
“STEADY AND UNACCUISING”
An Interview with Sterling A. Brown

by John Edgar Tidwell and John S. Wright

Since the early 1980s a series of symposia, public and academic awards, and other recognitions have testified to continuing popular and scholarly interest in Sterling A. Brown, poet, literary critic, teacher, anthologist, and raconteur. The Collected Poems of Sterling A. Brown (Harper & Row), for example, received the Lenore Marshall Poetry Prize for 1980 from Saturday Review. The Modern Language Association, at its December 1981 meeting, paid tribute to Brown’s many years of distinguished service as a man of letters. A Black World special issue (September 1970) and Michael Harper and Robert Stepto’s Chant of Saints: A Gathering of Afro-American Literature, Art, and Scholarship (1979) became the first two of many anthologies, critical studies, and journal special issues dedicated to him, for his enduring poetic innovations and his pioneering cultural criticism. At Howard University, on February 14, 1997, a symposium assessed the extent to which Brown’s thinking reflected and influenced African-American and American views on culture and literature. His sensitive creative work and astute analyses are captured in four published collections of poetry, six critical studies and anthologies, and over forty essays and speeches, together with the regular book review column he wrote in the early issues of Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life. The following interview—conducted August 2, 1980, but unpublished until now—was one he hoped personally to extend and revise. Nevertheless it offers in retrospect, we think, more testimony that Sterling A. Brown is a presence who remains, in the words from one of his favorite poems, “steady and unaccusing.”

STERLING A. BROWN: Are these rhetorical questions to which you already know the answers? Are you examining me?

JOHN S. WRIGHT: We know you’re too much the rhetorician for us to do that.

BROWN: Both of you are alright in my book. Question me, question me, prosecuting attorney!!

JOHN EDGAR TIDWELL: We’re interested in a wide range of things, but, first of all, we might start with the Associates in Negro Folk Education who published, among others, two of your studies and two by Alain Locke. We know very little about the genesis of the organization, its participants, and its plan of operation.

BROWN: Bob Martin should help you on that because he was really helping Locke a great deal, sending out the books and things like that. Locke, as you could imagine, was not too good at that and should not have had to be. Locke, as I understand it, got this money from the Carnegie Foundation as part of an Adult Education Project, and he had Howard University people do the books. None of us were experts in adult education, but we knew something of the purposes. Now, for instance, I had to add questions at the end of chapters so they could really be taught. The books were done as booklets. People have attacked them as criticism because I couldn't include long analyses of novels, when what I wanted to do was discuss the treatment of the Negro character in American literature. The first thing I did was *Negro Poetry and Drama*. Now I had done enough work to do more than one book on each of those, but I had to [limit] them to 125 pages. That's what we had to do. When it came to the *Negro in American Fiction*, I just said, "I'm not going to do it," and I added to it. That's a longer and a better book. Locke objected to that and said the [costs would] go up and I'd have to pay for it, but I didn't pay it. So I never got paid. They still owe me about \$300. We were making about \$300 per volume. No royalty on it. Just flat. Now, Locke did one on the Negro in music and the Negro in art, in both of which Locke would have been at that moment the authority. . . . [But] Locke could not handle the blues. Locke and I contributed to *Folk-Say* in Norman, Oklahoma. He and I did an article together on movies, "Folk Values in a New Medium," and then I did something on the blues. . . . Now Locke would read carefully what was essential. Locke did not like blues. Locke had—and this is anecdotal, so it may be wrong—but Locke had one blues that Langston Hughes gave him—"Ticket Agent, Ease Your Window Down," the only damn blues [he owned]. When the people behind Locke's place on R Street would be out there singing blues, Locke would pull his window down and put on Tchaikovsky. I don't blame him; that's the way he was trained. He knew the hell out of Tchaikovsky. He knew the blues were important, and he knew jazz was important. What you have, then, is a man intellectually aware [but] emotionally attuned to something else. But he would never do what Howard [University] did—disdain jazz in favor of classical music. He loved the classics and tried to understand the importance of jazz. But his hope for jazz unfortunately was the kind of nonsense that Paul Whiteman was doing. Maybe, Locke said, jazz will one day rise to the semi-symphonic level. This is crap.

WRIGHT: My next question follows pretty much directly what you were just saying. Clearly you share with Alain Locke a driving interest in folk art, folk values.

BROWN: No, I didn't share it; I taught him. He taught me a lot, but I knew the folk stuff and he didn't.

WRIGHT: But my question is, what really are the crucial differences between your position on the role of folk tradition in American life and Locke's? What criticism do you have—you offered one partly already here—of Locke's view of folk tradition?

BROWN: Locke's was not condescending, but Locke's position was [that] folk tradi-

tion is a minor thing; the major thing is classical art. I think they are both arts. They are oranges and apples. Now there can be very bad folk material. Today [give them] any kind of blues singer, and the white folks go crazy. To me there are good blues singers and bad blues singers. There are good blues lines and good blues standards and bad ones. I would say the difference is that I believe in the validity, the power, the beauty of folk culture at its best. Now, I don't blame Locke for this. How in the hell could Locke have gotten away [from] upperclass Philadelphia, Harvard? More niggers have been ruined by Harvard than by bad gin! Ralph Bunche and I had a thesis that every nigger that went to Harvard was crazy, starting with Bunche and with Brown. So, Locke had a lot against him, but he overcame it. . . . Now, this is going to be in the next *Caravan*, this whole stress of assimilation and the stress of genuine integration, which means an integer, a whole man. Phyllis Wheatley is not part of what I think is the most important tradition in our poetry, because she wrote [about the] life of New England, Puritanism, the patriotic, the neo-classic, the pseudo-classic; she wrote very well in that form. But that's all what she wanted to be, and she wanted to be praised for it. So, for a long time that's what we praised people about. But, to me, our tradition starts with "Before I'll be a slave, let me be buried in my grave." Or, from a blues song: "Trouble, trouble seen it all my days." Now, there are two traditions. Countee [Cullen] could not escape from race, but he wanted to do it in classical terms. He spoke of our problems as though he was Sisyphus. You know, pushing that rock up that hill. He was apt, but he was praised for that. I don't think you should be praised for how many classical references you have. I think you ought to be praised for the content of poetry. So, what you have is a large number of people [like] Jessie Fauset, a brilliant teacher, who wanted to write about our people who knew which fork to use, have the right car, the right family background. Now that is a kind of natural propaganda to write, and, so, I expect that. And I called a number of them the "NAACP School of Fiction." Now it had to be said, but that's not the chief purpose of literature. I mean she *praises* our middle class, which deserves the *blame* that Frazier gives it in *Black Bourgeoisie*. Both of them have to be taken, of course, together. The Black bourgeoisie is a stereotype, a caricature. I can get people to prove both sides. And the best thing—I'm doing this on Frazier in a group of essays—the best answer to E. Franklin Frazier's *Black Bourgeoisie* is Frazier's own *Negro Family in the United States*. You look at the chapter on Black Puritans. It's not scornful, but it describes a Puritan ethic. Which you gentlemen illustrate. [*Laughter*] I mean, you all are not into conspicuous display; you go for your summer down [to Atlanta University] and work like hell. That's a good ethic.

WRIGHT: Mortification of the flesh.

BROWN: With all them roaches. Zora Neale Hurston sitting over there [*pointing*], keeping us entranced. She was a better "liar" than I am, a wonderful liar! Just had us in stitches. She gets up to leave. Being of the folk, she had a cigarette holder from here to yonder with a cigarette in it [*gestures*] and a long ash and stands at the door and tells us goodbye and flicks them damn ashes right down on [my wife] Daisy's rug. Daisy

CALLALOO

took care of the house. Daisy looked at her flick those ashes, and Zora took her damn big foot and rubbed them into the damn rug and said "good for the roaches." She knew damn well we didn't have no roaches. Daisy could have killed her. Up until that Daisy had open admiration for anybody who could out-lie her husband. Now when Zora dropped them damn ashes over there . . . well, the Puritan ethic [said] no . . . But in *The New Negro Caravan* we're going to illustrate these two trends.

WRIGHT: Let's go back to the blues again. You spent a lot of time studying the blues, obviously, and beyond studying them, transforming them into poetry of your own. What do you think that your essays on the blues and the blues tradition did to alter the prevailing interpretations?

BROWN: They did some, but not much, because I was published in places like *Phylon*. I've got a big bibliography but people don't know about it because they didn't read *Opportunity*. Now those who read it were influenced. Ellison came to Howard—he talked about the blues—and the kids said, "Well, why don't we hear anything like that around here at Howard?" Ellison said, "You got Sterling Brown here." And Larry Neal—I didn't know this—Larry Neal says that this influenced him. I did "The Blues as Folk Poetry," an essay in 1930 in *Folk-Say*, and I did an enlarged one in *Phylon*. They have received attention from people in folklore—from English teachers and people in folklore—and they're going to be brought out by Howard in my essays, *To a Different Drummer*. So, I would say that as literary essays go they've had a modicum of influence.

WRIGHT: Ellison does refer to you explicitly as being one of the living presences that he drew on during his own career. How do you relate your view of the blues to Ellison's?

BROWN: I don't know his too well to comment on. I respect what Ellison says. I think that Ellison does cover up with profundity. I think what I've done frequently is give a capsule, and a guy has put it in a glass of water and got a little bit more. I think I have a quality of terseness. I think they enlarged it. But what I've seen of his I would have to [say], "I'm glad you can interpret me!" He's got an audience I never had.

TIDWELL: How would you define your audience?

BROWN: My audience has been the classroom. I have reached more critics and writers and intelligent kids, more than anybody else, more than Locke. Right behind up there. [Pointing] All those books up there are signed by critics, writers, and novelists. I just heard from Ossie Davis; he and Ruby Dee called me the other day; they're going to do something and sign me up on that. Tom Sowell, who somebody nominated for the National Academy of Education today. A right-wing economist, a green guy right out of the Marines, he dedicated his book *Black Education: Myths and Tragedies* (1972) to me and other people because I made him study. I was at Yale, and Charlie Davis

introduced me and said, "How is it that a man can have a book dedicated to him by Tom Sowell and another book by Don Lee?" I said, "Because I ain't got no principles." [Laughter] But the real reason is that I listened—though I'm not doing it now. I listened understandingly, and I listened [patiently]. I don't agree with them; I don't agree with Tom Sowell publicly, but I agree with a lot of the things he says on education. And Don Lee, my Don Lee . . . I ain't going back to Africa, but I'm going to be there before Don Lee, because, while he's in London trying on a new dashiki, I'm going to be standing on the shores waiting for him. I told Hoyt Fuller that down in Atlanta. I said while you're in Paris sipping on a bottle of Courvoisier I'm going to be down there on the sands of Accra. But I ain't going to be there. . . . I don't let you be too serious, but I'm teaching you. I'm teaching like Mark Twain, with anecdotes.

TIDWELL: In several of your essays, you express the concern for the lack of an adequate reading audience to support Black writers, and several of your works seem to function to educate the readership.

BROWN: That is true. I've heard from any number of people who tell me they're glad my book is out, but they ain't never said they're going to buy it. "Can I get it at the library?" is what they say.

TIDWELL: The works you have written seem to function to educate the readership. Would you comment on this purpose, beginning with your *Outline for the Study of the Poetry of American Negroes*?

BROWN: That is one of the first things I did. In *Opportunity* I wrote an essay called "Our Literary Audience" and attacked [Black] middle-class, upper-class standards. Then, the first book I did was for James Weldon Johnson's *Book of American Negro Poetry* because he couldn't do it. I called it *Outline for the Study of the Poetry of American Negroes* because I was teaching that. I wrote an essay called "The Negro Author and his Publisher." Not original, but I hadn't had too much experience with book publishing. There are grave problems right now for publishing because the 1960s had this wave of so-called "Black books." Now if a woman writes a book about Black machoism, she'll get fair attention. A woman like [Ntosake] Shange gets attention. But serious plays that people are doing don't get the attention that Shange gets . . . by not committing suicide and all that. So, we don't have publishers. One of the worthiest was Associated Publishers. A solid thing. But their solidity kept them from having too big an audience. A very valuable thing. But Carter Woodson, of course, had no imagination. Woodson was a [factualist], and he found facts that were of tremendous value. He was a pioneer, [but with] no sense of literature, no sense of poetry, [and] no sense of music. A book from Woodson was [like a recital from] Maude Cuney Hare. And Maude Cuney Hare was a concert pianist, a vocalist, and whatnot. She could deal with the great people of the earth but [getting] closer to the folk would [require a more] sensitive reading. Don't touch the blues [he said]. I mean Benjamin Brawley on jazz and the blues, you know, the genteel Brawley. He doesn't discuss jazz; says it raises

questions of musical taste. Something like that. Now the next historians like John Hope Franklin and Benjamin Quarles had no sense of the importance of literature and the arts. Quarles said, "Sterling, should an Irish historian, a historian of Ireland, have to read Joyce's *Ulysses*?" I said, "He better damn sight read it, and he better read criticism." Because I think Joyce is one of the monuments, before he committed suicide with *Finnegan's Wake*, before he had his wake for Finnegan. *Ulysses* is an important—though I think a very much overrated—book. But an important book. I did a 250 page book at Harvard on the treatment of the Irish in English drama.

WRIGHT: What led you into that originally?

BROWN: An interest in minorities. I saw these parallels. I had a course in English drama. I was always conscious of what was happening to our characters in American literature, but never in a scholarly way until I saw what they did with the Irish. Then I saw what they were doing to the Jews. And then the (whole damn cause.) Then the sociological criticism in America. How do you deal with the working class? Well, I was a stereotype, and I became an expert on stereotypes. Now I think that that essay has influenced more teachers than the one on the blues. Because, you see, a lot of English teachers don't want to deal with no damn blues either. You know that, don't you? And they don't want to do but so much with the spirituals. I wrote in my article in *Opportunity* something about the woman who changed "Swing Low Sweet Chariot" to "Descend . . . welcome vehicle." So, you see I didn't wait until today [to throw off] humility; I've been mean all my life. [Laughter]

TIDWELL: Would you comment further on the Harvard book?

BROWN: That was a thesis in a course. You know you didn't have an MA thesis at Harvard. You just did [four course theses]. I wrote that at Harvard. I'll tell you where I started on *us*—under Charles S. Johnson. Imagine this lineup at Fisk in 1928-29. Horace Mann Bond in education, political science, history; Charles S. Johnson in sociology; and me in literature. John Work was around there, who could [offer] something in music. But by and large, [it was my exposure to] *The Negro in American Civilization*. Johnson wrote that book for a course I taught there. And so then I came to Howard.

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TIDWELL: What about DuBois? Was he ever considered a potential writer in the Bronze Booklet series?

BROWN: No. I don't know how DuBois and Locke got along, but I'm afraid not too well. DuBois did not suffer fools gladly; DuBois did not have any friends among his

CALLALOO

peers. It's interesting the comments that [James Weldon] Johnson makes in *Along This Way* on DuBois. I was on the board of the NAACP, and, when I went in the office, [they] said what you got to know that's constant in this office is that everybody hates everybody else. Now I don't think that Joe Spingarn hated; I just think he was superior to everyone. I know Arthur [Spingarn] didn't. Arthur was a gentleman. But . . . DuBois left no mantle. DuBois was close to Allison Davis, respected him highly; for a time liked me, liked me in Atlanta. Close to Abram Harris, very close, until Abe reviewed his book, *Black Reconstruction*, I think for the *Nation*, and spoke of the Marxism as being illegitimate, which it was. The book is a tremendous book, but the Marxism is wishful talk, and the guy that did that for him [was] Sam Dawson, at Howard University. [Sam] did the Marxism, and then DuBois took it and put it in his book. At the end of his life, DuBois's mantle was on a good friend of mine, Alphaeus Hunton. And Hunton went to Africa with him. And Hunton died in Africa, recently, my age. Alphaeus Hunton. He was a good man; go to his papers on the last years of DuBois. DuBois's ending was tragic. But DuBois was a tremendous man. DuBois was my intellectual father. Now DuBois was my intellectual father more than Locke. Locke and I differed. When we came to *God's Trombone*, which Locke didn't like too much, he put in some sentences about Africa and I took them out. You don't have to go to Africa to explain *God's Trombone*. I ain't never seen any trombones in Africa unless Louis Armstrong left some over there at this time. I mean, these guys, when they come by me on Africa, see, they got to go way back. Cause my father was teaching religion at Howard; and my Sunday School teacher was an African, and he was the priestliest Victorian I ever heard. And he'd say, "You never sit like this [*gestures*]; you pull in your diaphragm." He was a great big tall Black man, and I was scared to death of him. Not because he was no damn savage; I didn't see no Congo cutting through no black; I saw the Cannes River or Cambridge. [*Laughter*] You all ought to take a course with me!

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WRIGHT: About the *Negro Caravan*, little has been said of the division of editorial labor and the kinds of critical issues that you, [Arthur P.] Davis, and [Ulysses] Lee may have had in planning the anthology. Can you shed any light on that, since it is the best example of its kind?

BROWN: No quarrel. I did most of the work. I think they would agree on that. Ulysses did that wonderful thing at the end (*The Chronology*). I was to do the selections about the novel, Ulysses was to do short stories, and Arthur was to do the drama. I was to do the "folk stuff." I think Arthur was to do the poetry. But that broke down. I did most of the work. . . . Arthur was at [Virginia] Union. Ulysses was available. The re-writing I had to do with the editor Stanley Burnshaw. We had over-written or run out of [space], and I went up to New York, stayed up all night, counting spaces in the lines.

CALLALOO

... The collaboration [on the *Caravan*] was good. There were no differences of opinion.

WRIGHT: I've come across some of the reviews of *The Caravan*. How did you feel it was perceived by the critics?

BROWN: I've got a lot of those. My wife was a very good person in that respect. I have a gang of wonderful reviews. There were only two antagonistic reviews that I knew about. One of them was by Lorenzo [Dow] Turner. He said it should not have been arranged by types. And his book *Readings of Negro Authors* is arranged by type. Then we had a bad review in *The New Masses* because we didn't have any communists in there.

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WRIGHT: That may be an issue that's come full circle historically. Right now, we've got at least a couple of streams of criticism, in contention. One of them is the sociologically-oriented criticism, the Black aestheticians of Addison Gayle and the Black neo-Marxians of whom [Amiri] Baraka is probably the best known. That school on one side, and on the other side the varieties of formalistic, textually-oriented criticism that Steve Henderson, Bob Stepto, Skip Gates, and some of the others represent. So, in terms of your own grounding in critical realism, how do you read the current critical debates?

BROWN: I have thought about that, and I have a feeling that there is too much fragmentation. I think that the good critic has got to make use of all of these devices. Now with Michael [Harper] and Stepto and Skip, when they say the work is not to be considered sociologically, they are going to do my poetry injustice because there is a great deal of relationship with sociology. Frazier called me his favorite literary sociologist. Now, if you dismiss sociology from consideration and just go to structure—that I think is vulgar. If you dismiss structure, you're not looking at it as poetry. You're just looking at it as message, and that's not good. So, I don't see why we can't have a critic broad enough to depart from these narrow categories that somebody else, by the way, set up. I'm concerned, for instance, [about] all of these long drawn out analyses of a novel. . . . I'm very interested in what is said and how it is said, and often they don't tell me what is said. They will get two novels, and one of them says lies and one of them says truth; and they give the same analysis to each. I don't think they should. I think they're neglecting the importance to me of a book. Again what it says and then how it is said: they go together. They go together because what is said poorly is not really said. I mean, you can have a lousy novel with the most beautiful message, and it's a lousy novel. And I think that our critics lack this breadth of approach, and I think, again, we're back to this "crabs in a barrel." We're back to this divisiveness. I'm right, and you're not right. I don't think the critics should be bothered about the other critics. You ought to be bothered by the work you criticize. I think criticism is

judgment, but I think it's not to be two judgments. Now, the trouble with [Addison] Gayle, it seems to me, is that if you come across with "Black is beautiful," then you're good. If you come across with Black men aren't always beautiful [you're bad]. In a way a novel propagates some idea. Propaganda does not defeat a novel—bad propaganda defeats a novel. . . . I think that [in writing] protest—I mean I've talked about this in my criticism—you can't have good fiction with villains and victims. You got to have fiction with *people*, and that's awfully hard. I have been taken to task [because, they say,] I attack the stereotype of Negroes but I allow the stereotypes of whites. But . . . I got a poem about a no-good cracker, and it's called "Mr. Danny," and I wanted to show an s.o.b., but I would not say that that is the total picture of whites. When they jump on Ralph Ellison, I don't think they should. I think *Invisible Man* is a very important novel. I do not agree with its metaphor anymore than with *The Waste Land's*. I got an essay, if you young men keep me living till Christmas, that I'll give you, called "Not so Invisible, Not so Strange, Not so Outside"; and I take up three flawed novels: [one is] *Invisible Man*. *Invisible Man* comes at the time when we were getting visible as hell. Now you see the Negro is not invisible; the Negro is misinterpreted; it's not that you can't see him. You do see him; that's the trouble. White folks see him too much I think. Now. If I look at you and do not read your proper character, which is the way most people look at other people, that don't mean you're invisible. We are not invisible. Now Ralph likes that idea, but we are not invisible. We are misinterpreted. When this Negro—this is *Candide*, this is Voltaire's *Candide*—when you get a nigger that ain't right bright and you put him through all these experiences and at the end he said, "I got to hide," I can't take it. . . . That's the reason I can't do too much with *Song of Solomon*. I am not surrealistic. I must not have no damn imagination. I can't see no nigger. But what I've got against *Invisible Man* is, if this boy is bright, like Ralph Waldo Ellison, he ain't going to take no damn white trustee of Tuskegee to no whore house. Now, one of the best things in the novel is that Bledsoe business; that's realism and beautifully done. What he's got is good snapshots: the Communist Party, the Rastafarians. He never has—and this I miss—he has so little of the people. He's got one old lady there, but no relationships to Harlem. It's like television. You get a nigger on television and they ain't got no culturing. The boy is to me a combination of [things, partly] a smart-alecky guy messing up on purpose. . . . When Ralph handles the people he's got to show you incest. Ain't no question there's going to be incest. But of all the "folk stuff," he has that; so he has selected episodes for [a kind of] *Candide*. I've said it's one of the most complex, one of the best novels to show complex problems of our lives. I agree with that, but I would say that in his carrying it out he is not convincing. The same thing with J. Saunders Reddings' *Stranger and Alone*. And there I think you get a whole lot . . . of a subjective thing. Again, *The Outsider* is not one of Dick's [Richard Wright's] best things, I think; but you see Dick has this feeling. Dick felt that if Sartre would pat him on the back, you know, that's something. Sartre, to me, ain't worth a "fartre." Now, I mean, he is a bright Frenchman but he can't tell me nothing about nothing over here and I ain't going to tell him nothing about Paris. . . . Then you get another one named Genet. He comes over here, and Negroes go running around [him] to be [changed] into Blacks. Ain't nothing Genet and Sartre can tell me about the brothers; but they got "great insight," so Dick goes over there, and he swallows all that

C A L L A L O O

stuff. [But] I'm being very negative. Dick had a great power, and Dick is a very important figure in American letters. But Dick was not the spokesman, was not the intellectual leader; and he wanted to be. But when you get Dick talking to Nkrumah, Dick is giving the old party line, plus the national one. Dick and Jean Toomer were much alike. They were always looking for something to give them the answer. And then, when they didn't get the answer they'd go to something else. They wanted a Messiah; they wanted a father. Karl Marx can't tell you; Mao can't tell you; Amiri Baraka's the same way. I don't need no father.

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TIDWELL: [How would you sum up your own career and outlook?]

BROWN: Fundamentally, I'm a teacher. I took teaching seriously. I got the papers back to the people. I read them. Sometimes I was called the "red ink man." I wrote more on the side than they wrote. And they kept it. You ought to let Ossie Davis tell you about that. And the same thing with Sowell. The same thing Michael Winston tells me; you know, he brings his stuff to me. I was a teacher. And next I think I was an interpreter; I was a critic, a literary historian. [But] I'm going to fool these guys. I'm gonna take a short story and write about 65 pages on it. I've been a family man, close ties, had a beautiful wife, wonderful woman, raised an adopted son—he has four kids—and had a lot of other interests; read everything, not doing that now, because of my eyes, but I'm listening a lot. I'm very aware of politics, and I'm racially obsessed with everything. Well, you know, Rayford [Logan] surprised me. Rayford said I—and Rayford is not modest—Rayford said that I was the cultural spokesman after DuBois. This is high praise, and biased because, you know, we are both M Street [Dunbar High School], Williams [College], and Harvard. I would say DuBois and Locke. I would say that I'm important. I've said things—this is not conceit, this is not arrogance—I've said things now that strike a chord that others didn't say. I don't know any poem like "Strong Men" in the 1920s. Langston was saying, "I, too, sing America. I am the darker brother," and so on. They will welcome me later on and say how beautiful I am. They will welcome me at the table. I don't want to be welcome at the table, ain't bothered about the table. I want to be respected. . . . Well, there was that trend; they will see how beautiful I am, and I'll be invited in. It's 1980, and we are *not* invited in; we are no longer completely cut out, but we're not invited in. With me, that does not cause one gray hair. I not only am not invited in, I ain't inviting them out here. If they've paid their dues, they can come. . . . [Look at] Robert Frost's "In Dives' Dive": "It is late at night and still I am losing, / But still I am steady and unaccusing. / As long as the Declaration guards / My right to be equal in number of cards, / It is nothing to me who runs the Dive. / Let's have a look at another five." The word *still* means "continually," "ever"; it's the Elizabethan "still." "Late at night": I'm 80 years old, and still just as always I'm losing. "But still I am steady and unaccusing." I ain't blaming you, ain't

CALLALOO

blaming me. I ain't blaming my papa, ain't blaming my mama. I'm unaccusing as long as the Declaration, capital "D," of Independence guards, "*G-U-A-R-D-S*," my right to be equal in the number of cards. You got five; he got five; *he* got five. "It does not matter to me who runs the Dive." He's wrong there, of course. But "Let's have a look at another five." The only time I ever talked to Frost, I mentioned that poem; he says I'm the only person who ever remembered that poem, and he loved it. He asked me, "Are you a poker player?" I said, "No, but I'm a loser."