed to desegregate its ranks if popular culture were to have any role in promoting racial parity in the early Cold War era. "The public has stood in line three-deep, to witness such sad picturizations of all-Negro stories. But over a period of years, the public has lost patience and now calls upon Hollywood to produce the play."[25]

Decades earlier, and before Micheaux's first contribution to the film genre that would become known as "all-Negro movies," the products of earlier American films that had included blacks were intentionally interracial in practice, even if they were racist or poorly executed. For instance, in an early attempt to offset the racial stereotypes promulgated in D.W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), a film originally titled *Lincoln's Dream* was imagined and developed as a response that pointedly incorporated African American actors. Often forgotten in the voluminous scholarship on *The Birth of a Nation* is that the film was not only criticized after its

[23] For a recent example, see Davarian Baldwin, *Chicago's New Negroes: Modernity, the Great Migration, and Black Urban Life* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).
[24] George Davis, "Black Motion Pictures: The Past," *New York Amsterdam News*, GBP.
[25] "Does Hollywood See The Light? New Pictures To Stick Closer to Facts," *Chicago Defender*, March 19, 1949, 18.

release for fueling racism and violence, but also for employing white actors in black face to play black Americans in principal roles. Describing the decision not to use "black blood" for these characters as "carefully weighed," *The Birth of a Nation* would instead employ a number of blacks as "extra people."[26]

And while *Lincoln's Dream* was designed as a filmic response that counteracted white Americans' mistreatments of blacks both in real life and on camera, the production that was released two years after its crew began filming would be curiously in line with these sensibilities. Emmett Scott, whose previous employment included secretary to Booker T. Washington at Tuskegee, was the African American figure responsible for proposing *Lincoln's Dream* and for raising funds for the film with the assistance of his nationwide black business contacts.[27] Because the staff Scott initially employed were inexperienced filmmakers that failed to finish the film over two years after initial shooting, the production company he had founded would run out of funds before its completion, which would require him to solicit funding from white backers. And these individuals who supported the film in its final stretch would insist on a number of changes, including significant alterations to the script, as well as demands that prior black staff be dismissed and that a new firm assume responsibility for the production.[28] The result of three years of changes and ultimatums from the film's unanticipated white interlocutors was a product that the film's initial African American production staff would refuse to align their names with. In 1919, this severely compromised work would be released as *The Birth of a Race*.

The film's new title preceded the new funding that had enabled its completion, and thus failed to reflect how the production's final white interlocutors excised almost all of its previous

[26] Melvin Stokes, *D.W. Griffith's "The Birth of a Nation": A History of "The Most Controversial Motion Picture of All Time"* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 87.
[27] George Davis, "Black Motion Pictures: The Past," *New York Amsterdam News*, GBP.
[28] Ibid.

commitments to African Americans in its final inception.[29] In deference to the American patriotism the film's white backers sought to promote, rather than an emphasis on black Americans, *The Birth of a Race* instead centered on the World War-era divisions within a German American family torn by conflicting national allegiances. The result was a production widely dismissed as a failure by white commentators, whose overarching criticisms were how confused and disjointed the end result of this haphazard three years long project turned out.

But as the African American press often did in the years following World War II, less than a year after the end of World War I, the *Chicago Defender* refused to criticize *The Birth of a Race*. In fact, one of several articles the national newspaper published on the film soon after its release was even titled "GREATEST PICTURE IN THE WORLD."[30] As it would well into the mid-1950s, the *Defender* celebrated the African Americans that had contributed to the film rather than dwelling on how the race had been shortchanged. In a nod to the film's initial black staff, one journalist for the paper explained, "It was an ambitious task the producers of 'The Birth of a Race' set for themselves, but they succeeded with it, and the result is a truly great photoplay."[31] The *Defender* also lauded contributions from white interlocutors such as Joseph Carl Breil who was responsible for composing the music that accompanied the film, and who had previously "arranged the music for 'Intolerance' [1916] and other great productions."[32] D.W. Griffith was responsible for the direction of *Intolerance*, a film whose timeline spanned over two millennia, employed over three thousand extras, and was produced at an astronomical sum that has been estimated as close to $2.5 million dollars. As the tremendous time and financial effort that went

[29] The second production company involved with the film before it was completed by an independent film company was Selig Polyscope Company. See Mark S. Reinhart, *Abraham Lincoln on Screen: Fictional and Documentary Portrayals on Film and Television* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2012), 58 – 59.
[30] No Author, "GREATEST PICTURE IN THE WORLD," *Chicago Defender*, September 20, 1919, 7.
[31] "BIRTH OF A RACE," *Chicago Defender*, October 4, 1919, 8.
[32] Ibid.

into the film suggests, it was by no means planned as a response to the racial stereotypes in *The Birth of a Nation*, even if the film's final title and organization were at least partially designed to address social critiques of that endeavor.[33]

Three decades later, when Hollywood produced film projects that either explicitly or obliquely engaged contemporary and historical social problems, African American inequality still barely registered with white filmmakers as either a viable or worthwhile topic. And in the exceptional cases when racial issues were addressed in the years following World War II, they were often broached in conversation with contemporary films that addressed anti-Semitism. Before 1950, the most prominently discussed films in the latter genre were *Crossfire* (1947) and *Gentleman's Agreement* (1947). The "racial angle," however, was not always explicit. For instance, when *Look*, the popular photography magazine, did a photo essay on *Knock*, which was widely considered "raceless," Motley confirmed in one radio interview that the entire spread was eleven pages. His interviewer responded by emphasizing that this was impressive because it was "two more than they gave to Gentleman's Agreement…"[34] A similar interpretation and relationship can be evidenced from a description of *Strange Victory*, a 1948 documentary produced by Target Films. But unlike the various popular manifestations of Motley's narrative, the relationship between anti-racism and anti-Semitism was much more explicit. A *Chicago Defender* profile of the documentary would describe the final product as a "powerful" anti-Jim Crow "film with facts."[35] Barnet Rosset, who would later own Grove Press and proactively solicit *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (1965), was the president of Target Films in 1948, and would described the firm's efforts that year as wanting to "make people so mad they'll do

[33] *Intolerance* was divided into three parts, and the filming of the third section, set in the modern era, predated *The Birth of a Nation*.
[34] June Baker Program, Motley Interview, No Date, Box 17, Folder 3, WMP.
[35] Lillian Scott, "Strange Victory Is Powerful Anti Jim Crow Film With Facts," *Chicago Defender*, August 14, 1948, 8.

something about these things." Rosset also explained that "[e]ven though there [had] been films like 'Crossfire' and 'Gentleman's Agreement' we felt there was something needed on the problem of discrimination against Negroes as that is much greater than the problems dealt with by the other two pictures."[36]

And while the number of films in the vague "social tolerance" category would indeed only grow in number in the decade following World War II, through the early 1950s, Motley and Yerby remained the only black authors to successfully sell novels—not scripts—to Hollywood.[37] Of the small cohort of prominent, mainstream black novelists in these years, only Ann Petry would come the closest to joining Motley and Yerby in having a novel converted by Hollywood after *The Street* (1946) was optioned to be produced as an independent motion picture in 1947. According to the *Amsterdam News* announcement of the novel's sale, when *The Street* made it to screen—it would not—Petry's story would be the first "non-musical Negro film" ever produced by Hollywood."[38] Explaining the significance of the prospect further, the *Amsterdam News* also reported, "nor has any Negro actress, including Lena Horne, been assigned as meaty a role as that of Lutie Johnson…who wages a courageous battle to make a home in Harlem's teeming 116th street." In the end, this form of racial imagery as imagined by the black press was incommensurate with the possibilities for sanctioned Hollywood films in the late 1940s, and the plans to produce Petry's novel would be canceled just a few months after this announcement. In a description published in late 1947 of why *The Street* was never produced, the *Negro Digest* reported, "[t]hey'd [only] be willing to film the story, said studio officials, if 'the characters were changed from Negroes to Swedes.'"

---

[36] Ibid.
[37] In 1951, Richard Wright would star in a film adaptation of *Native Son*, but this would be independently shot and directed in Argentina because of pressure from the U.S. government directed toward France to be passed on to the film's French director, Pierre Chenal.
[38] "Ann Petry's 'The Street' Optioned For Movie Play," *New York Amsterdam News*, May 31, 1947, 23.

In 1953, the *Afro-American* announced that Metro Goldwyn Mayer (MGM) had purchased Elizabeth Vroman's short-story "See How They Run" (1951) for production. Set in a rural African American elementary school, the story was safer than Petry's Harlem thriller. But with its focus on a powerful black female teacher, the story's production by Hollywood was celebrated by the black press in ways that were similar to African American hopes for *The Street*'s Hollywood production. As such, MGM's break with the dominant practice in the industry of rejecting dynamic scripts centered on black protagonists was described as representing the "first major picture from such a source dealing in reality with a colored theme."[39] And the only other black writer reported in this article as a predecessor of Vroman's to have "invaded the select circle of novel-script writers," was Yerby, with *Foxes* described as his "most prominent" film credit. Yet Yerby had no role in the Hollywood script for *Foxes*, and it is unlikely than he was ever offered an opportunity to contribute to the film's production.

Debates and confusion over Hollywood's conversion of Yerby's first novel were especially heated when African Americans considered how *Foxes* might impact the contemporary black struggle for equality in the years immediately following World War II. After its release, the film was widely criticized by the black press, primarily because of its general failure to demonstrate any of the social dissent countless black readers and critics had previously celebrated the novel for. Much of this hope, albeit in tempered form, had weathered the voluminous, conflicting coverage given to the film's production in the months leading up to its release. The final product, however, indicated that the individuals who were more cynical about the prospect of Hollywood's adaptation of the film having any impact on cultural perceptions of African Americans were correct.

The studio executive at 20th Century-Fox responsible for purchasing the story, Darryl F.

[39] E. B. Rea, "Hollywood Report On: See How They Run," *Afro-American*, February 14, 1953, 22F.

Zanuck, would even go on record maintaining his lack of interest in portraying the social and racial themes Yerby's book had explored meaningfully for countless readers. According to one journalist for the *Afro-American*, Zanuck easily "declare[d] that he bought the book for its entertainment values only." The journalist then explained, "[i]n Hollywood terms, this meant that any elements in the story which did not conform to the conventional ideas and myths which America still nourishes about antebellum days had to be either eliminated or glossed over…"[40] Another journalist who reviewed the film for the *Afro-American* would fault its producers for "pull[ing] the sting out" of the book, "merely by whacking out two-thirds of the best seller and attempting to dramatize the remaining third of the film [,which was] very much 'unYerbyish.'"[41] When specific shortcomings of the film were discussed, most damning for the majority of lay and professional black commentators was that the Hollywood version of *Foxes* "missed its bet as a tolerance document when the anti-slavery sequences were subdued to a whisper."[42]

More complicated still, the failure of *Foxes* to live up to its novel form led some commentators to accuse Hollywood professionals and funders of doing a better job delineating anti-Semitism, even though black commentators had previously lauded these efforts.[43] "While Hollywood has seemingly gone bare knuckle in broaching upon anti-Semitic elements as portrayed in 'Crossfire,' the filming of 'Harrow' shows that the celluloid-makers are still handling the race angle with kid gloves."[44] Indeed, the *Afro-American* critic responsible for this claim was so frustrated with what he had seen that he half-jokingly suggested that the film's

[40] Lois Taylor, No Title, *Afro-American*, November 15, 1947, 6.
[41] Bob Queen, "'Harrow' Film Misses Boat; Sting Absent," *Afro-American*, Oct 4, 1947, 6.
[42] George F. Brown, "Business Dip, Wax Ban, Bias Fight Mark 1947: Year Marked by Fights…," *Pittsburgh Courier*, January 3, 1948, 15.
[43] To be sure, films that addressed anti-Semitism and antiracism were not always considered as antagonists of one another or in competition in the postwar era. Because they were considered as doing related work, *Crossfire* was described in the *Pittsburgh Courier* and discussed along with *The Burning Cross* (1947), which was praised for "raking" the KKK. George F. Brown, "Business Dip, Wax Ban, Bias Fight Mark 1947: Year Marked by Fights…," *Pittsburgh Courier*, January 3, 1948, 15.
[44] Bob Queen, "'Harrow' Film Misses Boat; Sting Absent," *Afro-American*, Oct 4, 1947, 6.

viewers were likely to want their money back. "The millions of readers of Yerby's book will leave the picture disappointed and in a 'I want my money back' mood when they discover that the powerful book characters…have been relegated to minor roles."[45]

By comparison, and somewhat too optimistically, months later, Motley would be described by the black press while *Knock On Any Door* was still in production as "sticking by his guns," and not relinquishing his story to major revisions as Yerby had with *Foxes*.[46] In one of what in reality were innumerable attempts to tease out the similarities and differences between these stories, one writer for the *Defender* noted, "'Foxes of Harrow' [as] a modern piece was faced with the same problems that confront the Motley book." But the fact that *Foxes* had already been released seemed to suggest to still-hopeful African Americans that Motley had the capacity to avoid the choices and mistakes Yerby had encountered in selling his novel and surrendering any claim to its Hollywood production. "That Yerby agreed to the Hollywood rewrite version, is no reason to assume that Motley will do likewise. However, 'Harrow' has already been made into a film; 'Knock On Any Door' hasn't, if you get what we mean."[47]

***

The most important of the many crimes the Hollywood production of *Foxes* was accused of after its release was its lack of depth, the erasure of several prominent black protagonists, and its refusal to engage Yerby's emphases on the historical realities of antebellum interracial life. Of course, none of these racial politics were new in relation to Hollywood films: if D.W. Griffith had used real black men to grab white women in *Birth of A Nation*, it is more than likely that white responses to his work would have been even more swift and violent. Decades later, one of

[45] Ibid.
[46] Hilda See, "Motley Balks Plan to Rewrite His 'Knock On Any Door' For Films, *Chicago Defender*, March 13, 1948, 8.
[47] Ibid.

the many factors complicating the filming of William Faulkner's *Intruder in the Dust* (1949) in Oxford, Mississippi were the challenges navigating the town's Jim Crow customs for the blacks and Hispanics who participated in the film's production. In a biography of Faulkner, Joseph Blotner explains that the "[l]odging of the Negro actors 'in the homes of Oxford's colored leaders' solved a practical and social problem," as an answer to just one of the problems during the filming process.[48] Juano Hernandez played Lucas Beauchamp, *Intruder's* main black protagonist, but even he would encounter difficulties fraternizing at Faulkner's home with his white colleagues who were working on the film. Blotner notes, "[h]e was a fine actor and a cultivated man, but if they invited him, they would have to invite his colored hosts in Oxford, and they felt they could not do that. So the whole crew, with the exception of the portrayer of Lucas Beauchamp, came to out to Rowan Oak one evening."[49]

In general, and in comparison to all actors of color in the U.S., African American cultural professionals remained a special liability in Hollywood films and television well into the 1950s. In the early years of the 1950s especially, when leading black actors began appearing in prominent, less demeaning roles in Hollywood and television productions, these were designed so that their appearance and inclusion did not signify a "racial tone." This is the language the *Afro-American* would use to describe Sidney Poitier's casting as a parole officer in 1952 in the NBC drama, *Parole Chief*. "Mr. Poitier's role, which was without racial tone, was in keeping with the network's policy of 'Integration Without Identification.'"[50] If anything, professional commitments not to identify race in broadcast performances represented a continuation of how Yerby and Motley were treated by both their publishing firms and the Hollywood production

[48] Joseph Blotner, *Faulkner: A Biography* (New York: Vintage, 1991), 502.
[49] Ibid., 503.
[50] "Sidney Poitier Scores in NBC-TV Drama: Actor Cast As Parole Officer No Racial Tone In His Portrayal," *Afro-American*, December 6, 1952, 6.

companies responsible for selling their narratives. And because the group of prominent African Americans working across popular mass culture in these years was so small, it was all but impossible for these individuals not to have at least a passing connection to one another before the 1950s. Indeed, the *Afro-American* cited *Foxes* and just one other film in what is described as Poitier's "several motion picture" credits in its announcement that he had been cast in *Parole Chief*.[51] And similar to the black press's interpretations of Motley and Yerby's first films before the adaptations of each were criticized, the paper reported that many of the plays performed at NBC's Philco Television Playhouse were "concerned with the problems of modern society."[52]

Because the film industry's practice was to not credit African American actors when they appeared in Hollywood films through at least the late 1940s, it remains unclear whether or not Poitier actually appeared in *Foxes*, or what role he played. But if he did in fact appear in the film at the age of 20, Poitier would have been just one of several African Americans that had been or would become prominent in Hollywood and otherwise following its release in 1947. According to the production company's legal records, Dorothy Dandridge also appeared in the film; but only a cross-check with a *Negro Digest* article in 1946 was able to confirm that she had in fact quit the film during its production. In 1949, the *Amsterdam News* would report that Suzette Harbin, who had one of the most prominent black roles in the film, was still "in demand" after her performance in *Foxes*.[53] Kenny Washington, the first African American to sign a contract with the NFL in 1946, played her husband.[54] One of the most controversial black protagonists in

[51] Ibid. This is the only citation I have been able to find thus far that indicates that Poitier appeared in *Foxes*. The other film noted in the *Afro-American* was *No Way Out* (1950), a film-noir centered on a black doctor plagued by anxieties of medical malpractice after his racist, working-class white patient's death.
[52] "Sidney Poitier Scores in NBC-TV Drama: Actor Cast As Parole Officer No Racial Tone In His Portrayal," *Afro-American*, December 6, 1952, 6.
[53] No title, *New York Amsterdam News*, January 8, 1949, 21.
[54] For a comprehensive list and short discussion of the prominent black actors that appeared in the film, see Harry Levette, "130 Negro Actors In Final Scence of 'Foxes of Harrow,'" *New York Amsterdam News*, August 2, 1947, 17.

the film was played by Madame A.C. Bilbrew, who played the "voodoo practitioner" in the film; the threat her character posed was an ability to cast spells on the plantation's white family members. Only a little less than twenty years earlier, Bilbrew began her ascent to Hollywood fame as the choral director—and also, the "voodoo woman"—in the first "all-black" movie produced by a Hollywood studio, *Hearts in Dixie* (1929). Over a year after the release of her later performance, the *Defender* reported that the "talented actress was nationally acclaimed for her brilliant portrayal of 'Tante Caleen' the voodoo woman in the film version" of *Foxes*.[55]

During the filming of *Foxes*, Bilbrew would go on record as one of the few voices to dissent from the black press's criticisms of the production. In particular, Bilbrew defended how black actors were being treated on the set, and argued that contrary to reports, these performers and the other African Americans who worked on the film were being treated well. Arguing that the rumors of mistreatment had not been managed fairly, Bilbrew "blasted" these reports, and called them "second-handed, unfair, and unfounded…"[56] If anything, Bilbrew saw her participation in the film as a corrective to the industry's general malpractices against black cultural professions, observing that at the time there were "many controversies which have to do with the problems of Negro performers in motion pictures." By choosing to go on record publicly defending the film, she sought to clarify several "of the unfortunate impressions" that had "gone abroad about the filming of 'Foxes of Harrow.'" Among these is what she criticized as the alleged ignorance of the cast that the film would be different from the novel. Bilbrew maintained that cast members were well aware that the "motion picture code…determines the

[55] "Composer Trains Freedom Day Choir," *Chicago Defender*, December 18, 1948, 10.
[56] Harry Levette, "Mrs. Billibrew Defends 'Foxes of Harrow' Role, July 1, 1947, 2.

material which may be used in motion pictures and how that material can be treated. This code is, of course, influenced by the demands of bigoted southern distributors."[57]

But her defense of the production went well beyond what would eventually show up in cinemas, and she would point to a number of the production's African American contributions that were not related to acting. This included what she described as the several technical positions blacks had been hired for. Yet Bilbrew was by no means duped that these positions were adequate—even if others would suggest that she was by defending the studio[58]—and she still maintained that she and other African Americans were not entirely satisfied with their working conditions. "But why not be constructive, intelligent and productive? At least let us try to be authentic, enlightened and fair. Remember that 'Foxes of Harrow' is the brainchild of a Negro. Let's wish the best for the picture, producers, and cast."[59] Similar to Bilbrew's sentiments, two years later, black journalist E.B. Rea argued in the *Afro-American* that merely denouncing Hollywood practices would leave "a feeling of uncertainty among film-makers." As a result, he warned that African Americans would be left behind if actions were limited to criticisms. "Better pictures, better characterizations in pictures and better exploitation must come from an intelligent approach, and not merely stern censorship of Hollywood and the actors and actresses who, by their trade, must accept producers' offers, or remain out of work."[60]

To be sure, most black journalists were aware of these conditions for black cultural professionals in the late 1940s, which was one of the reasons that they regularly celebrated that

---

[57] Harry Levette, "Mrs. Bilbrew Defends 'Foxes of Harrow' Role, *Atlanta Daily World*, July 1, 1947, 2.
[58] For a brief note criticizing Bilbrew's defense of the studio and the production, see Maria Dragna, "This is Hollywood," *Chicago Defender*, July 12, 1947, 19.
[59] Indeed, especially in 1947, it is at least worth remembering that production practices in *Foxes* were exceptional, and were appreciates as such, when compared with the industry predominant standards. That year, Harry Levette reported in the *Afro-American* that screen credits had been denied in at least 24 films that were currently shooting in Hollywood. In contrast, the director and assistant director of *Foxes* had gone on record stating that were willing to ensure that these were recorded for the black actors that appeared in the film. Harry Levette, "Screen Credit Denied Top Stars in 24 Major Films," *Afro-American*, May 31, 1947, 8.
[60] E.B. Rea, "Encores and Echoes," *Afro-American*, March 26, 1949, 6.

Foxes had given "a lot of sepia actors and actresses employment," despite their reservations.[61] Indeed, the black press's willingness to champion the employment of black actors in the film did not preclude its willingness to publish concerns with how the film's director and production company managed the script.[62] For instance, a lamentation reported early and often was the fact that the novel's most rebellious African American character would not be filmed past the age of seven, and that the quadroon mistress of the white main protagonist would be played by a white woman.[63] And even those black roles that were perceived as having similar power in novel form, such as Bilbrew's voodoo protagonist, were criticized as accentuating African American attributes that were un-Christian and "uncivilized." In the postwar years especially, cultural characterizations like these were challenges to the respectable cultural portrayals many blacks sought as they aspired to American middle class lives that did not signify explicit racial distinctions. "The wisdom of Caleen and her witchcraft that was both respected and feared by the whites in the novel, is projected from the witchcraft angle only, and Little Inch fades out at the end of the picture, a mere six years of age."[64]

By 1950, even as several African Americans affiliated with the industry publicly expressed some hope that employments conditions were on the cusp of change, there were still no black actors signed with major studios that year. Suzette Harbin argued in one interview she conducted with the *Chicago Defender* that "'[e]every studio should have at least one Negro actress and actor under contract.'"[65] Harbin insisted that the problem was not a dearth of African American actors, but instead that black protagonists were still being cut from films, and that

[61] Earl Griffin, *Los Angeles Sentinel*, March 27, 1947, 21.
[62] Ibid.
[63] "The Hollywood Focus," *New York Amsterdam News*, April 26, 1947, 21; for a discussion of the plan to sublimate the novel's primary interracial romance, see Thomas Brady, "Two Films About President Roosevelt—Censors and 'The Foxes of Harrow,' *New York Times*, May 4, 1947, X5.
[64] Ibid.
[65] A.S. Doc Young, "What's Doing in Hollywood: No Negroes Under Contract To Major Studio Scribe Says," *Chicago Defender*, April 29, 1950, 21.

roles designed for blacks were being substituted "with whites or Mexicans." Similar to Bilbrew and Rea's articulations of related challenges, Harbin's comprehension of the structural problems of the business did not stop at either the camera or casting. "We need more agents—agents who will devote their time and energies to the artist. White agents just won't, they don't, do it. A Negro agent could sell a Negro artist better than anyone because he knows the Negro artist best."[66] In addition to requesting that black moviegoers send producers fan mail so that there was evidence that African Americans were appreciated, she also called for the black press to do a better job of working with Hollywood rather than criticizing it. "Many times, the press has been invited to visit sets, but failed to show up. They have run campaigns without investigating the facts. If they would try to work closer with Hollywood, things would be better all around."[67]

In reality, the factors that were inhibiting the inclusion of black actors and protagonists in dynamic roles, or in any roles at all for that matter in the years following World War II went well beyond the control of black cultural professionals and the black press. In one summation of the entertainment industry in 1947, George Brown, a staff writer for the *Pittsburgh Courier* explained that a confluence of factors, rather than social commitments or racial progress, deserved mention for occupying the central stage across the business. "Economics occupied the theatrical stage during 1947, with the recording ban, the Taft-Hartley Law, the red probe, a rising tide of intolerance and general retrenchment playing strong supporting roles."[68] As the list above suggests, the Thomas Committee's HUAC hearings began in earnest that year, and Brown described this inauspicious development as having major "repercussions on Negro film players" from that moment on. In particular, Hollywood's apparent response to fears of "being branded

[66] Ibid.
[67] Ibid.
[68] George F. Brown, "Business Dip, Wax Ban, Bias Fight Mark 1947: Year Marked by Fights…," *Pittsburgh Courier*, January 3, 1948, 15.

Communist, [was that] many producers wrote out Negro parts…" As several African American commentators would point out in these years, Mempis, Tennessee merited specific attention for how the city's censorship laws had defined how blacks appeared in Hollywood films screened in the South. "Southern film censorship—the Memphis brand—which resulted in Negroes being hacked out of pictures, caused great comment and threats of legal action."[69]

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, even when popular productions were described as tackling the problems of modern society, Hollywood continued its practice of casting white and Hispanic actors in parts that were intended to signal that the protagonist was black.[70] In 1949, Frederick O'Neal, who was described in the *Defender* as a "veteran of the stage" argued that "[a]ll of these pictures are supposed to be clarifying race relations and yet they are all doing the same things they are preaching against." In this same article, which focused on how common it was for white actors to be cast as black protagonists, one unnamed black actor explained that the producers of *Lost Boundaries* (1949) had never interviewed blacks for the film with the intention of casting them in lead roles. Ironically, that film was based on a true story of a black doctor whose family had successfully passed for white in a small New England town.

---

[69] Ibid. For at least two decades, from 1927, Lloyd Binford infamously presided over race-based censorship as the chairman of the city's censorship board. Amongst the films he banned after World War II were *Brewster's Millions* (1945) for "too much familiarity between the races," and *Annie Get Your Gun* (1947) for African American roles that were "too big." For these quotes and a broader discussion of Binford and censorship in Memphis, see M. Alison Kibler, *Censoring Radical Ridicule: Irish, Jewish, and African American Struggles over Race and Representation, 1890 – 1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 213.

[70] Nine years after its appearance, the *Chicago Defender* would claim that one of the reasons *Foxes* had done better at the box office than *Pinky* (1949), a drama about an African American woman passing for white, is because the latter film was rejected by Southern theaters. Jason Stahl was responsible for directing *Foxes*, and along with the other whites responsible for the Hollywood production of *Foxes*, he would go to great lengths to ensure that references to miscegenation did not hinder its distribution. While filming, Stahl was reported by the *New York Times* as having "no fears about the picture despite a warning from the Production Code Administration that the script contains sequences which will be scrutinized without sympathy if he shoots them." The two mains topics that were understood as problems with the novel that still remained represented in the script were attempts to portray both "adultery and miscegenation, a combination from which the censors shrink." To assure that the film was not in trouble, Stahl assured that one character would be "regarded merely as a creole of Latin extraction by those who see the picture without having read Yerby's story." Thomas F. Brady, "Hollywood Briefs," *New York Times*, May 4, 1947, X5.

Two years earlier, the founder of the Negro Artists Guild, Fredi Washington, had been "screen-tested for [the] important part" as the quadroon mistress of main white protagonist in *Foxes* but not hired. Dorothy Dandridge was also among the African American film stars approached and rejected for the part.[71] Both women were well aware of the near impossibility of being cast in this role. Washington's last screen appearance had been *One Mile From Heaven* (1937).[72] In that film, Washington had played the part of a woman with a white child; after the film was released, her role was considered so controversial that the film "was barred below the Mason-Dixon line."[73] In one reflection on Hollywood's plans to temper miscegenation references so that *Foxes* avoided a similar fate, Gertrude Martin, the book critic for the *Defender* wryly observed, "'The Foxes' will reach the South and the nation so watered down that even Memphis won't object."[74]

Muriel Fuller, a white literary agent who worked in New York in the 1930s and 40s was responsible for "finding" Frank Yerby, and setting him on the path to become the first black writer to sell millions of copies of novels to white Americans, starting with *Foxes*. In fact, Fuller's generosity toward Yerby had been so central to his success that he dedicated *Foxes*—the only novel for which he would be widely regarded as fighting American racism—to her. Yet Fuller's correspondence with her own family suggests how sensitive and stigmatized interracial collaborations remained during and following World War II. M. Fuller's mother, Olive Fuller was a resident of Charleston, and the letters she exchanged with her daughter before the war through the mid-1940s illustrate how extreme racial prejudice and tensions were in Southern

[71] "Dot Dandridge, Others in 'Foxes of Harrow' Test," *Afro-American*, April 19, 1947, 6.
[72] In the *Los Angeles Sentinel*'s recollection, this had not gone unchallenged. "Students at Duke…anxious to see the production, conducted a campus demonstration in protest." "Fredi Washington Tested for Role in 'Foxes of Harrow,' *Los Angeles Sentinel*, April 3, 1947, 20.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Gertrude Martin, "Bookshelf," *Chicago Defender*, May 17, 1947, 15.

cities in these years. And the generational differences evident from their opposing perspectives on race and racial integration in civil society and mainstream culture are suggestive of the barriers white professionals encountered as they fitfully de-homogenized the mass production of literature and film.

M. Fuller's letters to friends, colleagues, and even unknown industry professionals discussing her mother's intolerance indicate that she believed that the desegregation of popular media had the capacity to temper the racial prejudice expressed by individuals like her mother. In contrast, O. Fuller disagreed, and argued that "race mixing" in cultural production had no value. Describing her and a family member's philosophies on both issues, O. Fuller explained to M. Fuller, "Neither Burt nor I would go to a thing like Carmen Jones [1943, Broadway]…And this isn't prejudice. Prejudice can only exist where the thing prejudiced against is not known." O. Fuller's argument here and elsewhere was that the "truth" of racial hierarchy was easily evidenced in real-life in the Jim Crow South. "We both know the negro race as manifested in the south where we have lived so long. We are first last and always against the mixing of the races." According to O. Fuller, an older, deeply religious woman, efforts at racial integration were "doomed to failure; [they were] against that which has been laid down by Almighty God."

Indeed, O. Fuller was a woman who couldn't imagine sharing public and private facilities with African Americans, let alone having them in her home—unless, of course, this was in the capacity of a domestic worker. In several letters to her daughter, O. Fuller described what she felt was the horror that blacks were attempting to desegregate "white-only" spaces in Charleston during World War II. After explaining in one letter to her daughter why she had no doubts that blacks needed to be segregated from whites as a public health measure, O. Fuller wrote about an encounter in which she had witnessed a black woman demanding service at a segregated

department store.[75] O. Fuller dismissed the woman as a "husky black wench," and showed no sympathy with the fact that she had likely risked her dignity—if not her physical well-being—in her attempt to patronize this business. "Probably she was trying to start something and hesitated, or wanted to make an issue." For O. Fuller, desegregation attempts like these signaled that Charleston's racial hierarchy was severely threatened, even though she and her friends considered these actions far from welcome. "Their own peculiar smell [African Americans] combined with sweat is intolerable. I would rather have goats in my apartment."

To be sure, even if her comments illustrate otherwise, O. Fuller was far from uneducated or cultural unsophisticated. Strikingly similar to her daughter, decades earlier, O. Fuller had worked as a prominent female editor in New York's publishing world, was a member of the National Art Theatre Society in the first decade of the twentieth century, and she was also a published poet in these years. Most accurately, O. Fuller had strong but not unexceptional beliefs on why the integration of blacks into the nation's cultural and civic fabric was grotesque, and because her daughter did not feel similarly, she was deeply invested in explaining what she refused to consider "prejudice." Before the 1920s especially, it would be a mistake to assume that white Americans with the best access to literary culture would have either racially progressive values or that they would be proponents of social and cultural cosmopolitanism more broadly.

O. Fuller's candid discussions of how her own racial views differed from her daughter's, even though she was aware that M. Fuller found reading them abhorrent, is useful in delineating how older generations of white Americans perceived interracial cultural productions.

[75] Indeed, her anxieties against racial mixing were manifold. Citing her concern that many blacks in Charleston had syphilis, Olive argued that she didn't know where the fault lay, but that "I know the safety of the health of those who do not have this disease should be guarded and the negro race be segregated."

> I expect we shall always be miles apart on several matters. Othello [1943 – 1944, Broadway] is one of them, if and when the leading part is played by a negro [Paul Roberson] and a white woman must endure his embraces. The thought of those great black hands touching one's body gives me the shudders. How any white woman with the slightest regard for her person would submit to a negro embracing her is beyond me—I mean a white woman as I know the Desdemona [Uta Hagen] is. (I don't recall her name at present.) Of course I didn't read what Robeson had to say in the [Herald Tribune] Forum. I skipped several others too.[76]

As the excerpt above indicates, Olive studiedly avoided theatrical performances, films and writing that featured or was authored by African Americans. After Paul Robeson returned to his role as Othello at the Shubert Theater in 1943, he became the first African American to be cast in that role on Broadway with a white supporting cast. But as she indicates in the letter above, similar to countless white Americans in the 1940s, O. Fuller found cultural productions like these deeply disturbing because of how abominable they considered interracial interactions outside of perfunctory service transactions.

These prejudices would also make it an alarming surprise when O. Fuller unexpectedly found out that her daughter had not only helped facilitate the publication of *Foxes*, but that the narrative, which was widely considered racially belligerent in novel form, was dedicated to her. In a letter to M. Fuller after she was blindsided with this news, O. Fuller plead, "I really would like to know if you ever told me that Frank Yerbe [sic] had dedicated the book to you. I am very sure you did not but of course my memory slips of recent years. But please tell me."

By this date, Yerby's *Foxes* had already been greeted with phenomenal commercial success with the American public. But instead of merely enjoying and basking in his novel's acclaim, even though his publisher had gone through great lengths to hide his racial identity, occasional leaks and rumors that he was black would mean that Yerby and his family were forced to flee their home. For years, the family had lived in a suburban community on Long

[76] Letter, Olive Fuller to Muriel Fuller, Nov. 27, 1943, Folder 7, Box 6, Muriel Fuller Papers.

Island where they had previously passed as white; when his neighbors learned the family's race after the publicity *Foxes* received, they would attack and drum the family out of their home en masse. Given how vitriolic reactions were to Yerby's racial identity even in the heart of the "liberal" north, it is of little surprise that M. Fuller chose not to inform her mother of her involvement with the book or assisting Yerby with becoming a published novelist. Nevertheless, the omission is especially striking given that O. Fuller was aware of virtually all of her daughter's other professional activities in these years. O. Fuller would only discover that *Foxes* was dedicated to her daughter after an unexpected visitor from Texas arrived at her home with a copy of the novel. "I was amazed…I penned it in and concealed my amazement [and] I thought very well and said, 'Yes, I expect Muriel has made very many books 'possible.' It was the FOXES OF HARROW by Frank Yerbee [sic]."

Foxes, chock-full of antebellum slaves who violently retaliated against white masters, combined with a plot that emphasized the joys and pleasures of interracial sex and romance, represented many of the social changes O. Fuller believed had destroyed her beloved Charleston. It was thus that much more striking that even though she had studiedly avoided African American and interracial cultural productions that she would be forced to closely reckon with one such narrative that was produced with the help of her daughter. Not surprisingly, Olive couldn't "make sense" of the highly political ending of an abridged version of *Foxes* that she had read, which depicted victorious black protagonists winning freedom for their family after a particularly violent interracial contest for it. What was likely to only irk O. Fuller's sensibilities more was the fact that these fictional characters gained these rights while also exacting retributive justice against former masters that had previously been sexually abusive.

> I know recently after reading the abridged account—I had to skim it because of my eyes—The FOXES—I wrote you what I thought of it. I had no idea you even knew the

> author. I in all likelihood would not have expressed myself at all if I had. If I "hurt your feelings," I am too sorry. But I believe you are too big to be hurt by my differing opinion from you in a criticism of a book…So please forgive me if I was too frank. Will you tell me if you think the ENDING of THE FOXES made sense? Was it compatible with the story? Did it leave you puzzled? It didn't make sense to me.

By November 1947, the *Afro-American* was already reporting that even if the film version of *Foxes* would prove "an elaborate and action-filled spectacle, it [was] minus many of the highlights of Frank Yerby's best seller and retains only the bare skeleton of his story."[77] As a number of critics would observe well beyond the end of de jure Jim Crow, perceptions of the major studio system as vapid helped explained why African Americans were hardly vindicated by the medium, especially in comparison to the power of novels. "Hollywood could not bear to present on the screen the spectacle of soldiers of color fighting for their freedom during the War Between the States, or the rise of the freedmen to positions of authority and influence in the days of Reconstruction, as described by Yerby." Bandannas worn and religious fervor performed by older black actors were described as following prior novel to film conversions like Margaret Mitchell's *Gone With the Wind* (1936) "in stressing the romantic beauty of the Old South and muting a condemnation of its social system." In line with the majority of criticism of the film published by the black press, this review argued that "[p]ractically, the only episodes which are faithful to the book in showing spirit and courage on the part of a colored character have to do with the high-born African girl, Le Belle Sauvage, played by Suzette Harbin, who refused to yield to servitude."[78]

***

While the contours of white anxieties and black criticism of *Foxes* were indeed deeper and more complex than are often pointed out, as the frequent references to *Gone With the Wind*

[77] Lois Taylor, No Title, *Baltimore Afro-American*, November 15, 1947, p. 6.
[78] Ibid.

suggest, they were not exceptional. And even though several African American commentators would hold out hope that Motley's *Knock on Any Door* would avoid a similar fate in its film adaptation, these aspirations would also be quickly dashed after the film's release in 1949. Somewhat dissimilar from *Foxes*, however, more white liberals would grieve along with the author about the "social indictment" its Hollywood conversion failed to emphasize. One of these individuals, Donald Taft, a sociologist at the University of Illinois pinpointed in a letter to Motley what he considered to be the largest problem with Hollywood version of the story. "I have heard indirectly that the adaptation of your book for use as a motion-picture has involved a rather radical change in the interpretation of the characters. That is to say, I have been told that it will appear as an individual problem rather than as one growing out of the general culture."[79]

In a number of written and in-person conversations and exchanges with Taft and dozens of others, Motley overwhelmingly agreed with the many criticisms of Hollywood's *Knock*, even as he continued to cooperate with Columbia Picture's promotional efforts for the film. In just one of several letters he penned expressing his disappointment after viewing the film, Motley wrote Ted Purdy, his editor at Appleton-Century who assisted with selling the novel to Hollywood, lamenting how unrecognizable his own narrative was. "It ain't my kid! It's a bastard!...People have said they cried when they read the book. I cried when I saw the movie."[80] Here and elsewhere, Motley's would maintain that the underlying problem with Hollywood's final product was how little control and involvement he had in the film's script, casting and direction. "Some day the people in Hollywood…will have to have the authors on the set all the time as advisors at

[79] Donald R. Taft to Willard Motley, March 10, 1949, Box 10, Folder 13, WMP.
[80] Willard Motley to Ted Purdy, March 11, 1949, Box 10, Folder 13, WMP.

least. The authors, I think, know what they are trying to say, what mood should be captured, [and] what is particularly good casting for particular work."[81]

African American criticism of the film version of *Foxes* less than two years earlier repeatedly returned to what occurred when these black writers were estranged from the Hollywood's adaptations of their novels. One critic, Harry Keelan maintained that the destruction of Yerby's novel had been "complete and tragic! From the cadaver emerges only the customary boy-gets-girl formula, and the entire significance of Yerby's work is completely killed to conform with the American party line!"[82] Admittedly, Keelan's reaction to yet another poor Hollywood adaptation of a novel is surely exaggerated. And yet a specific connection that Keelan would also make between *Foxes* and Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) suggests his reflections on the failure of the adaptation of the former merits at least some additional consideration. For one, Harriet Beecher Stowe is not a writer who fits easily as a benchmark for what Yerby had achieved with *Foxes*. And yet one thing that Keelan seems to be pointing to with his reference to Stowe was that popular white authors since Stowe, including Margaret Mitchell, had shown little commitment to doing similar work.

> Except for 'Uncle Tom's Cabin,' Yerby's novel is the only important one which has condemned the entire social system of the antebellum South, by showing not only how completely unmoral and immoral it was, but also how futile! Like 'Gone With the Wind,' all other novels have been of the nostalgic kind, mourning the departure of a 'beautiful civilization,' destroyed by barbaric hordes from the North dressed in blue![83]

In general, white commentators were much less successful in publicly articulating the racial shortcomings of the conversion of either Yerby or Motley's novel, but they would join their black counterparts in widely rejecting both films, albeit on somewhat different grounds. As one of the most influential names in the business in the post-World War II years, Bosley

[81] Ibid.
[82] Harry Keelan, "Voice in the Wilderness," *Afro-American*, October 18, 1947, 4.
[83] Ibid.

Crowther, the film critic for the *New York Times* found little satisfaction with either *Foxes* or *Knock*, and he would not waste much energy qualifying his disdain in either case. In terms of the latter film, Crowther argued that Hollywood's sympathetic portrayal of Nick Romano, the queer protagonist on trial in Motley's novel for killing a policeman, was undeserved. Before seeing the film, one of Motley's fellow queer friends wrote to him explaining that the handsome actor cast in this role, John Derek, must have performed especially well given how upset Crowther was over the portrayal of Romano. Accordingly, the review of *Knock* featured in Crowther's column was described as "screaming over the 'mispaced' sympathy [Derek] arouses with his fine looks and romantic portrayal."[84] Motley's friend also criticized Crowther's review for "bellow[ing] 'rubbish' at the social angle. All a fine result of the typical twisting out of shape which Hollywood always dishes out."[85]

Because Crowther was one of the first in what became a growing consensus of the film's failures, Motley received at least a few letters touching on or complaining about Crowther's harsh review of the film. In a follow-up letter to the author after he finally viewed the film, the sociologist Donald Taft would not only protest that he wished Motley had "refused to take the $200,000, or whatever sum may have been involved," he would argue that Crowther's review was insignificant.[86] Because of Taft's frustration with how little Crowther had sought to engage with the novel version of the story, he was convinced that the critic had not read it, and thus faulted him for failing to adequately perform his role as a leading national commentator. Taft was so passionate about Crowther's professional shortcomings that he subsequently wrote a letter to the critic, and also made sure to send Motley a duplicate copy of these observations.

[84] Although I cannot identify the letter writer, a survey of the correspondence in Motley's manuscript collection preserved at Northern Illinois University indicates that the letter writer who addressed him as "Wilmot" was a close friend. Unknown to Willard Motley, circa February 1949, Box 10, Folder 12, WMP.
[85] Ibid.
[86] Donald R. Taft to Willard Motley, April 4, 1949, Box 10, Folder 15, WMP.

> As I have said before, I use the book as an example [in his Criminology course] as an example of the way in which American culture produces crime. I shall use the picture [film version] and your criticism of it as an example of the way in which our commercialized agencies of communication and entertainment, fearing perhaps to tell us the story as Motley tell us, hide from us the most significant reason of social science.[87]

In 1947, Crowther would illustrate his social and racial disregard for the cultural difference Yerby strived to create by likening the *Foxes* adaptation to *Gone With the Wind*, maintaining that the former was less successful because at base, its narrative was formulaic. "For here, in this plainly imitative costume drama, is manifest in excess the orotund situations and emotional clichés of 'fore de war' romance."[88] As a number of white critics would incorrectly suggest, Crowther explained that there was never anything especially new or captivating about the story or protagonists Yerby hoped might impact readers and viewers. But even if on its face Crowther's review seemed to focus on the film's failure, Crowther closed his review with an implication that other forms of the story were responsible for what Hollywood had failed to produce. He thus pointed to what he considered the film's lack of "a touch of intelligent motivation, a wisp of selective style. And that, of course, is the difference between good and bad movies, good and bad literature—or good and bad art."

As a number of sympathizers with Motley over what had been destroyed by Hollywood's adaptation of *Knock* would, in 1954, Lorraine Hansberry vociferously denounced Crowther's lacking racial awareness in an unpublished op-ed she sent to him at the *Times*. Hansberry's letter was motivated by an ill-conceived column that Crowther had recently published in the *New York Times* entitled, "Negroes In A Film."[89] While there were several observations that had angered Hansberry's in this article, she was particularly angry that even in the mid-1950s, alleged white

[87] Donald R. Taft to Bosley Crowther, April 4, 1949, Box 10, Folder 15, WMP.
[88] Bosley Crowther, "'Wind' BLOWS AGAIN: The Current Revival of 'GWTW' Inspires Some Thoughts on Film Classics," *New York Times*, September 28, 1947, X1.
[89] Bosley Crowther, "Negroes in a Film; 'Carmen Jones' Finds American Types Singing a Foreign Opera Score," *New York Times*, October 31, 1954, X1.

liberals like Crowther still thought that including more blacks in films required their portrayal in exotic terms.

Yet views like these articulated by "liberals" were far from unique. One of the leading white actors in *Foxes*, Vanessa Brown, would be quoted two years after the film premiered in an article written by Harry Levitte on what "liberal-minded" film stars thought of black actors. For the piece, Brown happily assured that she had "certainly enjoyed working with colored people in 'Foxes of Harrow.'"[90] But perhaps somewhat unwittingly, she did not hesitate to naturalize why African Americans had succeeded in their work on *Foxes*, or her enthusiasm for the intellectual capacities of her black colleagues during the film's production. "They all seem to be blessed with natural acting ability, brought out by training. I hope to see them become accepted in all types of roles just as other nationalities. I found Kennedy Washington exceptionally intelligent."[91]

And it would be views like Brown's that Hansberry would refuse to brush off as typical ignorance only a little more than five years later. As such, she pointedly criticized what she considered Crowther's regressive, fixed notions of human biology, and she would be especially disturbed by his notion that as "a race," blacks were "wholesomely endowed with talents for singing and dancing."[92] Hansberry also took aim at the types of movies Crowther considered achievements for African American actors, and was perplexed by his curious endorsements of both *Stormy Weather* (1943) and *Cabin in the Sky* (1943).

> It happens that both of these movies were thoroughly offensive and I imagine the vast majority of our people would have preferred that they had never been produced. And this despite the fact that we <u>are</u> eager and concerned about the matter of employment for our artists and entertainers. Yet, we despair of and despise all materials which persist in presenting us as a carefree irresponsible, childlike people. We feel such presentations have nothing to do with our actual history and present-day life in this country. We do not think the answer to our protests about stereotyped parts or movies is to merely make them

[90] Harry Levitte, "What Liberal-Minded Film Stars Think!," *Afro-American*, March 26, 1949, 6.
[91] Ibid.
[92] Lorraine Hansberry to Bosley Crowther, November 3, 1954, Box 63, Folder 22, LHP.

bigger and more lavish, as in the case of these two motion pictures."[93]

Hansberry balanced her criticisms by contributing some thoughts on what she believed a more robust Hollywood film culture might look like for African Americans. Her primary suggestion was that producers create "reality," which she would summarize as "the very drama of our lives." "We want to see films about a people who live and work like everybody else, but who currently must battle fierce oppression to do so…we want employment for our young writers and actors, who can best give expression to our sorrow, songs and laughter, to our blues and our poetry…"[94]

***

As the excerpts from Hansberry's letter to Crowther point out, with few exceptions, through the 1950s Hollywood films that featured African Americans were often considered by their black critics to be of low quality, primarily designed as entertainment, or both. And it would not be until the very end of the late 1950s that new generations of white film producers became more aggressive in seeking to change the status quo for how African Americans were represented on film. Writing to Hansberry in 1959, one white producer who is representative of a new generation of producers, Valentine Sherry, explained that his first film documentary, *Coney Island, USA* (1952) had "concentrated on the gaudy external sets of the popular, painted village." Seven years, Sherry was hoping to direct and produce something quite different that was much more than entertaining, although this element would not be thrown out. "Now I would love to do a film on HARLEM, with its naturally dramatic sets of degradation—and by means of a dramatic story—we could move our cameras into a Harlem flat to bare the hearts and minds of the people who dwell there." Indeed, Sherry was confident that "through an entertainment piece of this

[93] Ibid.
[94] Ibid.

kind, there could evolve the strongest plea for decent housing."

Sherry was far from alone among the electric group of white film and television producers who approached Hansberry after her commercial success with *Raisin in the Sun* on Broadway in 1959. Lloyd Young, another Hollywood film producer who wrote to Hansberry following a phone conversation with the playwright, formally proposed that she develop a screenplay for Eartha Kitt in an adaption's of the celebrity's autobiography, *Thursday's Child* (1956). In a recent biography of Kitt, John Williams notes, "[u]nusually for a show business autobiography it was plainly all her own work…However, it's a frustrating book, an impressionistic affair that leaves much unanswered." Of the details omitted from Kitt's autobiography, the first absence Williams discusses is "the fact of her mixed-race parentage." After its release, Williams reports that *Thursday's Child* did not receive a warm reception from either the *New York Times*, the most important literary organ in these years, or the NAACP's *Crisis*, which African American activists like Kitt could often rely on to be more sympathetic.

In 1959, given that Hansberry's play had just proven her ability with critics and audiences alike to universalize the lived experience of a working class black family in Chicago with middle class aspirations, Young believed she could do similar work for Kitt. He was especially interested in Hansberry's assistance with crafting a universalizing story of Kitt's multiracial background that either closely or loosely referenced stories from the entertainer's life. Indeed, Young stated plainly in his invitation to Hansberry that his writing for the project need not hew to the self-authored narrative Kitt had produced in negotiation with *Thursday's Child*'s publisher, Dell, Sloan and Pearce. And his thinking on the film's prospects were not being kept from Kitt; the letter Young sent to Hansberry indicates that the entertainer was copied on this correspondence, and unless there was some deception involved, she was likely aware of the

producer's intentions and proposals. "If you feel inclined to, throw out the book altogether and write a completely original story in which we may star Miss Kitt. My only concern is that the role in which we shall cast Eartha will be one in which she more or less plays herself."[95]

Because Kitt was distinctly "mixed race" in appearance, like many "sepia" stars in the 1950s, she sat somewhere uncomfortably between white producers who hesitated to spotlight such realities, and African American communities that were not entirely welcoming either. This interstitial position for the many prominent blacks who were once widely referred to as "sepia" and "tan" by the black press was especially difficult for those who were entertainers by the mid-1950s, as their inclusion in American life was increasing considered insufficient. To be sure, their challenges in these years were by no means new: this amorphous, racially ambiguous group had been negotiating the ever-shifting racial possibilities and challenges of multiracial identity since at least the codification of Jim Crow in the late 19th century. Frank Yerby's celebration by white America but rejection by his neighbors is just one example of this. In 1950, Lena Horne, who was a descendent of the infamous politician, political theorist, and slavery proponent John Calhoun, sought to cancel her contract with MGM because of the demeaning roles the studio would cast her in without fail.[96]

While her contract with MGM had enabled her to become the most financially successful African American female actor in that era, rather than the dramatic roles Horne desired, she instead accrued her earnings from singing roles during the seven years they represented her.[97] A Hollywood film like the one Young was proposing Hansberry assist with had the potential of ameliorating conditions similar to these for Kitt and African American stars with similar

[95] Lloyd E. Young to Lorraine Hansberry, December 16, 1959, Box 63, Folder 6, LHP.
[96] For a family history of the African American descendants of the Calhoun family written by Lena Horne's daughter, see Gail Lumet Buckley, *The Black Calhouns: From Civil War to Civil Rights with One African American Family* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2016).
[97] Jim Goodrich and A.S. "Doc" Young, "Won't Glamorize Negro Girls," *Jet*, September 17, 1953, 57 – 61.

complexions. “My basis in contemplating this project is to bring to the screen an inter-racial love story in which both principals act like ordinary people without respect to race. I should like the love scenes to be written and played unselfconsciously.” At the very least, Young hoped that “for a few moments” this type of “dramatic motion picture adaptation” might enable his intended audience to “forget Eartha’s race and think of her simply as a woman who is very much in love.”[98] In the end, a film adaptation of *Thursday’s Child* would not be made.

Yet the question of whether or not a film adaptation could adequately capture Hansberry’s gift for universalizing African American writing and the black experience would occupy Hansberry in relation to a number of additional projects. Two of these in particular were especially informative. In addition to Hollywood’s adaptation of *Raisin* in 1961, which was produced by Columbia Pictures, and starred Sidney Poitier, Hansberry also completed a script for NBC that the company would never broadcast. In 1960, the firm commissioned a work from her that was titled, *The Drinking Gourd*, a teleplay about slavery that NBC would subsequently refuse to broadcast, despite the substantial time, writing and historical research the author put into the project. Worse still, Hansberry would only learn how significant NBC’s vacillation on the project was after reading about it in a *New York Herald-Tribune* article, which also reported that several network television projects related to the Civil War were being canceled. With a distinct feeling of betrayal after this experience, she consistently declined similar solicitations. At the beginning of 1961, Arnold Laven, a famed director and producer for both television and film wrote to Hansberry seeking her professional services; but with a tip from a colleague, he was well aware that Hansberry was “turning down many offers to write for the screen.”[99]

Hansberry’s refusal to be mired in the negotiations, adaptations, and possibilities of not

[98] Ibid.
[99] Arnold Laven to Lorraine Hansberry, January 16, 1961, Box 63, Folder 6, LHP.

having a completed work broadcast in the early 1960s suggests that activism surrounding the content of television and films were far from her only concerns in these years. In the middle years of the classical Civil Rights Movement era, countless activists and commentators also physically challenged or described the racial segregation of movie theatres in the South, and Hansberry would personally collect clippings of these reports. In the early 1960s, de facto—if not de jure—segregation remained enforced, even when other spheres of Southern life began the process of dismantling Jim Crow. As one scholar has recently explained, "[u]nlike streetcars, railroad cars and station waiting rooms, movie theaters in the South were regarded not as public spaces but as private spaces." For instance, in 1965, the Justice Department was still seeking federal court orders to desegregate two movies houses in Bogalusa, Louisiana, and would do so with the assistance of the 1964 Civil Rights Act.[100]

At the beginning of the decade, protests against segregated seating took place in the South as well as the North. Some were interracial in implementation though a number were staged almost entirely by white students. In 1961, fifty members of the Congress of Racial Equality picketed the Paramount Theatre in Times Square to protest the segregated seating in theaters owned by American-Broadcasting-Paramount Theatres, Incorporated. While a brief article published in the *New York Times* would describe the protest in New York, the paper also printed a number of smaller United Press International (UPI) briefs that provided protest activities in a few other cities.[101] In one, UPI reported that a protest had taken place outside of a cinema in downtown Boston that was staged by the Boston Emergency Public Integration Committee. "The group of fifty college students, mostly white, dispersed after an hour's uneventful marching under the eyes of a detail of police." In Chicago, thirty students were

[100] No Author, "Entertainment," *Jet*, July 29,1965, 55.
[101] "Paramount Pickets Press Integration," *New York Times*, February 13, 1961, 27. Box 62, Folder 14, LHP.

reported as protesting the "disgraceful segregation policies" of the "affiliated theatres of A.B.C. Paramount." White students in the South initiated protests on this day as well, with "hundreds" of University of Texas students in Austin reported as using the date—Abraham Lincoln's birthday—to stage mass demonstrations against segregated theaters. The student's readiness to do so was then described in the UPI blurb as having the effect of "winning" the sympathy of "nearly 100 Southern Methodist University" students in Dallas.[102] The African Americans who proposed *Lincoln's Dream* forty-five years earlier would have been proud.

By the late 1960s, after a decade of increasingly aggressive protests that tackled the many ways blacks remained second-class citizens in the U.S., film scripts written by black writers began breaking new ground in earnest. And these would not be the only advancements. In 1968, Gordon Park would become the first African American to direct a Hollywood film with *The Learning Tree*, a novel he had written that was published by Harper & Row in 1963. Another black-authored film from this era, *Slaves* (1969), co-authored by John Oliver Killens and Alida Sherman, is also representative of the cinematic developments of this era. Explaining to the film's directors, Herbert Biberman and Alida Sherman that if the script was rushed into production, his name should be removed, Killens then asserted: "It needs the insight, the focus, the deepening, the idiomatic truthfulness which only a black writer could give to it."[103] Beyond altering the reigning cultural imagery of African American bondage with its depiction of an empowered, enlightened Christian slave, *Slaves* was also representative of the critical status quo when white critics maligned it. And eerily similar to the criticism of post-World War II films adapted from black-authored novels, *Slaves* was accused of failing to adequately break with the tradition of romantic films that had previously dominated antebellum dramas. One film critic

[102] The UPI briefs were printed directly under the article on the "Paramount Pickets" in the *New York Times*.
[103] Keith Gilyard, *John Oliver Killens: A Life of Black Literary Activism* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010), 236.

who expressed these views, Gary Arnold discussed *Slaves* over two reviews published in the *Washington Post*, where he was a staff writer. In the headline of his second review, Arnold claimed that even though *Slaves* was aimed "at the present," it remained "shackled to the past."[104] He argued, "'Slaves' may be saying goodbye to 'Gone With the Wind,' but it seems to be reviving an absurd offspring of the same tradition—the novels of Frank Yerby, who was known for pretty torrid trash in the days of my youth."[105]

To be sure, over the course of his coverage of *Slaves*—which was impressive for a movie he did not appreciate—Arnold would do much more than dismiss the film, which was co-produced by Theatre Guild Films and the Walter Reade Organization. As such, Arnold also reported that Biberman, who was noted as the film's director, had tried selling the "story idea" to major studios for years with no success. Even in the late 1960s, Arnold explained to his readership that *Slaves* was "not a safe movie to finance"; he then reported that its budget for shooting in Shreveport, Louisiana had been "well under $1,000,000," which he described as "a very slim budget these days." And while Arnold was aware of three major studios that were also developing "films about black heroes (Nat Turner, Jack Johnson and Malcolm X)," he noted that if *Slaves* was a success, this "would make things a little easier for everyone contemplating similar material."[106]

And yet Arnold was undeterred from arguing that because *Slaves* was strikingly disjointed in its final form—an observation that white critics had used to dismiss similarly awkward initiatives, including *Birth of A Race*—it would fail to have its intended effect. Maintaining that "good intentions don't make a movie," Arnold pointed out that they it was more

[104] Gary Arnold, "'Slaves Aiming at the Present But Shackled to the Past," *Washington Post*, May 25, 1969, 129.
[105] Ibid.
[106] Ibid.

likely for them to become "a stale substitute for imagination and feeling and competence."[107] Even if he was willing to concede that *Slaves* had an "earnest, pedantic side," what led to the movie's failure by Arnold's standards was its "tawdry, sensational side," two attributes that he claimed inevitably dominated the production. This also supported his observation that *Slaves* was "one of the gaudiest and silliest pieces of ante-bellum melodrama since 'Band of Angels' [1957; an antebellum and Civil War drama set in the South] and the heyday of Frank Yerby."[108]

But by the late 1960s and early 1970s, views similar to those expressed by Crowther, Arnold and other journalists who produced criticism for major newspapers and periodicals had contributed to a gradual shift of blacks away from seeking critical validation from these outlets. In part because these publications had also began the fitful process of desegregating their writing staffs during the 1960s, this movement would not be without contestation. In 1971, the black journalist Clayton Riley argued in the *Amsterdam News* that the black arts movement rooted in the 1960s had failed to foster a culture of dissent among African American artists and writers. "When…I began writing in the Arts and Leisure section of the Sunday New York Times, it became popular in some Black circles to demean any intentions with insults, threats, and the continuing suggestion that I was given space in those pages for no other reason than to destroy Black art."[109] Even though Riley claimed that he had attempted to solicit criticism to be printed by the *Times* from African American "playwrights, actors, directors, and other artists" he explained that these efforts were by and large refused. Later in the essay, Riley mocked what some of the rules for black culture might look life if its creators and critics were not free to

[107] Gary Arnold, "'Slaves': Film 'Slaves,' *Washington Post*, May 22, 1969, B1.
[108] Ibid.
[109] Riley defended his own opinions printed by the *Times* by arguing that African American criticism, "particularly of film and theater, should appear in as many publications as possible," and that this "criticism should be read and assessed wherever" it appeared. In the end, he feared that if African American artistry could not weather a range of criticism, the end result would lend to an environment where "[t]o dislike anything, to express minimal enthusiasm for a piece of art, Black art, would become an act of treason." Clayton Riley, "The Black critic – theater and film," *New York Amsterdam News*, September 18, 1971, GBP.

produce and think for themselves. "Don't show Blackness unless it is beautiful in a cosmetic sense. Lie to Black people and tell them everything is all right, everybody worth seeing is a hero."[110]

Similar to the literary initiatives sponsored by the Children's Book Council that were discussed in the previous chapter, beginning in the second decade of the twentieth century, film producers occasionally challenged cultural standards by experimenting with racial universalism. By the postwar era, that included the purchase of narratives by African American authors that, while not perceived by most whites as threats, were nevertheless described as having the capacity to change social attitudes and practices by transcending racial boundaries. And some leading black intellectuals viewed the strength of their engagement with the experiences of white ethnic Americans as a viable model for bettering African American conditions via popular cultural meditations on "universal" human concerns. Thus, African Americans' willingness to deploy and acquiesce to the use of universal themes from *The Birth of a Race* onward was often widely perceived as making important connections to the problems black communities shared with other victimized groups, like Jews and immigrants.

But in the overwhelming majority of black professionals' engagements with Hollywood, African Americans were unable to get these stories to the viewing public without accepting alterations that pandered to an even narrower vision of black life than "white life" novelists proposed. One outcome of these "lost opportunities," is that historical scholarship more frequently than not follow contemporaries in glossing over the racial and social power of novels and films like *Foxes* and *Knock* as "white life" narratives. Because both works have primarily been treated as devoid of meaning in relation to the black experience and the rendering of African American life in expansive terms, explicit cultural commitments to civil rights are over-

[110] Ibid.

emphasized with much to more subtle developments.

A closer examination of *Foxes of Harrow* and *Knock on Any Door*, as well as black and white critical responses and the large audiences for these works suggest that they were once less impotent than they appear today. Liberal critics of these and several other films in which African Americans appeared found black characters worthy of praise; racially conservative critics were threatened enough by these same character to frequently challenge their appearance altogether. The histories of the adaptations of *Foxes* and *Knock* shed light on the alteration and removal of fictionalized portraits of blacks lives to conform to industry-wide and societal expectations for how African Americans should appear both in real life and on screen.

The following chapter considers both the form and the dogged inequality of "universality" as many African Americans increasingly enjoyed signs of American prosperity. With a focus primarily on the 1950s, it considers structures, contestation, and racial elisions as African American novelists struggled and often failed to meet white expectations of "universal" narratives.

CHAPTER FOUR
Who, and What, Was "Negro Literature" in the 1950s?

> "Literature must remain the study of belles-lettres and must not be allowed to be prostituted to the cause of social justice for any group. The study of literature must properly concern itself with major authors, and Negro authors do not measure up to this demand."
>
> —John S. Lash, *College English*, 1947[1]

> "The artist feels unable to emulate the Michelangelos and the Shakespeares, so he goes to the other extreme and becomes merely complaining."
>
> —Lorraine Hansberry, *Mademoiselle*, 1960[2]

Toward the end of Richard Wright's novel *Savage Holiday*, first published as an "Avon Paperback" in 1954, anti-hero Erskine Fowler admits to his role in the accidental death of his five-year-old next-door neighbor, Tony Blake. After attempting to hide his involvement over the entirety of the narrative, Fowler, a white, young, wealthy, recently-retired insurance executive offered his first confession to the child's mother. Wright depicted Mabel Blake, Tony's mother, as an uneducated, financially struggling, single woman who suspected Fowler's role in her son's homicide almost immediately after his death. When Fowler finally offered his confession, Blake asked, "Why didn't you knock at my door?" Fowler, her fictional neighbor of three years admitted, "I didn't dare, Mabel, I didn't know you…"[3]

Wright then emphasized how disconnected Fowler was from Blake based on the former's lack of civic virtue in an attempt to illustrate the horror of a seemingly inexplicable disconnection between two long-term, next-door neighbors. "'Yes; *you* wouldn't think of doing a little simple thing like that,' [Blake responded,] and even managed a slow and rueful smile. 'You're very moral…'" The irony of Fowler's morality is a reoccurring trope in *Savage Holiday*.

---

[1] John S. Nash, "What Is 'Negro Literature,'" *College English*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (Oct., 1948), 42.
[2] Unnamed Author, "We Hitch Our Wagons," *Mademoiselle*, August 1960, p. 315. Box 63, Folder 15, Lorraine Hansberry Papers, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library.
[3] Richard Wright, *Savage Holiday* (New York: Awards Books, 1965 [1954]), p. 205.

In the book's last scene, Erskine turns himself into a police station, after killing Mabel Blake following his confession to her. While explaining the murder to an on-duty policemen, Fowler "readily identified" his "business connections, [and] his church and club memberships; he even tendered his bank book." In response, "The policeman gaped. 'Mr. Fowler, you look like a solid citizen to me. Tell me, what's behind all this?'"[4]

Wright's novel, populated with white protagonists, yet still grappling with many of the civic and social concerns that animated *Native Son* (1940), was virtually ignored by reviewers after publication. In a year that also marked the official literary debut of James Baldwin with *Go Tell it on the Mountain* (1954), a novel centered on a black family that also, uncharacteristically, met the "universal" standards of New Critics, who needed a "novel of violence with all-white characters"?[5] Dismissing the novel in 1970 in the first book-length study of Wright's oeuvre, Russell Brigano assured that it was unlikely *Savage Holiday* would ever reach a large segment of scholars "[b]ecause its publication has been limited to cheap paperback editions..."[6]

More recently, literary scholarship such as Gerald Early's 1994 afterword to *Savage Holiday* has moved a long way in redressing mid-20th century dismissals of Wright's novel."[7] His and similar efforts to recover previously dismissed "white-life" novels is reflective of a

---

[4] Ibid., 221.

[5] The small—but not exceptionally so—total number of black-authored books printed by mainstream publishers in the early 1950s only buttressed contemporary skepticism of those critical of "white-life" novels, such as black literary critic, Blyden Jackson's. "In a land with fifteen million Negroes, where ten thousand books are published annually, less than thirty books (to be generous) worthy of serious attention were produced by Negroes last year. There are four times that many Negro colleges." Delivering this lamentation in his review of "Negro Literature" published in 1954, Jackson explained unapologetically in a footnote that he had not even seen *Savage Holiday*. As a result, he chose to quote Arthur B. Springarn's comparatively larger survey of "Books by Negro Authors" in 1954, which had "characterize[d] [*Savage Holiday*] as a 'novel of violence with all-white characters.'" Blyden Jackson, "The Blithe Newcomers, Resume of Negro Literature in 1954: Part I, *Phylon*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (1st Qtr., 1955), 9.

[6] Arguing that this erasure would be "all the better for Wright's artistic reputation," Brigano's sentiments are representative of the decades-long elision of the artistic, intellectual, and political elements of "white-life" novels, as blacks developed new strategies for battling Jim Crow. See Russell Carl Brignano, *Richard Wright: An Introduction to the Man and His Works* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1970), 135

[7] See, for example, Gerald Early's afterword in a recent edition of *Savage Holiday* published by the University of Mississippi. Wright, *Savage Holiday* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1994), 222 – 35.

larger movement of scholars toward recognizing these works as notable contributions to "Negro Literature."[8] Yet recent scholarly interest in "white-life" novels has only initiated an examination of what in reality was a much-larger "white" infrastructure that shaped the postwar production of African American literary products as they entered the nation's cultural marketplace.

This chapter examines how a range of black writers strived to embrace and respond to so-called raceless, integrated and "universal" turns in American media and cultural production in the 1950s. It seeks to uncover what the literary output and cultural productions of black writers looked like as they sought to portray a wide range of African American life that was reflective not only of the race, but also of the human condition in universal terms. In the 1950s especially, they developed these works with the hope—and increasingly, the expectation—of being considered seriously by black and white audiences and critics alike. Although black writers had enjoyed the patronage, publishing contracts, and endorsements of key white figures across the nation's leading publishing firms since the 1920s, before the late 1940s, the results of these collaborations often eroticized black life. This trend would only begin to lessen somewhat beginning in the mid-1940s, when a number of new black writers obtained contracts with major publishing firms such as the Dial Press, Appleton-Century, and Houghton Mifflin.

But the most popular of these books, authored by Frank Yerby, Willard Motley, and Ann Petry, respectively, would not look like what had previously been considered "Negro literature" produced by black writers. But neither did black life look the same, as a small but increasing number of African Americans gained access to education, new employment opportunities, and

[8] A number of recent works by literary scholar Gene Jarrett have inspired increasing interest in each of these areas, but especially two of his earlier works. Gene Jarrett, *Representing the Race: A New Political History of African American Literature* (New York: New York University Press, 2011) and Jarrett, *Deans and Truants: Race and Realism in African American Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008). For an important new work on mid-20th century "white-life" writing by African Americans, see John Charles, *Abandoning the Black Hero: Sympathy and Privacy in the Postwar African American White-Life Novel* (Rutgers: Rutgers University Press, 2013).

the amenities of urban life during the second migration and in the years following the war.[9] Similarly, widely evidenced social problems across the nation such as "juvenile delinquency" during and after World War II, spotlighted the fact that white Americans similarly grappled with behavioral pathologies due to poverty, even in an era of economic growth. This prompted black writers like Willard Motley to tackle related issues without pre-determining who engaged with his concerns due to racial biases. But what complicated the new directions he and other black authors pursued in the post-World War II era was the question of whether or not blacks could effectively use mass literary culture as a social and political vehicle for themselves. Because several popular black writers in these years often, but not always, eschewed racial protest in favor of "raceless" and integrated forms of literary universalism, the implications of their national prominence as African American authors was often ambiguous, if not outright rejected.

More complicated still, while often forgotten in the present day, white writers were far from divorced from these contemporary conversations and debates on the pitfalls and possibilities of how "Negro" writers and texts were included within the nation's literary culture. Through the 1940s and well beyond, white-authored works as diverse as Lillian Smith's *Strange Fruit* (1944) to Norman Mailer's *The White Negro* (1957) to John Griffin's *Black Like Me* (1961), a title that alluded to Langston Hughes's "Dream Variations," were extremely popular. And it would be these books, along with black-authored "white life" novels, that dominated the ill-defined mass marketplace for "Negro Literature" before the 1960s. Indeed, it was not until the early 1950s that African American critics began the process of discussing books written by African Americans in racially exclusive terms rather than reviewing what literary critics had

[9] For a comprehensive overview of African American advancement during the 1940s, see Ira Berlin, *The Making of African America: The Great Migrations* (New York: Viking, 2010).

previously included in broader conceptions of "Negro Literature."[10]

As leading contributors and producers of the nation's fictional and nonfictional black protagonists until the end of the 1950s, white writers and publishing professionals also reckoned with changing demands and expectations for how African Americans were portrayed. For instance, at the beginning of the 1950s, which not entirely confident that the firm could avoid controversy, Avon reprinted and distributed Carl Van Vechten's *Nigger Heaven* (1926) as a paperback. Although the firm expected it to be one of its best sellers, it would be on newsstands for last than a year before being recalled by the head of the firm after protests. Anticipating trouble, the firm sought Van Vechten's approval to change the novel's title before it was reprinted, but he refused to budge.[11] Other white and black writers, sometimes in dialogue with mainstream publishers and cultural institutions, developed a variety of narratives and productions that reformed styles, dialect, contributors, and genres virtually everywhere culture "by and about" blacks appeared. For black and white critics in the majority of the 1950s, this would be a slow process, and, like Van Vechten, it was far from unusual for white writers and media professionals to resist or refuse changes to their writing, publishing, and productions.

In publishing, widespread complaints about how the postwar economy had trivialized authors and cultural productions suggests that for white intellectuals especially, little solace was taken in the fact that books had become cheaper and more plentiful. And while it was not uncommon for black scholars and journalists to balance their criticism of the lack of forceful

[10] Before the late 1950s especially, this older, more capacious category of African American literature that included white Americans that wrote about blacks were regularly described as texts "by and about Negroes." Because the modern cannon of African American literature is predominantly comprised of blacks and other people of color, the value and relationship of "white writing" to corresponding literature "by and about Negroes" is often overlooked. One consequence is that works such as Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959) a title derived from Hughes's "Montage of a Dream Deferred," are more apt to be positioned as representative of the "black experience," rather than as a "universal" drama that transcended race. Yet this was precisely the language countless American critics, media professionals, and audiences used to laud this play.

[11] Edward White, *The Tastemaker: Carl Van Vechten and the Birth of Modern America* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2014), 303.

black writing sponsored by major presses in the early 1950s, they regularly argued that merely having more black authors in circulation was insufficient. In order for this writing to be influential, these critics maintained, leading black authors like Frank Yerby, who would have close to 20 million books in worldwide circulation by the end of the 1950s, would need to address, rather than evade, race in his popular works.[12] But in the field of literary studies, the proliferation and circulation of black-authored novels is often treated as an empirical fact rather than a history worthy of analysis in and of itself.[13]

Historians, having ceded the analysis of American letters to literary scholars over the post-World War II era, with the exception of examinations of the 1920s Renaissance, have more famously explored how the growth of cultural infrastructure has impacted black communities.[14] As a result, generally underexplored in historical studies is how post-World War II African American mass literary culture took on "universal" forms that were sometimes welcomed as reflections of a multiracial, if not integrated, "American culture." Recovering this history, while

[12] In January 1953, Gertrude Martin, the literary critic for the *Chicago Defender* explained, "For some years there have been these rather dreary summings-up here. There are probably a number of reasons why there has been a noticeable decline in Negro literature recently." Martin was not optimistic for "Negro literature's" prospects for the coming year either, even though she argued that "one might expect an ever broadening output" as blacks continued their quickening but still unfinished stride toward "the millennium." "The flood of writing of some ten years ago has slowed to a trickle. The fact that economically and in civil rights the Negro's position has improved has much to do with the decrease." Gertrude Martin, "Book Reviews," *Chicago Defender*, January 10, 1953, 11. By 1959, Hansberry would lament that even as her neighborhood newspaper, the *Village Voice*, was growing in circulation, it pained her to find that its "voice" had become increasingly impotent. "And now you are dying, perhaps you are growing but it is clear that you are dying. I see how one may purchase your sheet almost anywhere and that you must be growing like that and it is sad because you are almost dead." Addressing the vague yet important role of a successful business model for the paper, she acknowledged, "Advertisers are god yes. It is true and sad and then unimportant. They care, the men of business, only that many will read what they have said makes theirs the finest of all." Lorraine Hansberry, Unpublished Editorial, June 16, 1959, Box 63, Folder 30, Lorraine Hansberry Papers, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library.

[13] See Morris Dickstein, *Leopards in the Temple: The Transformation of American Fiction, 1945 – 1970*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), especially Dickstein's discussion of Chester Himes in Chapter 3, "The New Fiction: From the Home Front to the 1950s." Paula Rabinowitz's recent study of paperbacks treats black-authored paperbacks similarly. Raboniwitz, *American Pulp: How Paperbacks Brought Modernism to Main Street* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015).

[14] Two important works include Davarian Baldwin, *Chicago's New Negroes: Modernity, the Great Migration, and Black Urban Life* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007) and Adam Green, *Selling the Race: Culture, Community, and Black Chicago, 1940 – 1955* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

necessary for understanding the spectacular growth of literary contributions from black writers across the nation's mainstream media by the late 1950s and into the 1960s, should by no means be misunderstood as a hagiography. In practice, the professional and artistic fortunes of blacks writers seeking contracts from major producers, agents, mainstream magazines, and publishing houses was often contingent upon whether or not their works met literary standards designed for white writers. And while some of these writers were indeed relatively well-intentioned in the 1950s, like Lillian Smith and Robert Penn Warren, white writers like William Faulkner and Norman Mailer were famously ambivalent, if not hostile to African Americans by mid-decade.

The first section of this chapter seeks to address what the American marketplace of mass culture looked like in the last decade that it was overwhelmingly dominated by both white authors and white protagonists. Even if African American and other American writers did not achieve professional parity in the 1960s, by the end of the 1950s a number of publishing firms and other media organizations began the process of adding these individuals in numbers never seen before. Examining what the marketplace looked like in the decade prior when it was dominated by white Americans sheds light on why it would not be until the decade following that African American literature, authored by black writers, would receive a broader critical register. The second section explores in greater detail the history of black writers that attempted, and sometimes did, begin the process of de-homogenizing the literary products, performances, and broadcasts sponsored by white professionals and firms during the 1950s. Although these individuals were not entirely shut out of "mainstream" culture in these years, their attempts to publish and produce works for both black and white audiences were frequently resisted by white editors and sponsors on racial grounds. These rejections, however, did not deter a number of black writers from continuing to promote and create robust, universal African American cultural

works that did not refuse the particulars of black life. The final section considers the collaborations and encouragement these writers received from friends, colleagues, African American cultural organizations, and even strangers as they developed black products that were slowly recognized as constitutive of American culture. In an era when contracts and funding remained uneven and episodic, social capital with white and black allies was important in empowering black writers to continue embarking upon and consolidating their professional turn toward creating black "universal culture."

***

While the increasing number of black writers over the 1950s would indeed begin the process of shaking up the racial composition of the mainstream publishing world, they still only represented a tiny fraction of the nation's leading professional writers. With a wide range of contacts, consumers, and social politics, in addition to a variety of training, fellowship and job opportunities, white writers easily maintained a long-standing professional advantage over their black counterparts following World War II. This would include their dominance in the circulation of African American imagery in short stories, novels, nonfiction, plays, and films. And even when the publishing industry began sponsoring more nonfictional essays and books that explored race relations and the prospects for racial integration in the *Brown* era, it was white writers like Lillian Smith and Robert Penn Warren that were primarily solicited to do this work. Smith, best known for the rapid sales and national controversies that surrounded her novel, *Strange Fruit* (1944), was also the author of a work that history has by and large forgotten, *Now Is the Time: Segregation, the Supreme Court, and Democracy* (1955). Representative of a new industry practice, Smith's book on *Brown* was published in hard cover by the Viking Press, in addition to a simultaneous printing as a twenty-five cent paperback "newsstand edition"

paperback by Dell. While dual publishing strategies such as these were first and foremost business decisions, it also ensured larger audiences for Smith's work based on the fact that mass paperbacks in this era were always much lower in price, as well as broader in circulation. And within the realm of popular fiction, white writers would be the primary individuals responsible for "harvesting" the "bumper crop" of contemporary and historical fiction on the South after it enjoyed renewed popular attention in the years following the *Brown* decision.[15]

Regardless of whether or not new literary efforts produced by whites were more racially progressive, these works were integrating into an American literary and cultural marketplace that was decidedly less racially equal or sensitive in previous eras to its black protagonists and critics. Novels and plays written decades earlier, such as DuBose Heyward's *Porgy* (1925) and Roark Bradford's *Ol' Man Adam an' his Chillun* (1928), continued the circulation of exotic, controversial, and not infrequently, outright demeaning depictions of blacks. Works like those originally penned by Bradford and Heyward are also both significant and representative of white writing about black life for their immense popularity, as well as their circulation in a range of cultural forms for decades. Indeed, some of these works would only begin waning in popular demand with the arrival of new productions staged in the early 1950s. One of these works was Bradford's book of short stories that would be adapted as a play by Marc Connelly in 1930 and re-titled, *The Green Pastures*; and yet even at the end of the 1950s, new adaptations of this play were produced for both television and film. Heyward's book would receive similar popular transformations into other forms. Authoring both texts, he would first turn his book into the non-musical Broadway play, *Porgy and Bess* (1927), which would initially be more popular than its more famous opera version. Combined with Gershwin's composition, Heyward's libretto would

[15] For a framing of this trend, see, for example, Harnett Kane, "A Bumper Crop From Dixie," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, December 2, 1956.

launch this version eight years after the play premiered on Broadway.

One of the key factors that enabled these stories, books, and performances to keep circulating in new forms well-into the 1960s was the fact that opinions, even in black communities, often remained divided as to whether or not these racial depictions were harmful. And it was perhaps even more common for whites to respond unequivocally that extremely popular depictions of black life in film form, such as *Porgy and Bess* (1959) and *Carmen Jones* (1954), both directed and produced by Otto Preminger, provided invaluable interracial exposure. In a personal letter outlining this general view for Hansberry, a white woman from the Midwest "conceded" that even if Preminger had "corrupted much that is genuine in the Negro culture to make it conform to white expectations," his films should still be regarded as "stepping stones."

> Hollywood has refused to recognize Negroes exist, except as servants. CARMEN JONES and PORGY & BESS (I have seen neither, so I go on what I've read and seen of them in magazines) are a departure from that stifling concept. Not the giant leap such a play as [Hansberry's *Raisin in the Sun*] is, which treats the Negro at last on an adult level—but perhaps not to be condemned either. While the Preminger movie Negroes are exotics, they are laughing, loving, feeling creatures. At last, in those motion pictures, Negroes are romantic heroes and heroines. While they are stereotypes, just as practically all movies present stereotypes, and they are attractive stereotypes.
>
> Does that last point sound childish? I imagine I need hardly point out the naiveté of most white Americans—but perhaps I can dramatize it by a specific case—mine. I was born in Kenosha, [Wisconsin], a middle-class girl who had almost no contact with Negroes until three years ago when my husband and I moved to Chicago. I would guess that I am not untypical of the bulk of white 'old Americans' in that respect. Except in metropolitan centers, most whites have only a hazy conception of what Negroes are like.[16]

"Protest," as Richard Wright's *Native Son* (1940) would be pilloried for—after the novel's sponsors and many others first hailed it as "universal"—was by and large absent among newly published works over the 1950s. Recent literary scholarship has argued that paperbacks created a market for black writing to circulate widely, but more accurately, the explosion of cheap paperback books from the early 1950s created new markets for older fictional works of

[16] Ruth (Mrs. Fred) Gleeson to Lorraine Hansberry, [circa 1959], Box 64, Folder 5, LHP.

social protest by white authors.[17] But the trend of older works of fiction and nonfiction being overrepresented in paperback form could be evidenced well beyond realist and naturalist texts. Before new writing increasingly appeared as "paperback originals" by the middle of the decade, reprint editions by and large dominated the paperback market in the early years of the 1950s, and the "peak of popularity" for the most renown of these writers had already passed.[18]

Furthermore, most "protest" novels in wide circulation during the 1950s "paperback revolution" were centered on the fictional lives of white Americans. Best-selling white authors who were described somewhat tentatively in the era as, "in a sense, protest writers," such as Erskine Caldwell, James T. Farrell, and John Steinbeck dominated the paperback market for fiction. Contemporaries widely considered these popular works outmoded, and their emphases on the plights of white protagonists were summed up in one dissertation on the 1955 paperback market as "more deeply rooted in the 1930's than the present, but still widely read."[19] And the fact that these writers and the majority of their protagonists were white would not absolve them from local and federal censorship efforts. Caldwell, Farrell and Steinbeck would each have books banned in Detroit in 1955 and in other communities around the nation during the 1950s. Thus distribution challenges that black and white avant-garde writers faced, compounded by the backlash against salacious book covers—and, less often, content—regardless of the author's race

[17] See, example, Paula Rabinowitz, *American Pulp* and Carla Cappetti, *Writing Chicago: Modernism, Ethnography, and the Novel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).
[18] Eleanor Blum, "Paperbound Books in the United States in 1955: A Survey of Content," Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Illinois, 1958, 163 – 168. Increasing competition over reprint rights in the early 1950s had simultaneously driven up the prices of these works in addition to opening up a new market for writers to produce works directly for firms specializing in paperback publishing by the mid-1950s. And while this opened up opportunities for first-time novelists to appear in print, if not to support themselves based on the inadequate compensation offered in most contracts, the nation's most popular writers by and large evaded this phenomenon, at least in the 1950s. These white writers continued publishing new work in hardbacks first; Frank Yerby fell into this group, representing yet another exception from the larger 1950s cohort of black writers. By comparison, as a seasoned, popular writer that was highly regarded in black intellectual circles, Wright represented somewhat of an exception to this trend in his willingness to experiment with publishing *Savage Holiday* with Avon in paperback as a new release. Frank L. Schick, *The Paperbound Book in America: The History of Paperbacks and Their European Backgrounds* (New York: R. R. Bowker, 1958), 82.
[19] Eleanor Blum, "Paperbound Books in the United States in 1955: A Survey of Content," 168.

suggests how media censorship resisted hewing to the color line in this era. In 1958, one publisher lamented, "[i]t has already made the work of some good writers—even classics—unavailable in some communities and has created the fascinating situation of a book being perfectly acceptable at $3.50 in hard covers, but dangerous at 35 cents in paper."[20]

Although some Renaissance-era black writers, such as Claude McKay with *Home to Harlem* (Harper and Brothers, 1928; Avon, 1951), were represented on paperback lists, it was much likelier that white writing on race, such as Smith's *Strange Fruit* would be republished. And when works from the 1920s generation of black writers was reprinted, white publishers in the postwar years did not reprint these books based on their "respectability." After *Home to Harlem*'s initial publication in 1928, Langston Hughes wrote Alain Locke celebrating the fact that it was the "best 'low-life' novel he had ever read." "Puts Francis Carco and Pio Baroja—even [Maxim] Gorki—in the shade for that kind of thing."[21] Hughes also joked that if it weren't for the opposition it would inspire from "the colored papers," "[*Home to Harlem*] ought to be named Nigger Hell."[22] Other black authors that were published in book form for the first time in the 1950s whose works were considered contemporary avant-garde writing, such as Ralph Ellison and James Baldwin, were circulated in much smaller numbers in comparison to McKay. Although these two were consistently recognized by white intellectuals in these years as "writers of recognized merit," in comparison to more popular authors published in paperback, even their cheaper works in paperback form were described as "more limited in public appeal."[23]

Nevertheless, by the end of the 1950s especially, leading African American writers

---

[20] Simon Michael Bessie, "American Writing Today: A Publisher's Viewpoint," *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, Vol. 34, No. 1 (Winter 1958), 17.
[21] Faith Berry, *Langston Hughes: Before and Beyond Harlem*, (Westport, Connecticut: Lawrence Hill, 1983), 94 – 95.
[22] Tyrone Tillery, *Claude McKay: A Black Poet's Struggle for Identity*, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994), 88; and Berry, *Langston Hughes*, 94 – 95.
[23] Eleanor Blum, "Paperbound Books in the United States in 1955: A Survey of Content," 167.

cautioned that racial representation in popular entertainment, even in its less pernicious forms, was insufficient as a strategy for developing a racially inclusive cultural sphere.[24] In a television discussion of *Porgy and Bess* leading up to its Hollywood premier in 1959, Lorraine Hansberry debated with Otto Preminger, the film's director, on the pitfalls of texts and broadcast productions that accentuated stereotypes of African Americans. And while some white viewers and publications were sympathetic with her arguments, others, such as *The Theatre* magazine, emphasized that Hansberry had not even seen the film yet, and was only familiar with Heyward's book version of the story. Following this critique, Hansberry submitted a letter to the publication which it would publish explaining that she was "deeply offended, perplexed and hurt" by its coverage of her participation in this debate.[25]

Represented among her concerns with both Preminger and *The Theatre* was that fact that she had been criticized for only having read—twice—the book; in hindsight, she also believed that Preminger had accentuated her objections to *Porgy and Bess* for his own benefit. Looking back, she explained that Preminger seemed "particularly anxious to relate my views to his film. It seemed curious to me then and I have only been able to surmise with hindsight that 'controversy' may have an economic potency which we innocents are inclined to forget." Her major point, she maintained, was not the content "put in" to novels and productions in the tradition of *Porgy*, "but what has been left out of Negro portraits."

> I am truly less obsessed with razor-fightism being unduly prominent in the output of white writers writing about Negroes than in the overt absence other dimensions. I cannot see how this attitude is a reflection of ghetto strengthening. I am audacious enough to believe that penetration in depth in the exploration of human personality is the only basis

[24] When circulation wasn't a factor, whites' intellectual authority over white readers and nonreaders continued to put them at an advantage compared to their black counterparts in defending regional and national cultural practices. For instance, the racially "conservative" Southern Agrarians only sold 2,000 copies of *I'll Take My Stand* after its first printing. But as blacks continued fighting whites' popular beliefs in their mental inferiority well into the 1940s, it is with little surprise that these intellectuals would hold more sway with the rising cohort of "New Critics" that celebrated black writers such as Baldwin that refused "protest."

[25] Lorraine Hansberry, *The Theater*, Vol. 1, No. 8, p. 10, Folder 28, Box 63, LHP.

by which an artist may evaluate his effort.[26]

In general, artistic reforms that represented more substantial breaks with the racial status quo in mass culture in the 1950s were limited to works that were considered racially offensive beyond a reasonable doubt, or at least so when protested en masse. For instance, rather than any particular concern over its content, Avon somewhat quickly agreed to recall its paperback reissue of *Nigger Heaven* nine months after printing the novel because of a number of "complaints over the title."[27]

Among other leading white writers from this era that transcended merely entertaining Americans, such as Norman Mailer with *The Naked and the Dead* (1948), if they were inclined to radically "protest" social conditions in the postwar era, it was not on racial grounds. In 1946, Robert Ellis reported for *Negro Digest* that Mailer "stays away from [the] race problem because of [his] lack of contact with Negroes." And as other white fiction writers and the publishing business moved away from realist narratives in the postwar era, texts that included dynamic portrayals of African American life became even more rare. Mailer's *The White Negro*, which was greatly offensive for many blacks, is representative of a book created by one of countless white authors who were estranged from the race, in addition to promoting racial stereotypes his generation was increasingly rebuffed for. After Hansberry debated Mailer in a *Village Voice* exchange in 1961, a number of readers would express their support for her perspectives. One writer, Howard Apter, explained in a letter to Hansberry that he found Mailer's "increasing appeal to savagery shocking," especially as compared with the humanist potential evidenced in *The Naked and the Dead*. "Of course there were seeds of danger in his first book. They kept sprouting in his second novel. But who amongst us is perfect? And the ensuing Age of Anxiety ground many of us to dust. But I did hope Mailer's personality was strong enough to resist. It

[26] Ibid.
[27] Eric Alden Eliason, *The J. Golden Kimball Stories*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 158.

wasn't."[28]

The artistic and professional trajectories of white writers who dismissed African American objections to their texts and productions were highly disappointing to their black counterparts. In the postwar era, popular black writers like Willard Motley, Hansberry, Yerby, Ellison and Baldwin were successful enough that they could confidently identify with white writers whose works they respected. More broadly, the friendship, collaborations, actions, and words of these black writers indicate that they would have identified themselves as members of an imagined universal guild of writers. As such, they regularly sought and professed solidarity with white writers with artistic and political standards similar to their own. Although it is often forgotten or obscured by their production of "Negro Literature," like their white peers, this loose cohort of African American writers at midcentury appreciated and consumed literature of all kinds, and white authors often inspired their own efforts. Indeed, it is critical to remember that as black writers developed African American literary universal over the 20th century, before the 1960s especially, they did not limit their reading, inspiration, or endorsements to other African American writers.

As just one of several examples, in the early 1950s, Hansberry was prompted to reflect in essay form on her artistic and political commitments as an aspiring young writer after the federal prosecution of Polish-American communist and author, V.J. Jerome. Hansberry's draft of this essay was largely concerned with Jerome's juvenile novel, *A Lantern for Jeremy*, published in 1952.[29] Jerome wrote poetry and read proofs for his book as he sat through a nine-month trial where he was prosecuted under the Smith Act for committing the "overt act" of writing a

[28] Howard Apter to Lorraine Hansberry, June 30, 1961, Folder 5, Box 64, LHP.
[29] Lorraine Hansberry, typed and handwritten essay draft, No Date. Box 62, Folder 7, Lorraine Hansberry Papers, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library. Jerome was widely considered the "cultural head" of the Communist Party.

pamphlet. And while Jerome was indeed a key figure in the CPUSA, Hansberry was not a member of the party. But like many rising black writers of her generation, she identified with him as a writer, and aspired to follow in his path by creating similarly universal texts and productions. As a result, Hansberry was especially frustrated by what she found to be the curious disconnect between Jerome's success in transcending the dominant salacious "commercial philosophy" of the era, and his prosecution. "And so—as a writer—as a young person I want to ask this question—why—? Why on earth do they want to put this man in jail?"

According to Hansberry, Jerome had contested a commercial literary marketplace that usually required "that that the only thing which may be written of is despair, degeneracy, sex, violence, death, and the hopelessness of mankind." Considering his work relevant to struggling persons around the globe, irrespective of nation, this affirmed Hansberry's own desire to produce universal art that dynamically conveyed portraits of African American life, but that would not be dismissed based on her choice of protagonists.

> I like people, I think they are gifted with endurance, I think they are heroic… I know about these things-and I even agree that if we are going to write realism, then indeed they must be a part of the work - but a part. For there is another side and that side is the sparkling exciting literature which can and must come from observations of human struggle… I say, that the every day struggles of the people to live. Just to live. Either in a small village in old Poland, or in Mississippi—[she crosses out black or white] is heroism… Still in resistance to all this—I say that the masses of people still do lift their heads above this life and search for what is moral-and decent and I think that this fact is the most glorious single characteristic of human existence. I want to write about these things some day-and this man [Jerome] has proven that it should be done, that it can be done, that it must be done and it is good rich exciting people's literature. [30]

It would not be until 1962 in the *New Yorker* that James Baldwin would famously notify white Americans that he was advising African Americans to question their integration into the so-called "burning house" of American Society.[31] Yet Baldwin was far from alone in the post-

[30] Lorraine Hansberry, typed and handwritten essay draft, No Date. Box 62, Folder 7, LHP.
[31] James Baldwin, "Letter: From a Region in My Mind," *New Yorker*, November 17, 1962.

World War II-era in detailing the insufficiencies inhered in the nation's civil and cultural practices, even if his willingness to frame related concerns in racial terms was somewhat newer for white audiences. Before the mid-1950s, it was much less common for white media professionals to speak candidly and without fear of reprisal when addressing the problems censorship was causing before the Red Scare lessened in intensity by the end of the decade. The small collectives of whites who spoke out during the early 1950s were overwhelmingly leftist, to this day it remains underreported that these individuals were not necessarily "radicals."

Beginning in the late 1930s, and only increasing over the 1950s, generations of white writers, editors, publishers, and commentators publicly and privately lamented the unpredictable business models and politics that were disrupting both the quality and reliability of U.S. media. And while widespread accusations of Communist infiltration can be evidenced in critiques of media professionals from the pre-World War II-era, during the early Cold War, political figures that charged writers and books with anti-Americanism were much more powerful. From at least the House Committee on Un-American Activities subpoena of the "Hollywood Ten" in late 1947 onward, the federal government's tightening grip and attempts to suppress cultural works usually centered on efforts to directly censor dissident artists.[32] Countless intellectuals and writers would be affected by so-called anti-Communist activism until the late 1950s, and governmental activity

[32] As historians and other scholarly have painstakingly documented for decades, from the late 1940s onward, the early Cold War initiated a comprehensive national drama resulting in widespread media censorship. Yet scholarship on government censorship and sanctions against artists and intellectuals during the Cold War era generally discusses the trajectories of either black or white Americans, but rarely both. In practice, however, local and federal efforts to curtail freedom of expression during the Cold War were more intertwined. Often lost in Civil Rights and African American historiography especially is the fact that white writers had just as much reason to fear political and professional reprisals if they were perceived as having a noteworthy relationship to social protest over the 1950s. Two prominent works in particular are useful for thinking about how researchers have framed this history. Herbert Mitang's *Dangerous Dossiers* was an early, ground-breaking work uncovering what CIA and FBI surveillance on writers at mid-century by focusing primarily on white writers. For a recent example of scholarship that focuses on how African American writers encountered governmental surveillance largely independent from how similar activity impacted their white peers, see, William J. Maxwell, *F.B. Eyes: How J. Edgar Hoover's Ghostreaders Framed African American Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014); Mitang, *Dangerous Dossiers: Exposing the Secret War against America's Greatest Authors* (New York: D.J. Fine, 1988).

ranged from the withholding of passports to the coercion of publishers as inspired by individual authors and select publications. Indeed, their dominance and ability to curtail allegedly subversive culture would not lessen until the mid to late 1950s. And while the actors responsible for directing censorship and the form of sanctions may have changed over the decade—McCarthy only represents a chapter in the anti-Communism of the era—constricted movement and government surveillance remained relative constants. Following McCarthy's fall, white proletarian author Jack Conroy jokingly confessed in a personal letter to Gwendolyn Brooks in 1955 that he was hesitating to seek royalties for previous works from Russian publishers because he remained uncertain of the consequences. "McCarthy is not dead but only sleepeth. Besides, Eastland and Walters seem to have taken over where the Republicans left off."[33]

In 1953, a brochure published by the National Council of the Arts, Sciences and Professions, a socialist organization led by whites but that also included a few blacks, asserted once again that "freedom of communication and publication" in the U.S. were vital necessities.[34] Following World War II, the ASP most famously raised these concerns in relation to censorship during the "Cultural and Scientific Conference for World Peace" it held at the Waldorf Astoria in New York in 1949. By the 1950s, a few of the organization's new leaders, overwhelming comprised of leading scholars and cultural figures, had gained some ground in successfully challenging dismissals and calls for the removal of its leadership from prominent positions. And in at least one case but most likely several, similar contestations of Red Scare-era tactics would only be vindicated in the decade following. Among ASP's leadership in 1953, these individuals would include: Robert Morss Lovett, Irving Adler, and Frederick Schuman. And those ASP leaders represented in the group that would be less successful in fighting charges of subversion

[33] Jack Conroy to Gwendolyn Brooks, October 28, 1955, Container 1, Folder 28, Gwendolyn Brooks Papers, Oversize Box 3, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.
[34] 1953 ASP Brochure, Box 62, Folder 5, LHP.

included but was no means limited to: W.E.B. Du Bois, Paul Robeson, Dorothy Parker, and John Howard Lawson, a member of the Hollywood Ten.

But as *Life* magazine would claim of the ASP's prominent attendees at the Waldorf, if it remains unclear what these figures represented, this was a group that lent socialism and the Late Popular Front "glamour, prestige [and] the respectability of American liberalism." In short, until its demise under Cold War pressures and prosecutions similar to peer institutions and organizations in the mid-1950s, the ASP's contestations were posed in reasoned rather than hostile terms.[35] The group's measured, if not subdued, advocacy can be evidenced across its 1953 brochure, including in its articulations on how Cold War "precautions" had informed its activities in light of the repressive environments they had contributed to that were felt across mass culture.

> We believe that we cannot place too much emphasis upon the importance of employing to the fullest the creative energies, skills, and experience of our members. On the one hand, these abilities are ASP's greatest single resource. On the other, commercialism, McCarthyism, and militarism are making a desert of the garden of American culture.
>
> …Beyond this, however, we have an unmistakable duty to the American people. The noxious air of our time is suffocating popular culture. Such is the demand for conformity to the hysterical standards of the moment that artists, writers, actors, scientists, teachers—in short, all intellectuals—are being deprived of their very bread.[36]

As the sentiments ASP articulated in the first paragraph excerpted above illustrate, it was not uncommon for those individuals willing to speak publicly about McCarthyism and censorship in this era to also address "commercialism" in tandem. And in a professional sense, discussing how publishers were determined to maximize profits, often at the expense of quality and content, was a safer topic to interrogate in examinations of the predominant factors shaping

[35] For a brief overview and discussion of the ASP and the fate of similar groups, see James Smethurst, *The Black Arts Movement: Literary Nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 114- 118.
[36] 1953 ASP Brochure, Box 62, Folder 5, LHP.

these businesses over the 1950s. This was of course compromised for those individuals responsible for publicly promoting the robust performances of publishing houses and mass media firms. But even if professionals in this position hesitated to say so publicly, countless people across the field reflected privately on the pessimism they felt toward a print industry plagued by uneven revenues, mergers, and buyouts as the paperback industry took off in the United States. In addition to less predictable financial projections in these years, rising production costs, and the rise of television and other technological developments in cultural entertainment were further threats to the publishing business from the late 1940s onward. But what was especially unpredictable in these years was the core consumer market for hardcover fictional books, which had previously enjoyed stature as the financial and cultural corner stone of the U.S. publishing business from at least the first half of the 20th century.

And while nonfiction and instructional books were increasingly popular with American consumers, increased demand, solicitations and the freedom to explicitly address racial issues and segregation outside of fiction and academic texts lagged behind this market growth. As such a cohort of popular white writers would not contribute books on the topic without fears of reprisals, a lack of compensation, or accusations of communist subversion, until the years following the *Brown* decision.[37] Northern white readers in particular were considered by publishers to be much more apt to engage with Lillian Smith's nonfictional reflections on race based on her literary reputation, identification as a Southerner, and their belief that she would

[37] Overall, the lacking compensation for white authors who would otherwise consider publishing on these topics was perhaps the most crucial factor. After World War II and before the mid-1950s especially, it was quite common for white writers who had written or helped facilitate works about racial prejudice to lament the dearth of adequate compensation or fellowship support to research and produce such works. Noting how financially untenable the pursuit of "serious" writing on Southern race relations was in 1948, Hollywood writer Cameron Shipp lamented lacking the financial support to pursue the "Southern problem as a story." Indeed, he informed his friend literary agent Muriel Fuller that he believed that it was "one of the greatest in the nation." Shipp maintained, "if I did not have a family to support, I would try to get it and write it." Letter, Cameron Shipp to Muriel Fuller, March 4, 1948, Folder 10, Box 19, Muriel Fuller Papers.

report with relative objectivity. In announcement that Smith had planned a visit to *Vassar* in the fall of 1955, one student journalist cautioned that it remained "difficult to assay accurately the influence Lillian Smith has wielded upon Southern mores and how she [would] go down in history." More tangible, however, was that "[a]lthough Miss Smith has been severely criticized as a Southerner for speaking out against traditions and beliefs, she is universally recognized as an honest person with the courage of her convictions and as a talented writer."[38]

Other prominent fiction writers that were represented among the leading cohort of white authors who published nonfictional essays, books, and opinion pieces on the nation's racial issues included William Faulkner and Robert Penn Warren. Of the three, to this day Faulkner and Smith are considered legacies for creating popular fiction that gainfully explored Southern race relations. But their nonfictional works related to civil rights were widely also distributed and discussed over the entirety of the 1950s, even though these endeavors are largely forgotten or dismissed in the present day. To be sure, white writers who held both professional and social advantages in the nonfiction business of "race relations" did not mean that it was completely impossible for African Americans to publish on related topics. But books such as Richard Wright's *The Color Curtain: A Report on the Bandung Conference* (1956) and *White Man, Listen!* (1957) were dissimilar from the products of leading white writers such as those above. Unlike Smith's, Wright's texts were marketed as cultural contributions that might offend or frighten white American readers. In short, his racial biases were accentuated rather than toned down.

By comparison, black-authored nonfictional texts related to civil rights with the potential of gaining a white readership that might consider their accounts "universal" or objective

[38] W. J. Howland, "The South Sees Her Own—Lillian Smith's Contribution," *Vassar Chronicle*, Vol. XIII, No. 3, October 8, 1955, 3.

appeared in much-small numbers before the late 1950s. To be eligible for either of these designations, these texts required a high degree of mediation by white editors, which inevitably included endorsements by white writers. Beyond academics, before the 1960s these individuals were political leaders rather than professional writers. Indeed, Walter White and Martin Luther King both published books on civil rights in the 1950s in their capacities as individuals at the vanguard of the movement. With the help of the advising, publishing connections, and likely not a small amount of ghost writing from Stanley Levison, King was offered a $3500 advance for his first book *Stride Towards Freedom*, published by Harper in 1958.[39] To compare this figure with the heightened demand for nonfictional black writing representative of the following decade, six years later, Alex Haley was able to secure a contract from Doubleday that included a $20,000 advance to be split between himself and Malcolm X for the latter's autobiography.[40]

Indeed, *Stride Towards Freedom* was particularly representative of the general terms of engagement black authors navigated when they sough to publish books with mainstream publishers. And a letter that King wrote to Lillian Smith in the hopes of securing a book endorsement after its publication provides a number of insights into how her prospective support figured into promotion strategies. Explaining the book's purpose to Smith in the summer of 1958, King hoped that she would be willing to "suggest to the editor of the book review section of The Los Angeles Times that they give [her] the opportunity to review the book…" From King's or an adviser's perspective, her review of *Stride Towards Freedom* "would uniquely stimulate interest and discussion and thereby materially aid in focusing the attention of thinking Americans on one of the major social problems of our day."

Complimenting their professional accomplishments and endorsements, in addition to the

[39] Hugh Pearson, *When Harlem Nearly Killed King: The 1958 Stabbing of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr*., (New York: Seven Stories, 2011).
[40] Manning Marable, *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention*, (New York: Viking Press, 2011).

tone of the text itself, white editors strived to affirm these books as measured and optimistic via consumer advertisements that signaled these attributes to prospective readers. As such, Walter White's 1955 *How Far the Promised Land*, published by Viking Press, was advertised by the publisher as spotlighting "some of the phenomenal advances" in "the American Negro's progress during the past fifteen years." Another Viking advertisement of the book published in the *Wilson Library Bulletin* further assured, "[o]ne will find zest, hope, and dedication in this testament, and in sections it almost seems as though Mr. White knew he was writing his last book." And as King's letter to Smith suggests, it was not uncommon for black authors to enlist themselves in publicity efforts out of necessity. In the case of his first book, this would be life threatening: a mentally disturbed black woman would stab King at a Harlem department store less than one month later while he promoted the book. Nevertheless, more representative of the conditions black writers promoted their works under can be noted in King's effort to assure Smith that other interracial brokers' endorsements of his book was a sign that his work deserved, if not demanded, her support as well. "A number of serious workers in inter-group relations who have seen the manuscript feel that it is extremely important that the book be widely read for the contribution it can make in race relations." King's words here align with Hugh Pearson's recent observation that *Stride Towards Freedom* was designed by its editors with the goal of "explain[ing] the movement to Caucasians. It was to be intellectual, but not too dry. Neither should it come across as 'too Negro.'"[41]

***

Over the 1950s, black and white American readers, especially its intellectuals, witnessed the remarkable entry of a loosely affiliated, rising generation of black writers into the

[41] Harper had previously pestered King for months in their hopes of publishing his account while the Montgomery bus boycott was fresh in white Americans' memories. Hugh Pearson, *When Harlem Nearly Killed King: The 1958 Stabbing of Martin Luther*, 9.

mainstream publishing industry, in numbers that had not been seen since the 1920s Renaissance. Novelists and playwrights such as Frank Yerby, Ralph Ellison, John Oliver Killens, Julian Mayfield and James Baldwin gained contracts with major publishers, foreshadowing the professional gains black writers would enjoy in even greater numbers during the 1960s.[42] Yet, even as these writers' postwar successes indicated to some that the nation's cultural firms were on the cusp of moving beyond their usual practices of representing one or two black writers, if that, in general, their professional advancements remained difficult for most of the 1950s.

Nevertheless, the numbers in which black writers gained footholds in the publishing business via the pursuit of a diversity of themes was momentous compared to previous celebrations, fixations, and eventual backlashes, against just one black writer, Richard Wright. As the "dean" of black letters from the late 1930s, even when Wright was compared with other black authors, in practice his unusual success generally left him standing alone in the general field of American literature in comparison to his black peers. Of Wright's dominance, Chester Himes would explain, "[t]he Black Renaissance was an inward movement; it encouraged people who were familiar with it, who knew about it and were in contact with it, but the legend of Richard Wright reached people all over." Because black writers barely registered as a cohort of any sort beyond the black press until the 1960s, it was also not unusual for white commentators to sidestep entirely comparisons to other black writers in their discussions of Wright and other black authors between 1930 and 1960. Instead, they compared them to other forms of African

[42] If the 1960s has come to be termed, "Renaissance II" because of the strength cultural work depicting African America presented, it was the cultural work of the 1950s that initiated this regeneration. John Killens, a key leader in the development of black writing from the early 1950s onward, reflected on the black literary output of the decade at a New Year's Eve party ringing in 1960. He maintained that the literary production coming out of the 1950s had been larger in quantity, quality, and profundity than that of the Renaissance. Hansberry, Ellison, Mayfield, Childress, Baldwin and his own work were cited as just a few prominent examples. For a comprehensive interpretation of this event and its broader implications, see Keith Gilyard, *John Oliver Killens: A Life of Black Literary Activism* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010), 149. Other writers Gilyard cites as examples of new black writers on Killens's list include: Loften Mitchell, William Branch, Paule Marshall, Pauli Murray, Lorenz Graham, Frank London Brown, and Louis Peterson.

American-produced entertainment. In 1941, one Northwestern University radio commentator, with the agreement of John Frederick, the host of the station's program, "Of Men and Books" observed, "I'm fully convinced that Richard Wright belongs to the long line of Negro singers which began with the spirituals."[43] Edward Morgan's attempts to characterize Hansberry's impact on American race relations due to *Raisin in the Sun*'s unprecedented success with whites would be described similarly almost twenty years later at the end of his eponymous television news program on April 6, 1959.[44]

A significant factor in the continued "invisibility" of popular black authors and protagonists for white Americans even at the tail end of the 1950s was the relative success these individuals had producing so-called "raceless writing." By the early 1950s, black-authored "white-life" novels like *Savage Holiday* were seemingly ubiquitous in the form of cheap paperbacks. By 1953, 972,500 paperback copies of Ann Petry's white life novel *Country Place* (Houghton Mifflin, 1947; (New American Library (NAL), 1949) had been sold; by comparison, the novel she remains famous for, *The Street* (1946), had only sold 50,000 copies in hardcover by 1955.[45] Willard Motley's *Knock On Any Door* (1947) and *We Fished All Night* (1952) and virtually every novel of Yerby's from *Foxes of Harrow* (1946) used this strategy, and each of their works would be tremendously successful with American consumers. By 1953, NAL had sold over a million copies of *Knock*. Given the popularity of these so-called "raceless" novels, when the African American-authored above were considered at all from the late 1940s onward, black commentators especially regularly accused them of being unsuccessful in contesting the nation's cultural status quo. Particularly vexing for these critics was the fact that the increasing visibility of black writers who readily produced "white life" novels seemed to contribute to an

[43] *Of Men and Books* (Evanston: Northwestern University Radio Dept, 1941), 55.
[44] Edward P. Morgan and the News transcript, April 6, 1959. Box 63, Folder 10, LHP.
[45] "How Successful are Lady Authors?," *Jet*, October 13, 1955, 46.

ongoing "invisibility" of the artistry and activism of the majority of black writers.

Even for the few firms that enabled the wider circulation of black-authored texts, including those with blacks characters, such as NAL, Avon and Pocket Books, beyond NAL their movements toward desegregating mass culture were rarely animated by racial concerns. The sluggishness and intransigence of racial change in publishing in particular, and cultural firms more broadly, is especially evident when their 1950s histories of desegregation are compared with the much-larger number of related efforts these businesses made by the end of the decade. Indeed, rather than race, the more striking characteristic linking the small but steadily growing number of black writers published by mainstream publishers for the majority of the 1950s was their ability to master the industry's exacting standards for black American professional writers.

Almost without fail, these standards were much higher than they were for white writers. Asked to excise controversial or "protesting" black figures from their books, sticking to "Negro themes," not being "too Negro," and lobbying for their own manuscripts when publishers and agents would not, are just a few examples of common laboring for black writers in these years. However, in the event that an African American writer was able to meet the industry's unequal standards in the postwar era, publishing firms, periodicals, and foundations would validate these individuals as constructive "professional" authors. As such, they were the most likely to receive accolades in the forms of money and awards to support their works in progress for major publishing houses and theatrical production. James Baldwin (Guggenheim, 1954), Ralph Ellison (Prix de Rome, 1955 – 1957), and Chester Himes (Yaddo, 1948) are just a sampling of the writers who received various forms of fellowship support in the postwar era. To be sure, remuneration from fellowships and books contracts varied greatly. Before the greater institution support available for black writers in the 1960s, they were often insufficient for both new and

established black writers to support writing activities over longer terms, even if they enabled the development of many new projects over shorter terms.

Institutional recognition of African American authors with fellowships, awards, and book contracts also signaled to colleagues, commentators, and audiences that white Americans were willing to appreciate black writing that transcended social protest. For instance, Himes, the quintessential African American protest writer of this cohort, had an amazingly difficult time gaining any of these forms of support after the critical acclaim he enjoyed in the mid-1940s dissipated. More than in any period prior, being a published "Negro writer" would not require—and in many cases, even accept—the latest generation to privilege or dwell on the depravities of despondent black protagonists. Many commentators published by the black press lamented the sharp reduction of so-called protest works published by major publishing firms by the early 1950s. But here and elsewhere, commentators of all races also readily acknowledged the expansion of themes African American writers pursued in the postwar era.

Even when white Americans celebrated the best of these works that conveyed "raceless" themes, it was far from uncommon for black readers, scholars and journalists to reflect on these works more cynically for a variety of reasons. Most prominently, Frank Yerby's works were regularly dismissed or discounted by these individuals based on what most critics considered to be his evasion of race. And for those who came to his defense, and quite a few would, it was not uncommon for these respondents to point to other prominent black authors who were popular with white Americans who they felt perpetuated black stereotypes and narratives of black declension. For instance, Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952) was famously celebrated for its artistry by white intellectuals, and far more so than for any particularly legible protest in the early 1950s. But as Arnold Rampersad has pointed out in his biography of Ellison, at least two black critics

mocked Ellison's racial self-hatred.[46] In 1952, one black scholar observed in the *Afro-American* that "[e]ven Time Magazine admits that colored people will not like it. One colored critic argues that it contains the same old line, the same old nonsense about colored people that whites have been reading for years."[47]

Similarly, Baldwin's *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (1953) was widely lauded by New Critics, but this did not mean that journalists and writers for the black press warmly welcomed their praises. Reporting on the novel for *The Crisis* in 1953, Henry F. Winslow explained,

> Mr. Baldwin has been urging as an anti-protest critic, a thesis which is being warmly endorsed by the clique of critic-patrons who sponsor this notion through publications like the *Partisan Review* and *The Reporter*…in *Go Tell it On the Mountain* there is considerable nature, for there is much truth; but there is less art, for there is nothing new.[48]

By no means duped by the racial discrimination inhered in meeting what in practice were moving standards in relation to what constituted "universal" literature, in black journals and newspapers especially, critics regularly pointed out how difficult white interlocutors made this. But the fact that critics often blamed black writers rather than the white publishing structure they negotiated with suggests how obscured the publishing process was even for journalists and scholars who regularly contributed to the black press.

McCarthyism, New Criticism, widespread anti-communism, and a cautious, generally conservative, publishing climate regularly animate scholarly and popular discussions of cultural production in the 1950s. But in reality, an array of factors influenced new sensibilities in the literary pursuits of African American writers. Of these, one factor that critics of "raceless" literature often sidestepped, and that old and new members of the black middle class often pointed out to them, was that a growing number of blacks were hopeful about the possibilities for

[46] Arnold Rampersad, *Ralph Ellison: A Biography*, (New York: Vintage, 2008).
[47] E. Harris, "In Defense of Frank Yerby," *Afro-American*, November 15, 1952, A9.
[48] Henry F. Winslow, "Church Sermon," *The Crisis*, Vol. 60., No. 10 (December 1953), 637 – 638.

universalism and interracial life. As two scholars would argue in a seminal anthology of "Negro Literature" published in 1968, "postwar ideological and educational advances implicit in the Declaration of Human Rights and the Supreme Court Decision of 1954" contributed to new literary perspectives. And even though social advancements were by no means fully realized in the 1950s, the era's objectively positive developments "seemed to assure a period more congenial than the wartime 1940's to an art requiring some detachment and calm perspective."[49] Gains in postwar African American employment and professional opportunities, increasing political influence at the federal level, and a variety of additional social gains were among those important factors that encouraged experimentation with new, universal forms of literature.

The most prominent African American sponsor of a dynamic black presence within American culture since his editorship of *The New Negro* anthologies in 1924 and 1925, Alain Locke's life work was meant to culminate with a book representative of the postwar zeitgeist. Locke's *The Negro in American Culture* (1956), a historical account that would only be finished and published posthumously by Margaret Butcher, was based on Locke's research, lectures, and scholarship in the years prior to his death.[50] Rather than pointed racial advocacy, or a demonstration of African Americans' humanity with explicit social, cultural and political aims, Locke's post-World War II project enjoyed a degree of relative subtly that *The New Negro* was

[49] James Emanuel, *Dark Symphony: Negro Literature in America* (New York: The Free Press, 1968), 371.
[50] Locke would not live to see his work completed, published or reviewed. Before his death in 1954, he handed over the materials for the project to his friend and scholar Margaret Butcher, who would complete and publish *The Negro in American Culture*. The book that was meant to be Locke's "magnum opus," like Penn Warren's simultaneously reviewed *Segregation*, is almost unknown. Yet it is also of little surprise that *The Negro in American Culture*, demonstrating how generations of Africans Americans led developments across American culture over a variety of forms, would not have a similar staying power on the eve of black self-empowerment. Rather than an announcement of a "New Negro," even if this label would less famously be given to black Americans and other pan-Africans by the mid-1950s, this work announced that African Americans had arrived and contributed to American culture for decades. To be sure, *The Negro in American Culture* by no means avoided taking a political stance, especially in its determination that the era in which it appeared was best defined by nonproductive segregation and cultural separatism. Nevertheless, its hopes for future integration, given the legal, professional, and social advancements for African Americans by the mid-1950s, were optimistic. In the years immediately before his death, for Locke, with Butcher's assistance, integration and cultural democracy would not be the dead end assimilation devoid of racial pride represented three decades earlier.

regularly accused of lacking. And unlike the 1920s, Locke also benefitted from changes in the structure of support for black writers and scholars, which had moved well beyond the individual patronage that Renaissance-era authors were sustained by. In 1951, the Rockefeller Foundation granted Locke generous financial support to conduct his project tracing African American contributions across the long history of American culture.

As a project that built on his and other cultural promotions of interracialism, *The Negro in American Culture* also reflected a markedly different intellectual climate from the early decades of the twentieth century. The title alone suggests the work's orientation toward productive social and cultural integration, which by mid-century, while still aspirational, seemed much more tenable given the social and political advancements of African Americans in comparison to previous decades. From 1916, when W.E.B. Du Bois first approached Locke on behalf of the NAACP to help turn black theatre into a "political weapon," he worried that the politicization of black culture had the potential to detract from its artistic development.[51] But because Locke was deeply invested in promoting black cultural engagement that did not require the loss of self and group identity, he supported a wide range of initiatives that contributed to the institutional and professional development of black art inspired by African heritage.

As poet, writer and literary critic William Stanley Braithwaite, born in 1878, would argue in 1955 before Locke's Memorial Committee, it wasn't the "Negro in American Literature" that defined "the spirit of Alain Locke," it was "Negro authorship" in American literature.[52] And it was important for Locke that these writers appear and be received on equal terms, which informed his longstanding skepticism of explicitly political messages in cultural works. Indeed,

---

[51] Samuel A. Hay, *African American Theatre: An Historical and Critical Analysis*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 80.

[52] The "address delivered before the Memorial Workshop, Alain Locke Memorial Committee, New York City, 1955" was published in *Phylon* as "Alain Locke's Relationship to the Negro in American Literature," *The Phylon Quarterly*,Vol. 18, No. 2 (2nd Qtr., 1957), 166.

Locke's perspectives were especially well suited to the media climate for black intellectuals in the early 1950s. Thus, even as his final work reflected his longstanding commitment to celebrating, if not fighting, for the race, it would not be easy for white readers and commentators to regard his capstone research as mere protest. For instance, in 1957, *Commentary* commissioned the African American scholar Charles H. Nichols to review Butcher's *The Negro in American Culture* alongside Robert Penn Warren's *Segregation: The Inner Conflict in the South*. Because of Locke's commitments to deep research and careful argumentation, which he expected Butcher, a literary scholar, to continue, Nichols could fairly examine both books based on their arguments and substance, rather than the racial identities of the authors.

But even if many middle class black Americans were more sympathetic to efforts like Locke's that promoted the history and possibilities for a multiracial democracy in terms that were familiar—and perhaps, digestible—to whites, similar sensibilities were regularly contested. While the dissent would not be nearly as strong as it became by the middle years of the 1960s within African America, in the 1950s there were still marked disagreements over "integration" as the definitive language for defining black Americans' goals in relation to equal rights. And these debates in the postwar era were far from new. Langston Hughes, Alain Locke, Zora Neale Hurston, George Schuyler and countless others famously debated the contours, possibilities, and pitfalls of "Negro Culture" from the 1920s onward.

Critics like Hurston and Hughes argued that Americans of all races needed to accept black life and artistry on its own merits, rather than thinking of either in teleological terms. Hurston thus conflated integration with assimilation; or more bluntly, attempts to be white or movements toward racial abandonment. For Locke and other middle class supporters and beneficiaries, the concept was much less pernicious, and would only prove advantageous to

future generations of black Americans. For these individuals, integration would not signify the abandonment of race, but the lessening of restrictions, the capacity to account for multiple races equally, and life without Jim Crow. Therefore it is with little surprise that while working on *The Negro in American Culture*, Locke chose the language of integration to praise *Invisible Man* in 1953 in his review of the previous year's literature for *Phylon*. "It is in fact one of the best integrated accounts of interactions between whites and Negroes in American society that has yet been presented, with all characters portrayed in the same balance and perspective."[53] While not misconstruing his work as political, Frank Yerby's work represented for Locke what might transpire if racial barriers were to fall entirely. Contextualizing what he considered one of Yerby's "best and most elaborate historical romances" in the same essay, Locke argued that this work "vindicates once more the right of the Negro as artist to any theme and province he chooses as a freeman of the world of letters." As such, Yerby's "cumulative maturity" and "general success with the public will be an incentive to younger Negro writers that may spread our creative production over wider subject-matter fields than usual."[54]

But Locke's willingness to accept even "raceless" fiction as representative of "Negro authorship" in "American Literature" would put him at odds with others from his generation who were also supporters of "Negro culture," such as Hughes. While Hughes would not reject figures like Yerby, or even Baldwin's willingness in the 1940s and 50s to acquiesce to New Critical standards, neither would he engage their ideas without skepticism. In his acceptance speech written for the NAACP's 1960 Spingarn Medal, after witnessing at least fifteen years of black writers producing "white life" novels in their attempts to meet the "universal" standards of white America, Hughes issued a firm rebuttal.

[53] Alain Locke, "From Native Son to Invisible Man: A Review of the Literature of the Negro for 1952," *Phylon*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (1st Qtr., 1953), 35.
[54] Ibid., 39.

> There is so much richness in Negro humor, so much beauty in black dreams, so much dignity in our struggle, and so much universality in our problems, in us—in each living human being of color—that I do not understand the tendency today that some American Negro artists have of seeking to run away from themselves, of running away from us, of being afraid to sing our songs, paint our pictures, write about ourselves—when it is our music that has given America its greatest music, our humor that has enriched its entertainment media for the past 100 years, our rhythm that has guided its dancing feet from plantation days to the Charleston, the Lindy Hop, and currently the Madison. Our problems have given intriguing material to writes from 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' to Faulker, from 'The Octoroon' to Eugene O'Neil. Yet there are some of us who say, 'Why write about Negroes? Why not be just a writer?' And why not—if one wants to be 'just a writer?' Negroes in a free world should be whatever each wants to be—even if it means being 'just a writer.'"[55]

While American publishers and media firms were in fact welcoming black authors and contributions in numbers that had not been seen in many years, in reality, this represented a marked shift in the industry's practices for the majority of the 1950s. With few exceptions, publishing contracts for black writers for most of the decade, when offered at all, were paltry. Several commentators, included Hughes, joked that writers like Frank Yerby, one of the most successful American writers of any race, had avoided the precarious financial position the majority of professional writers exposed to.[56] Black writers' fortunes were tied even closer to new publishing trends in the 1950s—and in particular, the paperback business—in comparison to other writers, regardless of how prominent. In that regard, Richard Wright's *Savage Holiday*

---

[55] Remarks by Langston Hughes in Acceptance of 45th Spingarn Medal at NAACP 51st Annual Convention, Northrop Auditorium, University of Minnesota, June 26, 1960, Box 63, Folder 13, LHP.

[56] Hughes joking complained in his *Public Defender* column in 1952 about how woefully misinformed his fan base was about his finances, noting that he was "downright flabbergasted" that he regularly received requests from strangers asking for money. "I am about the brokest writer that ever wrote." Seeking to deflect the problem to at least one of his wealthier black counterparts, Hughes suggested that his solicitors would do better by "contacting some of the big best-sellers like Mickey Spilane or Ernest Hemingway or Frank Yerby—and see if they might be in a charitable mood." Langston Hughes, "There Is No Telling What the Mailman Will Bring," *Chicago Defender*, December 20, 1952, pg 10. Simon Bessie was one of what was likely several publishing professionals who pointed out that extremely popular writers like Frank Yerby had avoided the precarious trends in the publishing business. In his reflection as a seasoned publisher, he also observed, "It is noticeable that more and more of our novelists seem to be part-time or full-time members of faculties. I am thinking of writers like Saul Bellow, A. B. Guthrie, George Stewart, Robert Penn Warren."[56] Bessie's guess was that the "not particularly popular novelist" might also rely on teaching for additional income, in addition to "becom[ing] increasingly dependent upon an occasional book-club selection or movie sale or reprint sale..." Simon Michael Bessie, "American Writing Today: A Publisher's Viewpoint," 17.

serves as a useful example of what the popular market for fiction looked like in the early 1950s.

And while the paperback revolution would enable new black authors to approach publishers in greater numbers by the mid-1950s, more frequently than not, this business would expose them to a host of financial problems. For instance, because it was common for black writers have little control over the reprint rights to their works, it was not uncommon for them to receive little compensation when they were. In Chester Himes's case, after moving to Europe, more often than not he was unaware of when his detective novels were published in paperback in the United States. According to John Williams, "[Himes] would write and ask me to confirm their presence…That he was being paid little or no money for these rights only supported his contention that publishing was a brutal business and brutal businesses always take advantage of black people."

Indeed, although Hime's financial position as a popular black writer was dire, among this small cohort, his lack of compensation was not especially unique. During the 1950s, Himes was considered one of the top authors published in French. Nevertheless, because of his strained relationship with the American publishing industry, he was often scrambling for cash to support himself. And it would be this predicament that led Marcel Duhamel, an influential French editor, to encourage Himes in 1956 to start writing detective novels for money, a suggestion Himes would at first rebuff, even though these were the books that he would become most famous for. "I didn't believe I could do it, but I was flat broke."

Along with Yerby, by the 1960s, these books would make Himes one of the two most widely sold African American authors in the world. Most of his memories and experiences with American publishing business before this point highlight how little agency he had as a controversial black author. In the early 1950s, NAL offered Himes $2500 to reprint *Cast the*

First Stone, Himes's semi-fictional autobiography of the seven years he spent in prison. Himes used a white protagonist for the novel, rewriting it several times in an effort to meet the standards of several publishers that rejected the work, even after title changes and manuscripts revisions. Coward McCann would eventually publish it in 1952. That version has regularly been described as a hardened version of Himes's nuanced manuscript, and largely unrepresentative of his initial attempts. Three years after purchasing *Cast the First Stone*, NAL would decline reprinting the novel, and choosing instead to void the contract. Avon would pay an advance of $1500 at the end of the decade to publish the book as a paperback, but would also decide against publishing it.

And Chester Himes's experiences engaging, but also being rejected by publishers, over the 1950s and 60s represent one of the most extensive negotiations between black writers and major publishing houses during the decade, like his finances, the outcomes were not unusual. Often, even when black writers had agents, editors, and publishers in the 1950s, authors like Himes, Martin Luther King, and James Baldwin often had to promote or sell their own works. As Langston Hughes would explain to John Oliver Killens after Yerby's and Baldwin's publisher, the Dial Press, published *Youngblood* (1954), even if a publishing house took a risk on a black writer, "[y]ou had to do your own promoting."[57] Literary scholar Keith Gilyard has recently argued that books like *Youngblood*, which spotlighted the struggles of a black sharecropping family, would require extra efforts in the 1950s to convince libraries and prospective readers that that they were "not bitter or anti-white."[58] According to Gilyard, Vivian Harsh, Chicago's first black librarian, informed Killens of this concern in relation to the Central library's rejection of his novel after an internal reviewer determined it was "unfair to white people." In order to have

[57] Gilyard, *John Oliver Killens*, 111
[58] Ibid., 114 – 115.

this review overturned, Killens directly intervened by speaking with library staff.[59]

While professional editors attempted to avoid books such as King's as being "too Negro," if one's authorial identity was minted as a black author, prominent writers such as Himes, Wright, Hansberry, and Baldwin were also stymied by publishers desires that they stick to "Negro Literature." So when Baldwin approached Knopf about publishing *Giovanni's Room*, the publishing house "protected him" by refusing to publish it. On his own, he secured a small British publisher before he was able to ensure its publication in the U.S. To be sure, his prior relationship with the publisher was not a particularly lucrative one. He wrote *Go Tell it on the Mountain* with only a $250 advance from Knopf, and a promise of $750 more dollars. Baldwin's engagements with publishing industry professionals would be even more disheartening in his attempts to publish his second novel. After completing *Giovanni's Room*, Helen Strauss, Baldwin's literary agent, discouraged him from publishing it. Fern Marja Eckman has described Baldwin as being "hurled" into a depression by warnings from American publishers that its theme would ruin his reputation. "They said I would [wreck my career]—I was a *Negro* writer and I would reach a very special audience." By this logic, Baldwin's queer novel would usurp any gravitas he had or could establish with white liberals interested in, or captivated by, outstanding artistic portrayals of race in the mid-1950s. "And I would be *dead* if I alienated that audience. That, in effect, nobody would accept that book—*coming from me*."

Indeed, Baldwin accused Helen Strauss of instructing him to burn the *Giovanni's Room* manuscript, a charge she would subsequently deny. After absolving herself of Baldwin's charge with a "thank God," she qualified her earlier skepticism of the novel by noting, "I just thought he could do better." For his part, Baldwin would never forget or forgive the lengths he went through to ensure that the novel was published. After being rejected by multiple publishers because of its

[59] Ibid.

more explicit homosexual theme, Dial accepted it, and also offered him a contract for *Another Country*. Even more egregious than her failure to support his work, when Strauss finally stepped in to negotiate a contract for Dial to publish the books, the firm would only offer him a two thousand dollar advance for both. Poignantly for Baldwin, only eight years later, Mailer was offered a Dial contract accompanied by a $125,000 advance. When prompted to reflect on the exorbitant difference in compensation between himself and his alleged peer, at least based on the popular and intellectual standards of the 1960s, Baldwin fumed: "Don't talk to me about it! That's *my* money!"

Even if he would suggest otherwise in his accepted speech delivered in 1960, as a seasoned black writer, Hughes was well aware of these vagaries in mainstream publishing for black writers. His agreement to testify before HUAC in 1953 would cost him his friendships with both W.E.B. Du Bois and Paul Robeson. Hughes was able to demonstrate his patriotism in front of the committee by presenting a copy of his children's book, *First Book of Negroes*, which had required ignoring Du Bois entirely in an extended narrative of Booker T. Washington, and excising Josephine Baker. Erasing Baker's image from the second printing of the book after threats from a New York columnist, his other books from these years, *Montage of a Dream Deferred* (1951) and *Laughing to Keep From Crying* (1952) were sold off cheaply rather than distributed traditionally. The publishing firm Henry Holt had published both works. Not only would the firm's leadership concede that publishing books was a mistake while Hughes was maligned during the Red Scare, his future contracts with the firm would also be canceled, and the editorial staff responsible for publishing these books summarily fired.[60]

***

[60] Arnold Rampersad, *The Life of Langston Hughes: Volume II: 1941 – 1967*, (New York: Oxford University Press), 230.

Rather than conceding defeat to having professional contracts canceled, the popularity and commercial success of "white life" novels, or the near impossibility of publishing books that realistically portrayed adversity in black life, many authors producing in the 1950s trudged on. Often with the help of white friends and colleagues, several black writers led a number of cooperative efforts from the 1940s onward that proactively developed and refined "Negro" literature, theatre, and for a brief moment, even television. Indeed, in the early to mid 1950s especially, black writers and artists did not will to exclude white writers or media professionals and financial backers as collaborators, as would increasingly be the case beginning in the early 1960s. Also distinct from the following decade, the discourse surrounding professional development and cultural activism in these areas would not be marked by the high level of male chauvinism that increasingly dominated later movements toward African American cultural universalism. And in general, the individuals who were committed to keeping the "Negro in American culture" not only sought to develop their own works, they were also committed to protesting and actively reforming popular culture that was unflattering or demeaning to blacks.

As one of the movement's key leaders in the 1950s, Mayfield regularly promoted the need for the support and professionalization of black artists and writers. Even if various forms of white support remained important, and perhaps central to these efforts in the 1950s, he and others nevertheless maintained that black communities could, or would eventually be in a position to, support these activities independent of white consumption patterns. Writing to Langston Hughes in 1953 in response to a column he had recently published "declaring the need for a good literary magazine," Mayfield reported that Hughes's advocacy was "met with an enthusiastic reception" by the Harlem Writers Guild. Mayfield continued, "The need for such a magazine is greater than ever. The Negro American has taken giant steps in the arena of world

affairs. Our day in history is not yet over and according to the evidence, seems only [to have] just begun."[61]

In New York, an array of black cultural development was organized by affiliates of the Committee for the Negro in the Arts (CNA), an interracial organization committed to eliminating racial stereotypes across theatre, literature, music, television, and visual arts.[62] While this was not the only African American arts organization in New York—there were multiple organizations there and elsewhere—a number of prominent midcentury black authors were affiliated with this collective. Mayfield, Alice Childress, John Henrik Clarke, Paul Robeson, Lorraine Hansberry, William Branch, and William Attaway, were just some of the prominent writers that would participate, promote, and sponsor CNA literary and theatrical activities. Beyond Harlem, CNA leaders and members also facilitated ties between white and black individuals and organizations that were prominent publishers, producers, and reviewers of related content, including collaborations with Paul Robeson's *Freedom*.[63] And while officially considered a subversive Communist-front organization by HUAC from at least 1949, the group's professional activities were not defined by political commitments to the party, but were instead based on the artistic and political advancement for blacks.

In 1954, Mayfield, a novelist and playwright, described the organization's members as having "social and political responsibilities" to one another, as "honorable men and women who [had] banded together in a common struggle."[64] And indeed, their struggles were plenty in an era when black voices were often distorted by racial stereotypes, canceled by censorship, or

[61] Julian Mayfield to Langston Hughes, Nov 13, 1953, Box 7, Folder 1, Julian Mayfield Papers, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library.
[62] For a comprehensive discussion of the CNA's activities, see Brian Dolinar, *The Black Cultural Front: Black Writers and Artists of the Depression Generation* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2012).
[63] Julian Mayfield to Louis, November 17, 1953, Box 7, Folder 1, JMP.
[64] "Statement of Resignation," February 12, 1954, Box 7, Folder 1, JMP.

significantly muted as black writers attempted to meet the "universal" expectations of the white publishing industry. But because the development of professional practice was viewed as more if not more important than cultural activism, new contributors and leaders in black letters such as Mayfield were equally, if not more, committed to proposing new standards to advance black culture. "We simply insisted that there was a vast difference between a theatre and a play producing organization," Mayfield informed one friend in 1953. "Our position, stated simply, was that to build a theatre required a group or a couple of dedicated people agreed on a theoretical approach to art problems and political problems related to art." This type of order, for him, would mean that a "theater could not maintain an open door policy where any interested body could enter," but instead, would require that certain standards" be "met for membership." In this professional approach to art, it would only be through "long, hard work" that solutions to the most complex artistic and political problems could be resolved. With this perspective, Mayfield insisted that having obligations to the entire CNA rather than a smaller group of art professionals producing high quality work would make it impossible to reach this goal.[65]

Beginning in the late 1940s, CNA's members developed and produced what John Henrik Clarke would later describe as a number of "cultural activities in the Harlem community."[66] Offering this description of the organization's "Literary Chapter Workshop" in a 1971 letter of recommendation for Julian Mayfield, one of the CNA subgroup's co-founders, Clarke explained that "some of the leading black writers in this country" had come out of the writers' workshop. In 1950, this CNA subgroup would be renamed the Harlem Writers Guild. Among the outcomes of the group in these years were two of Mayfield's "early novels 'The Hit' and 'The Long Night,'" which "were developed partly as projects in the Harlem Writers Guild." As a

[65] Julian Mayfield to "Charlie," October 1, 1953, Box 7, Folder 1, JMP.
[66] John Henrik Clarke, Letter of Recommendation for Julian Mayfield, June 22, 1971, Box 4, Folder 10, JMP.

longstanding contributor to the Black Arts Movement well before it claimed this title in the late 1960s, Clarke was sure that Mayfield had engaged and would continue to engage "in other activities to record the current history of our community both in Novel and drama."[67] And according to one admiring Chicago-based observer of CNA in 1953, in its early years, the organization had set itself apart from similar organizations in other cities via its "close amount of cooperation." If successful examples similar to these could be fostered, this fan of the organization predicted that African Americans would evidence "a cultural resuscitation of the forces among our people" that had the potential to strengthen black life and culture in locales around the country.[68]

To be sure, not only were these activities comparatively smaller to the black cultural development that became embedded in black communities by the late 1960s, during the early years of the Red Scare especially, CNA cultural activities were considered active threats. In 1954, Julian Mayfield wrote to Alvin Webb at the *Amsterdam News* to thank him for his support of a New York television show *Harlem Detective*, the first television show to use African Americans in leading roles. The show, which was a CNA project, was doomed by a number of factors, including its low budget, and allegedly, a lack of suitable facilities for its production. But as historian Emilie Raymond has recently pointed out, the fact that the black detective lead, William Marshall, an associate of Paul Robeson's, had his name smeared in the anti-Communist publication, *Counterattack* was the nail in the show's coffin. Marshall's participation in the show was criticized based on what the *Counterattack* staff considered overlooked evidence by its producers that he was responsible for leading "'Communist-inspired' activities affiliated with

[67] Ibid.
[68] Greg Paschal to CNA, April 14, 1952, Box 10, Folder 1, ACP,

civil rights."[69] More than likely, especially given the anti-Communist pressures in these years, this effort to reprove Marshall was the real reason for the show's cancelation. As Webb, the drama critic for the *Amsterdam News* would point out, the producer of the show would claim that Marshall left the show because: "(1) he was considered too tall for the role, and (2) he had other Hollywood commitments."[70] The show aired for a total of just a day shy of three months.[71] Using Louis Armstrong, Nat King Cole, and Pearl Bailey as similar examples of successful black television stars who avoided Marshall's fate, Raymond observes, "[i]t is no wonder that other African American TV performers kept their civil rights activities to a minimum."[72]

The show, which employed black novelist William Attaway as its scriptwriter, was broadcast on New York's WOR-TV. Virtually alone in these years, it did not feature black actors in their usual background roles, nor were they portrayed as social deviants. Because of the show's commitment to quality roles and acting for African Americans, rather than a racially exclusive production, the show was and still is regularly described as the first "integrated" television cast. Centered on a detective duo, one was white and the other was black. The production was shot live at WOR's production headquarters, with the majority of the show filmed on top of the Empire State Building

And this was a popular show. Its ratings were the highest-registered among WOR's programming in the month of its release according to Telepulse ratings. According to a survey by The Pulse, *Harlem Detective* reached approximately 25% of black homes that had televisions in the New York region that month.[73] After the show died, Mayfield assured Webb that its

---

[69] Emilie Raymond, *Stars for Freedom: Hollywood, Black Celebrities, and the Civil Rights Movement* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2015), 48.
[70] Alvin Chick Webb, "TV Show Out After Axing Of Marshall," *New York Amsterdam News*, January 16, 1954, 1.
[71] J. Fred MacDonald, *Blacks and White TV: African Americans in Television Since 1948* (Chicago: Nelson Hall, 1992), 47.
[72] Pamela Deane, *James Edwards: African American Hollywood Icon* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2009), 74.
[73] "'Harlem Det.,' 'Tension' Pace WOR-TV Drama in Telepulse," *The Billboard*, December 5, 1953, p. 3.

cancelation was "only a skirmish," and that the CNA would "win the final battle for Negro rights." After the *Counterattack* piece, Mayfield noted that the show had "died a couple of weeks later (as we predicted)…" But from Mayfield's perspective, if journalists "of integrity" like Webb could be counted on to "encourage" these types of cultural productions, vindication for African Americans would be "all the more certain.[74]

Younger generations of African Americans especially benefitted from support by organizations like CNA, the Harlem Writers Guild, and dynamic black-authored dramas to help them develop their craft. By the mid-1950s, the plays of writers affiliated with the CNA such as Alice Childress and William Branch made it possible for black communities to perform African Americans works where they would have once privileged the performance of "white" plays. In 1956, the training of African American actors was seemingly in full swing in Los Angeles, but largely without the support of black-authored plays to perform and draw inspiration from. Writing to Childress that year, Mae Henderson, the business manager of Negro Actors Associated announced that her organization was "the newest Acting group to come upon the Hollywood legitimate scene." And the way the group had demonstrated their arrival before Henderson's letter was via performances of classical works, including Sophocles's "Oedipus Rex" and Shakespeare's "Macbeth," which she explained, had "prove[n] [their] merit as an outstanding theatre group." If they could acquire one of Childress's plays, they would have a somewhat different body of literature to draw from in their professional aspirations.

Indeed, rather than perceiving their mastery of classics as an elite exercise, Negro Actors Associated performed these works virtually anywhere in their efforts to reach new audiences. "We began by playing in Parks, Halls, lawns, or in any place that would provide us with the space because we were interested in 'bringing theatre to the people.'" By 1956, the group had

[74] Julian Mayfield to Alvin Webb, January 29, 1954, Box 7, Folder 1, JMP.

reached out to Childress because of her recent Off-Broadway success with "Trouble in Mind," which won an Obie, making her one of the first recipients of the distinguished award. Henderson thus confidently relayed to Childress that it was finally time for the Negro Actors Associated to, "do a play about Negro life." And as Childress was no doubt well aware, at the time of Henderson's letter, there was still "a great dearth of scripts, and very few [black] writers at this time" from which the group could draw from.[75] And it was the production of black-authored plays like *417* that also had the unintended consequence of highlighting how older generations of African Americans had relatively little or nonexistent access to similar training structures or black cultural productions. Although Mayfield maintained confidence in the quality of its content as a "serious play," the first time the play was produced, he was still forced to reckon with the fact that its "production was poor." Not only would he and the play's cast members only have a week to rehearse the script, *417* was staged using non-professionals whose jobs were actually as staff members of other CNA units. "Not only that but most of them are older people in my play and not likely to be as alert as young actors (or amateurs) and professional[s] of the same age."[76]

As the civil rights movement of the 1950s burgeoned, refined African American cultural works similar to Childress and Mayfield's grew in number and were thus positioned better than ever before to meet new demands for black writing and cultural products. Even if obtaining and performing these works remained somewhat difficult in the mid-1950s, dynamic African American cultural works that had been supported and developed by organizations like the CNA in the first part of the decade were still available in greater numbers. By the second half of the decade, "universal" African American plays like *Raisin in the Sun* as well as much less famous works were performed and celebrated around the nation. Rather than performing *A Man Called*

[75] Mae Henderson to Alice Childress, May 2, 1956, Box 10, Folder 1, ACP.
[76] Julian Mayfield to Charlie, July 28, 1953, Box 7, Folder 1, JMP

Peter in 1955, a play adaptation of a biography published in 1951 about a Scottish immigrant's experience in the U.S., the faculty at Allen University, a historically black university in South Carolina could consider performing Childress's *Trouble in Mind*.

Trouble in Mind was a comedic meta-drama about the social and professional tensions between a white director and a set of black actors, as caused by the stereotypical portrayals of black female characters, combined with only-slightly veiled references to McCarthy's black list. The faculty member at Allen wrote to Childress explaining that they were choosing between her play and its alternative, the Scottish biography. And while the obvious choice may seem forgone from our vantage point, in 1955, the decision of which production to choose was seemingly far from determined. "Another member of the committee is pressing for such dramas as 'A Man Called Peter,' but if I am armed with some suggestions for good progressive plays for a Negro cast, I may well be able to win the day."[77] The theatre director at Talladega College, Alabama's oldest private, historically black college, would pose a similar request for the *Trouble in Mind* script, but would also articulate the stakes of Childress's work more explicitly. "Each year I like to give at least one play that does not represent the usual Broadway play. Also I am interested in scripts by Negro authors."[78] Yet instead of merely seeking a topical work, or one authored by an African American, it was the quality of Childress's writing that was valuable for these solicitors. Another fan claimed that in Childress's plays, "[t]here is a glorious not-taking sides value in them. In this sits your greatness, I swear, not in judgment, but in making us judge."[79]

A significant challenge of these years, however, would remain the question of what constituted a strong contribution to African American and American culture for the many works that fell into an interstitial zone, including *Trouble in Mind*. Thus blacks questioned whether or

[77] John G. Rideout to Alice Childress, November 17, 1955, Box 10, Folder 1, ACP.
[78] James O. Hopson to Alice Childress, February 17, 1956, Box 10, Folder 1, ACP.
[79] Marcia Stephen to Alice Childress, September 13, 1956, Box 10, Folder 1, ACP.

not CNA projects like *417,* Mayfield's one-act play on the numbers game in Harlem that his first novel was based on, was a remarkable contribution to "American Literature." Or, as other viewers of *417* "very angrily exclaim[ed]," according to Mayfield in one letter, did his play represent one of the "worst pieces of anti-Negro literature in existence"?[80] For black writers, producers and critics, these questions in relation to African-American-authored culture would remain particularly live, and at least somewhat ambiguous and unresolved well into the 21st century. As such, questions and attempts to classify black-authored novels, plays—and eventually, films—in similar "either/or" terms continued to be a regular topic of published and private debate, as critics sought to determine the value of an increasingly diverse black culture. Baldwin's *Go Tell It on the Mountain* and Ellison's *Invisible Man*, while reasonably resolved and hailed by most critics in the present day, are just two similar examples to the one-act play that would become Mayfield's first published novel, *The Hit* (1957).

In the early 1950s, Mayfield would explain to younger artists that they did not need to conform to the cultural status quo with their work but should instead be patient with the time that it took to build an appreciative audience for high quality African American drama. He assured one young man, "[f]or the rest of us [black Americans], theatre has not meant anything because it so seldom has had something to offer us. Now that it has, it is my belief that it will take a little time for us to become accustomed to it." For Mayfield, it would be "[g]ood plays on Negro life" that would "naturally attract us, perhaps not at the very beginning, but you must believe that as we become more accustomed to the idea of these groups, we will begin to support them." To facilitate this demand, Mayfield maintained that writers needed to question their presentations, and continue asking themselves if their "approach to the people [was] correct enough so that they will come." Conceding that this would not be a quick process, he noted, "[a]fter hundreds of

[80] Julian Mayfield to Charlie, July 28, 1953, Box 7, Folder 1, JMP.

years of being denied theatre, I suspect that it will take more than an effort to find a real audience."[81]

Broader cultural advocacy efforts similar to Mayfield's were often framed in personal and familial terms when black media professionals and publications were offered to support new works by black artists and writers' during the 1950s. Pointing to the Baltimore *Afro-American*'s promotion of Childress's *Trouble in Mind*, a representative of the paper sought to establish what was described as the beginning of a new, intimate relationship between the playwright and the newspaper's staff and leadership. "Did you note the little memo in this week's Afro in [regards] to the opening of your play on Broadway[?] This is just a reminder to you that now you are a member of the Afro writers 'family.'"[82] As one of the paper's favored cultural producers, Childress was to "let Carl Murphy [publisher of the *Afro-American* and an NAACP activist] know about it every time something happened to you, in the theatre or the literary world."[83] Similar to Alvin's Webb's support for *Harlem Detective*, informal social and professional connections like these regularly assisted black writers with connecting to one another, connecting to black audiences, and a host of other resources in the broader publishing world.

To be sure, just as crucial to many black writers in these years, especially given their small numbers, were white interlocutors as varied as publishers, producers, agents, colleagues and friends during the 1950s. And while racial protocol informed these interactions, it did not determine whether or not manuscript submissions, letters of protest, or ideas for future content would be received negatively or positively. In addition to promotional support from the black press, publications like the *New York Times*, the *National Guardian*, and *Reader's Digest* were considered key in assisting with growing larger bases of readers and audiences for black-

[81] Julian Mayfield to "Max," July 28, 1954, Box 7, Folder 1, JMP.
[82] Letter to Alice Childress, July 8, 1956, Box 10, Folder 1, ACP.
[83] Letter to Alice Childress, February 20, 1957, Box 10, Folder 1, ACP.

authored cultural works. And even if these publications could not be counted on to consistently promote and support black art, or to reform what they published in relation to contemporary and historical depictions of black life, black writers regularly made related claims in each of these areas. Writing to the Drama Editor of the *Times* in 1953, Mayfield suggested that Estelle Hemsley deserved more attention from the paper. An 83-year-old black female actor, Mayfield was struck by her "master craftsman[ship]." For him, her skills were "all the more amazing when we consider what obstacles Miss Hemsley must have had to overcome in developing her very fine art. The lamentable fact that Miss Hemsley is not a 'star' is no fault of her own. It's our theatre's loss."[84]

And while their efforts for most of the decade did not necessarily lead to significant changes beyond eliminating the most egregious racial portrayals, by the end of the 1950s, mainstream newspapers and periodicals would be of tremendous value to black writers. In addition to increasing solicitation for their work, these publications would also be how theatre groups learned about new black plays, and where white readers unfamiliar with an author's books might at least read reviews that exposed them to the ideas of black writers. Not infrequently, mainstream newspapers and periodicals also functioned as platforms that exposed white consumers to samples of new works by black authors.

This process was much easier when publishing houses and white editors maintained personal and professional connections to friends and colleagues at publications like *Reader's Digest*. And while it would be "hard to guess" what of Gwendolyn Brooks's writing might be acceptable to that widely distributed publication in 1953, her editor at Harper, Elizabeth Lawrence announced that this was precisely where she was hoping to send the author's new writing. According to Lawrence, Harper retained "a good alert woman on that job who will

[84] Julian Mayfield to "The Drama Editor," November 16, 1953, Box 7, Folder 1, JMP.

surely do everything to increase your (and Harper's) store of pennies." Explaining how she wanted to manage this submission, Lawrence noted, "I shall want the Magazine to see the book at an early stage, in the hope that something can be extracted. Digest sales come after publication."[85]

Even though Lawrence did in fact have Brooks's interests in mind with her longstanding requests and suggestions for how Brooks might develop her writing in as "universal" a fashion as possible, it was not uncommon for requests similar to these to offend black sensibilities. Childress's refusal to launch a Broadway production of *Trouble in Mind* after its Off-Broadway success represents an illustrative precursor to the growing professional dissent the white publishing world and its consumers would increasingly be exposed to beginning in the 1960s. After being asked to make the play's ending "happy" to appease the white producers that approached her to fund its iteration on Broadway, Childress refused to make changes to the script.[86] As a result, the play would never make it to Broadway, and would not make it would not be printed by a mainstream publisher until it appeared in a compendium of African American drama in 1971.

The backlash against Childress's play and her professional decisions did not stop there, and the other forms of resistance she encountered might be thought of shedding light on what black writers' efforts to desegregate the nation's cultural organizations looked like in these years. For instance, the backers of the Off-Broadway production of *Trouble in Mind* ended the play's run rather abruptly after she refused to change its script, even though it was well known that the the play—remarkably similar to *Harlem Detective*—was still quite popular. Paul Mann, a white Canadian actor who trained scores of black actors at his eponymous Actors Workshop in New

[85] Elizabeth Lawrence to Gwendolyn Brooks, January 5, 1953, Container 1, Folder 34, GBP.
[86] Kathleen McDonald, *Feminism, the Left, and Postwar Literary Culture* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2012), 65.

York from the early 1950s, discussed this conspicuous disconnect between its closing and its popularity in a letter to Childress. "I could not understand why they closed it. I still don't, for aside from the play's obvious cultural value, just in plain show biz terms they had a hit on their hands and an ever growing audience." Mann, who would tell the show's actors as much backstage on the night of the show's last performance, would be informed that "they fully agreed with [these] sentiments, and they too could see no practical reasons for its closing."[87]

Finally, after being blacklisted in 1956, Childress would only encounter further resistance from other professional cultural organizations like the New Dramatists Committee, a group that was conspicuously reluctant to accept her as a new member, despite her phenomenal success. After claiming to have read the play she submitted with her application, the group's membership committee explained in a letter to the famed playwright that it would require more of her writing before it could reconsider her application. By 1958, the group casually suggested that Childress was just one of hundreds of playwrights out there, and her previous success alone seemed not to merit their respect or close consideration. "Since we can accept but a very small percentage of the hundreds who make application [sic], our screening process must be very careful and thorough."[88]

***

The history of postwar African American inclusion in mainstream publishing houses, Broadway theatres, and popular periodicals was marked by an unusual balance of sympathy and suspicious from the liberal white professionals that dominated these industries. More complicated still, their willingness to remain at least nominally open to publishing black writers and producing African American productions was offset by an industry increasingly unable to

[87] Paul Mann to Alice Childress, March 24, 1956, Box 10, Folder 1, ACP.
[88] B.J. Whiting to Alice Childress, March 5, 1958, Box 10, Folder 1, ACP.

any new author that could not supplement their careers with other employment. Even the few select African Americans who were touted by white critics as artists of universal merit in these years, like James Baldwin, frequently encountered both rejection and disappointment from an industry with exacting standards and expectations for black writers especially.

By the late 1940s and early 1950s, this left the black press and African American commentators torn between those who readily endorsed the artistic freedom of the most successful black novelists, and those much more critical of narratives that evaded race. Suggesting how limited their understandings were of the artistic and professional constraints virtually all black writers faced in these years, rather than faulting the structure of the nation's entertainment industry, it was much more common to fault the author.

The discourse and tensions that stemmed from the dominance of raceless universalism fueled an African American cultural scene that remained aware that African American talent and protagonists were not excluded on racial grounds alone. Increasingly, their labors and experimentation led to some of the first novels, theatrical productions, and television programs hailed as contributions to both American and African American culture—in sum, works that did not preclude the exclusion of black protagonists.

Nevertheless, until the tail end of the 1950s, widespread fears stemming from the social, legal, and financial ramifications of publishing or producing anything that seemed even remotely sympathetic to communism kept black-authored books and productions limited. The final chapter of this study examines the fallouts that accompanied the years when black writers were increasingly sought to explain to white Americans what they had missed in the era of prosperity and communism. While a new generation of black writers became household names in these years, many of these and older generations of successful black writers increasingly rebuffed

explaining the African American condition to white Americans. That racial dissent would also add tremendous power to the value and legitimacy to the African American cultural works that were described as representative of the Black Arts Movement by the mid-1960s.

CHAPTER FIVE
The Fall of Integration in American Culture, 1958 – 1972

"FOR SOME TIME NOW it has been apparent that the traditional leadership of the American Negro community—a leadership which has been largely middle class in origin and orientation—is in danger of losing its claim to speak for the masses of Negroes."[1] This was the warning with which popular fictionalist, Julian Mayfield began his essay, "Challenge to Negro Leadership: The Case of Robert Williams," published in *Commentary* magazine in April 1961. By the early 1960s, Mayfield was one of the leaders of what was still a small but growing cohort of popular blacks writers in the United States. John Killens, one of his colleagues in this field, would cite Mayfield less than two years earlier as contributing to what Killens considered the "renaissance" in black letters over the 1950s. Indeed, Killens would argue on the eve of the 1960s that this latest cohort of authors, while small in number, had still managed to exceed the output of writers associated with the "Harlem Renaissance," not only in quantity, but also "in quality and profundity."[2] Yet as scholars such as William Maxwell have recently pointed out, there were several structural parallels linking rather than disconnecting the literary movements of the 1920s and 1960s, or what he has termed "Renaissance I," and "Renaissance II."[3] Not least important in this regard was the publishing support black writers still received from Jewish Americans in the early 1960s, including the intellectuals responsible for editing *Commentary*.

---

[1] Julian Mayfield, "Challenge to Negro Leadership: The Case of Robert Williams," *Commentary*, April 1961, 297-305. Box 62, Folder 3, Lorraine Hansberry Papers (hereafter LHP), Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library.

[2] Quoted in Keith Gilyard, *John Oliver Killen: A Life of Black Literary Activism* (Athens, University of Georgia Press, 2010), 149. In his description of the excitement of this moment as many of these writers celebrated the coming decade together at a New Year's Eve party together, Gilyard explains, "the writers talked optimistically about how the upcoming decade would usher in great change in the country…and they believed that would integrally involved as voices for black liberation."

[3] William J. Maxwell, *F.B. Eyes: How J. Edgar Hoover's Ghostreaders Framed African American Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014).

There are other parallels between the publishing practices of the 1920s and the 1960s that also merit attention. Similar to the interlocution of white intellectuals such as Carl Van Vechten during the 1920s, Mayfield's interlocutors at *Commentary* sought to align his piece, and their magazine more generally, with mainstream American cultural interests beginning in 1960. Their goal in doing so before the publication drifted toward the American right by the late 1960s is deceptively simple: during the early 1960s, the editor *Commentary* appointed in 1960, Norman Podhoretz, still sought to reach broad audiences beyond the nation's Jewish community. Somewhat contrary to the conclusions present-day historians might draw from an essay explaining the increasing militancy of black Americans in the Civil Rights era, Mayfield's essay was aimed at white Americans, via Jewish American sponsorship. Rather than addressing a black readership seeking cultural and political knowledge, as black authors are perhaps best known for in the "Black Power" era, Mayfield's essay was designed to explain to white liberals why tactics and conditions in the civil rights struggle were rapidly changing.

This investigative report, Mayfield's first contribution to *Commentary*, represented what in practice was one of many efforts black writers made over the late 1950s and 1960s to sustain their creative endeavors through "mainstream" professional work, with higher compensation. Dissimilar from portrayals of black writers as "racial separatists" in this era, and not infrequently in our own, their reflections and so-called "problems" with white America's desegregation efforts were published in earnest by major media outlets, from the late 1950s onward. But somewhat differently from the mid-1920s onward, however, were firmer personal and literary affirmations that African American "universalism" was both possible and equivalent to cultural works that were not as explicitly marked by racial or national concerns. Not inconsequentially, these developments were also reflections of the later era's sharp movements away from the

dominant "raceless" universalism often required when black writers produced substantive cultural works for mass audiences during the 1950s. Reporting on the unprecedented racial dignity and high morale he observed in Union Country, Mayfield explained, "Largely vanished are the slouching posture, the scratching of head, and the indirect, mumbled speech that used to characterize the Negro male in the presence of whites."[4]

No longer committed to non-violence alone, the Civil Rights Movement had also evolved by the late 1950s to accommodate physical—and sometimes violent—resistance. Narrating the shifts in African Americans' sentiments and actions for *Commentary*'s readership, Mayfield used the racial and organizational unrest in Union County, North Carolina in 1958 as an illustrative case study. In his efforts to outline key rifts that would only become larger in the years following, his conveyed that the NAACP, the Urban League, and other traditional organizations were no longer considered leading organizations in directing the "action" protests of the era. Offering evidence of a burgeoning discourse among black intellectuals and students that he—somewhat too innocently—overheard while conducting research for the essay, Mayfield warned that these constituencies increasingly disregarded the strategies of these organizations. In his telling, just a few years after the Montgomery bus boycott, most religious and civic leaders were viewed "with either disdain or despair, in the belief that they [were] doing too little, too timidly and too late."[5]

As evidence, Mayfield pointed to Union County's new NAACP membership. In fact, by 1961, unlike any other chapters in the U.S., Union County's NAACP had shed virtually all of its "respectable," non-violent, middle-class members. "[It was] the only one of its kind now in existence. Its members and supporters, who are mostly workers and displaced farmers, constitute

[4] Julian Mayfield, "Challenge to Negro Leadership: The Case of Robert Williams," *Commentary* (April 1961), 297-305. Box 62, Folder 3, LHP.
[5] Ibid., 297.

a well-armed and disciplined fighting unit."[6] But rather than dwelling on hardened racial animosity in Union County, or sensationalizing the efforts of its black community to defend itself with force, Mayfield's piece elaborated on how and why life in the area had changed after *Brown*. Physical threats by a revitalized Ku Klux Klan in the wake of *Brown*; revocations of professional licensures; boycotts on black hiring and businesses; and terrorist strikes on their homes. These and a host of other threats had led the previous, middle-class members constituting the core of Union County's NAACP away from the organization—according to the blacks Mayfield interviewed, these individuals virtually renounced their memberships en masse.

After outlining how whites living in and beyond the town of Monroe had physically and professionally threatened a "young physician"—one of only six black professionals left in Union County's NAACP by 1958—Mayfield cited the petty, yet primary, cause of their agitation. "The popular young physician, who was fairly prosperous, had built an attractive, ranch-style home overlooking a new highway."[7] To be sure, Mayfield was well aware of what armed threats to the physician's new home might signify for liberal white Americans; as such, his broader narrative of the black community's strides toward self-determination portrayed their defense of this home as a catalyst for broad change. Not only would Mayfield describe the region's newly emboldened Klan as finding the house "an affront" to Monroe's racial order, he also described the group's backlash as stemming from their belief that the doctor in question contributed large sums of money to the local NAACP. As a result, "[the KKK] publicly announced its intention of running him out of the county." In response—and one likely to make a deep impression on *Commentary*'s white readership—working and underclass blacks that had previously abided by

[6] Ibid., 298.
[7] Ibid., 303.

Monroe's racial hierarchy defended Perry's new home with guns, in an unusual, but highly organized defense.[8]

This chapter shifts away from the dissertation's emphases in previous chapters on how de-parochialism both functioned and slowly increased across the nation's mainstream letters and cultural production. It does by examining not only the conditions that enabled the extraordinary increase in black writers contributing to mass culture from the late 1950s, but also how and why a growing number of these individuals moved away from mainstream firms beginning in the 1960s. While most histories of mass media outlets and infrastructure in the U.S. during these years have emphasized how key actors and publications increasingly invested in recording and challenging segregation, this chapter seeks to complicate these surprisingly teleological narratives.[9] It does so by analyzing a wide range of attempts new and old publications made to include black writers, producers, and content during these years, which in practice were much more tense and complex than is often acknowledged. Similar to the narrative Mayfield published in *Commentary*, for many writers, media professionals, and audiences, these efforts were often reflective of broader problems that would soon plague civil rights initiatives directed toward desegregation from the mid-1960s onward.

Overall, problems that stemmed from the incorporation of new voices across the nation's major cultural outlets raise new questions about how Americans of all races and ethnicities were

[8] In Mayfield's telling of their story, Union Town's African Americans won this battle, if not the war. (Perry was eventually run out of town after providing an abortion for a white woman.) But his framing of the shift from a professional, non-violent, legalistic civil rights leadership, to one of "mass" African American organization in 1958, was still no less prescient: "The most decisive factor in the [civil rights] conflict will probably be the Negro laboring class, heretofore unheard from." Ibid., 305.

[9] See, for example, Gene Roberts and Hank Klibanoff, *The Race Beat: The Press, the Civil Rights Struggle, and the Awakening of a Nation* (New York: Knopf, 2006); beyond the national frame, leading Cold War scholarship emphasizes a similar trajectory of political progress inspired by media attention to terrorized blacks, racist whites, and ambivalent State Department "diplomats." Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Penny Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004).

affected by "integration," and what the terms of "inclusive" efforts were more precisely. Among the outcomes of the vignettes presented in this chapter is a clearer understanding of the contours of both black and white responses to the cultural, social, and civil struggles for black equality. And given how interrelated black and white reactions to desegregation often were, tracing how new voices were added to the still-unfolding national saga on multiculturalism enables a dynamic, interracial history of both the "Black Power" and the "Black Arts" Movements.[10]

As the tail end of a dissertation that has traced the intellectual, social, and political pursuits of writers and publishing professionals over decades, this chapter also affirms one of the study's larger claims: that the cultural agenda accompanying "Black Power" was not abrupt. Not only did momentous shifts away from the philosophy, language and faith in a robust, racially "integrated" society begin much earlier than the mid to late 1960s, black writers regularly functioned as test cases, narrators and intermediaries at the core of these transitions. As new, authoritative voices that had attempted to desegregate the nation's media outlets in earnest before growing individually and collectively impatient with the concessions their inclusion required, they sought—and were required to—offer much more than complaints. Mayfield, Lorraine Hansberry, James Baldwin, Langston Hughes, and a number of others did much of this work during the 1950s, by initiating, supporting, and providing robust fictional and non-fictional accounts and conversations for white audiences about black life. Yet the lingering failure of

[10] In attempting to do so, this broader narrative necessarily links these endeavors to what in practice represents a much-longer history of black America inevitably organizing to defend and enrich the race "on its own," as provoked by insufficient national structures that unequivocally privileged whites. Before the efforts toward these ends in the late 1950s and over the course of the 1960s, contemporaries cited the 1920s social, political and artistic Black Renaissance as its most immediate predecessor. As an early example, Nell Irvin Painter's path-breaking work demonstrated how black migration out of the South in 1879 represented black mobilization, political organizing, and institutional building and support that had previously only been acknowledged as beginning with the Great Migration on the eve of World War I. Nell Irvin Painter, *Exodusters: Black Migration to Kansas after Reconstruction* (New York: Knopf, 1977); more recently, John M. Giggie's work might be considered as in conversation with Painter's earlier study. Giggie, *After Redemption: Jim Crow and the Transformation of African American Religion in the Delta 1875 – 1915* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

scholars to recognize their early contributions to "white" media, combined with persistent assumptions that black leaders of all types only sought to address other blacks in the 1960s, has only reified facile understandings of racial divisions in this era.

Overall, including white editors' sponsorship of a more thoroughly dynamic, black universalism beginning in the late 1950s demonstrates that these individuals often operated at the forefront of an integrated civil rights movement. And in practice, a broader cohort of progressive white Americans was by no means limited to those working in publishing in the early 1960s. Politicians such as Robert Kennedy, and similarly committed racially "progressives," including middle-class white media consumers, were also represented among their ranks. Their efforts were numerous, but most important in the nation's cultural spheres were their acknowledgements of the need to change the nation's understandings of blacks on a large scale, and their willingness to listen to and include black contributors in developing this programming. Each of the following sections will explore the factors that would make this an extremely difficult process.

***

As Jean-Paul Sartre pointed out in relation to Richard Wright's work in "For Whom Does One Write," an essay first published in France in 1947, influential, commercially successful black writers produced, out of necessity, "for a [racially] split [American] public."[11] A cultural "dilemma" by no means limited to Wright's era, the challenges inhered in both reaching and engaging America's segregated republic would only become a battle for a sizeable cohort of successful black writers during the 1950s, when their numbers were stronger. Before 1950, the number of black writers producing for white audiences was still abysmal compared to the 1920s Renaissance, which ended abruptly for many aspiring African Americans writers due to the onset

[11] Jean-Paul Sartre, "For Whom Does One Write?," in *What Is Literature?*, trans. Bernard Frechtman (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), 71 – 74.

of the Depression. And while a new cohort of black writers would train and grow in numbers from the late 1940s onwards, while also taking advantage of new resources, such as the Harlem Writers Guild founded in 1950, most black writers were largely invisible to white America until the 1960s.

Intellectually and professionally tenacious, and strikingly dispersed, by the 1960s, black writers produced for whites in much greater numbers in comparison to the small but successful cohort of black writers in the 1940s. In the commercial market, in addition to Wright, only three other writers gained wide acclaim and sales before 1950: Ann Petry, Willard Motley, and Frank Yerby.[12] By the 1960s, a much larger cohort of black writers were increasingly successful with white consumers; and somewhat paradoxically, their works enjoyed even stronger demand during what would become a racially separatist Black Arts Movement by the 1970s.

Although newly successful black writers were often conflicted about contributing work to mainstream cultural outlets in the late 1960s, many of them would continue doing so to sustain themselves. Put simply, when given the opportunity, the most ambitious and financially solvent black writers in the post-Civil Rights Movement years spoke to, wrote for, and were offered contracts by Americans of all races and ethnicities, just as they had before the fall of Jim Crow. To be sure, as they had for decades, African American newspapers and universities continued to support the majority of "confederate" research, opinions, and authorship that remained alienated from white funding (e.g. black history, by blacks[13]). But to use Sartre's phrase, many black writers continued viewing writing for "negroes alone" as a financial liability, especially given the

[12] The most detailed account of the production and social conditions of the most prominent black writers before 1960, including analyses of how their professional circumstances changed, see Lawrence Jackson, *The Indignant Generation: A Narrative History of African American Writers and Critics, 1934 – 1960* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

[13] For a discussions of how black individuals and institutions (e.g. the black press) supported "Afro-American historians" in the twentieth century when academic institutions and major publishers would not, see: W. Burghardt Turner, "J.A. Rogers: History with a duty," *New York Amsterdam News*, September 18, 1971, Gwendolyn Brooks Papers (hereafter GBP), Oversize Box 3, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

"countless [black] communication vehicles" that were described in the early 1970s as having "lived and died in the decade of the Sixties."[14]

For those black writers whose words were printed and voices broadcast by the nation's "white" media outlets, they represented and enacted a form of interracial intimacy that had yet to prove itself—outside of the virtual sphere—on a mass scale since the 1930s "slumming" era.[15] As sponsors, these media firms were among the first experimenters with "mass" racial desegregation following World War II, thus enabling strong black writing, televised bodies, and voices to enter white homes on an unprecedented scale. The small but noticeable integration across the nation's media spheres, which came primarily in the form of soliciting black writers for various projects, was also significant in changing both cultural and professional practices.

And even though the willingness of many firms to integrate new voices in publishing and broadcasting often remained unfinished over the rest of the century, efforts to diversify authorial ranks from the late 1950s moved the trade well beyond prior sensibilities. Perhaps most significantly in the publishing business, it upset the trade's predominant mode of granting white authors a monopoly on promoting racial equanimity. Broader social and civil shifts conversant with this change meant that radio stations, magazines, and publishing houses all solicited black writers and commentators in earnest for positions as race "experts" from the late 1950s.

---

[14] Phrases taken from Sartre's discussion of what Wright's work might look like if he wrote for a black "public," rather than a racially "split public." Jean-Paul Sartre, "For Whom Does One Write?," in *What Is Literature?*, trans. Bernard Frechtman (New York: Harper and Row, 1965, 71 – 74. Don L. Lee discusses the "black media publications that lived and died in the 1960s in: "Black art/the politics of Black poetry," *New York Amsterdam News*, September 18, 1971, Oversize Box 3, GBP. These were: "Black World, The Journal of Black Poetry, Broadside Press, Third World Press, Jihad Productions, Liberators, Freedomways, Soulbook, Nkombo, Nommo, Free Lance," community newspapers and "countless other communication vehicles."

[15] For influential recent historiography on how the practice of "slumming" changed over the course of the first half of the twentieth century, moving to integrate and socialize whites and American minorities across space via cultural outlets, starting with a decline and eventual sharp downturn in patronage from the mid-1930s to 1945, see Chad Heap, *Slumming: Sexual and Racial Encounters in American Nightlife, 1885 – 1940* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009). The most influential study of the increasing segmentation of American individuals and families post-1945 remains Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Early Cold War Era* New York: Basic Books, 1988).

To be sure, interracial professional lives and cultural productions were by no means only amiable in these years. In mass literary culture especially, predominant were sensational magazine covers that sold visual reports of urban destruction and subjective video evidence affirming how disruptive civil rights claims were. Curiously, scholars have often repeated rather than interrogated how divisive black and whites lives and culture were in this era. Although white interlocutors, such as the Jewish editors responsible for publishing *Commentary*, receive only episodic attention in historical literature on "Black Power," when they do, they are consistently portrayed as the antagonists of increasingly empowered blacks.[16] As a result, we know very little about how and why white Americans solicited, encouraged—and eventually, questioned—the strategies black Americans used in an increasingly aggressive civil rights movement.

While recent historical scholarship on black power has complicated popular assessments of the movement as inexplicably vitriolic, many of these accounts still affirm rather than broaden the political and temporal contours of the movement, with only few exceptions.[17] A representative example of the scholarly paradigm that continues to elide these shifts can be seen in an article published in the December 2013 issue of the *Journal of American History*. In this work Tom Davies traces Robert Kennedy's involvement with the racially segregated Bedford-Stuyvesant economic development corporation. Davies's focus on the interracial interactions between these groups—"one black, one white"—illustrates his larger argument that "Kennedy's

[16] For an discussion of scholarly literature on Jewish and African American interracial alliances and antagonisms, see Kimberly Chabot Davis, *Beyond the White Negro: Empathy and Anti-Racist Reading* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2014), esp. 66 – 71.

[17] A recent, influential reassessment remains Daniel Matlin's "'Lift Up Yr Self!' Reinterpreting Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones), Black Power, and the Uplift Tradition," *Journal of American History* Vol. 93, No. 1 (2006), 91 – 116.

efforts" are representative of "the 'interplay' between liberalism and black power."[18] The temporal liabilities of his conceptualization of African American self-determination are perhaps best summed up in one sentence from this piece: "It was not until June 1966 that the first chants of 'black power' reverberated across the nation."[19] Surely this would be surprising to Julian Mayfield, not to mention socially anxious, racially curious, white intellectuals reading *Commentary* and other major American publications from the late 1950s onwards. However, Davies also points out that years before this work in Brooklyn, Kennedy met with a group of black cultural, political and intellectual leaders, selected by James Baldwin, in his Manhattan apartment in an effort to better understand the social unrest unfolding in black communities. Yet this formative 1963 initiative is minimized by Davies's commendable work reminding historians of the interracial tensions inhered in Robert Kennedy's later economic development work.

The infamous 1963 meeting at Kennedy's family's home on Central Park South—humorously, the attorney general did not know the address himself[20]—is admittedly difficult to write about without repeating countless forebears. Dozens of white and black newspapers and periodicals provided conflicting accounts of the acrimonious meeting from the following day onward, starting with the *New York Times* after Baldwin leaked news of the meeting to a staff reporter in the hours after the event. Unintentionally, it seems, dozens of recent popular and

[18] Davies also points out that years before this work in Brooklyn, Kennedy met with a group of African American cultural, political and intellectual leaders, selected by James Baldwin, in his Manhattan apartment in an effort to better understand the social unrest unfolding in black communities. Yet this formative 1963 initiative is minimized by Davies's primary objective stated in the essay seeking to remind historians of the interracial tensions inhered in Kennedy's later economic development work. Tom Davies, "Black Power in Action: the Bedford-Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation, Robert F. Kennedy, and the Politics of the Urban Crisis," *Journal of American History*, Vol. 100, No. 3 (2013): 736 – 760.

[19] While representative of my attempt to provide a long narrative of the factors driving a movement toward black power, the intent should not distract from Davies's broader point about Robert Kennedy's social and political commitments. The key argument for him in this regard is that Kennedy's "deep, genuine, and growing personal concern" with poverty and racism in America are neglected by historians in favor of emphases on his presidential bid and opposition to the Vietnam War.

[20] Fern M. Eckman, *The Furious Passage of James Baldwin* (Lanham, MD: M. Evans, an imprint of The Rowman & Littlefield Pub. Group, 2014), 184.

academic monographs have followed in the footsteps of the voluminous contemporary coverage by offering their own conflicting accounts.[21] As a result, there still remains remarkable confusion over who said what, who walked out, whether or not Robert Kennedy remained silent or participated in the "exchange," and not least important, if the meeting had any traceable impact on the Kennedy administration. Contributing to the competing interpretations offered in recent accounts, Baldwin declined to provide any comprehensive account of the meeting until 1979, at which point he published an essay in the black journal, *Freedomways* that was inspired by Hansberry's participation.[22] The only other authoritative, detailed account of the meeting before the 1980s besides Baldwin's is historian Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr.'s. But given his positions as both "court historian" and special assistant to the Kennedy administration between 1961 and 1963, Schlesinger's narrative is woefully lacking in objectivity, and his sympathies with Robert Kennedy can be easily evidenced from his interpretation of the event.

Perhaps most instructive for understanding the professional ambiguity and confusion surrounding the meeting is a recent narrative of the meeting published in an account written by Susan Sinnott, whose biographies are primarily designed for young adult audiences. In Sinnott's attempt to convey the significance of Hansberry's participation in the private meeting with Kennedy for younger audiences, she raises a number of significant historical questions, in addition to providing an astute description of the exchange.[23] In her narrative, Sinnott aptly explains that the Attorney General considered and later described the group as "uppity." Not only did Robert Kennedy find his engagement with the African Americans he invited to his

[21] See, for example, Michael Williams, *Medgar Evers: Mississippi Martyr* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2011); Christopher Bram, *Eminent Outlaws: The Gay Writers Who Changed America* (New York: Twelve, 2012); Peniel Joseph, *Dark Days, Bright Nights: From Black Power to Barack Obama* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2010); and Harry Belafonte, with Michael Shnayerson, *My Song: A Memoir of Art, Race, and Defiance* (New York: Vintage, 2012).
[22] James Baldwin, "Lorraine Hansberry at the Summit," *Freedomways*, Vol. 19, No. 49 (1979): 269 – 72.
[23] Susan Sinnott, *Lorraine Hansberry: Award-Winning Playwright and Civil Rights Activist* (Berkeley: Conari, 1999).

apartment unacceptably belligerent, he was also disappointed that these individuals failed to give his brother's administration the credit he felt it deserved for its work on civil rights. But in truth, the professionally and politically disparate group, eclectic even by its own standards—if not Kennedy's—held no common praise to convey to the administration. While such fractures in political opinions in the present day are far from uncommon, African Americans' comfort with expressing divergent viewpoints from one another in interracial settings was only a few years old by the early 1960s. And while Sinnott's biography of Hansberry doesn't dwell on how diverse the invited group was, she still managed to reflect on what many new readers would consider "the oddities" that this meeting between the administration and cultural black leadership took place at all. "[Kennedy] chose to meet with only a few policy experts, but many artists. Would he have met with white artists to discuss the urban poor? How often does it happen that a black writer is regarded as an expert in all manners pertaining to black people?"[24]

Given the Attorney General's understanding of how rapidly racial tensions had burgeoned across the U.S. over the course of just a few short weeks, Kennedy was not only looking for authoritative black figures to explain the contours of mass unrest to him. As the line of questioning he pursued during the short breakfast meeting he had with Baldwin at his home outside of Washington D.C. the day before their meeting in New York suggests, he was also looking for black leaders the African American people would listen to. Baldwin would explain to the Attorney General that black America would not listen to "…politicians. I don't mean Adam Clayton Powell. Or even Martin Luther King."[25] That morning, Kennedy also asked Baldwin,

[24] Ibid.
[25] David Levering Lewis, *King: A Biography* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1978), 217. Yet neither would the cultural leadership Baldwin chose to meet with Kennedy the following day enable their willingness to address the nation's black ghettos on the administration's behalf. During the meeting in Manhattan, Lena Horne would scold, "If you are so proud of your record, Mr. Attorney General, you go up to Harlem into those churches and barber shops and pool halls and you tell the people. We aint' going to do it, because we don't want to get shot." James Baldwin, "Lorraine Hansberry at the Summit," *Freedomways*, Vol. 19, No. 49 (1979), 271.

"How important do you think the Black Muslims are?" Baldwin is reported to have indicated that they were very important, "because the extremists best articulate the Negro's pain and despair."[26] The Attorney General sought clarity on these and other issues because he hoped reaching out to black figures that were actually socially influential in black communities could prove useful in helping to temper street conflagrations that were rocking the nation's cities. Evan Thomas has recently noted that by the end of July 1963 Robert Kennedy was more than aware that the Justice Department had counted "758 racial demonstrations in 186 cities" that year.[27] Indeed, Kennedy delivered a grave report to the administration on the increasing social unrest in American cities just days before his meetings with Baldwin that May.[28]

And while there were a striking number of parallels, a gentleman's dinner party like the gathering depicted in Plato's *Symposium* their second and final meeting would not be.[29] No small difference in this admittedly unusual comparison is the fact that the blacks present at Kennedy's apartment were willing to express themselves freely to a white person of the Attorney General's

---

[26] Even as Kennedy relied on Baldwin and his aides to gather black entertainers and handle other logistical concerns, he had nevertheless cultivated an awareness of how influential black artists, popular intellectuals, and entertainers were to black America. Prior to the meeting in New York, Kennedy and Baldwin had met one year earlier at a White House celebration for Nobel Laureates. But more recently, the comedian and civil rights activist Dick Gregory had suggested to Kennedy via an aide that he meet with Baldwin. In short, Gregory had warned that a key problem with the Kennedys, and the President's administration more generally, was that they never "talked" to black people. And as historian Ruth Feldstein has recently joined others in arguing, "culture was a key battleground in the civil rights movement. Had that not been the case, Robert Kennedy would never have taken comedian Dick Gregory's advice to meet with Baldwin, Horne, and other black celebrities."

[27] Evan Thomas, *Robert Kennedy: His Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000), 243.

[28] Just three days earlier, Kennedy had reported that "major problems" with African American populations had recently broken out in a number of cities, in both the North and South. One day earlier, the Attorney General relayed to his brother and the President's key advisers that Mayor Daley of Chicago had recently experienced, and was further predicting, "a lot of trouble" with the city's black population. Daley had warned that the city's officers were encountering "Negros" in "underworld bars who ordinarily would [have] run" from them. Now, rather than run, these individuals were now willing to stand up and tell white men as powerful as police captains that came through the doors of establishments such as these to "go to hell."

[29] I point to Plato's work for thinking about the parallels and differences between the spatial and social construction of ancient and modern political debate. A gentleman's drinking party taking place in the private, wealthy home of a poet, the symposium brought together rich Athenian politicians, artists, and philosophers. A lamentation of times past, the *Symposium* was set thirty years earlier when a gathering such as this would be more likely to take place. The male homoeroticism as political induction in the dialogue might also be contrasted here with the homosexuality and queer politics of Baldwin and Hansberry. It was written about 380 BC. (set in 416BC). Athens had been involved in a bitter war with Sparta for 15 years.

stature. Indeed, this represented a marked shift in interracial social decorum. During a meeting with Eisenhower at the White House in 1958, an official record described the president as "extremely dismayed to hear that after 5 ½ years of efforts and action in this field," the "gentlemen" he met with would dare to report that blacks were still disenchanted. As Eisenhower considered the news "that bitterness on the part of the Negro people was at its height," he flippantly "wondered" aloud "if further constructive action in this field would not only result in more bitterness." Representative of both the racial solidarity and deference widely compelled in engagements with whites before the 1960s, A. Phillip Randolph and Roy Wilkins "hastily assured the President that the bitterness they referred to was not directed to the President of the Administration…"[30]

Only five years later, Robert Kennedy, arguably the most bona fide representative of a presidential administration in the 20th century, was likely one of the first leaders in American high politics to hear, in unadulterated terms, how blacks actually felt about "the problem." And the frustrated emissaries of black cultural leadership would emerge especially critical of Kennedy's familial class of white liberalism; as a group, virtually each participant found him "too sheltered by power and privilege to understand them." Schlesinger's narrative of the meeting published in the late 1970s only confirms how abrasive Kennedy and white Americans of this class and status interpreted even the most conciliatory black voices in the early 1960s. In a somewhat dubious description of Baldwin's personality and social outlook in 1963, Schlesinger claimed that the author was "a brilliant, passionate, sensitive, dramatic man imbued with a conviction of utter hopelessness about the black fate in white society."[31]

Despite the volume of subjective, conflicting, and incomplete accounts of the meeting

[30] Ibid.
[31] Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *Robert Kennedy and His Times* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1978), 330.

with Robert Kennedy in particular, and meeting attendees more generally, a number of facts can be ascertained from the infamous event. Through a combination of secondary sources and materials preserved in black writers' archives, the civil rights initiatives and challenges that followed the meeting come into remarkably clearer focus. For instance, a number of secondary sources, including Schlesinger's, have identified the meeting as one of the key factors that influenced the administration's swift move forward in its more forceful advocacy for civil rights legislation during the turbulent summer of 1963.[32] Less than two months following his brother's engagements in New York, John F. Kennedy would go in front of the nation in an unprecedented televised address to lobby for a civil rights bill. His speech, which he delivered based on a hours long one-on-one conversation with his brother, and likely recorded on the back of an envelope, incorporated a number of concerns and philosophies vocalized by Baldwin's group. And while President Kennedy made the final decision of when to address the nation, in a civil rights strategy meeting with his policy advisers leading up to the address, Robert Kennedy had been "the only one who urged him to do it."[33] Thus, even if Robert Kennedy initially rejected and resisted most of the criticisms he listened to in New York, President Kennedy's televised address, and Schlesinger's records of conversations and actions after the exchange, confirms substantive overlap between the three.[34]

---

[32] E. Culpepper Clark, *The Schoolhouse Door: Segregation's Last Stand at the University of Alabama* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 220; Philip A. Goduti, Jr., *Robert F. Kennedy and the Shaping of Civil Rights, 1960 – 1964* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2012), 193; Clay Risen, *The Bill of the Century: The Epic Battle for the Civil Rights Act* (New York: Bloombury, 2014), 52 – 56; and Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *Robert Kennedy and His Times* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1978), 335 – 344.

[33] Schlesinger, Jr., *Robert Kennedy and His Times*, 344.

[34] Ibid., 335 – 344. Drawing these parallels from the vantage point of history is not to suggest that there does not remain a lack of clarity on Kennedy's "education" at the time, or even years later. In the end, Baldwin was perhaps the most optimistic about what the Attorney General gained from the encounter, after being informed by "people he trusted" that Kennedy had demonstrated growth. Baldwin observed, "[a]nd, of course, there's also the possibility, you know, that my *own* judgment of him—is quite wrong. Or, at least, outdated. And that he's *learned* more—since that *stormy* meeting. I feel, of course, that people after all *do* change. He has developed a great *deal* since that time." Baldwin was so moved by the idea that he even indicated in this interview that he would "like to *see* him again." Eckman, *The Furious Passage of James Baldwin*, 197.

Of these converging frameworks in the summer of 1963, after the feedback Robert Kennedy received in New York, the most important policy outcome was President Kennedy re-emphasis of the centrality of moralism in the need for federal civil rights legislation.[35] Only weeks earlier, a major conflict in the meeting between the Attorney General and the group Baldwin invited was Robert Kennedy's unwillingness to understand or act on desegregation in moral terms. Indeed, besides for the inauspicious belligerence that opened their interracial dialogue, one of the foremost tensions to emerge from later accounts was Robert Kennedy's refusal to escort a black child into a school in the Deep South. When asked, he rejected this request as a "meaningless moral gesture." But to his guests, a demonstration of sincerity such as this would instead signify that the administration's policies and actions were driven by meaningful "moral commitments." Informing their perspective was the belief that politicking rather than passion haunted President Kennedy's previous efforts to calm social unrest and to support civil rights. Suggesting how important correcting this perception for African America was in this era, Lena Horne asserted that anyone who dared to "spit" on the child a Kennedy escorted to school would "be spitting on the nation."[36]

Because Robert Kennedy felt personally attacked by the fact that the group invited to his home delivered an explosive combination of anger, thoughts, and skepticism in their reflections

[35] When the group attacked the Attorney General for his lack of empathy in considering civil rights a "moral issue," Kennedy is reported as asking Baldwin's agent Robert Mills, "Didn't I give you those copies of the President's message to Congress?" Mills is reported to have answered in the affirmative. Mills followed by observing, "The President said there that it was a moral issue. He said it clearly and well. But—nobody here saw it. Which can only mean it didn't receive much publicity." Kennedy has been described as "taken aback" by this response, and did not reply to the comment. Given the gravity of these concerns, and the attempt to move Kennedy to act accordingly, the President's subsequent emphatic assurance that morality was a major concern in relation to the issue in his televised address is a noteworthy departure in how the issue had previously been framed. Regardless of its impact, from a historical perspective it demonstrates a newfound flexibility in how the administration sought to address civil rights, not least for the wide publicity lacking in previous efforts. "It is better to settle these matters I the courts than on the streets, and new laws are needed at every level, but law alone cannot make men see right. We are confronted primarily with a moral issue. It is as old as the scriptures and is as clear as the American Constitution."

[36] James Baldwin, "Lorraine Hansberry at the Summit," *Freedomways*, Volume 19, No. 49 (1979), 271.

on racial inequality, he emphasized how bitter and uninformed they were in the days following. But given that African American cultural leaders were regularly called upon to represent the race in political and social settings, the individuals Baldwin invited were well aware of their prospective impact in shaping how the administration viewed and engaged civil rights. Summarizing the definitive characteristics linking an otherwise motley group, Baldwin explained, "I called the people who had, I knew, paid some dues and who knew it." And dissimilar from most accounts of the group Baldwin invited that could actually attend—the meeting was so last minute that he could not extend each invitation himself—this was not a racially exclusive group. "There were many more people than I can name here. Let us say that I simply called black or white people whom I trusted, who would not feel themselves compelled to be spokesmen for any organization or responsible for espousing any specific point of view."[37]

Patience, which the group was accused of being curiously lacking in, was crucial in relation to their last minute invitations, even if many narratives of the event have failed to credit how quickly these celebrities re-arranged their schedules to descend upon Central Park South. Lena Horne, often reported as one of the most vocal guests at Kennedy's apartment, along with Hansberry, flew across the country at little more than a moment's notice from Palm Springs at Baldwin's request, even though she had informed him that she "never" flew. Baldwin would later recall, "[s]he nevertheless arrived the next day." And he semi-jokingly noted, "I found her wearing a beige suit, sitting in Bobby Kennedy's lobby and complaining that she had a 'hole' in her shoe from guiding this plane across the continent. She had just driven in from Idlewild—soon to be renamed Kennedy."[38]

Yet Baldwin himself was easily the most accommodating interlocutor, having flown to

[37] Ibid., 270.
[38] Ibid.

Washington D.C. early the morning prior to meet with the Attorney General, which is also when he agreed to Kennedy's impromptu request to organize a larger meeting the following day. To be sure, during the summer of 1963 especially, Baldwin was by no means a celebrity with an open calendar following the enormous success of *The Fire Next Time*, which had only recently been released and was enjoying strong sales and wide-acclaim. After landing in Washington, Baldwin was driven to Virginia to meet with the Attorney General for a breakfast that only ended up lasting twenty to thirty minutes, although this sleight is omitted entirely in most accounts of the meetings between these two.[39]

Because Baldwin realized how unusual the opportunity to have intimate rather than virtual dialogues with a Kennedy was, he would again make time to meet him the following day in New York in between several other obligations, in addition to agreeing to gather a group. By all indications, the secretive meeting Baldwin and his inner circle coordinated for the next day, while much longer, would be much less sanguine than his breakfast meeting at Kennedy's home in Virginia. The overwhelming majority of primary and secondary accounts of the discord that afternoon suggest that Kennedy remained silent as the figures Baldwin gathered berated him for three hours. Yet the exchange, while certainly one-sided given how vociferous Kennedy's guests' criticisms of the presidential administration's management of civil rights were, was more interactive than these narratives suggest.[40]

---

[39] The prospect of a longer breakfast meeting was technically thwarted by Baldwin's late arrival due to a delayed flight, only to be further hindered by another commitment on Kennedy's schedule. One short account of the breakfast that includes this detail is Clay Risen's, *The Bill of the Century: The Epic Battle for the Civil Rights Act* (New York: Bloombury, 2014), 50.

[40] One recent, useful exception to this has been published by historian Ruth Feldstein. Feldstein writes, "[a]fter hors d'oeuvres and small talk," Kennedy "explained how important it was for African Americans to support the administration and steer away from the kind of radical protest he associated with Malcolm X." Other recent accounts have also pointed out that Kennedy defended his brother and the presidential administration by pointing to their legal and legislative efforts on behalf of civil rights, including attempts to offer detailed statistics that substantiated their work. These numbers and accomplishments were also meant to assure the group of how much more the Kennedy administration had done compared to the Eisenhower administration. Feldstein, *How It Feels to Be Free:*

In particular, his interactions with Jerome Smith, the young, political activist the group selected as their first respondent to Kennedy's opening remarks, can be usefully reflected upon for how it upset decades-long customs for how blacks were expected to interact with whites. Beyond cultural programming such as concerts or symbolic visits, private interracial fraternity between "upstanding" white and blacks remained a rarity in the U.S. at the beginning of the 1960s. At the beginning of the century, when President Theodore Roosevelt invited Booker T. Washington to the White House, mass hysteria spread throughout the South after dozens of fear mongering reports from the Southern Press. And while other exceptions were regularly made—if not condoned—in the case of black musicians in the 19th and 20th centuries, it was implicit in these interracial settings that the white participants were intellectually superior.

Indeed, attempts at relatively equal heterogeneous fraternity of any sort had only been practiced in the U.S. for little more than a half of a decade by 1963. Mabel Dodge, arguably the most prominent midwife to the "free speech" movement across the nation's elite private spheres, only began sponsoring a rudimentary version of the practice in her apartment at 23 Fifth Avenue beginning in 1913. Rather than an attempt at interracial dialogue, the inclusion of black entertainers at the first salon Dodge hosted was instead an exotic show, and she found the intimacy that having blacks in her apartment required more disturbing than captivating. Writing off Carl Van Vechten's excited appreciation of the two black entertainers he invited and their performance as characteristic of his unusual personality and social proclivities, Dodge was unforgiving in how uncomfortable this scene made her. Two decades later, she described one of the entertainers as an "appalling Negress [that] danced before us," and the other black entertainer as "strumm[ing] a banjo and [singing] an embarrassing song" for the "disparate people" gathered. "So as readily as I let Carl bring Negroes (once), I let Steff [Lincoln Steffens] suggest

---

Black Women Entertainers and the Civil Rights Movement, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 4.

another pattern."[41]

Beyond the exclusions of African Americans and what Dodge then viewed as crass entertainment, as her words above suggest, there was still order to be maintained, including the decision required for who would open conversation. Five decades later in Kennedy's apartment, the fact that Jerome Smith, largely unknown to white Americans, would open the conversation between those gathered after Kennedy spoke, would have been surprising to the Attorney General, regardless of what the young activist said. Smith, previously a Ghandian passivist, was perhaps the most famous survivor of the 1961 Freedom Rides. His fame—and one largely contained with African America—unfortunately hinged on the fact that he had likely been beaten more and spent more time in jail than any other member of CORE, one of the "Big Four" civil rights organizations in these years. In fact, he was in New York for medical treatment, and his speech impediments and bodily injuries remained an issue at the time of the meeting. Worse still, especially for the hopes of a civil interracial exchange, Smith's experiences with Southern brutality were only accentuated by recent events in Birmingham.[42] "In that moment, with the situation in Birmingham the way it was,' Lena Horne was reported as saying later, "none of us wanted to hear figures and percentages and all that stuff. Nobody even cared about expressions of good will."[43] Yet these were precisely the data points Kennedy began the dialogue with.

In his own words, Smith would open the meeting by explaining that he was sickened—and more specifically, "nauseous"—to even be at a meeting with Kennedy in his Manhattan apartment to discuss "accommodations." Reports of the meeting overwhelmingly describe

[41] Mabel Luhan Dodge and Lois Rudnick, *Intimate Memories: The Autobiography of Mable Dodge* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1984), 122.
[42] At the beginning of the month on May 2, after weeks of demonstrations, police turned fire hoses and police dogs on children marching in the city. With television reporters present, the event was televised to the nation by that evening.
[43] Schlesinger, Jr., *Robert Kennedy and His Times,* 333.

Smith's remarks as an unfortunate opening that only served to immediately offend Kennedy. But he would only become even more shocked by Smith's assertion that he would not take up arms in Cuba to defend the United States.[44] As a result, Kennedy physically turned his back on Smith, and declared his intent to only listen and speak with the "civilized" leaders of the race that had been invited. From at least Booker T. Washington's dinner with Roosevelt, to Mabel Dodge's dismissal of the "appalling Negress" in her house in 1913, Kennedy's dismissal of Smith, more so than he was aware at the time, played in to what had been the racial status quo for generations.

The famed and accomplished group that Kennedy hoped would serve as Smith's foil, however, quickly rebuffed performing that role. Contextualizing Kennedy's rejection of Smith, Lena Horne has been reported as stating that Smith:

> …just put it like it was. He communicated the plain, basic suffering of being a Negro. The primeval memory of everyone in that room went to work after that…He took us back to the common dirt of our existence and rubbed our noses in it…You could not encompass his anger, his fury, in a set of statistics, not could Mr. [Harry] Belafonte and Dr. [Kenneth] Clark and Miss Horne, the fortunate Negroes, keep up the pretense of being the mature, responsible spokesmen for the race.[45]

In the end, Schlesinger argued that Smith's opening remarks were among the opinions expressed in New York that changed how the Attorney General understood the urgent need for civil rights. In 1971, an aide to Robert Kennedy, Edwin Guthman also wrote about the Attorney General's transformation after hearing Smith's words. "Instead of repeating, as he had, 'Imagine anyone saying that,' he said, 'I guess if I were in [Smith's] shoes, if I had gone through what he's gone through, I might feel differently about this country.'"[46] President Kennedy would also directly

---

[44] This latter statement in particular rattled the Attorney General so much that Schlesinger's account noted that he remained physically shaken and in disbelief that this could possibly be true for the entirety of his journey back to Virginia. In an effort to assure the historian of having calmed down by some point later in the evening, Schlesinger wrote, "I worried (as I noted) 'that his final reaction would be a sense of the futility rather than of the urgency of trying to bridge the gap. He may have felt that himself that I might have had this fear, because he called me later in the evening on another matter and seemed thoroughly calm.'" Ibid.

[45] Schlesinger, Jr., *Robert Kennedy and His Times,* 332.

[46] Edwin Guthman, *We Band of Brothers* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 221.

take up the issues of the race's relationship to patriotism in his televised civil rights address less than two months later, which was almost certainly an outgrowth of Smith's skepticism of fighting on the nation's behalf. "Today we are committed to a worldwide struggle to promote and protect the rights of all who wish to be free. And when Americans are sent to Viet-Nam or West Berlin, we do not ask for whites only."

***

As 1960s white America's new interest in black writers with the capacity to assist with "universalizing" the Afro American experience suggests, their literary, social and cultural work became increasingly central to contemporary civil rights actions and discourse. And while writers such as Lorraine Hansberry, Julian Mayfield, and James Baldwin led much of this activity, a number of additional black writers joined them in even larger numbers by the end of the 1960s. From the late 1950s, corporate and institutional investments in African American culture burgeoned as "white" publishing firms, magazines, and other organizations created space for black writers and narratives that had not been seen in such large numbers since the 1920s. While it was not uncommon for black and white folks alike to raise criticisms of how these new works reified older popular notions of black life, neither were these works as racially pernicious as their cultural predecessors. In efforts to improve popular culture that included black protagonists, African American writers were solicited for contractual employment as varied as media and research consulting, talk show appearances, and script writing. By the end of the 1960s, black writers also gained unprecedented access to short and long-term employment by universities that had founded new research centers for "Afro-American" culture.

As it had been in previous decades, white American support was crucial in assisting black authors with both working on this programming and publishing their writing across mainstream

cultural outlets. *Commentary* was by no means alone by the early 1960s among aspiring and established mainstream and intellectual magazines attempting to explore the disillusionments influencing shifting African American tactics in the continued struggle for civil rights. In 1954, some of their fellow New York Intellectuals, including Norman Mailer and Irving Howe, founded *Dissent* in the months following the *Brown* decision to challenge the political status quo in ways they believed *Commentary* had not.[47] While *Dissent* was not a civil rights publication, the left-wing magazine sought to open a small but vibrant conversation on what an active, socially democratic life in the U.S. would look like in what Howe termed and titled in 1954 as "This Age of Conformity."[48] By 1956, this even included *Dissent*'s publication of historian Lawrence Dunbar Reddick's "The Bus Boycott in Montgomery," which the periodical would advertise elsewhere, including the NAACP's *Crisis* magazine, as the "first full-length report on the bus boycott."[49] *Dissent*'s social and racial sensibilities similar to these, which were also meant to represent a break from the magazine's avant-garde peers at *Partisan Review*, would soon appear in greater force after Norman Podhoretz assumed responsibility as *Commentary*'s chief editor in 1960. With its shift in editorial direction at the beginning of the 1960s, the magazine's circulation increased to 60,000 copies per issue, and larger audiences of white literals were exposed to black intellectual contributors like Mayfield than had previously been the case.

While fictional and nonfictional books had by and large dominated the most prominent, enlightened discussions on the nation's prospects for a robust multiracial democracy during the

[47] See Nathan Abrams, "'America is Home': *Commentary* Magazine and the Refocusing of the Community of Memory, 1945 – 1960," in *Commentary in American Life*, ed. Murray Friedman (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005), esp. 36 – 37.
[48] Irving Howe, "This Age of Conformity," *Partisan Review*, 21 (January – February, 1954): 7 - 33.
[49] L.D. Reddick, "The Bus Boycott in Montgomery," *Dissent* 3 (Spring 1956): 107 – 117; Spring 1956 *Dissent* advertisement published in *The Crisis*, Vol 63 (1956), 313.

1940s and 1950s, this form's monopoly was disrupted by the end of the latter decade.[50] Radio, broadcast television, magazines, newspapers and movies joined book publishers in initiating and growing national conversations about racial integration and civil rights. And in the late 1950s and early 1960s, a wide array of "white" media organizations and news outlets such as *Commentary*, *Playboy*, the *Village Voice*, the BBC, led efforts that encouraged, solicited, and facilitated the dissemination of new black voices to white homes. Books printed in the years prior to this development that are representative of the outsized role they played include W.J. Cash's *The Mind of the South* (1941); Gunnar Myrdal's *An American Dilemma* (1944); Richard Wright's *Native Son* (1940); and Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952). In the case of both smaller and more popular magazines, attention to African American life had not been seen on this scale since the demise of 1930s publications broadly affiliated with the Popular Front, either among CPUSA organs, or artistic, avant-garde publications. While not always successful or produced with the intention of avoiding sensationalism, the general aim of these efforts in the late 1950s and early 1960s were practical in nature. Indeed, the best of periodicals' efforts were designed to provide white Americans with what were perceived as crucial details on the political conflagrations quickly changing the dynamics and strategies of the black struggle for equality.

To be sure, cultural efforts similar to these in the U.S. were not entirely new, and their genealogies across popular and intellectual publications and other literary and entertainment venues can be traced back to at least the late 1910s, if not earlier.[51] Yet as many writers and commentators who participated in these earlier endeavors often lamented, before the growth of

[50] Rather than an exhaustive list, a few key works that contemporaries would cite here are: Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1944); W. J. Cash, *The Mind of the South* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1941); Richard Wright, *Native Son* (New York: Harper, 1940); Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (New York: Random House, 1952).

[51] For an example of how Lester A. Walton, the managing editor of the African American newspaper, the *New York Age*, planned to sponsor theater performances and "entertainments of all kinds," in efforts to help white audiences "overcome ignorance and prejudice," see: "Drama and Race Relations," *The Independent*, August 16, 1919, Vol. 99, No. 3688, 212 – 213.

the Civil Rights Movement in the second half of the 1950, white Americans often failed to engage these efforts as seriously as their later counterparts. After an auspicious announcement to cultured white America in the 1920s that there was a "New Negro" literary and artistic movement fostered by black working in these forms, sustained attention to black-authored humanism remained episodic and virtually absent. Nevertheless, the special issue of *Survey Graphic* that Alain Locke guest-edited, "Harlem: Mecca of the New Negro," would sell 42,000 copies in 1925, roughly twice the circulation of other issues of *Survey Graphic*. After World War II, the glossy commercial publications that are most representative of the periodicals Americans consumed during the 1940s and 1950s failed, refused, or perceived few reasons to sponsor similar cultural endeavors.[52] Before the late 1950s, black writers, and substantive cultural production about blacks, was systematically shut out from most intellectual and commercial publications, with only a few exceptions—especially in comparison to the 1960s.

The role of mass culture in imparting interracial understanding from the late 1950s was arguably even more important than it had been in previous years, with white Americans physically separated from largely-urbanized black populations more than ever before. Widely broadcast and published debates between black writers, white writers and leaders and politicians of both races, moved otherwise limited racial and interracial conversations on these issues even further out of private spheres, and thus increasingly available for broad audiences. Various letters preserved in the manuscript collections of a small number of the most prominent black writers in these years suggest how momentous white Americans found the spatial changes that affected how Americans encountered debates over racial equality. After a 1964 Town Hall symposium broadcast on New York's noncommercial radio station WBAI entitled, "The Black Revolution

[52] The primary exception to this trend in magazine publishing were the fiction and non-fiction anti-discrimination works that focused primarily on the African American experience as civilians and participants in the nation's war efforts during the mid-1940s.

and the White Backlash," at least one woman argued that these discussions between black cultural and political leaders were best limited to the home. In a letter to Hansberry, who participated in the exchange, the woman explained that the angry rhetoric she heard in the discussion was inappropriate for radio broadcasting. "It was heartbreaking to me to hear a group of prominent and respected Negro artists play traitor to their fellow American Negro."[53] By no means "universal" resources to either mainstream or African America, Hansberry and the other symposium participants were accused by the white woman of betraying the race, which she argued would only serve to alienate white Americans further. She scolded, "At a time like this, we need the support of every American in this national crisis and it is a national crisis since every American is involved."[54]

The interracial format, or forum, was also an increasingly popular style employed over a range of mass media outlets from the late 1950s onward.[55] While these, too, were often not without their critics due to the racial antagonism they published and broadcasted to large audiences, efforts to promote interracial exchanges represented what in practice were more civil exchanges than those taking place on the street. Further, these initiatives are also reflective of broader social and cultural patterns that sought to create spaces and products that demonstrated racial parity. From the mid-1960s through the early 1970s, publishers sponsored these efforts by printing books for children and young adults that enabled to black-authored books that were designed and advertised as equals to white writing in comprehensive surveys of "American Literature." By 1971, the Scholastic Black Literature Series proudly announced, "Students who

[53] Blanche Dorsky to Lorraine Hansberry, June 25, 1964, Folder 10, Box 63, LHP.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Examples include: Nathan Podhoretz, "Liberalism and the Negro: A Round-table Discussion." *Commentary* 37 (March 1964): 25 – 42.

read Faulkner, Poe, Sandburg, and Twain, can now read Ellison, [William Melvin] Kelley, Wright, and Chesnutt."[56]

Indeed, the dramatic shift from white publishers' previous difficulties in acknowledging an African American author's race in the post-World War II era contributed to a professional environment by the late 1950s where it was almost impossible not to mention this identity. As a result, the previous decade's fixation on "universalism" was increasingly viewed as inadequate for either desegregating American life, or comprehending the writers and literature emanating from an increasingly progressive multiracial nation. African American writers that had refused "raceless" universalism for years were the best positioned to benefit from this transition, and when they were solicited for new cultural productions and endeavors, they were often very appreciative. But for the most popular and prominent of these individuals, as it had been for their predecessors, increasing invitations, both physical and virtual, were often personally and professionally stressful and invasive. And the problems related to these issues were only compounded by a somewhat common professional hazard writers encountered when their texts, comments, and interviews were published in edited versions that did not honor either what they had agreed to, or their contribution.

Indeed, not uncommon for black writers that were widely acclaimed and successful with white Americans during the Jim Crow era were inaccurate published reports that misrepresented their philosophies on writing as they were increasingly profiled by mainstream publications. In 1959, Frank Yerby was asked by *Harper's* to contribute an essay on why he wrote "costume novels," which included a request that he specifically address why he had chosen this genre as an

[56] While these books were by no means considered racially exclusive, advertisements from the era suggest particular pride in the creation of a more inclusive cannon both available and providing an important social and cultural value for school-age black children. Scholastic Book Services Advertisement, p. D-28, *New York Amsterdam News*, September 18, 1971, Oversize Box 3, GBP.

African American writer. In sum, the magazine sought an essay expounding on why Yerby continued to publish novels that were widely celebrated as entertainment by white American consumers even though they rarely—if ever—registered with these readers as "protest." While most black readers had known Yerby's race for over a decade, due in no small part to the unwanted coverage he regularly received by the black press, popular commentators would continue joking for decades that most whites were unaware that he was a "Negro writer." Given the immense popular recognition Yerby received as a popular writer during the 1940s and 1950s, if Yerby was a "credit" to anything for the overwhelming majority of his fan base during these years, it was the American dream in pointedly abstract terms, not "the race."

The published essay Yerby agreed to contribute to *Harper's* in 1959, then, represented a notable departure from how most mainstream press coverage had considered the author's tremendous output. Aware of how sensitive the author's race was in relation to his work, the editors at *Harper's* approached looming questions surrounding his racial identity in fairly gentle terms. "As the piece has been revised you discuss books on racial themes at various points but never say you are a Negro... I wonder if you would be willing to add…'Perhaps, as a Negro, it took me longer than it should have to learn this lesson.'"[57] Yerby's interlocutor at *Harper's* further assured, "If you don't want to make any reference of this sort, of course, it is fine with us." In response, Yerby would decline the request, in no uncertain terms. But rather than seeking to "pass" with this essay in an effort to protect his commercial success, which had in fact been perceived as a requirement by his agent and publisher in their efforts to build a mass readership for his earlier work, he rebuffed their request in different terms.

His blunt response, in fact, embraced a "raceless" universalism, and argued that race did not merit consideration in relation to the essay, or anywhere else for that matter. "As for your

[57] *Harper's* to Frank Yerby, Frank Yerby Collection, Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center, Boston University.

suggestion that I use the phrase, 'As a Negro, etc – ' no. [It] smacks of breast beating and special pleading to me. Besides which, it is irrelevant, both in writing and in life, at least to anyone who has managed to grow up."[58] *Harper's* editors, however, sidestepped Yerby's perspective on the issue by disclosing the author's racial identity in their introduction to his essay, even though his contribution argued that novels organized around social problems had no civic utility or value. "One of the few successful Negro authors who are not preoccupied specifically with Negro problems in their work, he argues in defense of pure 'entertainment.'"[59]

By 1964, the post-World War II sensibilities that had enabled the elision of a black's author racial identification in the mainstream press had been overthrown almost entirely, and even insincere negotiations like those between Yerby and *Harper's* became virtually impossible. Yerby's longtime editor at Dial, Helen Strauss, had vociferously protected the author's race since the first book he published in 1946. But even she could not imagine a public relations scenario in the mid-1960s that would allow Yerby to recuse himself from commenting on the national drama surrounding civil rights. "You cannot ignore the entire civil rights question. Newspaper reporters will be in touch with you, also the various civil rights groups, and no matter how adroit you may be on the subject you'll definitely have to participate in some way."[60] As Kennedy had attempted with the writers and other spokespersons convened at his home the year prior, Strauss had no doubt that a range of Americans would rely on Yerby to comprehend and assess the increasing violence in the Southern civil rights struggle.

---

[58] Yerby followed this statement by indicating that beyond an invocation of race, he would be willing to do "anything" the magazine requested. Without losing a gracious beat in this exchange, he closed with the valediction, "Thanks for your kind letter." Unpublished letter from Frank Yerby to *Harper's*, Frank Yerby Collection, Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center, Boston University.

[59] Introductory Paragraph to Frank Yerby, "How and Why I Write the Costume Novel, A Special Supplement, *Harper's Magazine*, Oct 1, 1959, 145. In the next issue of the magazine, the editors indicated that they had "heard from a number of readers who differ sharply from Mr. Yerby" Text from the next issue and a few responses from readers are preserved in the Frank Yerby collection, Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center, Boston University.

[60] Unpublished letter from Helen Strauss to Frank Yerby, April 1964, Frank Yerby Collection, Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center, Boston University.

But Yerby had in fact absconded from any explicit role in the civil rights struggle after publishers rejected two of his novels protesting African American inequality in the 1940s. A number of racial sleights would only strengthen his resolve on the issue in the late 1940s and over the 1950s, including the experience of his family being driven out of their home on Long Island after his neighbor's discovered he was black after his first book was published.

> …as for evading the racial problem, my considered opinion is that any person of noticeably Negro ancestry, who can afford not to, and who voluntarily lives in the Union of South Africa or the United States of America is in serious need of psychiatric care… I am not patriotic. Why the hell should I be? I regard it as rather sad that in Franco's Spain, I can and do belong to the Country Club, while in Johnson's U.S.A. Ralph Bunche's son can't play tennis on a Long Island Court…And if I exaggerate, might I remind you that that was my house they threw those milk bottles against in Valley Stream, Long Island; that I was able to move into Jackson Heights only because two Jewish families held out against signing the petition to bar me.[61]

By 1963, Yerby was ready to publish a novel about a black family that integrated a white neighborhood titled "The Tents of Shem," which he considered one of his best novels.[62] But this work would never be published. In 1969, Yerby drafted a note to readers that he believed would be printed with "The Tents of Shem" that year. "This novel will seem curiously out of date to the average reader. The reason for this is very simple: It was written in the early part of 1963. At that time, John and Robert Kennedy, and Martin Luther King were still alive."[63] Yerby would, however, be successful in his efforts to publish *Speak Now: A Modern Novel* (1969), an interracial love story set in 1961 Paris, and also his first of three novels to—at least partially—embrace African American literary universalism.[64]

***

[61] Frank Yerby to Helen Strauss, April 1964, Frank Yerby Collection, Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center, Boston University.
[62] James Hill "Anti-Heroic Perspectives: The Life and Works of Frank Yerby" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Iowa, 1976), 35.
[63] Frank Yerby, "Note to the Reader draft," 1969, Frank Yerby Collection, Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center, Boston University.
[64] John C. Charles, *Abandoning the Black Hero: Sympathy and Privacy in the Postwar African American White-Life Novel* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 2013).

As Yerby's challenges pursuing his literary interests in African American life from the beginning of the 1960s suggests, there were scores of professional challenges for black writers that began and continued producing culture for mainstream audiences in this era. While their contributions to a growing national conversation on blacks, racial integration and civil rights were more welcome they ever before, even when their works were accepted, it remained challenging to cooperate with liberalism that was often racially conservative. Lorraine Hansberry and James Baldwin, who were often among the most conciliatory black voices during the 1950s and early 1960s, regularly vilified by white Americans for being too bitter or militant. In attempts to distinguish these writers from Martin Luther King and other so-called "good will" racial ambassadors, whites that identified as civil rights supporters deemed their words and actions traitorous to fellow African Americans, and Americans more generally. Little understood by these white Americans at the time, however, is that these figures were participating in social and cultural exchanges that came with expectations of racial deference that blacks were increasingly less likely to agree to.

One of the problems that contributed to increasing animosity evident from black writers was the fact that the "job" of representing African-America was particularly laborious in the early 1960s. Not least important in this regard was how small their numbers were in terms of black writers who were both professionals and culturally prominent. As such, invitations from white writers, and cultural and political leaders for "informal and occasional" meetings "now and then in Village apartments," or on and around Park and 5th Avenues, were often marked by racial isolation, even when this was not the host's intention.[65] In a draft of an unpublished essay titled "Life in America: Conversations on a Train," Hansberry argued that if segregation "were even handled as it should be," people would consider how African Americans considered integrated

[65] Lawrence Barth to Lorraine Hansberry, July 15, 1960, Folder 15, Box 63, LHP.

life in public and private settings. Starting the essay with a reference to its title, she asserted that little attention had been given, for instance, to the fact that "black folks would have something to say about the obnoxious personalities that we are made to ride with in the North's feeble attempt to be 'cosmopolitan.'" But Hansberry's indictment of an imagined gathering at an integrated dinner at a white family's dinner table, reminiscent of the frustrations she would voice so prominently at Robert Kennedy's home in Manhattan, were even more critical. "Imagine the indignity which must accompany a Negro sitting at the same table with two representatives of the white upper class –."[66] One can only imagine how she reacted after receiving Hugh Hefner's 1962 Western Union telegram requesting "the pleasure of [her] company at a party in my home…midnight until (?)."[67]

And while Hefner's invitation was certainly less serious than many Hansberry received in the early 1960s, it was far from uncommon for the small number of prominent black writers of her generation to frequently reject either untoward or trivial requests for their participation. In one solicitation for her participation in the *National Guardian*'s 1963 "Fashions for Peace" lunch, Hansberry instructed her assistant to make up an excuse indicating that she could not attend because she was "out of town then maybe."[68] The "progressive newsweekly" planned to hold the event in early Spring of that year at New York's Plaza Hotel. "We will assemble 500 women in the New York area to meet our distinguished guests and to enjoy our fashion show, which will feature such spring firsts as, 'what to wear as a HUAC witness' or 'how to appear on a peace picket line' or 'a spring bonnet, the latest in fall-out head-gear.'"[69]

[66] Lorraine Hansberry, Draft of "Life in America: Conversations on a Train," No Date, Folder 4, Box 63, LHP.
[67] Hugh Hefner to Lorraine Hansberry, October 12, 1962, Folder 7, Box 63, LHP.
[68] Jane McManus to Lorraine Hansberry, January 28, 1963, Folder 8, Box 63, LHP.
[69] Ibid.

In addition to dismissals and disinterest in scenarios where white interlocutors poked fun at peace and protests in these years, it was also common for black writers to encounter white Americans interracial initiatives that were overly sensational, platitudinous, or conservative. Major periodicals like Hefner's *Playboy* even sponsored African American writing and exposure that was outright racially hostile for the black writer it employed. One example of how this sensationalism manifest can be evidenced from *Look*, a popular bi-weekly magazine that emphasized photographs rather than texts. Extremely popular with a mass readership, the publication enjoyed the second highest circulation in the nation among general interest publications; in fact, it boasted of having over 7.5 million readers.[70] In 1961, *Look* would publish, "Explosive Youth: Introduction to a Sit-in."[71] Rather than emphasizing the political elements of the social protests of the moment, the photo piece emphasizes the interracial sexual undertones of these actions. The "sit-in" the magazine profiled spotlighted an attractive young white woman sitting between two attractive black men. While photographs of the three were not explicitly denigrating, sexuality haunts the spread, and one that would be by and large illicit and unacceptable to mainstream white America.

At other moments, interracial threats and hostilities were more blatant and fully on display in both the design and production process for African American-themed articles sponsored by white editors and publishers. For the May 1963 issue of *Playboy* magazine, Alex Haley conducted an interview-styled exchange with American Nazi Party leader George Rockwell. This assignment that Haley agreed to participate in would be relatively dangerous

[70] Arlin Crotts, *The New Moon: Water, Exploration, and Future Habitation*, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2014), 469; Steven Conn, *Americans Against the City: Anti-Urbanism in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 326.
[71] "Explosive Youth: Introduction to a Sit-In," *Look*, January 3, 1961, 36b-36d. A reprint of the article is preserved in Folder 3, Box 62, LHP.

compared to the two widely celebrated African American literary works he published soon after: the *Autobiography of Malcolm X* (1965) and *Roots: The Saga of an American Family* (1976).

But before Haley influenced the nation's perception of black life by focusing on African Americans, his task was to conduct an "interview" with Rockwell within the confines of the Nazi's leader's personal compound. Even more threatening in his report for *Playboy*'s white, suburban readership was the fact that Rockwell kept his loaded pearl-handled gun within close reach while describing his hatred of both blacks and Jews during the interview. "Rockwell: It's nothing personal, but I want you to understand that I don't mix with your kind, and we call your race 'niggers.'"[72] Whether or not this qualification alleviated any of Haley's anxieties about his own well-being while engaging in this exchange at Rockwell's home is less than clear. Yet it is the next line in their dialogue that is perhaps equally if not more illuminating of the conditions necessitating this exchange. Rather than expressing a fear of being shot or lynched in the published exchange, Haley reported that he told Rockwell, "I've been called 'nigger' many times, Commander, but this is the first time I'm being paid for it. So you go right ahead. What have you got against us 'niggers'?"

Haley's recognition of getting paid to conduct an interview in the compound of an avowed racist may seem extreme, but racial hostility from white Americans was by no means limited to these individuals, or conservatives more generally. Years before Norman Podhoretz began leading *Commentary* toward the neoconservative right as his own political views shifted, he would alienate a generation of African Americans with his infamous essay, "My New Problem—And Ours." Published in 1963, in this essay Podhoretz confessed to a number of "twisted feelings" he had "about Negroes" in the piece, asserting that doing so "as honestly as possibly" would enable their containment and "ultimate disregard." For instance,

[72] Alex Haley, "Playboy Interview: George Lincoln Rockwell," *Playboy* (April 1966).

> And when I think about the Negroes in America and about the image of integration as a state in which the Negroes would take their rightful place as another of the protected minorities in a pluralistic society, I wonder whether they really believe in their hearts that such a state can actually be attained.[73]

Not even two years after Mayfield's *Commentary* piece, Podhoretz's contradictions in his approach to moving toward civil equality by expressing extreme reservations toward blacks at the same time that he maintains that he must disavow racism. From *Look*'s sit-in introduction to Hefner *Playboy* to *Commentary*, equivocation and backpedalling on what racial equality could and should look like was the standard across mainstream culture.

True to her fashion, Hansberry responded to Podhoretz's essay with force. For her, "My Negro Problem—and Ours," was downright irresponsible and ignorant. At the heart of her criticism was a questioning of how Podhoretz could in good conscience project his own sordid racial anxieties in the form of a respectably literary essay for white liberals. "I mean to say that an attempt to reduce the situation of U.S. Negroes to an exchange of personal memorabilia of the brutalizing hazards of an urban upbringing is a sheer outrage." And Hansberry perceived this lack of considered interracial engagement as making her work more difficult. How could black writers like Hansberry bring increasingly disenchanted African Americans back toward racial reconciliation if essays like his were the status quo? In her response to him, which *Commentary* would publish a short version of in its "letters from readers" section, she concluded:

> But most painfully of all, I charge him with something I know that he cannot presently appreciate the seriousness of: of having given those impassioned young black folk who have 'given up the Mr. Podhoretz's.' a document with which to heighten their ever-deepening articulation of their contempt of his self-exemption. Those of us who feel that we stand between, trying to maintain the chain, have been handed a body blow…[74]

As Podhoretz's willingness to publish Hansberry's response to his essay suggests, it was not uncommon for liberal white Americans to engage these criticisms, even if they could not

[73] Norman Podhoretz, "My Negro Problem—and Ours," *Commentary* 35 (1963), 101.
[74] Lorraine Hansberry, Draft of "'My Negro Problem'—II," Folder 16, Box 63, LHP.

understand them. In one of several letters from white readers and listeners who failed to see Hansberry's perspective on the vapidity she often lamented in mass culture, an extremely educated reader who had attended Harvard was confused as to why she would want to ban *Time*. "Mind you, I'm not indignantly challenging you. I simply want to know why TIME should be banned." For the letter writer, the magazine "seemed to be on the side of the angels in most matters that are important to me - race, education, theatre, music, art, medicine, science - and gives marvelous coverage to them…" Because the magazine was on "the right side" of these issues, he explained that he could forgive the magazine of its "sins."[75]

Many black writers, of course, were not willing to forgive these sins during the 1960s. After receiving a contract faculty position at Cornell's in 1967, Julian Mayfield would decline or decide against pursuing multiple faculty positions that entailed directing "black studies" programs at white institutions, in deference to writing. This would include his decision to leave his position at Cornell University in 1971.[76] At the time, Mayfield would explain his personal and professional dilemmas related to these opportunities across a number of letters to his friend Sandra Drake, the scholar St. Clair Drake's daughter. "One college near here had been thru 4 black studies directors in one year. Nevertheless I considered the Mass position because with $22,000 a yr I could perhaps pay off a few debts. But I thought at the time you ought to have a better reason than that for taking such a job."[77] Nevertheless, Mayfield was well aware that the funding institutions were newly providing was extremely important to established writers and scholars, and those who were just beginning their careers. If you were "single, [and] young," according to a letter Mayfield sent John Henrik Clarke, a friend and also one of the pioneers of

[75] John L. Anderson to Lorraine Hansberry, No Date; their first letter exchange dates from February 29, 1964, Folder 6, Box 64, LHP.
[76] Julian Mayfield to Sandra Drake, June 2, 1971, Folder 14, Box 4, Julian Mayfield Papers (hereafter JMP), Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library.
[77] Julian Mayfield to Sandra Drake, October 3, 1971, Folder 14, Box 4, JMP.

Africana Studies in the U.S., "scholars in African and Afro-American history" even qualified for $10,000 residency positions at Cornell by 1968.[78]

Little more than a year later, Mayfield and others were increasingly considering leadership positions in these institutions professional liabilities rather than opportunities. In one exchange with Mayfield, Sandra Drake briefly described both the excitement and drawbacks that accompanied her father's founding and appointment as the first academic chair of the African and African American Studies program at Stanford in 1969. The details she chose suggest her own astute awareness of the delicate professional and political balance such positions required at the end of the 1960s. "My father's got a real hot seat—head of the Afro-American Studies Program. The Administration wants him to put out the fires so his job is to keep it while not doing what they want him to."[79] After his own experiences in this expanding field, Mayfield was particularly skeptical that this was possibile. "[St. Clair Drake] is, indisputably, the greatest teacher I have ever seen or heard of, but if Cornell and NYU taught me anything it is that he'd have to be a triple genius to hold that job successfully." And according to Mayfield, his own challenges were more than personal anecdotes. "Everyone I know, even young deans, [are] getting out because of the impossibility of serving several gods at once. This is the year for getting back to teaching or writing and research…."[80]

Indeed, one of the conditions that Mayfield was responding to by the late 1960s was what he considered would be a rapid, dramatic end to the 1960s vogue for writing about African American life. Not only was one of his smartest friends "who happen[ed] to be a communist" predicting a recession that would unfold beginning in the fall of 1970, Mayfield anticipated that this development would further reduce the funding the government contributed to books about

[78] Julian Mayfield to John Henrik Clarke, May 23, 1968, Folder 10, Box 4, JMP.
[79] Sandra Drake to Julian Mayfield, September 28, 1969, Folder 14, Box 4, JMP.
[80] Julian Mayfield to Sandra Drake, No Date, Folder 14, Box 4, JMP.

blacks. "One reason publishers could afford to try to meet the demand for black books was that schools and poverty programs were receiving large chunks of dough from the government, and they were expected to buy a lot of the books which would be published."[81] Explaining the rough economics of the business in 1970 to W.E.B. Du Bois's stepson, David Du Bois, who was hoping to publish a book in the U.S., Mayfield warned that he needed to strike soon, because demand would soon dry up, just as "public demand [was] already drying up." [U]nder the Nixon" administration, previously available funds had:

> been slashed almost in half, and may be slashed further. Thus publishers will no longer be able to experiment very much with black material…Large numbers of whites, especially among the liberal sections who buy books, are losing interest in racial questions because, firstly, they can't or won't do anything about it, and secondly, they have been rejected by the blacks with whom they would like to work (as leaders, as always), and thirdly, there are other causes to interest them now. There is not only the continuing war, but THE ENVIRONMENT, which is all the rage now. I suspect it will be the "In" thing in the next years or so. If they must stick to people, they'll take the American Indian Cause or the Mexican American Cause. My last reason you should hurry may be the most important for you: There is practically no general interest in Africa now.[82]

***

In reality, there had never been much of a sustained commercial market for serious texts and other cultural works on African and African American life in the United States. Rather than outright rejecting her criticism of Podhoretz's article, as a number of white editors of newspapers and periodicals had since the 1950s, he somewhat flippantly informed her that *Commentary* would, "of course, publish as much of it as we can find room for." "Meanwhile, I can only wish that the next thing you write gets as intelligent, perceptive, and comprehensive a response as my article has elicited in you."[83]

[81] Julian Mayfield to David Dubois, August 26, 1970, Folder 15, Box 4, JMP.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Norman Podhoretz to Lorraine Hansberry, March 11, 1963, Folder 16, Box 63, LHP.

White American "progressives" like Podhoretz were among the first to express skepticism and frustration with blacks, even though scholars are much likelier to posit that those who participated in less subtle "white backlashes" against 1960s civil rights claims were.[84] To be sure, efforts to recover white responses to changes in the nation's racial landscapes are still relatively new, and by no means constitute a fully developed scholarly literature.[85] Represented among the gaps in this historiography is how little scholars know about the interrelationship of 1960s black and white life beyond political activism; and most menacingly, the development of "Black Power," and its less-celebrated twin, "White Power." In 1965, Rockwell would claim,

> All over Chicago, wherever there are White people, you will find swastikas and "White Power" scrawled on the walls!
>
> When CBS did a recent TV documentary on Chicago, they were unable to avoid showing the swastika as the symbol of White resistance, even though they studiously didn't mention us."[86]

Yet well before the mid-1960s, it was not uncommon for much-smaller social and professional sleights to be used as justifications for the promotion and development of culture produced by African Americans, including responses that called for the inclusion of whites. In 1961, Amiri Baraka, who was still LeRoi Jones at this time, wrote to Hansberry with stationary from the publishing firm Totem Press, which he had founded with his then white wife, Hettie Cohen in 1958. His goal was to get Hansberry to agree to participate in a forum with Norman Mailer after reading an exchange in the *Village Voice* between the two, which he proposed would

[84] In his effort to provide a comprehensive overview of this phenomena in "How Brown Changed Race Relations: The Backlash Thesis," Michael Klarman points out that "[m]any historians and political scientists—for example, Earl Black, Numan V. Bartley, Hugh D. Graham, and Neil R. McMillen—have copiously documented the racial fanaticism that *Brown* induced in southern politics." Klarman, "How Brown Changed Race Relations: The Backlash Thesis," *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 81, No. 1 (June, 1994), 82 – 83.
[85] One of the most prominent recent works on these subtleties remains Kevin Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007); for another recent work that explores how white conservatives shed overt forms of anti-Semitism and racism in the postwar era, see Darren Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt: Plain-Folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2011).
[86] George Lincoln Rockwell, *The Rockwell Report*, (Dallas: American Nazi Party, 1965), 62.

benefit an organization he had recently founded, "OYM." "I have recently gotten together an organization of young men (most of whom are black, and in the arts in one way or another) and we need monies to further some of our projects."[87]

Not only would Hansberry explicitly refuse Baraka's request based on the assertion that her differences with Mailer were not "significant," it is unlikely that she would not have been offended by the sexism inhered in his early conceptualization of the Black Arts Movement. Indeed, Baraka's response to her illustrates what his casual chauvinism and his cynicism directed toward the American and African American middle class would look like for years to come.

> To my mind, the position you have made for yourself (or which the society has marked for you) is significant, if only because it represents the thinking of a great many Americans…black as well as white. Your writing comes out of and speaks for the American middle class…The critics, etc., were joyous about Raisin for exactly that reason. And as an articulate voice of an entire class you certainly do become a "leader," like it or not.[88]

The racially antagonistic attitudes articulated above that the broader Black Arts Movement would only move further toward were by no means foregone based on Baraka's early cultural interests. Indeed, Baraka and Cohen's press was the first to publish Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg, and would continue being an important organ for Beats poets through the early 1960s. Ted Wilentz, one of the co-founders of Corinth Books along with his brother Eli, explained that he began publishing books with Baraka in 1960. But it was not until after 1964 that "[Baraka] began to drift away from the scene and grew more and more involved with the black movement. I feel very strongly that one of his great contributions in that period was to really bring black writing into a competitive level with writing done by whites."

Beyond the criticisms Baraka directed toward Hansberry in the early 1960s for failing to support his male-centric goals for African American cultural production, their philosophical

[87] LeRoi Jones to Lorraine Hansberry, June 13, 1961, Folder 15, Box 63, LHP.
[88] Ibid.

divergences also suggest how fractured the Black Arts Movement often was in practice. As a movement that would not gain mass momentum across the nation's ghettoes until the late 1960s and early 1970s, in the post-Civil Rights era, it was not difficult for writers of any race, gender, or sexuality to rebuff what self and community determination looked like. One poem from a self-published "zine" printed in California preserved in Gwendolyn Brooks's archive at the Bancroft Library makes explicit how entangled and fraught several progressive social positions became by the late 1960s. "A LOT OF YOUNG PEOPLE/TOOK UP ASTROLOGY. A LOT/OF THEM TOOK UP DRUGS./SOME OF THEM TOOK UP/POLITICS OR ORIENTIAL/RELIGION. THE POOR ONES/TRIED TO ORGANIZE. SOME/TOOK UP ASTROLOGY, DRUGS,/…"[89] The self-proclaimed poet excerpted here, Peter Carr, opened his sharpie-penned collection of art and text by noting, "I DID ALL THIS, PUBLISHED IT, AND COPYRIGHTED IT IN 1969." In the third stanza of his poem excerpted above, Carr also addressed what he portrayed as the era's ominous trends and general complacency. "THE PEOPLE BECAME DANGEROUS/AND THE PLANET BECAME/POLUTED."[90]

Indeed, similar literary, artistic, and nonfictional lamentations and cynicism were evident in black publications in the late 1960s and early 1970s, although many of these reflections were also balanced by reports on the progress African Americans were making in these years. By the mid to late 1960s especially, it was clear that even once "raceless" literary universalists like Frank Yerby were willing to "speak now," which also included more explicitly engaging racial subjects in his novels. A figure that once shunned and steadily avoided the black press, in 1966, Yerby agreed to be interviewed by Hoyt Fuller for a long form essay published in *Ebony* on the

[89] Peter Carr, No Title, 1969, Oversize Box 3, GBP.
[90] Ibid.

author's life, at which point he also expressed his intention to "write novels of significance."[91] Emphasizing the author's new courage, the piece closed by reporting that "Yerby paused, reflected, then stated emphatically: 'I am not going to sign any contract which does not permit me to do any kind of book I choose.'"[92]

Representative of a wider "patricide" directed against older generations of popular black writers in the late 1960s and 1970s, including those that had chosen not to expatriate, overtures such as these would not always be welcomed unequivocally by African American readers. *Ebony* would publish at least two letters in subsequent issues indicating how "late" and unwelcome Yerby's efforts were in an era when black arts and politics were showing unprecedented signs of strength and development.

> **'Don't Need Yerby Now'**
> I wish to commend you on your fine June issue. I read the interview with Mr. Frank Yerby, in which he states he may return to America to help us in our struggle for first class citizenship. Yerby ran out on us when our backs were to the wall. When his book, *Foxes of Harrow* [1946], was a best-seller and Mr. Yerby was riding the crest of popularity, he wanted no part of us and hid himself off to Europe to a white world, which was his business. Also, what color his wife is, is his personal affair, and no concern of mine. But as for his being interested in our plight now, will someone in the audience please stand and tell Brother Yerby we don't need him now.[93]

To be sure, views and tendencies similar to these were by no means totalizing, and it was not uncommon for writers, including Baraka, to at least balance their criticism of black authors like Yerby at least somewhat.[94] In less equivocal terms, Gwendolyn Brooks would defend Langston Hughes in a glowing obituary following his death in 1967, arguing that the younger

[91] Hoyt W. Fuller, "Famous Writer Faces A Challenge," *Ebony* (June 1966): 188 – 194.
[92] Ibid., 194.
[93] Letter to the Editor, *Ebony* (September 1966), 14.
[94] In a book of essays written between 1960 and 1965, Baraka wrote: "You can be Frank Yerby, speaking from the vantage point of raceless historical sex fantasy, and make all the loot you want—but then you have to be an American. (Though Yerby is cooler than that and has moved out, he is still one of the money-lenders—but his books are always good for at least one hard-on, as I remember.)" Amiri Baraka, "black writing," in *Home: Social Essays* (New York: William Morrow, 1966), 163.

generation often failed to give older generations of African American writers credit where it was due. Even if she couldn't promote Hughes's literary style as a "correct" model to follow, it certainly wasn't one to be forgotten. Noting that it was almost cliché by the 1960s to "squeal" about being out and fighting before you were even born, Brooks maintained that Hughes' decades-long "labors" had enabled these new conditions. "But at least all may admit that Langston held high and kept warm the weapons until the youngsters could cut the caul, could wipe away the webs of birth and get to work. He, himself, preceded them with a couple of chores, a couple of bleedings."[95]

Indeed, the majority of the obituary Brooks wrote, while not ignoring Hughes's prominence in the broader American cultural landscape, was committed to demonstrating how the poet was one of a small number of midwives to the Black Arts Movement. By comparison to her peers that were leaders among the older generation of African American writers, Brooks would fair relatively well, in terms of receiving less criticism. Not least important was her decision to leave her long-time publisher, Harper & Row in favor of fledgling black publishers. *In the Mecca: Poems*, would be her last book with the firm, but also her first to squarely address the new direction of black power and politics of the late 1960s. In turn, her black audiences accentuated their ownership and pride of both Brooks and her work.

And even though Hansberry would refuse to align her artistic and political commitments with someone as chauvinistic as Baraka, she nevertheless praised and supported the development of black publications while continuing to develop work for mainstream audiences. Before her premature death in 1965, she would be one of the key writers to help Shirley Graham Du Bois develop *Freedomways*, the black periodical in which James Baldwin would later commemorate

[95] Gwendolyn Brooks, Langston Hughes Obituary, *Panorama*, a special supplement of the *Chicago Daily News*, June 3, 1967, Oversize Box 3, GBP.

Hansberry's participation in the meeting at Robert Kennedy's apartment. In its development stage from at least early 1961, the periodical's raison d'être wasn't predicated on a sharp turn away from social and cultural American integration, but rather an extended rumination on integration's shortcomings. "WHY THIS NEW MAGAZINE?" This was the opening question in a working draft of a letter designed to justify the creation of *Freedomways* that Du Bois sent to Hansberry in 1961. The draft argued, "Negroes," as well as "Whites," "who feel themselves hard pressed and harassed to support existing periodicals will ask why we should attempt another magazine."[96]

Shirley Graham Du Bois was the co-founder and general editor of *Freedomways* from its inception, and she framed the publication's more "progressive" interracial political possibilities, in part, by invoking an analogy to a much-earlier, toxic, interracial collaboration. Her reference was to the contestation within the NAACP four decades prior as the organization's leadership debated the merits of establishing *Crisis* magazine. Her reach back to the debates surrounding the publication that would become the organization's most prominent publication, and the severe disapproval it had elicited from one of the NAACP's prominent white members, was meant to suggest how powerful *Freedomways* could be. "Dr. [W.E.B.] Du Bois tells that when he was planning the Crisis some fifty years ago, the Attorney General of Massachusetts, a member of the NAACP National Board, commented dryly, 'It will be like adding flies to the flies of Egypt!'" While it is by no means ambiguous that this example points out the prospective toxicity inhered in interracial collaboration, Shirley Graham Du Bois was not claiming a need in the 1960s for a racially exclusive publication. Instead, *Freedomways* was conceptualized as a new magazine to be "brought out by Progressives." White Americans would not be left out if their

[96] Author not indicated, Draft: "Freedomways: A Quarterley Review of the Negro Freedom Movement," Folder 9, Box 63, LHP.

racial commitments were more advanced than the interlocutors these individuals regularly battled, even though they were supposed to be fighting for similar goals.

If black cultural and political leaders sought to portray developments like *Freedomways* and other forms of self-determination increasingly evident by the late 1960s and early 1970s as positive, it was not uncommon for older generation of white liberals to be much more cynical. As Shirley Graham Du Bois's example from the 1910s highlights, many whites that had previously been at the forefront of inspiring "interracial understanding" viewed literary and political activity foregrounding blacks as having the opposite impact. Reporting on a 1970 Yale student "rally in support of the Black Panthers," a friend of Muriel Fuller's, the agent responsible for helping Frank Yerby publish his first book in 1946, lamented that "everyone" in New Haven was bracing themselves for a terrible time. The woman reported that Yale's "kewpie of a president" and his "sinister trouble-making far-left" chaplain were "doing all they can to help stir up the student body. When do they get an education, I wonder?"

The new directions in liberal and racial politics, which Muriel Fuller also strongly resented, were so abhorrent that her friend wished for their elimination via capital punishment. "I'd like to see all of them go to the electric chair, so the world would be well rid of the barbarians. The Panthers have a dangerous and tragic hold on the young black people."[97] Rather than responses to changes in discourse and culture sensibilities alone, the increasing physical precarity across American cities complemented white anxieties in these years. Indeed, their criticisms of black activists, and of the younger generations more generally, were often wide-ranging. Not only were groups like the Panthers accused of stirring up "groups" to knock people down, snatching pocketbooks, and looting stores in New Haven, when Earth Day came around,

[97] Letter, Ginny to Muriel Fuller, April, 26 1970, Folder 7, Box 20, Muriel Fuller Papers, Archives & Special Collections, Hunter College Libraries, Hunter College of the City University of New York, New York City.

"none of these young people made any attempt to help clean up their environment. We live in a crazy era." Nonplussed, Muriel Fuller's friend was determined to take care of her own environment, regardless of whether or not she found New Haven's youth adequately concerned about theirs. "I'm off to clean up my environment by raking the yard."[98]

***

The vignettes in this chapter have suggested that cultural "black power" and some leading African American writers' shifts away from commitments to both literary and civic integration were driven in no small part by a host of failures to communicate across racial lines. While these African Americans were increasingly less patient with both the criticisms and violence that accompanied the burgeoning, increasingly violent civil rights movement, white Americans like Robert Kennedy often failed to consider black lives in equal terms. Unlike previous years, black writers and activists showed little hesitation in criticizing his and various white responses that suggested a unwillingness to engage black social and political concerns on fairer terms.

More problematic still, even when black authors began turning toward structural resources designed to support African American communities, those resources were often insufficient. While new publications, publishing houses, and cultural organizations rebuffed abstact, raceless American humanism, the new resources at their disposal were nevertheless unapologetically male-centric and financially inconsistent. Not infrequently, these literary and cultural endeavors were linked to more social antagonisms and hostilities than their communal objectives and services to African American communities suggested.

If black writers as a generational cohort seemed to turn away from the national project of social and cultural integration beginning in the late 1950s and 1960s, that shift, and the direct

[98] Ibid.

feedback it inspired from liberal white Americans was macabre. In sum, it also illustrated a starker distance between black and white Americans than many if not most racial liberals had previously imagined. Of its many consequences, social and political desires for interracial life, and the realities of American racial hierarchies, would remain far from resolved through the late 1960s and early 1970s, even as many African Americans gained legal access to a host of resources they were otherwise arbitrarily deprived of.

CONCLUSION

By the late 1960s, many long time observers had witnessed more changes in the American publishing industry in the decades prior than they could or desired to account for. By this era, Helen Strauss was no longer taking unprecedented gambles on black authors like Frank Yerby, as she had in the 1940s, or suggesting that Baldwin burn the manuscript for *Giovanni's Room*. Instead, she was applying her "talent for luck" to the television business, which was not only more popular, but also more lucrative than the publishing industry.

As the final chapter of this dissertation argued, by the late 1960s, a variety of interracial collaborations and support networks had broken down across the American entertainment industry. The cynicism evident in New Journalism was symptomatic of related social, political and cultural impasses, only to be complimented rather than challenged by the racial separatism promoted via the Black Power and Black Arts Movements of the era. In a sense, these developments might be considered provocations for deepening cultural understandings of the "fractures" and "backlashes" some historians have described as central to the post-1960s.

Recent controversies over the Oscars are perhaps just the latest in what this study points out was a decades-long exclusion and elision of African Americans in Hollywood entertainment. As the black actors boycotting that awards ceremony in 2016 suggest, further historical reflections on the place of African Americans in the entertainment industry might serve as a corrective to those who maintain that racial and ethnic integration in the U.S. has been secured, or that the nation's desegregation victories are not in danger of being lost.

And yet, the years and decades following the late 1960s and early 1970s cannot easily be characterized as an era lacking African American representation across a wide range of intellectual thought, avant-garde letters, or popular culture more broadly. Though the early 1970s

ushered in what quickly became known as "blacksploitation," this was also the era of Toni Morrison and other African American female writers widely read and celebrated by white Americans. As literary and social historians continue revising our understandings of black and white power, analyses of the literary and cultural products that reemphasized the power of African American womanhood—rather than manhood—in the post-Black Power era beg for more attention.

More broadly, the confusion over what social and cultural integration had meant for African Americans remains obscured by ahistorical interpretations that privilege racial pride rather than by the historical forces that the structured the African American experience at midcentury. As just one of several provocation, perhaps the national and international concerns in relation to environmentalism require deeper engagement with the cynicism Julian Mayfield expressed—in essence, the framing of environmental activism and awareness as a competitor to African Americans' access to the nation's publishers.

Finally, Barak Obama is perhaps the best exemplar of the contradictions inhered in what it means to integrate a black voice into the nation's governance. After his election, an awed nation celebrated what many viewed as a triumphant end to the nation's legacies of slavery and segregation. Present, but less powerful, was a reckoning in both black and white communities in regards to what it meant for the President to be a multiracial American, a reality that was—and often still is—sidestepped for the stake of simplicity. In many ways, President Obama's many gestures of social, political and racial conciliations are reminiscent of what Eleanor Roosevelt desired when she promoted African American literature like Motley's *Knock on Any Door*.

Bibliography

Libraries, Archives, and Collections

Boston University (Boston, MA)
- Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center
  - The Frank Yerby Collection

Chicago Public Library (Chicago, IL)
- Vivian G. Harsh Research Collection of Afro-American History and Literature
  - Ben Burns Collection

Columbia University in the City of New York (NY, NY)
- Rare Book & Manuscript Library
  - Bennett Cerf Papers ca. 1898 – 1911.: Series I: Catalogued Corrspondence

Harvard University (Cambridge, MA)
- Houghton Library
  - Conrad Aiken miscellaneous correspondence, 1914 – 1969, (MS Am 1422.3)
  - William Stanley Braithwaite papers, 1897 – 1930, (MS Am 1444)
  - Amy Lowell correspondence, (MS Lowell 19 – 19.4)
  - Houghton Mifflin Company reader reports on manuscripts, (MS Am 2516)
  - Houghton Mifflin correspondence and records, (MS Am 1925: I.A.)
  - Material concerning the publication of Confusion : manuscript (MS Am 1344) [James Gould Cozzens]
  - Horace Elisha Scudder correspondence, (MS Am 801.4)
  - Walter Hines Page letters to Charles Waddell Chesnutt, (MS Am 2535)
  - Oswald Garrison Villard papers, (MS Am 1323)
  - Jean Wagner papers, (MS Am 2035)
- Radcliffe Institute, Schesinger Library
  - Ann Petry Papers

Hunter College of the City University of New York (New York, NY)
- Archives & Special Collections, Hunter College Libraries
  - The Muriel Fuller Papers, 1914 – 1991

Northern Illinois University (DeKalb, IL)
- Rare Books and Special Collections At Northern Illinois University
  - Willard Motley Collection, 1909 – 1965

The New York Public Library (New York, NY)
- Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture
  - Lorraine Hansberry Papers, 1947 – 1988
  - Julian Mayfield Papers, 1949 – 1984
  - Alice Childress Papers, 1937 – 1997

Libraries, Archives, and Collections

Boston University (Boston, MA)
- Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center
  - The Frank Yerby Collection

Chicago Public Library (Chicago, IL)
- Vivian G. Harsh Research Collection of Afro-American History and Literature
  - Ben Burns Collection

Columbia University in the City of New York (NY, NY)
- Rare Book & Manuscript Library
  - Bennett Cerf Papers ca. 1898 – 1911.: Series I: Catalogued Corrspondence

Harvard University (Cambridge, MA)
- Houghton Library
  - Conrad Aiken miscellaneous correspondence, 1914 – 1969, (MS Am 1422.3)
  - William Stanley Braithwaite papers, 1897 – 1930, (MS Am 1444)
  - Amy Lowell correspondence, (MS Lowell 19 – 19.4)
  - Houghton Mifflin Company reader reports on manuscripts, (MS Am 2516)
  - Houghton Mifflin correspondence and records, (MS Am 1925: I.A.)
  - Material concerning the publication of Confusion : manuscript (MS Am 1344) [James Gould Cozzens]
  - Horace Elisha Scudder correspondence, (MS Am 801.4)
  - Walter Hines Page letters to Charles Waddell Chesnutt, (MS Am 2535)
  - Oswald Garrison Villard papers, (MS Am 1323)
  - Jean Wagner papers, (MS Am 2035)
- Radcliffe Institute, Schesinger Library
  - Ann Petry Papers

Hunter College of the City University of New York (New York, NY)
- Archives & Special Collections, Hunter College Libraries
  - The Muriel Fuller Papers, 1914 – 1991

Northern Illinois University (DeKalb, IL)
- Rare Books and Special Collections At Northern Illinois University
  - Willard Motley Collection, 1909 – 1965

The New York Public Library (New York, NY)
- Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture
  - Lorraine Hansberry Papers, 1947 – 1988
  - Julian Mayfield Papers, 1949 – 1984
  - Alice Childress Papers, 1937 – 1997

The Newberry Library (Chicago, IL)
- Roger and Julie Baskes Department of Special Collections

Harry Hansen Papers, 1900 – 1977

University of California, Berkeley (Berkeley, CA)
The Bancroft Library
The Gwendolyn Brooks Papers, 1917 – 2000

University of California, Los Angeles (Los Angeles, CA)
Charles E. Young Research Library
Department of Special Collections
George P. Johnson Negro Film Collection (Collection 1042)
Actors' Laboratory Records (Collection 1064)
William A. Bacher Papers (Collection 919)

Yale University (New Haven, CT)
Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library
Yale Collection of American Literature
Henry Seidel Canby Papers
Dial Press Records
Chester Himes Papers
Claude McKay Collection
Robert Penn Warren Papers
Wallace Thurman Collection
Richard Wright Papers
James Weldon Johnson Collection
James Baldwin Early Manuscripts and Papers
Langston Hughes Papers

Magazines, Newspapers, and Journals

Atlanta Daily World
Baltimore Afro-American
Chicago Daily News
Chicago Daily Tribune
Chicago Defender
College English
Commentary
The Crisis
Dissent
Ebony
The Elementary English Review
Freedomways
Harper's
Jet
The Journal of American History
The Journal of Negro History
Look
Los Angeles Sentinel

Mademoiselle
Negro Digest
New York Amsterdam News
New York Times
New Yorker
Partisan Review
Pittsburgh Courier
Playboy
Publishers' Weekly
The Sewanee Review
Virginia Quarterly
Washington Post
Wilson Library Bulletin

Published Sources

Abrams, Nathan. "'America is Home': *Commentary* Magazine and the Refocusing of the Community of Memory, 1945 – 1960." In *Commentary in American Life*, edited by Murray Friedman. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005.

Baldwin, Davarian. *Chicago's New Negroes: Modernity, the Great Migration, and Black Urban Life* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

Baldwin, James. "Letter: From a Region in My Mind." *New Yorker*, November 17, 1962.
———. "Lorraine Hansberry at the Summit." *Freedomways*, Vol. 19, No. 49 (1979): 269 – 72.

Baraka, Amiri. "black writing." In *Home: Social Essays*, edited by Amiri Baraka. New York: William Morrow, 1966.

Belafonte, Harry, and Michael Shnayerson. *My Song: A Memoir of Art, Race, and Defiance*. New York: Vintage, 2012.

Berlin, Ira. *The Making of African America: The Great Migrations*. New York: Viking, 2010.

Bessie, Simon. "American Writing Today: A Publisher's Viewpoint." *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, Vol. 34, No. 1 (Winter 1958).

Berry, Faith. *Langston Hughes: Before and Beyond Harlem*. Westport, Connecticut: Lawrence Hill, 1983.

Blotner, Joseph. *Faulkner: A Biography*. New York: Vintage, 1991.

Bram, Christopher. *Eminent Outlaws: The Gay Writers Who Changed America*. New York: Twelve, 2012.

Breitman, Richard, and Allen Lichtman. *FDR and the Jews*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013.

Brigano, Russell. *Richard Wright: An Introduction to the Man and His Works*. Pittsburg: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1970.

Brooks, Gwendolyn. *In the Mecca: Poems*. New York: Harper and Row, 1968.

Buckley, Gail. *The Black Calhouns: From Civil War to Civil Rights with One African American Family*. New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2016.

Burkholder, Zoe. *Color in the Classroom: How American Schools Taught Race, 1900 – 1954*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.

Camarillo, Albert. "Navigating Segregated Life in America's Racial Borderhoods, 1910s – 1950s." *Journal of American History*, Vol. 100, No. 3 (December 2013).

Cappetti, Carla. *Writing Chicago: Modernism, Ethnography, and the Novel*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1993.

Cash, W.J. *The Mind of the South*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1941.

Charles, John. *Abandoning the Black Hero: Sympathy and Privacy in the Postwar African American White-Life Novel*. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 2012.

Clark, E. Culpepper. *The Schoolhouse Door: Segregation's Last Stand at the University of Alabama*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.

Conn, Steven. *Americans Against the City: Anti-Urbanism in the Twentieth Century*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014.

Crotts, Arlin. *The New Moon: Water, Exploration, and Future Habitation*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2014.

Davies, Tom. "Black Power in Action: the Bedford-Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation, Robert F. Kennedy, and the Politics of the Urban Crisis." *Journal of American History*, Vol. 100, No. 3 (2013): 736 – 760.

Davis, Kimberly. *Beyond the White Negro: Empathy and Anti-Racist Reading*. Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2014.

Deane, Pamela. *James Edwards: African American Hollywood Icon*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2009.

Dickstein, Morris. *Leopards in the Temple: The Transformation of American Fiction, 1945 – 1970*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002.

Dochuk, Darren. *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt: Plain-Folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2011.

Dolinar, Brian. *The Black Cultural Front: Black Writers and Artists of the Depression Generation*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2012.

Douglas, Ann. *Terrible Honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1995.

Dudziak, Mary. *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000.

Du Rocher, Kristina. *Raising Racists: The Socialization of White Children in the Jim Crow South*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2011.

Eckman, Fern. *The Furious Passage of James Baldwin*. Lanham, MD: M. Evans, an imprint of The Rowman & Littlefield Pub. Group, 2014.

Eliason, Eric. *The J. Golden Kimball Stories*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007.

Ellison, Ralph. *Invisible Man*. New York: Random House, 1952.

Emanuel, James. *Dark Symphony: Negro Literature in America*. New York: The Free Press. 1968.

Feldstein, Ruth. *How It Feels to Be Free: Black Women Entertainers and the Civil Rights Movement*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Fuller, Hoyt. "Famous Writer Faces A Challenge." *Ebony* (June 1966): 188 – 194.

Giggie, John. *After Redemption: Jim Crow and the Transformation of African American Religion in the Delta 1875 – 1915*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Gilyard, Keith. *John Oliver Killen: A Life of Black Literary Activism*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010.

Glazer, Nathan. "Liberalism and the Negro: A Round-table Discussion." *Commentary* 37 (March 1964): 25 – 42.

Goduti, Jr., Philip. *Robert F. Kennedy and the Shaping of Civil Rights, 1960 – 1964*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2012.

Green, Adam. *Selling the Race: Culture, Community, and Black Chicago, 1940 – 1955* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

Guthman, Edwin. *We Band of Brothers*. New York: Harper & Row, 1971.

Hay, Samuel. *African American Theatre: An Historical and Critical Analysis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

Heap, Chad. *Slumming: Sexual and Racial Encounters in American Nightlife, 1885 – 1940*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009.

Howe, Irving. "This Age of Conformity." *Partisan Review* 21 (January – February, 1954): 7 – 33.

Hutchinson, George. *The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995.

Hutner, Gordon. *What America Read: Taste, Class, and the Novel, 1920 – 1960*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009.

Jackson, Blyden. "The Blithe Newcomers, Resume of Negro Literature in 1954: Part I." *Phylon*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (1st Qtr., 1955)

Jackson, Lawrence. *The Indignant Generation: A Narrative History of African American Writers and Critics, 1934 – 1960*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010.

Jackson, Walter. *Gunnar Myrdal and America's Conscience: Social Engineering and Racial Liberalism, 1938 – 1987*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990).

Jarrett, Gene. *Deans and Truants: Race and Realism in American Literature*. New York: New York University Press, 2008.

———. *Representing the Race: A New Political History of African American Literature*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008.

Joseph, Peniel. *Dark Days, Bright Nights: From Black Power to Barack Obama*. New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2010.

Kaplan, Carla. *Miss Anne in Harlem: The White Women of the Black Renaissance*. New York: Harper Perennial, 2013.

Katznelson, Ira. *When Affirmative Action Was White: An Untold Story of Racial Inequality in Twentieth-Century America*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2005.

Kazin, Michael. *American Dreamers: How the Left Changed a Nation*. New York: Random House, 2012.

Kennedy, David. *Freedom From Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929 – 1945*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.

Kibler, M. Alison. *Censoring Radical Ridicule: Irish, Jewish, and African American Struggles over Race and Represenation, 1890 – 1930*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015.

Kinnamon, Kenneth, ed. *New Essays on Native Son*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990.

Killens, John. *And Then We Heard the Thunder*. New York: Knopf, 1963.

Klarman, Michael. "How Brown Changed Race Relations: The Backlash Thesis." *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 81, No. 1 (June, 1994).

Kruse, Kevin. *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005.

Lewis, David. *King: A Biography*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1978.

Li, Stephanie. *Playing in the White: Black Writers, White Subjects*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015.

Lichtman, Allen. *Prejudice and the Old Politics: The Presidential Election of 1928*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979.

Locke, Alain. "From Native Son to Invisible Man: A Review of the Literature of the Negro for 1952." *Phylon*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (1st Qtr., 1953).

Luhan, Mabel Dodge, and Lois Palken Rudnick. *Intimate Memories: The Autobiography of Mable Dodge*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1984.

MacDonald, J. Fred. *Blacks and White TV: African Americans in Television Since 1948*. Chicago: Nelson Hall, 1992.

Matlin, Daniel. "'Lift Up Yr Self!' Reinterpreting Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones), Black Power, and the Uplift Tradition." *Journal of American History*, Vol. 93, No. 1 (2006): 91 – 116.

Martin, Gertrude. "Book Reviews." *Chicago Defender*, January 10, 1953: 11.

Maxwell, William. *F.B. Eyes: How J. Edgar Hoover's Ghostreaders Framed African American Literature*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014.

Marable, Manning. *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention*. New York: Viking Press, 2011.

May, Elaine. *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Early Cold War Era*. New York: Basic Books, 1988.

McDonald, Kathleen. *Feminism, the Left, and Postwar Literary Culture*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2012.

Meier, August. "Whither the Black Perspective in Afro-American Historiography?" *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 70, No. 1 (June 1983).

Mickenberg, Julia. *Learning From the Left: Children's Literature, the Cold War, and Radical Politics in the United States*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.

Mitang, Herbert. *Dangerous Dossiers: Exposing the Secret War against America's Greatest Authors*. New York: D.J. Fine, 1988.

Musher, Sharon Ann. *Democratic Art: The New Deal's Influence on American Culture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015.

Markowitz, Gerald, and David Rosner. *Children, Race, and Power: Kenneth and Mamie Clark's Northside Center*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996.

Myrdal, Gunnar. *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*. New York: Harper and Row, 1944.

Nash, John. "What Is 'Negro Literature,'" *College English*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (Oct., 1948).

Nicolaides, Becky. *My Blue Heaven: Life and Politics in the Working-Class Suburbs of Los Angeles, 1920 – 1950*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002.

Painter, Nell. *Exodusters: Black Migration to Kansas after Reconstruction*. New York: Knopf, 1977.

Pearson, Hugh. *When Harlem Nearly Killed King: The 1958 Stabbing of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.* New York: Seven Stories, 2011.

Peterson, Ruth, and L.L. Thurstone. *Motion Pictures and the Social Attitudes of Children*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1933.

Podhoretz, Norman. "My Negro Problem—and Ours." *Commentary* 35 (1963).

Rabinowitz, Paula. *American Pulp: How Paperbacks Brought Modernism to Main Street*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015.

Rampersad, Arnold. *Ralph Ellison: A Biography*. New York: Vintage, 2008.
———. *The Life of Langston Hughes, Volume II: 1941 – 1967*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Rasberry, Vaughn. "Black Cultural Politics at the End of History." *American Literary History*, Vol. 24, No. 4 (Winter 2012): 796 – 813.

Raymond, Emilie. *Stars for Freedom: Hollywood, Black Celebrities, and the Civil Rights Movement* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2015).

Reagan, Patrick. *Designing a New America: The Origins of New Deal Planning, 1890 – 1943*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999.

Reddick, L.D. "The Bus Boycott in Montgomery." *Dissent* 3 (Spring 1956): 107 – 117.

Reinhart, Mark. *Abraham Lincoln on Screen: Fictional and Documentary Portrayals on Film and Television*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2012.

Risen, Clay. *The Bill of the Century: The Epic Battle for the Civil Rights Act*. New York: Bloombury, 2014.

Ritterhouse, Jennifer. *Growing Up Jim Crow: How Black and White Southern Children Learned Race*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006.

Roberts, Gene, and Hank Klibanoff. *The Race Beat: The Press, the Civil Rights Struggle, and the Awakening of a Nation*. New York: Knopf, 2006.

Rockwell, George. *The Rockwell Report*. Dallas: American Nazi Party, 1965.

Sartre, Jean-Paul. *What Is Literature?*. New York: Harper and Row, 1965.

Schick, Frank. *The Paperbound Book in America: The History of Paperbacks and Their European Backgrounds*. New York: R. R. Bowker, 1958.

Schlesinger, Jr., Arthur. *Robert Kennedy and His Times*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1978.

Smethurst, James. *The Black Arts Movement: Literary Nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005.

Stokes, Melvin. *D.W. Griffith's "The Birth of a Nation": A History of "The Most Controversial Motion Picture of All Time."* New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.

Sinnott, Susan. *Lorraine Hansberry: Award-Winning Playwright and Civil Rights Activist*. Berkeley: Conari, 1999.

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

Thomas, Evan. *Robert Kennedy: His Life*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000.

Thompson, Era Bell, and Herbert Nipson, eds. *White on Black: The Views of Twenty-two White Americans on the Negro*. Chicago: Johnson Publishing Company, Inc., 1963.

Tillery, Tyrone. *Claude McKay: A Black Poet's Struggle for Identity*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994.

Uphaus, Robert, ed. *American Protest in Perspective*. New York: Harper & Row, 1971.

Von Eschen, Penny. *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004.

Warren, Wini. *Black Women Scientists in the United States*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999.

White, Edward. *The Tastemaker: Carl Van Vechten and the Birth of Modern America*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2014.

Williams, Michael. *Medgar Evers: Mississippi Martyr*. Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2011.

Wright, Richard. *Native Son*. New York: Harper, 1940.

———. *Savage Holiday*. New York: Award Books, 1965.

Yerby, Frank. *Speak Now: A Modern Novel*. New York: Dial Press, 1969.

Dissertations, Theses, and Unpublished Sources

Blum, Eleanor. "Paperbound Books in the United States in 1955: A Survey of Content," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Illinois, 1958.

Hill, James. "Anti-Heroic Perspectives: The Life and Works of Frank Yerby." Ph.D. dissertation, University of Iowa, 1976.