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TEMPLES FOR TOMORROW: THE JOURNAL FIRE!! AND AFRICAN AMERICAN MODERNISM DURING THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE

by

Ashley Goulder

A Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

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Dedication

For Ruth and Rachel

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Abstract

Temples for Tomorrow: The Journal *Fire!!* and African American Modernism During the Harlem Renaissance

Ashley Goulder

2019

This dissertation explores the one-issue *Fire!!* created, edited, and published by Wallace Thurman, Zora Neale Hurston, Langston Hughes, Gwendolyn Bennett, Aaron Douglas, and Richard Bruce Nugent in 1926 - during the height of the Harlem Renaissance. By giving a close examination of the short stories, plays, poems, editorials, and illustrations included in the journal, I examine the editorial and aesthetic choices of the younger generation of artists and their collective effort to broaden the perspectives and representations of African Americans in art and in culture. By publishing a journal outside of the constraints of the race leaders' social science journals and outside of the white patrons' expectations, these artists were generating texts that conformed to understanding of culture - more to the proletariat, lower classes, and less to the 'social uplift' mantra of the era. In this journal multiple representations are given from a narrative of an unapologetic and unregenerate prostitute, to self-hatred and colorism among African American women, to even the first explicitly homoerotic narrative published by an African American author. The goal of this journal was to "burn up the old conventions," escape the strict and narrow creative options of either the 'pure' or the 'primitive,' and create art that reflected the lives these artists new were viable possibilities within African American culture.

The works of these authors contained in this journal represent the creative approaches that many of these authors continued even after the height of the movement, and most of these editor-authors even

reflect back to the publication of *Fire!!* in other works produced after the climax of the Harlem Renaissance. For instance, both Thurman and Nugent reflect back to the summer of 1926 in their respective novels *Infants in the Spring* and *Gentlemen's Jigger*. However, Hughes, Hurston, Douglas, and Bennett do a similar thing with later publications. Each chapter in this study discusses a different author and contributor. My method, a combination of biography and close reading, allows me to examine the journal in ways not often fully discussed in other scholarship. This approach reveals the historical currency and literary consistency of each author. Organized in conjunction with the order of the journal, the chapters of this study tell of the many and often contested versions of modern African American literary production.

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Introduction

In 2011 Mona El-Ghobashy published an article in *Arab and Arab American Feminisms* entitled "Quandaries of Representation" denoting the limited stereotypical assumptions Americans make regarding Muslim women. In the article El-Ghobashy claims that representations for Muslim women, particularly those who wear the hijab, are highly limited in their socially sanctioned depictions. Part of her thesis is that capitalism and entrepreneurship market and package a Muslim woman who can speak about and for all Muslim women: "As is so common with disingenuous attempts to address 'the community,' the audience for such self-appointed spokeswomen is not their community but the publishers, talk-show hosts, and think tanks eager for more sordid tales of the backwardness of Muslims" (485). These publishers are the driving force and creators of the representation in large part because one perspective, or one dimension is profitable – "without the stereotype, the entrepreneurs have no traction" (El-Ghobashy 485). Ultimately two primary options are available in mass publication: the oppressed women who need to be rescued or the polar opposite – the liberated woman who seeks to represent the best of Muslim femininity. In truth, Muslim women are exceedingly diverse, varied, and filled with ambiguity. However, as small minorities in a Western capitalist society, Muslim women fall prey to restrictive labels and limited imagery. El-Ghobashy asserts that "each Muslim woman is an irreducible self, capable of speaking on her own behalf" (486). When Muslim women are seen and represented as individuals rather than a collective group, and their representation is elevated and varied, then their status in America will also be elevated and varied.

The limited representation of Muslim women El-Ghobashy references is akin to the narrow lens through which African Americans were viewed in the early twentieth century. Following World War I an artistic and cultural explosion occurred that created thirst for African American depictions; however, those depictions had primarily two options: the purest of the race or the primitive versions before civilization. These two presentations were also somewhat opposites, and like the argument El Ghobashy makes for Muslim women, these are still limiting of individual diversity. Even with these two main, yet narrow options, African Americans were better served in cultural representation during the Harlem Renaissance than in the decades preceding that era. These two pure and primitive options gave more variety than had previously been afforded this particular minority group.

Before this time, African Americans were widely portrayed in art through blackface minstrelsy, a practice that appropriated African American culture into villainy, vice, and folly for both economic profit and cultural catharsis. The dominant culture hijacked African American culture, which caused blackface minstrel imagery to shape cultural misunderstandings of an entire group of people for decades. To escape the negative stereotypes and the consequences those stereotypes generated, African American race leaders urged African American artists to go in the opposite direction and represent the positive values and possibilities inherent in African American culture. At the same time, dominant white culture was depleted with its own cultural resources following the Great War. The dominant culture was looking for something new in art, something beyond Western civilization, and in America, the source of artistic inspiration was found in African American culture, particularly before European influence. Dominant white culture sought the “pre-civilized”, primitive worldview to supplant the vacuity of the European representations following the Great War. Thus, these two pure and primitive options arose, which offered more positive representation than had been previously allowed. However, just like Mona El-Ghobashy’s argument regarding Muslim women, having only two or three options in representation are not sufficient to reflect the myriad of individuals within the African American culture.

Logically speaking, an either or fallacy occurs when a diverse group of people is portrayed in only two or three versions from a multitude of possibilities, and it speaks to the limited understanding of that culture as well. When Muslim women only have two options-- support the oppressive view that is propagated by the dominant culture, or represent the antithesis to that view--Muslim women are still a narrow stereotype that does not take into consideration the variety that exists within that particular social community. Likewise, when African Americans are given two choices of artistic representation--that of the dominant culture - socially sanctioned primitive view, or the one propagated by the leading race men of the time of proper respectability--the diversity of character, spirit, and personality is limited. Some claim that this limited representation explains lack of diversity seen in many of the creative works of the Harlem Renaissance. Many scholars, most notably Nathan Huggins, have argued that the Harlem Renaissance was a failure in part because of the narrow creative window through which the Harlem Renaissance artists had to work (Huggins 9).

The Harlem Renaissance occurred in the 1920's when post war America was both reeling in a cultural shock from such global destruction and rolling in economic prosperity from the capitalist profit of that destruction. This combination brought experimentation to dominant cultural art that both questioned Victorian standards and sensibilities in content as well as opened artists up to new forms of expression, from stream of consciousness to the haiku. White authors and artists were permitted and even at times encouraged to reflect the brokenness of post-war America in new and diverse ways from poets like Robert Frost and Carl Sandburg to authors like Ernest Hemmingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald.

While white authors and creators were experimenting with new content and new forms that more accurately reflected humanity in the early part of the twentieth century, African American artists of the Harlem Renaissance were only permitted a few options. Even with the limited options, many great works and great artists thrived during this time. As the explosion in African American art increased, younger artists were frequently praised and celebrated as heralding in a new era of social equality through their talent and their connections to the dominant culture. The more these young artists were put in the spotlight and projected as representative of the race and the connection to new levels of social equality, the more they saw their potential to be equal to the dominant culture counterparts in artistic expression.

In January of 1926, Jessie Fauset, managing editor of *The Crisis,* sent out a survey to various white and African American artists that questioned their opinion of how African Americans were to be portrayed in art. This questionnaire clearly indicates that *The Crisis* was well aware of the limited representative options coming from blackface minstrelsy and propagandist art, and that more diversity in representation was a possible next step in art to bridge the inequality gap between African Americans and the dominant culture. The questionnaire contained only seven questions – the title of the questionnaire: “The Negro in Art: How Shall He Be Portrayed?” These questions were as follows:

1. When the artist, black or white, portrays Negro characters is he under any obligation or limitations as to the sort of character he will portray?
2. Can any author be criticized for painting the worst or the best character of a group?
3. Can publishers be criticized for refusing to handle novels that portray Negroes of education and accomplishment, on the ground that these characters are no different from white folk and therefore not interesting?
4. What are Negroes to do when they are continually painted at their worst and judged by the public as they are painted?
5. Does the situation of the educated Negro in America with its pathos, humiliation and tragedy call for artistic treatment at least as sincere and sympathetic as “Porgy” received?
6. Is not the continual portrayal of the sordid, foolish and criminal among Negroes convincing the world that this and this alone is really and essentially Negroid, and preventing white artists from knowing any other types and preventing black artists from daring to paint them?

> 7. Is there not a real danger that young colored writers will be tempted to follow the popular trend in portraying Negro characters in the underworld rather than seeking to paint the truth about themselves and their own social class? (Thaggert, "Introduction" 2)

This questionnaire or survey of how African Americans are to be represented in art as a collective group was loaded with a certain philosophical bent or political objective in mind. By the wording of these questions, it is clear, Fauset and Du Bois of *The Crisis* are attempting to bolster support for the artistic renderings of the educated and more "positive" views among the group and the minimizing, if not silencing of the criminal or worst version of the collective. The "positive images" are the focus here. This survey is pivotal to the events which took place the remainder of 1926, and for the purpose of this study, the final question targeting the younger artists is significant. By addressing the young artists who had arrived in Harlem by winning short story, drama, and poetry contests, *The Crisis* magazine was pointing to them as the creators of the art in question. These young artists were the ones creating and therefore portraying the race as the collective. Their choices as artists were crucial to how African Americans were to be perceived, not just in art but in society. The last question, however, poses somewhat of a contradiction in its own construction. The question assumes that the younger artists will follow the popular trend, i.e., minstrelsy, and select negative stereotypes to portray the race; however, the question then suggests that these artists tell the truth about social class, as if to also assume that each artist is the elevated, positive label and social rank. For some of these artists, the truth of their rank and position was not in conformity to the ideals projected by the virtuous, racial uplift mantra. Some of their ‘‘truths’’ were as members of the ‘‘underworld’’ Fauset rejects. So what is the younger artist to do? How is he to interpret this question? Does he forfeit the "underworld" portrayal of his race and highlight only the positive ideals, or does he use his artistic talent to represent his ‘‘truth?’’ The remainder of 1926, a debate ensued over this issue of artistic representation.

Younger artists, including Wallace Thurman and Langston Hughes, submitted responses to this questionnaire in editorials, citing their justifications to multiple representations in art while members of the old guard, in particular Du Bois and Locke, countered those arguments with editorials of their own.

What prompted these younger artists to so quickly reject the positive image ideal suggested by Fauset's questions, and by extension, Du Bois' philosophy? Why is Du Bois so set on this one brand, as Locke is set on his selective representations in *The New Negro*? What provoked the debate at all? A myriad of things - A century of blackface representation on the stage and on film's first full-length feature, the thirst for new ideas from a post-war culture, and the literary power and promises of socio-political organizational journals in overturning racism through socio-political statistics and later overturning racism using art. Some of the more prominent publications of the Harlem Renaissance were *The Crisis* of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, *Opportunity* of the National Urban League, *The Messenger*, and *Negro World*. These journals began in conjunction with the Great Migration following the Great War and increased in literacy from "Negro schools." Racial awareness increased with the rise of a black press in various cities and metropolitan areas. Many journals began as social-change engines where African Americans could learn of news specific to their race and social status, with employment opportunities, lynching statistics, and political commentaries all included. The goal of most of these journals was to raise racial awareness and generate more militancy against racism among African American readers.

Following the release of D. W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* in 1915, some of these journals began hosting competitions for art, poetry, and short stories and including more literary and artistic pieces in the predominantly socio-political journals. Art was the new weapon with which to fight the racism war, and many editors and academics from Jessie Redmon Fauset to Alain Locke, encouraged African American artists to challenge the racial status quo with art. In addition, they publicly heralded these artists as equal to the dominant culture in their artistic skill. The promises made by these journals and their primary editors, as well as the encouragement of the dominant culture's white counterparts gave the younger African American artists the hope of writing and creating what they wanted in their art - of being as free to express life through literature, poetry, drama, and visual arts as white artists of the early twentieth century. If art is to be a vehicle through which racial equality could be realized, then equality in artistic expression by the races should be an additional effect or by-product.

These promises of racial uplift and equality through art began perhaps at the 1924 awards banquet at the Civic Club in New York. The Civic Club, one of the only clubs to admit both black and white at the time, is where Alain Locke uttered a promise, a prophecy that was to go unfulfilled. In 1924 Charles Johnson, editor of *Opportunity,* hosted an awards dinner for winners of fiction contests. On this night, the master of ceremonies was Alain Locke. This dinner was meant to acknowledge the publication success of Jessie Fauset's first novel *There is Confusion,* but by Locke's bidding, the evening became a call to all of the younger African American artists of the post war era. It was *Opportunity*'s competition, *The Crisis* editor Jesse Fauset's novel, and *The New Negro* editor Alain Locke's role? as the master of ceremonies. These leaders were the collaborators that called, found, and encouraged the young. In his autobiography *The Big Sea* Langston Hughes called Fauset, Johnson, and Locke, "the three people who midwived [*sic*] the so-called New Negro literature into being" (*The Big Sea* 218). These editors and historians built high hopes and expectations for the younger artists, some of whom were there that night. Countee Cullen and Gwendolyn Bennett both read poetry that very night. Others would come later; they would eventually find their way to New York, to Harlem where the promise of New Art - the promise of the New Negro would give them dreams of art for art's sake - or even more daring art for their own sakes. However, within two years, these hopes were dashed, and the young artists were embittered by the journals and editors.

These race leaders were encouraging and even hopeful when the art suited their socio-political aims, but when an artist of renown deviated from the script, he was often unpublished. When artists' personal lives did not represent the sought after respectability, they were silenced and hidden, or at the very least, chastised. These artists were to be representatives in their work and personal lives, but they were to only represent the best, or the elite version to white and African American audiences. However, that was not what was promised by Locke in the introduction essay to *The New Negro*. In his opening essay, Locke sets the younger artists apart from the African American group of the previous generation, before the Great War, making a claim that this new generation who is migrating North and into Harlem are the lower classes: "The answer is in the migrating peasant. It is the 'man farthest down' who is most active in getting up…. The clergyman following his errant flock, the physician or lawyer trailing his clients, supply the true clues. In a real sense it is the rake and file who are leading, and the leaders who are following" (Locke "The New Negro" 7). Locke here is expressing that the lower classes constitute the masses who have migrated to Harlem, and that their story of geographic as well as social moving is the story. The ''leaders'' of the race are taking cues from the average man, the lower man. The New Negro is not an elite who has already attained his education, but the lower classes striving to climb from poverty to opportunity in a variety of ways.

In addition, Locke offers an essay in *The New Negro Anthology* entitled, "Negro Youth Speaks." This essay addresses the young artists themselves and the new artistic aesthetics and philosophies this group brings with them into Harlem. He addresses that "it is youth that speaks in the voice of Negro youth, but the overtones are distinctive: Negro youth speaks out of an unique experience and with a particular representativeness… as we approach cultural maturity in a phase of art now that promises to be fully representative" (Locke 47-48). The idea of being fully representative opens the door to more than one representative option. Rather, his idea suggests that to be fully representative and culturally mature, the art that is created by these young artists would be varied and complex. A myriad of options is possible, so to speak.

Later in the same essay, Locke calls these younger artists by name and seems to state their new aesthetic goals as he understands or interprets them, again reiterating that these new artists are objective, and creating more realistic representations of African American people in art. Specifically, Locke names Jean Toomer, Rudolph Fisher, Claude McKay, Jessie Fauset, Langston Hughes, and Countee Cullen among others. By naming and differentiating this younger group from the previous artists at the turn of the century, Locke is separating these artists from the old forms. Following the Great War, something has happened to generate more of a race consciousness and a race pride in these artists that gives them the confidence and courage to pursue art from new perspectives. Locke states,

> Through their work, these younger artists have declared for a lusty vigorous realism; the same that is molding in contemporary American letters… the elder generation of Negro writers expressed itself in cautious moralism and guarded idealizations; the trammels of Puritanism were on its mind because of the repressions of prejudice were heavy on its heart. They felt art must fight social battles and compensate social wrongs; "Be representative": put the better foot foremost, was the underlying mood… (Locke, "Negro Youth Speaks" 50)

These ideas that the new generation of artists are different from the moralisms of the previous generation and that their work expresses a more realistic representation attests to an artistic aesthetic that is open to more complex, more manifold options in character and situation. These are the ideas, published in 1925 in a text inspired by an awards banquet in 1924, that are perhaps part of the impetus for these younger artists rejecting the positive propaganda ideas of the social science journals.

Ironically, many of these younger artists seemed to take the words and ideas of Locke seriously; as some were being published and accepted by white journals and white audiences, many were making strides to try new strategies in art. Part of this fascination with these new strategies had to do with the success of Jean Toomer's *Cane* in 1923.   The unique prose poem style of Toomer's notable work was influenced by white artists and writers after the Great War – members of the Lost Generation who were denouncing social systems that created the war and soul deadening results in the aftermath. These Lost Generation artists often adopted Bohemian lifestyles and experimented with content and form in an effort to create something original that also reflected the desperation for regeneration. Following the Freudian "noble savage" archetype, many of these dominant culture artists sought out and even longed to be more fully understood. The African American became the pre-civilized, innocence and an untapped resource for art in a diseased, broken white civilization. Interestingly, as many of these post World War I dominant culture artists sought out African American culture as a source for art the opportunity for improved race relations appeared. This is how and why the social science journals *The Crisis* and *Opportunity* began offering more poetry and short stories in the midst of unemployment statistics and lynching crimes. There was a chance to rewrite the artistic narrative of African American art as it applied to real life African American culture, and these bohemian, Lost Generation intellectuals and artists were eagerly seeking them out. These opportunities for improved race relations were happening, but ironically, the goals for art were somewhat contradictory. Following the Great War, many contemporary white artists were often using art to expose the emptiness of Western culture, and the vacuity of materialism that led to war. Art was a means to openly reject this society. To African American race leaders and artists, the goal for art during this time period, was not necessarily to reject America, entirely. For many, the goal was to be accepted by America.

The connection with the Lost Generation and the intellectuals and artists of the dominant culture following the war gave creative options to many of these younger ''Negro'' artists. As white authors were trying on new forms of poetry, prose, and visual art, and while they were creating characters and situations that flipped Victorian sensibilities and moralisms on their heads, many African Americans witnessed and noticed these shifts. While the bohemianism of white culture in Greenwich Village and the bohemianism of Harlem were similar in many ways in the reality of the day to day, in the realism of artistic expression and the goal for art they differed vastly. While the social scientist race leaders wanted a genteel representation that countered the blackface tradition and represented the best of the Talented Tenth, the younger artists wondered if the New Negro could really represent the masses. Rather than tell the account of the top ten percent, why not tell the story of the other ninety, the majority?

To freely represent anything other than the genteel representation, these younger artists would have to create their own forum. These younger artists would ultimately create their own journal - a journal that reflected the artistic editorial choices of the artists, rather than the socio-political choices of the other sociology journals because this time, the editors were the artists. In the summer of 1926, six months following the questionnaire about art and black representation in *The Crisis,* the younger artists who referred to themselves as the Niggeratti, collectively pooled their own resources to publish their own artwork against the proper intelligentsia's requirements. Many of the bills went unpaid by this group, but the financially responsible party and primary editor was Wallace Thurman, who strove to find more payments to continue his journal and even attempted to publish another artistic journal of similar ideas. For this study I aim to examine the editorial choices of the young writers of the one issue artistic journal *Fire!!*, taking into consideration their opinions of the other African American literary journals at the time and their goals as artists. By a close examination of the types of stories that were told, stories that focused on the lower class proletariat rather than the ‘‘soul of the bourgeois,’’ stories that gave a different ‘‘authentic’’ picture of the race even while minimizing racial elements in some ways, one can determine their view of art, their view of the African American people, and their view of themselves.

Wallace Thurman, Zora Neale Hurston, Langston Hughes, Richard Bruce Nugent, Gwendolyn Bennett, Aaron Douglas, and John Davis combined their creative and financial efforts to produce art for art's sake - art for their own sake. John Davis was only involved in the business portion of this venture, but the other six all contributed creatively and financially. First, the very fact that these six artists of the Niggerati were willing to put their money into the project, reveals their drive and perhaps desperation for a medium of their ‘‘brand’’ or even hopes of diversity in African American art. Most of these artists were in their 20s; most were unemployed and earning college degrees. They were not gainfully employed and established professors of colleges like many of the other editors of African American art. Perhaps they were young and naïve, but these artists found that the criterion for African American art was limiting in its scope and not living up to the New Negro promise. In addition, the experiment of *Fire!!* served as a training ground to what some of these authors were to become. For some, this journal was a spark of creativity, the source of uninhibited inspiration that helped develop and shape their exact art. For others, it was a chance to use African American art as a mirror to the common folk – a direct rejection of the intelligentsia and a catapult for African American art into the modern era.

In this study, I will begin by examining the massive stronghold of influence that blackface had become to the collective African American community and the urge with which the race leaders, Du Bois, Locke, and even Johnson strove to overturn the representation and its influence, as well as examine the expectations and criteria for African American art, especially for the younger artist, as stated in some of the sociological journal, such as *The Crisis* and *Opportunity* during the Harlem Renaissance. The editors of these journals were scholars in sociology and their objectives were to promote the race under a certain agenda. These journals were circulating before the art explosion of the New Negro Movement occurred, and they had cultural demons such as lynching and blackface minstrelsy to fell within each publication. For many of these journals and their editors, the goal was to humanize a degraded people. Following World War I these publications also became the vehicles through which many of the artists found their start. Were it not for these journals, Thurman, Hughes, Bennett, Hurston, and others, would not be as publicized, nor would they have all been in Harlem together in the summer of 1926. These journals, their contests, and awards dinners influenced and were the impetus for *Fire!!*

In addition, these sociological journals attempting to include art, created a mixed discipline of the humanities imposed in the social sciences. The very nature of the socio-political journal required or expected a certain journalistic rather than artistic approach to the representation of the race. This is not to say that art or literature cannot be used to discuss social problems. Often art and fiction can serve as a window to the whole human experience within a social struggle. However, interpreting or generating art with a social science lens will likely be problematic. Typically, social sciences rely on empirical data, objectively retrieved. Some of the data is quite selective to focus attention on cause and effect and problem solving within society; whereas, art focuses on the human condition typically in all its intricacies (using the simplest of definitions), and limited or imposing restrictions on that human condition, such as using only selective data, generally creates poor art. The younger artists recognized the short-sightedness of the sociology journal and opted to generate their own journal strictly devoted to their art.

To fully understand the scope and goal of the social journals, the beginning of this study will examine the history of blackface minstrelsy and the strides Du Bois, Locke, and Johnson made to dismantle such representations in African American art. Understanding the political and social implications of blackface minstrelsy, Du Bois, Locke, and Johnson wanted to elevate the race through bourgeois, or middle-class sensibilities. To understand the criteria the intelligentsia provided for the New Negro and his art, this study will examine the criteria set forth in Alain Locke's *The New Negro*.

As an anthology of creative expression, this collection serves as a floor plan to African American art, but under close inspection it is a symbol for a New Covenant in African American art and culture. Locke even adopts religiously loaded language and tropes throughout the anthology. The collection is "dedicated to the Younger Generation" and calls out the short-comings of the sociologist and race leaders of previous generations in understanding the momentum of this new psychology. Despite claims to understand and support, nay promote the ideologies of the younger artists, Locke too seems to be limiting in his understanding of the diversity contained within this New Negro. Rather than stay inside the socially approved lines, *Fire!!* attempts to incinerate the confines these men construct for African American art and society, and in so doing to create variety and more authenticity in representation. Where the old guard is looking to define and transcribe a new, yet narrow view for the younger generation, these artists in *Fire!!* attempt to defile and transgress that interpretation.

Taking into consideration the editorial choices of the major journals like *The Crisis*, *Opportunity*, and *The New Negro*, the third chapter, and the majority of this study, would like to examine the editorial choices of *Fire!!* as an artistic journal collectively and in its own right. By examining the correspondence of several of the artists themselves, as well as some of the essays on art they wrote, their collective manifesto for African American art becomes clear. In particular, Langston Hughes' essay "The Negro Artist to the Racial Mountain" published in *The Nation* in the summer of 1926 highlights in great depth the frustrations the artist/editors of *Fire!!* felt toward the racially limited presentations allowed in their work. Hughes' essay serves as a declaration of literary sentiment. In addition, Gwendolyn Bennett's "To Usward," published in 1924 and recited at the Civic Club during the awards banquet, provides a dedication or edict for the younger artists to strive to reach. By analyzing the Bennett's poem and Hughes' manifesto, one can glean the true goals set forth in *Fire!!* A close reading of the major works published in *Fire!!* reveals just how close these artists were to the artistic goals they set forth. Some of the work included attempts to subtly elude race, while others clearly create racial content. Furthermore, many of the works endeavor to be modern in substance when compared alongside their dominant culture contemporaries. Lastly, this study will examine the reception this journal received when it was first published and analyze the reaction many of the contributors make after the failure of this self-publishing endeavor. Many of these artists looked back on the summer of 1926 with fondness and even attempted to recreate it in later published works. By examining the works published in the journal, as well as looking at some of the work that looks back with positive nostalgia at the summer of self-publication, one can determine the attitude toward which each artist approached his or her art during the Harlem Renaissance and their overall hope for themselves, for their art, and for the New Negro.

Many chapters and articles have been published about *Fire!!*; however, scholars have typically examined the journal under the lens of one prominent author. Interestingly, very little has been researched about the collective group and the effect this venture had on them as artists. This study attempts to situate *Fire!!* and the creative group, the Niggeratti, in the evolving definition of African American art and culture in the twentieth century. Some have argued the failure of the publication due to its short tenure of one issue. However, as Du Bois attempts to dismantle the blackface minstrelsy for its racist overtones and narrow, bigoted view of African American culture, these younger artists dared to represent a diverse, lower class view of life to broaden a still too narrow view of African American life. By dismantling Du Bois' efforts and challenging Locke, these artists are expanding the definition and increasing the complexity of their cultural representations. The process by which they manage to critique and reject the assigned forms is evidence of cultural evolution necessary for the uplift of the race, and arguably the success of Du Bois' and Locke's goals for art.

Furthermore, most scholars have examined the creators of *Fire!!* on an individual basis, noting the summer of 1926 as influential, but only part of the biography of these artists. Few scholars have devoted more than a chapter or a journal article to the impetus *Fire!!* had on the movement, other than to note its negative reviews as perhaps a sign of its failure. However, looking at *Fire!!* through the lens of only one artist at a time, limits the scope of the manifesto Hughes provides as it is extrapolated in the entire journal.

For example, Valerie Boyd's *Wrapped in Rainbows* devotes two chapters to the summer of 1926 and to specifically Zora Neale Hurston's time in Harlem working on the Niggerati art project. In these chapters Boyd cites Hurston as one of the primary contributors to the publication, and she analyzes Hurston's story "Sweat," which is contained in the journal. However, the other editors, Hughes and Thurman in particular, wanted Hurston to submit another story under a pseudonym. Hurston's unwavering sense of folk literature and its stark contrast to the urbane representations requested from other journals, particularly in representation for women, was just the type of stories Thurman wanted, and he was eager to have her submit another story. While he is advancing an art that represents African American life in honesty and in diversity, he is pressuring and willing to have a certain type included on multiple levels. Hurston contributed the play *Color Struck*, which had won an *Opportunity* contest. The only original story for the magazine is "Sweat" and it provides "arguably her finest fiction from the decade" (Boyd 136). This is also one of her last from this decade. Even as Boyd and other researchers have examined Hurston's work in *Fire!!* and its contribution to her future, few have chosen to examine Hurston's "Sweat" alongside Thurman's "Cordelia the Crude," which is his original story in the journal. As I aim to show, by surveying Delia of "Sweat" in conjunction with Cordelia of "Cordelia the Crude," both of whom have the same name, an argument can be made that Hurston and Thurman provide varying perspectives to potentially the same woman, both struggling to find autonomy in a society that limits their means. The setting, character, plot, and outcomes are markedly different for both women;

however, they are equally represented in the journal, as if to claim that diversity in representation IS the key to authenticity in representation.

In Amy Helene Kirschke's biography *Aaron Douglas: Art, Race, & the Harlem Renaissance*, several sections mention Douglas' contributions to *Fire!!* Douglas' house was also one of the meeting places where the younger artists gathered to discuss plans and dissect artistic abilities. In her biography Kirschke reports, "Collaboration was the essence of the movement, and though he enjoyed his work for the *Crisis* and *Opportunity,* it did not compare to the experience of putting together *Fire!!*" (89). For Douglas, the venture of writing and creating art without editorial censorship was exciting and liberating, and the three panels of art Douglas contributes to the journal are vastly different than what Douglas had submitted to the other journals. These three drawings get negative reviews. Critics claimed Douglas ruined "three perfectly good pages and a cover" with his contributions to this magazine (Kirschke 87). These drawings are perhaps not as interesting as the starkly contrasting bold black and white primitive images found in most of Douglas' work, but they almost serve as a short story in an image. I would like to examine these images not only in contrast to the other work by Douglas, but both in relation to each other, as well as to the other stories, plays, and poems included in the journal.

In addition, Maureen Honey's *Aphrodite's Daughters: Three Modernist Poets of the Harlem Renaissance* devotes an entire chapter to Gwendolyn Bennett and her involvement in the Harlem Renaissance, including her work with the journal *Fire!!*. Bennett's involvement and connections during the Harlem Renaissance, particularly early on in the 1920's was vast, and she was highly popular and recognized. However shortly after the publication of *Fire!!* Bennett's father passes away, she married a doctor who moves his practice to Nashville, TN, and Bennett becomes so immersed in a troubled marriage and an affair, that she has little time to write. While the chapter is mostly a biographical snapshot of Bennett's life with several published and unpublished poems dispersed within, the pivotal point for Bennett in this biography from successful writer to struggling wife, is during the year of 1926, the year of *Fire!!*'s publication. The chapter does not mention many of the other contributors to the journal; although, Wallace Thurman and Aaron Douglass are both mentioned briefly. While there is only a few scholarly works published on Gwendolyn Bennett, these works either focus on Bennett's life or Bennett's works, but not her collaboration with the other editors of *Fire!!*

Anne Elizabeth Carroll's *Word, Image, and the New Negro*, discusses the collective efforts of the editors of *Fire!!* in the sixth chapter, "The Importance of Multiple Identities: *Fire!!* as an Avant-garde Arts Magazine." In this chapter Carroll acknowledges the goals that the younger artists set for themselves and the attempt to shift the direction and change perceptions of African Americans through art. She also discusses several contributors from Thurman, Nugent, Douglas, and Hurston and their particular contributions to the published project. Only a few pages are given to each artist and his work; however, this chapter is possibly the most thorough critical discussion about the collective efforts in this journal to date. However, Gwendolyn Bennett, Langston Hughes are only briefly mentioned in the chapter. Clearly more scholarship should be done on behalf of this creative enterprise.

Rather than examine *Fire!!* through a single author's contributions to it, this study examines the collective ideas and effects the journal had on some of the prominent contributors. How closely do these authors reach their goal as stated in "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain"? How much does the collaboration of ideas help to develop the daring choices these authors make? How does the journal as a whole, in collaboration with the work of Du Bois, et al., generate a more complex picture of African American culture?

Chapter One:

Black Face and Black Souls- Mixed Messages and Mixed Genres

Before one can fully discuss why Thurman, Nugent, Hughes, Hurston, Bennett, and Douglas were so compelled to create their own journal with their own art, one must understand why the criteria for African American art was rigid, even in a time of artistic explosion such as the Harlem Renaissance. The older generation and more prominent leaders of the movement, Du Bois, Johnson, and Locke, felt the need to define the criteria for African American art against a century of stolen representation and exploitation of blackface minstrelsy. To fully appreciate the need and adherence to new criteria for African American artistic expression, one must appreciate the position and place of African Americans in American culture and their role and representation in American art before the Harlem Renaissance. The first formal public acknowledgement by dominant Eurocentric whites of African American culture was based on blackface performance. Blackface minstrelsy was considered America's first popular cultural artistic expression; for as newly unified American citizens following the Revolutionary War strove to find the answer to "What is American?" they often embraced the mass culture of the Other. By rejecting English or strictly European ideas, many early theatre productions were crude impersonations of African American life perhaps in part because it was in contrast to European or English experience and art.

However, that blackface theatre entertainment was extremely lucrative and exceedingly popular among the white lower classes. So popular in fact that blackface minstrelsy had a continuous audience for a century, and even today vestiges of blackface are seen in various forms when whites appropriate African American culture. When whites impersonate African American culture in the name of highly popularized entertainment, at the same time that African Americans become limited, sometimes even prohibited, in expressing their own arts, the race as a whole is demeaned and dehumanized to a vulgar mask. The popularity of minstrelsy greatly shaped the assumptions made of African Americans in dominant cultural understanding, particularly with the black male body.

In *Love and Theft* Eric Lott asserts that blackface minstrelsy of the nineteenth century was invested in the "traditional 'preindustrial' joys that social and economic pressures had begun to marginalize" (Lott *Love and Theft* 148). As industrialism shifts culture in the nineteenth century, the social tensions increase. Some primary tensions are racial but are intensified by class and economic status as well. In other words, it is the lower class member of the white dominant group who feel the competition with other lower class minorities for the industrial jobs. Hatred of the other is incensed through this competition. However, tensions are eased through mimicry and mockery for " the minstrel show was, on the one hand, a socially approved context of institutional control; and on the other, it continually acknowledged black culture even while defending white American against it" (Lott *Love and Theft* 40). The presence of an emasculated black body on the minstrel stage continually reified the supposed superiority of the white man's status, especially of the lower class white man.

By World War I blackface began to dissipate as a strictly theatrical form, although it continued in varying degrees with other media for the remainder of the twentieth century. The first full length silent motion picture was D. W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation*, which depicts and justifies the rise of the Ku Klux Klan from the "black menace." This film, even as the first full length feature, shows the popularity with which blackface had become in the 19th and early 20th century culture, and this theme continued as other forms of media were created and disseminated. The first nationally popular radio broadcast was *Amos and Andy*; the first cartoon catered to the popularity commonly using the music of Stephen Foster, the renown minstrelsy composer. Blackface as a popular art has had a lasting effect on lower art forms for decades.

However, as the Modern era dawned with the mantra of “Make it New!” many artists were searching for something more original, more innovative than the remainders of old forms. After the close of World War I (1919), many in the Western world were in shock at the death tolls of a global war. By many accounts, the culture was broken and the rules and notions of the past were open for discussion or complete dismissal. Colonialism was in question and perhaps was largely to blame for the global involvement in a Western world skirmish. Not only was the emphasis of modernism on the broken nature of the tradition, but many artists and authors were seeking new forms and new ideologies to embrace in their art: “In their writings, the modernists struggled to understand war, technology, urbanization, and their own personal disillusionment” (JBHE 27). As old traditions were dismissed, and new ideas were being discussed, many in the modern era were searching for something new, perhaps even a new representation of the colonized people… enter Locke, Du Bois, and even Johnson. Enter the New Negro.

Early modernism came with new versions of minority groups, but in America the New Negro gained overnight success. In 1925 the March edition of *Survey Graphic* gave insight to the New Irish and the New Mexican. Following the Great War, Americans gained an interest in other cultures of the world. However, among American audiences the New Negro was the most popular and more representation, more exposure quickly followed with the Harlem Renaissance. If even dominant culture white America wanted something new in the representations of minority cultures, then those minorities were more than ready to provide a more respectable representation for African Americans in art.

Many of the other editions of *Survey Graphic* were edited by dominant culture white editors whose goal was to highlight the differences between cultures; however, the goal of “The New Negro” edition, ironically, was to highlight how similar African Americans were to that dominant culture. The unique nature of *The Harlem: Mecca of the New Negro* issue of *Survey Graphic* derives because the editorial choices were given to Alain Locke and many African American contributors, many of whom had to be previously recognized by the other journals, *The Crisis* and *Opportunity*. This newness that modernism promised provided a window to tell a respectable version of African Americans in art. The hope was that art could be used as a vehicle to more social and civil equality for African American culture in America.

In March of 1925 this special edition of *Survey Graphic* edited by Alain Locke was published. This edition highlighted Harlem as the “Mecca of the New Negro.” Most of what was included in the *Survey Graphic* was later published in Locke’s anthology, *The New Negro.* It is this collection of essays, poems, artwork, and drama that heralds in a new age of art and social awareness for the African American. Locke believed the New Negro had moved away from the Old Negro, not in just geographic location of the rural South to the urban North, but in ideology and in presentation through art. In his anthology Locke dedicated the contents to the “younger generation.” The distinction between the Old Negro and the young New Negro differs in the way art is employed and expression is liberated. The goal of art for the younger artists was to use race for art’s sake, rather than to use art for the race’s sake, according to this essay. Locke was welcoming a modern realism so he claimed, and the younger artists took him at his word.

This anthology included many of the prominently published and recognized voices. However, some voices were excluded, and their exclusion highlights certain editorial choices on the part of Locke. Marcus Garvey and several of the editors of the radical socialist *Messenger* were not included; however, an essay contributed by W. E. B. Du Bois highlighted issues of labor for African Americans with a rather social science lens. Other than Du Bois’ article, Locke opted to minimize the sociology reports; most accounts of the social sphere are anecdotal. These deliberate choices reflect what his aim for the New Negro and art were to be – art was an attempt to forge a positive collective identity. Perhaps the goal of generating a unified identity was the forefront of Locke's vision; however, his projections and expectations of art, particularly of the younger artists were not what the artists themselves were expecting, and honestly not what Locke had promised.

The idea espoused by Locke in "The Negro Youth Speaks" of modernism and art free from racial or social warfare was quickly determined as a myth by those very artists. The mantra was dispelled by the propagandist needs of the various socio-political and literary journals, including the ideas of respectability and propriety. During the New Negro Movement, or Harlem Renaissance, the role of African American art was quickly codified in the primary literary journals such as *The Crisis* and *Opportunity* to replicate certain moral and racial presentations. Leaders such as W. E. B. Du Bois and Charles Johnson respectively argued for "truth" in art and a propaganda that promoted a revised presentation of the African American experience as opposed to the stereotypical versions of the race supplied and reinforced by the dominant white culture, in particular blackface minstrelsy. *The Crisis* and *Opportunity* often selected and published works that built up the character and morality of the African American people with works that often mirrored English and Victorian authors in presentation and style. The goal in these literary journals was to promote African American art and issues of racism in America through the lens of sociology. Through these journals many of the prominent writers of the Harlem Renaissance were discovered. Reports of the abuses faced by African Americans were frequently covered from lynching to unemployment, but it was the art contests that called attention to the art explosion for which the Harlem Renaissance was known.

Both journals called for a new approach in the fight for social equality. The older forms of apologetics and assimilation, of stereotyping and oppressing were coming to an end. World War I or the Great War was a turning point in the country and for African Americans. Many of these literary journals were advocates of social change, justice, and uplift. Each served as a battle cry in politics and a critique of democracy and capitalism in America. However, because of the explosion of art and the financial funding by white publishers and white art patrons, African Americans were now writing plays and short stories of lynchings rather than the news reports and statistics on lynchings.

Even though from the beginning a debate occurred as to the definition of the Harlem Renaissance, by 1926, the question as to the role of art for the African American presented itself in various journal articles by men and women of different opinions – almost speaking and contradicting each other directly. By February of 1926 Du Bois had strongly encouraged artists to forgo artistic liberty and strictly work to dismantle "the net result of American literature [in depicting] the twelve million black Americans as prostitutes, thieves, and fools" ("The Negro in Art", *The Crisis*, 165). Using art that would reinforce such presentations would be a disservice to the race, and this artistic opportunity to garner the attention and funds of white audiences, patrons, and audiences, was for Du Bois a chance to change the script and tell the other side of the story. As the "race leader" of the day, he had the ability and influence to promote and solicit certain exemplifications from artists and audiences. The younger artists interpreted these views as too narrow to really signal change or merit social and artistic equality with the dominant culture. Ironically, when Du Bois was the younger voice, he too criticized the primary "race leader" at the turn of the century.

In 1903 W. E. B. Du Bois published his thoughts and concerns for the African American people amid the segregation and suppression of the turn of the twentieth century in his famous *The Souls of Black Folk.* In this work Du Bois criticized the noted leader of this time, Booker T. Washington, particularly Washington's speech at the 1898 Atlanta Exposition. To Du Bois, Washington's Tuskegee school and his program of assimilation and accommodation to the dominant culture asked African Americans to surrender too much of their own liberty and identity in exchange for temporary economic prosperity: "Booker T. Washington arose as essentially the leader not of one race but of two, --a compromiser between the South, the North, and the Negro" (703). Washington's plan in the South was one that called for submission of certain rights and liberties, an accepted status of inferiority of the African American people, that would possibly secure a low-paying job. However, Du Bois was one of the first and most vocal critics of this plan. To accept inferiority as a status, and to not demand equality in civil, political, or intellectual pursuits, was to remain in slavery. Yet, African Americans were readily rallying around Washington's ideals in part because he had such a following among the dominant white culture both in the North and South. This widespread blind submission to Washington's policies was also a part of Du Bois' critique in *The Souls of Black Folk:* "The black men of America have a duty to perform, a duty stern and delicate, - a forward movement to oppose a part of the work of their greatest leader" (Du Bois, *Souls,* 707). While critiquing the leader at the turn of the twentieth century, Du Bois should have considered that he would soon assume that role. By the 1920's Du Bois was the voice and authority of the African American race, especially as the founder of the National Association of the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). However, the younger generation following Du Bois took his words to heart. As the front-runner and spokesman for his race, his leadership was criticized by younger African American men and women artists during the Harlem Renaissance. The questions of race and art have been a generational struggle again and again, but Du Bois is not just resisting Washington in his treatise. *Souls of Black Folk* is an attempt to use social science to dismantle the racist social science theories behind Social Darwinism.

Du Bois as a social scientist was also well informed of the reality of the leading social science of racial group differentiation known as Social Darwinism. Social Darwinist theory suggests that the triumphs of the weaker by the stronger is simply a natural law of science, evolution, and racial difference. This theory gives scientific justification for racial and economic oppression as natural, but in *Souls of Black Folk* Du Bois is attempting to prove that science alone cannot be used to justify racist policies. Even with the early publication of *The Crisis* Du Bois' goal was always to "set forth those facts and arguments which show the danger of race prejudice, particularly as manifested today toward colored people" (Du Bois "The Crisis" 10). The original goal of the magazine was to highlight the abomination of racist policies and practices; however, the inclusion of positive images and positive reflections was more effective at increasing readership among African Americans. The magazine was for African Americans, and rather than relay how savage lynchings were and how poor economic and job opportunities were, having a positive illustration was more enticing to the selected audience. Du Bois often put the images early in the journal and labeled them first in an issue's table of contents (Carroll 23).

While Du Bois and the NAACP were challenging racism with verbal protest and racial uplift through visual images and illustrations, Charles Johnson took up the battle against racism in writing with a different approach. Like Du Bois, Johnson was a sociologist. However, after World War I and the Great Migration northward, the intensity of anger against racism seemed to dim a bit. Charles Johnson's aesthetic in the National Urban League's *Opportunity* was one of sociological and scientific objectivity. It's goal was not to highlight racism primarily; rather, the goal was to encourage more assimilation and show success stories of individuals integrating and succeeding in various trades and industries. According to Anne Elizabeth Carroll, "Though *Opportunity* was carefully non-inflammatory, and though it emphasized the ability of African Americans to successfully fit into and contribute to American industries, it also acknowledged the continuing racism and discrimination that was practiced against African Americans" (56). Violent racism was still rampant against African Americans following World War I, but 'Opportunities' were changing the volume and emphasis of the conversation regarding race. For Johnson, assimilation and integration through more favorable economic circumstances.

Alain Locke also articulates in his work that race cannot be defined in biological or scientific terms. Rather than look at race through the lens of social science solely, Locke opts for a more interdisciplinary approach to understanding race as a cultural and historical framework. For Locke understanding and classifying race comes by a blend of anthropology, history, social science, and an understanding of economics. Modern race relations and policy for Locke became indoctrinated by the dominant class for the economic promotion of slavery and the need for excessive and cheap labor. As the editor of Paul Kellogg's *Survey Graphic* New Negro, Locke was primed to use essays, images, and art to represent African Americans to dominant culture white American audiences. Interestingly, the art and images used in *Survey Graphic* and by extension images mostly used in *The New Negro* are either urban types or rather representations of indigenous African cultures. Through the sociological and integrative work of Du Bois, Johnson, and Locke, the lens for representation narrowed to only two options: the primitive before western civilization or the fully civilized, integrated, and urbane sort. The primitive or the pure - those were the two options most distinct from black face and most appealing to white audiences.

The Harlem Renaissance was an opportunity for African Americans to represent themselves in artistic expression on a large scale that garnered the notice and support of the dominant culture. But this increase in artistic expression gave rise to African American literary criticism and theory. What types of art should be produced by African Americans? Ultimately, the answer from leaders like W. E. B. Du Bois was fairly prescriptive. The purpose of the art was to generate a new vision of the African American, and the African American artists served as representations of the collective "we" of the entire race. The goal of the artist was to provide a view of 'racial uplift.' Writing in *The Crisis* W. E. B. Du Bois stated his view of art as propaganda:

> Thus all art is propaganda and ever must be, despite the wailing of the purists. I stand in utter shamelessness and say that whatever art I have for writing has been used always for propaganda for gaining the right of black folk to love and enjoy. I do not care a damn for any art that is not used for propaganda. But I do care when propaganda is confined to one side while the other is stripped and silent. (49)

The bulk of "Criteria for Negro Art" is a discussion on the notion of 'truth' in art; however, Du Bois does not divorce his arguments from the dominant culture's conventions. In his essay "The Talented Tenth" Du Bois argues for a classical education of Western tradition to fully develop African American minds to be leaders. He felt that "The Negro race, like all races, is going to be saved by its exceptional men. The problem of education, then, among Negroes must first of all deal with the Talented Tenth; it is the problem of developing the Best of this race that they may guide the Mass away from the contamination and death of the Worst" (Du Bois "Talented Tenth"). His goal in creating leaders among his race was to find one in ten who were exceptional according to Western traditions and train them to lead and teach their race as he was doing. Du Bois' classical western education from Harvard certainly helped to make him a leader of his race; however, it shaped the way in which all African American success was to be achieved, through the lens and scope of the dominant white culture.

During the Harlem Renaissance, Du Bois encouraged the cooperation of African American artists and white publishers. The white publishers had the means for the mass production and distribution of art during the New Negro movement. The use of white publishers because of economic necessity begs the question of authenticity of African American expression in the works published in these journals. To be published, the artists must provide a work that coincides with the goal and purpose of the journal and one that the editors approve. Some of the most notably published works of poetry were of a conservative aesthetic, as well as one that mirrored the dominant culture. Ironically, in advocating the artistic conformity and cooperation of African American art to that of the dominant culture just to be published and noticed, Du Bois is doing that for which he so strongly criticized Washington. He is also a compromiser, willing to sacrifice at least part of an artist's self-expression and liberty for economic security. Additionally, many of the published authors found in Du Bois' own *The Crisis* expressed African American experience in English style, like Countee Cullen's "Yet Do I Marvel," an African American poem in the form of the English sonnet.

In "Yet Do I Marvel" Cullen questions God at creating an African American artist in a culture that does not want or welcome African American art. This poem expresses the dilemma of accurate black representation in the form of a Shakespearean English sonnet. The content is also of Western cultural history. Cullen lists figures from Greek mythology who were tortured endlessly. These figures are references to Cullen's classical western education, but they also play a double part. Tantalus, for instance, sees the fruit and water that could nourish and satisfy him, but they both remain forever just beyond his reach. For Cullen, the food for his soul, the art of poetry is within his reach, but not exactly poetry of his race. The final couplet of this sonnet express the layers of complexity for Cullen as an African American poet during the Harlem Renaissance: "Yet do I marvel at this curious thing: / To make a poet black, and bid him sing!" Here is Cullen publishing his poetry, garnering great notoriety for it, and certainly one of Du Bois' poster children for the Talented Tenth, but the content and structure of his poetic song is of a Western Greek heritage rather than an African one. If African American art is meant to represent African American culture, but it simply reflects the dominant white culture in content and aesthetics, is it still African American art?

The answer to that question can be both yes and no. If the purpose of art is to represent culture honestly, and that representation is an expression of the universal human condition, then perhaps

Tantalus can be an adequate parallel to the struggle of Cullen and his creative peers. Cullen could have alluded to a character within African mythology and culture to illustrate his torment as an artist, but it would not have been understood as readily by the dominant culture and its publishers. Additionally, the point would not have been as clear. Part of Cullen's torment is due to that Western tradition and the limits it places upon his artistic technique, so he uses a Shakespearean sonnet rather than a jazz poem to demonstrate his frustration. And this frustration is specific to African American artists during the Harlem Renaissance, so "Yet Do I Marvel" can be argued as authentic African American expression; however, Thurman would never agree to that assessment.

Just as Du Bois offers a scathing critique of Booker T. Washington for limiting the race, the younger artists openly critique Du Bois for limiting the role of art. In February of 1926 in *The Crisis*, "The Negro and Art" requires art to overthrow certain racial stereotypes. His goal for art in his social science journal was to challenge the view of African Americans as villains and fools. The art produced by these artists during this movement have to fill a void and represent the other side of the coin – the untold version of African American life. The need for that presentation was great, because the struggle was great. The repeated misrepresentations reinforced the cruel reality.

To fully understand and appreciate the intense need for positive propaganda, one needs only to look at the history of blackface minstrelsy and the first Jim Crow routine by Thomas Dartmouth Rice. The minstrel show was not just a happy go-lucky account of a simpleton's life; occasionally the stage performers would give mournful accounts of that life. Blackface may have presented some diversity in details of content, the common theme or stereotype was of naiveté or of one who is not fully adult. As white men performed with blackened faces they 'borrowed' content from African American culture, sure, but they high-jacked that culture to meet their audience's expectations. The immature status perpetuated the inferiority status of African Americans beyond the stage. Scott Herring in his article “Du Bois and the Minstrels” states “when members of the white audience left the theater, they hoped, often expected, sometimes demanded, that the minstrel play continue among the blacks they met in the street...In Du Bois’ America the color line had been partly drawn by the forward edge of the minstrel stage” (10). The influence of the minstrel stage on race relations was telling. Perhaps Du Bois’ understanding of the minstrel stage on public life shaped his position that art was political, “all art is propaganda.” Du Bois and the other members of the old guard saw well with their own eyes the effect art had on shaping and changing society. The goal of art during the Harlem Renaissance was to revamp or reorient the narrative of race to reveal the shared experience between African American culture and that of dominant white America. This also explains why Du Bois prefaced each chapter in *The Souls of Black Folk* with both a Sorrow Song and a line of English poetry. The goal was not to show vast distinctions but similarities and shared realities - to reflect a fully human, fully mature adult representation of African American life. To do so heavily, strategically, and repeatedly would challenge the social norms and dismantle the stereotype in the mind of white audiences.

However, the effect of such a strategy was somewhat confusing to the younger artists creating mixed signals in their scientific research, mixed genres by adding art to social science journals, and mixed messages of what they claim is possible in art, and what is actually published in the journals. W. E. B. Du Bois and Alain Locke as social scientists were aware of the social science and Social Darwinists theorists who claim strength over weakness has provided scientific justification for “war, muder, slavery, exytermination, and debauchery” (Du Bois *Souls* 114). Social science has been used to justify racial oppression, so these social scientists are striving to use the same science on behalf of an oppressed racial group. Du Bois in particular strives in his writings to debunk the theory or scientific definition of race. In “The Healhty and Physique of the Negro American” he dismisses the question of how many races as being unscientific and a matter of “philosophical speculation [that] can only indicate the main division of men in broad outlines" (28). Both Du Bois and Locke wish to reject the biological notion of race; however, in some of their own social science research they use biology to study African Americans. According to Tommy Lott's "Du Bois and Loick on the Scientific Study of the Negro," "In a manner totally inconsistent with his appeal to prehistoric racial intermingling to flatly rejecty he idea of pure blood types, Do Bois calls for 'a scientific study of types of American Negroes'" (140). Alain Locke contradicts his stance on the biology of race as well. In *Race Contacts* Locke cites ancient imperialism as an automatic practice, but modern oppression is an "indoctrinated" practice. Locke connects this to merchant capitalism, but he too reveals "a commitment to a biological notion of race - a view [he] largely want[s] to reject" (Lott 142). Ultimately, both men begin to see race as more culture and class than biology; however, the contradictions reveal the mixed signals in their own research. As the leading social scientists of the day struggle to define, debunk, and redefine 'race' for the African American minority group, the artists of the New Negro movement were also struggling with how to define artists renderings of this group.

As the Great Migration was occurring following World War I, culture in dominant America, and culture for African Americans began to shift as well. The leading journals of *The Crisis* and *Opportunity* were also making a shift from the news, facts, reporting, and statistics about African Americans that had a social science objective bent, to the inclusion of illustrations, short stories, and poems that were more entertaining to the audiences of these journals and therefore generated more subscriptions and revenue. It was also generating a culture consciousness, so Du Bois, Jessie Fauset, and Charles Johnson encouraged the inclusion of various subjective art submissions in what was once objective news reporting magazines. While the inclusion of the arts in a news magazine is not fraudulent in itself, the idea that social scientists who are used to studying groups of people through statistical data are now art critics lends itself to skepticism. As stated, the goal for many of these sociologists was to use data and objectivity to change public opinion and racist public policies, and while art is highly effective at generated and changing culture, the scientist with an agenda is perhaps not the best judge of cultural and artistic representation. Rather, the art that was selected and published was art that fit the sociologist's agenda. The mixing of genres shows the evolution of these magazines that reflects the evolution of African American group following the Great Migration and urbanization, certainly. However, it greatly limited the creative freedom of the artists publishing in those few journals.

Lastly, the race leaders the 1920's were sending mixed messages to the younger artists. In particular, Alain Locke's essay "Negro Youth Speaks" recounts repeatedly that the younger artists are free to be "fully representative" (*The New Negro* 48). Race, for these younger artists, "is an idiom of experience, a sort of added enriching adventure and discipline, giving subtler overtones to life" (48). Race is just a minor filter for their art, but not an absolute paradigm from which to generate art. Rather Locke admits that "the newer motive, then, in being racial is to be so purely for the sake of art" (49). The younger artists of the New Negro Movement according to Locke will be free of Puritan moralism and respectable idealism. He is promising that these artists now have the freedom to create what they want to create in their art. It is a bold proclamation, and considering the art of previous generations it is not too far of a stretch. This renaissance of artistic expression is vastly different from previous generations of writers and painters. However, the momentum with which these younger artists were publishing and the cultural influence and consciousness they were generating through their art, led the leaders to reign in the creative abilities of these talented artists. Hughes, Thurman, Nugent, were basically doing what Locke prescribed in his essay - generating art without a racial uplift agenda. They were creating art for art's sake, or for themselves; however, the negative reaction and overall rejection of such art following such promises led the younger artists of the Niggeratti to abandon the primary journals and create a journal of their own. Their manifesto was to burn up the socio-political agenda for art and be “free from the restraints imposed by the need to please patrons and publisher...and achieve the objective which united them in their diversity of intentions, sensibilities, and styles- excellence. Excellence for its own sake. And excellence to show that the breadth and depth of talent existed among younger Negro artists” (Wirth 2).

Chapter Two:

Fire! Fire! The Manifesto of the Younger Artists-

Wallace Thurman, and the Tragedy of Misrepresentation

Just as Du Bois took issue with how easily Washington caved to the "inferior status" of African Americans in his *Souls of Black Folk*, some of the younger artists took issue with the limited and narrow options for art and how that created a commercial presentation rather than an artistic one. In the middle of Harlem Renaissance, during the year 1926, editorials went to war for the sake of art. In May of 1926, in the middle of a review of Walter White's *Flight*, Wallace Thurman critiques the narrow propagandist art, the art according to Du Bois' criteria. His only critique of White's novel is the propaganda content: "[it is] about time for the ballyhooing to cease and for the genuine performance to begin. However, my only quarrel with this school is that they are wont to consider their written propaganda as literary art. All art is no doubt propaganda, but all propaganda is most certainly not art" (Thurman, *The Collected Writings*, 183). Thurman's number one critique of White's novel is that rather than being a story of a mixed race woman passing for white, this novel is simply a social science paper or even a commercial of African American virtue passing, or rather attempting to pass as a novel. This critique of propaganda and lack of pure art becomes a common theme in Thurman's reviews.

Why would Thurman reject the propagandist art of respectability? He is well aware of the negative presentations of African American life created by white artists and publishers; he knows the struggles of racial tension are recurrent and frequent. However, the art of the Primitive and the art of upper-class bourgeois living are both presentations that are anachronistic and not reflective of current African American life. The African Primitive, like the art of Aaron Douglas, was beautifully rendered and wildly popular for African American and European American audiences, but it was too limiting in its representations in part because it failed to reflect the reality of many of the artists creating it.

Additionally, the Victorian or even Puritan presentations of 'racial uplift' are of European artistic movements from years past. As with Cullen's "Yet Do I Marvel" and many others, this call to the past in form and call to the "sitting room culture" is the stuff of 19th century Victorian propriety, wealth, and materialism where social spaces are highly regulated around appropriate morality. Du Bois, Locke, and others were asking the artists to produce art on the same scale as dominant white culture from the previous century. Yes, many of these artists were the Talented Tenth, earning their college degrees and winning awards for their art, but they were not living the sitting room upper-class life. They were in the back rooms, attending rent parties, and barely paying the bills. Life for them was not a materialistic or moralistic utopia, and to produce art that promoted social equality, Thurman and many others felt that the art should be as effective in depicting realism and modernism in the African American community.

Within five months of Thurman's critical review of White's *Flight*, Du Bois publishes his "Criteria for Negro Art" in *The Crisis* in October of 1926. Knowing that the summer of 1926 was the summer the younger artists met and planned the journal *Fire!!*, and knowing that *Fire!!* was to be published by November, this "Criteria for Negro Art" is a direct and open attack at what Wallace Thurman had written in his reviews, and likely an attack on Thurman's first artistic literary-only journal. Du Bois was aware of the disdain from the younger artists from the essays and editorials, and as if to borrow his words from Thurman himself, Du Bois states, "Thus all art is propaganda and ever must be, despite the wailing of the *purists*…" (Du Bois, "The Criteria for Negro Art," 49). This label of purist is meant for the younger artists, and possibly directly aimed at Thurman. Du Bois is defending his title as a propagandist for good reason: some battles still need to be fought for social justice and equality. Massive unemployment, even in the midst of an economic boom of the 1920's, and lynchings in the southern region of the US that occur in broad daylight are still harsh realities to many African Americans. Yes, many are living in poor slums, in dirty cities, but to celebrate that in art would be interpreted by the dominant group as a cultural embrace of African American depravity. However, he acknowledges that more could be done and that artistic liberty will be a hard war to win: "Our worst side has been so shamelessly emphasized that we are denying we have or ever had a worst side. In all sorts of ways, we are hemmed in and our new young artist have got to fight their way to freedom" (Du Bois, *Criteria for Negro Art,* 50). Du Bois here is almost admitting that he understands and knows that the art is narrow and limited, and that the succeeding generations are the ones who will have to fight to have a varying style. Still, he rejects the armor of realism they choose in fighting that battle. Rather they must have the approach of respectability.

Du Bois' moral view of the race prohibited him from seeing the race in art as it truly was. In effort to shift from the negative extremes minstrelsy provided in art, Du Bois often highlighted the virtue of the race and hid the vice. His narrow view caused him to dismiss Wallace Thurman's "Cordelia the Crude" as offensive while missing an important aspect of the story. "Cordelia the Crude" is in many ways a retelling of Shakespeare's *King Lear* with a young girl being rejected due to a misunderstanding of her affection and the consequences which bring about her tragic fall. Du Bois dismissed this work because of the promiscuous content; in so doing, he bypassed perhaps one of the most effective classical tragedies written during the Harlem Renaissance.

Some members of the younger generation sought to write and create art that was not simply written for economic security, but was more art for art's sake, but perhaps even more so for their own sakes. By compromising in content and form to be published by the often wealthy and white publishers, African Americans were stunting their own artistic ability. Wallace Thurman worked as a managing editor of the *Messenger* literary magazine, one that he felt was compromising and often caving under economic necessity. In his autobiography *The Big Sea* Hughes asks Thurman his opinion of the *Messenger* and Thurman replies, “it reflected the policy of whoever paid off the best at the time” (Hughes 233-4). The artists who created *Fire!!* took full advantage of their freedom, brief though it was, to pursue and achieve the objective which united them in their diversity of intentions, sensibilities and styles –excellence and authenticity.

Du Bois, a champion of propagandists’ art, as opposed to the “purists” contradicts his own essay, “Criteria for Negro Art,” when he blasts the new journal *Fire!!* as decadent and vulgar. Langston Hughes commented on this reception in his autobiography *The Big Sea*: “None of the older Negro intellectuals would have anything to do with *Fire!* Dr. Du Bois in the *Crisis* roasted it” (237). To Du Bois, the work was too offensive because it painted the race in a negative light, highlighting sexual vices and sexual prowess and ambivalence when the dominant culture already used such tactics to paint African Americans as inferior and savage. On the same vein, one reviewer from the *Baltimore Afro-American* commented, “I have just tossed the first issue of *Fire!!* into the fire” (Hughes 237). While many African American reviewers criticized it openly for being trash, white intellectuals hardly took any notice to it. However, the work found in *Fire!* was possibly an honest representation of African American experience. Ironically, Du Bois criticizes the journal for its crude and offensive content, but he failed to see how Thurman’s story, and many others, was certainly English in its style and content.

Just as Cullen’s “Yet Do I Marvel” expresses the African American experience in English form, Wallace Thurman’s “Cordelia the Crude” articulates an episode in African American life in the shape of Shakespeare’s tragedy. In “Cordelia the Crude” Thurman is signifying the African American and Western literary tradition as Henry Louis Gates Jr. describes in his essay “The Blackness of Blackness: A Critique on the sign and the Signifying Monkey.” In an analysis of Ishmael Reed’s *Mumbo Jumbo* Gates writes:

> A close reading of Reed's corpus suggests strongly that he seems to be concerned with…the precise rhetorical shape of the Afro-American literary tradition and with the relation that the Afro-American tradition bears to the Western tradition…on the one hand with the relation his own art bears to his black literary precursors…and on the other hand the process of willing into being…a literary language…that allows the black writer to posit a structure of feeling that simultaneously critiques both the metaphysical presupposition inherent in Western ideas and forms of writing and the metaphorical system in which the blackness of the writer and his experience has been valorized as a "natural" absence. (Gates 997)

Wallace Thurman is doing a similar thing. He is finding his place against his literary predecessors, and as a member of a younger generation of writers and a member of a bohemian subculture, Thurman is signifying on Du Bois' "racial uplift" ideas by writing about the vice of prostitution, and ultimately about the consequences of misrepresentation. By writing on a young woman mistaken as a prostitute, Thurman is critiquing Du Bois' criteria of a certain type of virtue for African Americans.

This narrow criterion creates a mistaken identity of "real" African American life. For Thurman, this is the tragic death of the Harlem Renaissance. Thurman even reveals much of his opinion regarding this debate in art in his novel *Infants of the Spring.* Thurman writes an exchange between Raymond and Dr. Parker in regards to private versus public lives. Because the members of Niggerati Manor are holding rent parties and interracial sex orgies, Dr. Parker (inspired by W. E. B. Du Bois or even Alain Locke) comes to warn them of the consequences to their reputation: "It's a matter of protecting yourself from unnecessary attacks on your reputation….Talented Negroes are being watched by countless people, white and black, to produce something new and something tremendous…Scandal stories in the newspapers certainly won't influence the public favorably" (197-98). Because the new generation of the Talented Tenth gained a level of fame and all the nation was watching and keeping tabs on their private lives, these individuals had very restrictive private as well as creative lives. Not only were the restrictions for publication choking the expression from their art, the celebrity and pressure to be the example for their entire race was highly limiting to their private life choices during a time when white writers were receiving more acceptance for their bohemian or unconventional lifestyles, like Oscar Wilde, for example. In *Infants of the Spring* Thurman provides his view of why the Harlem Renaissance was a failure. The novel is of conflicting ideologies and theories and various and clashing problems of the New Negro Movement. Ray is often considered the character most in line and inspired by Thurman himself, and his retort to Dr. Parker is a rebuttal to the philosophy of racial uplift: "Can't you see that my generation, or at least the more forward of my generation, is tired of being patronized and patted on the head by philanthropists and social service workers? We don't always want to have to beg and do tricks. We want to lose our racial identity and be acclaimed for our achievements, if any" (200). These multiple restrictions were choking the life and momentum out of the Harlem Renaissance, and *Fire!!* was the younger generation's attempt to burn up the old restrictions and fan a new flame of artistic and creative life for African American artists.

Thurman's issue with members of the previous generation is that they expect a certain representation, but one that serves as a role and not a reflection of life. This prescriptive representation is one of misrepresentation, and misrepresentation is the death of the Harlem Renaissance, just as misrepresentation is the death of Cordelia. Perhaps the narrator in "Cordelia the Crude" is Du Bois. Just as he and those of his ilk quickly rejected the younger generation's work and aesthetic ideals, the narrator rejects and dismisses Cordelia because her appearance and behavior conforms to a certain preset expectation for a prostitute. He quickly assumes her role without fully understanding the depths and complexity of her experience and humanity, and Du Bois criticized and "roasted" the journal *Fire!!* without stopping to notice the depth of humanity expressed within the pages.

Thurman's story also critiques the assumptions Western readers make when they read the narrative. The story never clearly states that Cordelia is a prostitute; however, the frequency of men and the description of her body as object cause the reader to assume and misinterpret her identity. In writing "Cordelia the Crude" as a tragedy on par with Shakespeare, Thurman is also expressing the universal value of African American experience. The absence of Cordelia's race in the story and the universality of her experience within modern western tradition create a story that is not propaganda for a racial uplift movement, but a work of literary art that spans continents and literary movements.

By writing outside of the prescriptive rules of the previous generation, Thurman is a Realist, who sees and creates African American art in the same way Stephen Crane and Theodore Dreiser theorize. Dreiser's "True Art Speaks Plainly" clarifies the role of art in the realist movement against what the moral critique calls immorality: "The extent of all reality is the realm of the author's pen, and a true picture of life, honestly and reverentially set down, is both moral and artistic whether it offends the conventions or not" (917). Art in the early twentieth century sought not to teach a moral lesson or paint some romanticized view of culture but to bear verisimilitude to the reality of industrialization, urbanization, and potential social isolation. Artists such as Dreiser, Frank Norris, and Henry James wanted art to simply reflect what was seen in culture, not to paint some virtuous counterfeit whose purpose is to teach morality. When Thurman creates the complexity of characters in both the narrator and Cordelia, he reveals not just the quality but also possibly the equality of African American creative expression with that of mainstream dominant literary movements, another stated goal of Du Bois. Thurman is striving to lose his racial identity and write a story that is universal rather than racially distinct.

Wallace Thurman also states some of his own theory of what constitutes great African American art in the commentary section of *Fire!!* in his essay "Fire Burns:"

> It really makes no difference to the race's welfare what such ignoramuses think, and it would seem that any author preparing to write about Negroes in Harlem or anywhere else…should take whatever phases of their life that seem the most interesting to him, and develop them as he pleases. Why Negroes imagine that any writer is going to write what Negroes think he ought to write about them is too ridiculous to merit consideration. It would seem that they would shy away from being pigeon-holed so long have they been the rather lamentable victims of such a typically American practice, yet Negroes would have all Negroes appearing in contemporary literature made as ridiculous and as false to type as the older school of pseudo-humorous, sentimental white writers made their Uncle Toms… (48)

Thurman sides with Dreiser. African American writers should write about what they want and what is real, and they should develop realistic, complex characters. The prescriptive nature of the previous generation is just as stereotypical and limiting, albeit with positive stereotypes, as the white stereotypes Du Bois is attempting to debunk and escape.

In Shakespeare's *King Lear* Cordelia is the favored daughter who is ultimately banished when her expression of love for her father is misinterpreted by Lear. Gonreil and Regan, her older sisters, express their love with overwhelming flattery, claiming to love their father more than their own husbands and their own lives in an effort to win more of the inheritance from their aging father. Cordelia sees the trickery in their words and opts to express herself plainly when she says: "I love your Majesty / According to my bond, no more nor less" (Shakespeare I, i, 92-93). Her father, expecting all praise and sycophancy, is reactionary in his response. He disowns her ultimately and banishes her from his kingdom. Her banishment prompts her two older sisters to pursue even more of the kingdom by deposing Lear from his throne and even propositioning themselves to Edmund the bastard son of Gloucester who is equality desirous of power at any means. When Cordelia and Lear are re-united near the close of the play, their roles have reversed. Cordelia is the one with authority over armies of men, and Lear is confused and fails to even recognize his daughter at first. Cordelia takes on the parental role over her father, and Lear humbles himself and follows her directions. However, Cordelia and Lear are captured when the French lose the war to the British in battle at in Act V.. As they are being escorted to the prison, Cordelia. At the close of the play, Lear enters with Cordelia's lifeless body and cries, "I might have saved her, now she's gone forever" (V,iii, 271). Lear's misunderstanding of Cordelia's affection leads to her ultimate fall, her death by hanging in prison.

Wallace Thurman's "Cordelia the Crude" is a compelling example of Thurman as a modern writer with his objective realism at work, but also a repeat of the Elizabethan tragedy. In Thurman's story Cordelia's "race" is never mentioned; however, her family's migration northward, the geography of the streets of Harlem, and a brief mention of her skin-color provide clues that this is an account of a young African American woman. No other distinguishable markers exist, and the story could easily be construed as Stephen Crane's *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* or Theodore Dreiser's own *Sister Carrie*. This story is not New Negro propaganda; it contains no moral as to the vices of prostitution and lewd sexual practices. Rather, it provides insight into the universality of human nature when messages are miscommunicated. It is a realistic account of the consequences of interactions between a young naïve woman and a misinformed man.

The narrator begins a first person account of how he met Cordelia at the Roosevelt Theater and was immediately drawn to her by the way her "overly developed legs and bust" moved as she walked to her seat. Richard Bruce Nugent, a friend and artistic peer of Thurman, supplied an illustration of "Cordelia the Crude" in the November 1926 edition of *Fire*!!, to correspond with the publication of Thurman's story. Nugent's illustrative art supplies a dark profile of the young sixteen-year-old girl naked with fully developed feminine curves. The profile is set against a topical background, perhaps referencing an African heritage, or Cordelia's southern agrarian upbringing. The woman leans against a tropical tree with tall grass beside and along her legs. Though the sketch is a deep black color, the details of Cordelia's body are vividly seen, particularly her breasts, stomach and hips. To the left of the tree are archways, the last of which is ruffled and creased in a triangle pattern. The arches are symbolic of theater curtains, suggesting Cordelia's meeting place for clientele as well as her objectification as a prostitute and sexual performer in a performing arts center. The artist image can be interpreted as a shadow behind a theater screen as well as an African woman in a jungle land (Fig. 1).

The story opens with a third person account of how Cordelia is introduced into the life of prostitution at the Roosevelt Theater: "Cordelia had not consciously chosen this locale nor had there been any conscious effort upon her part to take advantage of the extra opportunities afforded for physical pleasure. It had just happened that the Roosevelt Theater was more close to her home than any other neighborhood picture palace…" (Thurman 523). Cordelia selects this theater for the theatrical rather than the physical entertainment it may lend her and because of the simple close proximity of it to her own home. Cordelia is not on the prowl until after she discovers just what the Roosevelt Theater offers her in addition to a "thrice weekly program" (523). However, within a few visits, Cordelia quickly learns how to fill her nights with company and even how to "find the qualities one admires or reacts positively to in a varied hodge-podge of outwardly different individuals" (523). No matter the appearance or attire of the man approaching her, Cordelia could find pleasant company in all of them. Such an openness and lack of discrimination for concern for the sexual favors she bestows make her "a fus' class chippie" (Thurman 524).

The narrator makes advances to Cordelia, but she comments at his hesitancy and slow approach. She manages to get him to a complex where the liaison can commence, but in a moment of true hesitancy, the narrator backs away from her: "I abruptly drew away from her, opened my overcoat, plunged my hand into my pants pocket, and drew out two crumpled one dollar bills which I handed to her, and then, while she started at me foolishly, I muttered good-night, confusedly pecked on her cold brown cheek, and darted down into the creaking darkness" (Thurman 525). The narrator does not comment on what prompted his quick leave; however, assumedly the narrator was slow in approach and fast to retreat perhaps because this was his first encounter at the Roosevelt Theater, and he was second-guessing his decision in purchasing a prostitute. His awkward 'fatherly' kiss on her cheek following certain animal kisses indicate a change in his perception of her. The narrator knows her age: "sixteen years old, matronly mature," and in the opening line comments that though she is physically a potential prostitute, perhaps mentally she is not (524). Her mental youth and naiveté are what halt him from pursuing a sexual encounter with her and prompts rejection of her and his sudden exit.

The universal authenticity of the text is only part of the greatness of this work. Additionally, the aesthetic use of tragic irony and the unassuming tragic hero are what make the narrative a notable work of art. The narrator leaves Cordelia with two dollars as a parting gift or consolation for failing to meet his end of the deal. The two dollars is an offering to her, a gift to help her without demanding the price of her flesh in return. The narrator supplies the money embarrassingly, but with a consideration of her; his efforts are implicitly intended to help her even possibly escape the financial necessity of prostitution. However, this effort causes the opposite effect, and the narrator is the tragic hero in this tale. His actions do not bring about his own demise, but in an attempt to offer encouragement and relief from prostitution, the narrator's offering is the impetus for Cordelia's full admittance into the life of a prostitute.

The narrator meets Cordelia again six months later at a "well known whore house on one hundred and thirty-fourth street near Lenox Avenue" (Thurman 525). If the narrator was embarrassed or hesitated with Cordelia because of some Puritan notions as to sexuality, the six months' time has altered his reluctance. It is at this whore house that the narrator sees Cordelia in a drunken stupor dancing and propositioning herself to men on the floor. She is more aggressive, commanding an army of men within her presence, and the narrator is not certain that this is the same young girl from the Roosevelt Theater. Seeing her in such a wasted, alcoholic state counters what was to be the result of his contribution into the future of so young a woman. Upon following her and calling out her name, Cordelia stops, recognizes him and simply replies "'Lo kid…" without emotion (526). Cordelia's acknowledgement of the narrator as "kid" indicates a shift in power and perception in Cordelia, a reversal of roles even. She now sees the narrator as the naïve young-minded one rather than a wise benefactor. His money was a cover for his inability to perform his side of the agreed liaison, and it brings about his fall, his demise in her eyes at least.

The greatest tragic irony is seen in the final line of the story. The narrator overhears Cordelia answer questions from other women as to his significance and connection to her. Cordelia answers, "The guy who gimme ma' firs' two bucks" (526). "Cordelia the Crude" ends with such a deliberate and sudden statement of irony that enlightens the entire plot and overturns assumptions made by the reader. This final line by Cordelia, simple and direct, opens up the story to the reader in such a way that it resonates with the reader's humanity, and it reveals the truth of Cordelia's time at Roosevelt Theater. She is not there to sell her flesh for some dollars from various "lewd faced Jews and eager middle-aged Negroes" (523). She is there to find company and companionship, to be promiscuous only from loneliness, and/or boredom, and to give and receive attention and affection. When the narrator misinterprets her expression, he flees from her and seals her fate. At the knowledge that she also can get money for the sexual meetings she is already enjoying for free, Cordelia finds a more lucrative location at a well-established whore house rather than as a potential prostitute at a local theater close to her home. The situational irony revealed in the last line is excellently placed and highly effective in providing a catharsis in the reader, particularly a purging of pity for both Cordelia and the narrator. The narrator's actions were efforts to help Cordelia; however, even though he might have saved her, she is now gone forever.

While Thurman's story is an intriguing retelling of *King Lear,* the promiscuity of "Cordelia the Crude" is a realistic story. In Harlem during the twenties, such a large mass of people came to reside within the city, that rooms for rent were often very full with diverse people. Additionally, the artistic nature of the Harlem Renaissance also lent the environment to rather bohemian principles. But Du Bois admonishes the dominant culture to look at the humanity differently. In an article in the *Crisis* Du Bois pleads with whites to not simply look at the public spaces and performances, but to look at the apartments and homes, the real people and faces of Harlem: "It is not a spectacle and an entertainment, it is life; it is not chiefly cabarets, it is chiefly home" (qtd in Robertson, White, Garton, and White 443). Du Bois was calling for the dominant culture to avoid making quick assumptions about the entire race based on the shadier parts of the town, or of the representations in the nightclubs and bars, but to look into the hearts and homes of the many African Americans who had migrated north to Harlem. However, and once again ironically, it was in those very apartments where much of the vice and sexuality was taking place. Sexuality and prostitution did not simply happen in vice districts like cabarets and night clubs; rather, it was frequent within the houses and flats of Harlem. Cordelia meets the narrator not at a cabaret, but at a public theater and takes him to an apartment room wherein the liaison could occur. In the "Disorderly Houses" article the authors show that often Harlem's landlords would offer privacy, despite the risk of scandal and prosecution: "Faced with competition for tenants, they tolerated guests, granting their lodges what were called 'privileges'" (Robertson, et al. 453). Some landlords had so many families in one flat, that it was hard to know who was a visitor and who was not.

Overall, the study indicates that in urban crowded areas, such as Harlem, landlords kept a degree of respectable social distance and ignored much of what occurred.

The overcrowded nature of Harlem led to housing reform in Harlem, of which Du Bois was a participant. The housing reform was needed because as in the words of Lawrence Veiller, “The introduction of strange men into the family life [leads] to the breaking up of homes, to the separation of husband and wife, to the going astray of young daughters, just emerging into womanhood” (qtd in Robertson, et al. 444). There is great fear for the young daughters with so many diverse people and many meeting places in the city. Such a young daughter is Cordelia. The fear among the dominant white culture was miscegenation rather than prostitution: “It was concern about interracial mixing that led the Committee of Fourteen to send a black man undercover to investigate Harlem’s nightlife in 1928. The 130 reports he filed described visits to apartments being operated as buffet flats” (Robertson, et al. 446). These buffet flats or rent parties were spaces, “through which residents raised money for rent by charging guests a few cents for admission to their apartments and providing food, liquor, live music, and uninhibited dancing in a highly sexually charged, unrestrained environment” (461). It is at one of these rent parties where the narrator encounters Cordelia once again. Thurman’s account of Cordelia’s journey from a young woman entering into womanhood in a busy, crowded city with avenues to meet “friends” in private homes, reveals another side of misunderstanding for Du Bois. He encouraged the dominant class to turn away from the cabarets were modern sexuality was on public display because it made the African American in urban spaces appear too promiscuous. Rather, they should look at the homes and the private lives of ordinary residents of Harlem to find the “reality” of African American life, a more conservative picture, he claims. Perhaps it is just as well for the politics of a respectable representation that Du Bois advanced that the dominant culture focused on the cabaret and paid little attention to the goings on of Harlem’s homes.

Wallace Thurman wanted to present his race honestly, telling the greatness and commonness of the people and to write of their victories and their vices. In so doing, he and his peers were the Moderns of the New Negro Movement. Writing such honest work isolated him from the propagandist magazines, whose goal was to give African Americans a certain representation, a seal of quality and equality with the dominant culture. The "vulgarity" of Thurman's story excluded him from *The Crisis,* but ironically, Thurman was actually representing the race with more honesty than Du Bois, and reshaping a portion of Shakespeare's tragedy *King Lear*. The minimizing of race, the tragic irony, the final denouement, and the catharsis make Wallace Thurman's "Cordelia the Crude" an exceptional work of literature, rather than a distinctively African American Harlem Renaissance work.

Fire!! was just a flash, a moment of artistic expression where the artist expresses the truth within himself. The artist must do so, not for art's sake, but for his own sake, his people's sake, and for the sake of all humankind. And that neither self, nor truth, nor art can be divided into boxes labeled "Black" and "White", or "High" and "Low." In creating *Fire!!* the younger generation was critiquing and questioning their greatest leader, W. E. B. Du Bois. Just as Washington's plans were too limiting to the race according to Du Bois, when Du Bois came into power and leadership, other African American artists were just as limited, just as stereotyped. Wallace Thurman's"Cordelia the Crude" is a story of the dangers of misrepresentation, assumptions, and labels. Misrepresentation and labeling lead to Cordelia's assigned fate; misrepresentation leads to the sealed fate and failure of the Harlem Renaissance. Indeed, this is a story that is signifying the western tradition by mirroring one of William Shakespeare's tragedies. At the same time, it articulates the African American experience as a universally human one. It signifies and critiques the restrictions of life, art, and the artists' lives by the propagandist literary magazines. Thurman's very brief story is one that could be from the dominant white culture, but at the same time, it has details that are realistic only to Harlem. By writing a story similar to Dreiser's, Thurman is demonstrating the equality of African American artists with that of the dominant culture. It is both Elizabethan and Modern. It is both African American and universal. “Cordelia the Crude” tells of the tragedy of misrepresentation.

Chapter Three:

Zora Neale Hurston and the Varieties of the Female Spirit-

From Tragic Inferiority to Triumphant Indifference

Zora Neale Hurston is a veritable tour de force and, some could argue, a contradiction to the goals set forth in *Fire!!* Hurston disagrees with the tenets for art set forth by the conservative or Victorian views of African American art and culture held by Du Bois and his peers. In "How it Feels to Be Colored Me" she states that she does not "belong to the sobbing school of Negrohood who hold that nature somehow gave them a lowdown dirty deal and whose feelings are all hurt about it" (Hurston, "How It Feels to Be Colored Me," 941). She did not agree or see the victimhood of African Americans against the dominant culture. Sure, she was aware of the injustices that occurred, but she found that life within the African American culture, beyond the approving eyes of white culture, was varied and beautiful. Most of her stories deal with life inside African American families and communities, particularly her own Eatonville, Florida, an isolated all African American Southern community where she was reared. Such a unique upbringing, in a southern town that somehow escaped the staunch segregation and vitriolic racism of the rest of that region, Hurston came to value the distinctions and complexities of the common speech patterns of southern rural African Americans. These vernacular patterns were often classified as examples of blackface, and a mockery of black culture rather than an accurate depiction of rural life. Even the possibility of an all African American town like Eatonville was suspect and considered fantasy by many of Hurston's critics. However, her experience provided a wealth of original material, folklore, witticism, and perspectives for realism in African American art.

Hurston was overly critical of Du Bois and often of Locke. Just as she is credited with giving the younger artists the title the Niggeratti, she coined a nickname for Du Bois, “Dr. Du Bois,” reflecting his desire to represent African Americans as clean, educated, urban, middle class whites with a darker hue, than allow African American artists represent themselves in diverse hues and perspectives in art. Likewise, she was suspect of Locke and his altruistic interest in young artists of the movement. In a letter to James Weldon Johnson, Hurston offers a cutting critique of Locke: “Alain Leroy Locke is a malicious, spiteful, little snot that thinks he ought to be leading the Negro because of his degrees…. So far as the young writers are concerned, he runs a mental pawnshop. He lends out his patronage and takes in ideas which he soon passes off as his own” (qtd in Kaplan 413). Hurston also viewed Du Bois’ criteria for African American art as catering to white expectations and dismissive of the younger generation. However, Hurston can be viewed as quite a controversial figure in that she also catered to white patrons in power to maintain the financial freedom to research and write “in interesting ways and I chose” (qtd in Kaplan 4). While she has been argued as catering to the ways and wants of her white patrons, Hurston perhaps is just changing the joke to slip the yoke at its best.

Hurston’s characters may closely fit with the blackface minstrel mask; however, when humans have agency over even their negative images, they can use what was once used to mock them, as a mask to protect them. Mikko Tuhkanen argues that

> the abusiveness of minstrel images can under certain circumstances be turned around and mobilized for self-affirmative purposes by African Americans… they are not limited by or to oppressive direction or determination.... by embodying the blackface persona, black performers were able to periodically reconfigure racist representations and challenge the oppressive logic on which they were based. (18)

In other words, by putting on the minstrel mask, whether on stage, in writing, or in relationships with dominant culture publishers and patrons, Hurston is going and changing the conversation in ways that give her more agency and power than she otherwise would have had.

In "The Unbearable Weight of Authenticity: Zora Neale Hurston's 'Their Eyes Were Watching God' and a Theory of 'Touristic Reading'" Rosemary V. Hathaway calls attention to the white patronage of Hurston's work and they contrasting ways in which her work was received by African American reviewers and white reviewers. The most famously known review of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* was written by Richard Wright, who was critical of the "minstrel technique that makes the 'white folks' laugh...her novel is not addressed to the Negro, but to a while audience whose chauvinistic tastes she knows how to satisfy" (as cited in Hathaway 117). Wright took issue with the "quaint" and simplistic style particularly regarding the dialect that mirrors minstrelsy of the previous century on stage. His assessment of Hurston's style catering to white tastes is reinforced by Lucille Tompkins review in the *New York Times Book Review* also in 1937. Tompkins acknowledges that "…it is beautiful. It is about Negroes, and a good deal of it is written in dialect, but really it is about every one, or at least every one who isn't so civilized that he has lost the capacity for glory" (as cited in Hathaway 117). Hathaway considers such a review a white "touristic" review of Hurston's style, one that "first romanticized or fetishizes ethnicity, then erases it" (117). Tompkins review of the novel in many ways reinforces Wright's critique of it; however, both reviewers are taking a broader view and missing the many nuanced ways Hurston captures the vernacular language and folk traditions.

Even from the beginning of her time in the Harlem Renaissance Zora Neale Hurston had a writing style that was original to her region and her upbringing. While Wright and many of the following generation rejected her writing style as a mockery or repackaging of minstrelsy, Hurston was enthusiastically received among her own peers - the newly formed group of young writers known as the

Niggeratti shortly after arriving in Harlem. Her story “Spunk” won second place in the *Opportunity* magazine competition in May 1925 and the same story appeared in Locke’s *New Negro* anthology. Not only were her short stories adored in print form, but her orations of Eatonville made her a celebrity at parties all around Harlem.

Hurston, though living in Harlem and earning an education at Barnard College, was the antithesis of what African American womanhood was to be at this time. The New Negro Woman was to be urbane, educated, eloquent, and with middle-class, borderline bourgeoisie – and have traits that lift up the standards of the race. However, Hurston created characters that were rural, and earthy, but women who were also complex and intricate in their characterizations. These female characters may have been uneducated, poor, rural, and Southern, but they were both confident and insecure; triumphant and defeated. Hurston’s female characters were often multifaceted representations of humanity, the composite goal of art for these younger artists.

Her donation to the younger generations’ literary journal *Fire!!* was a play entitled *Color Struck* and a short story called “Sweat.” Both of these creative works are set in the South, near or around Eatonville, Florida, and both protagonists are living out working class lives with rural traditions and occupations to survive their lower class station. When pitted against the backdrop of blackface minstrelsy, one could argue that these simple stories of southern life are quaint and precious, reinforcing the stereotypes of Jim Crow from minstrel theatre; however, Hurston reveals the financial and social degradation African American women suffered, even in isolated environments like Eatonville. Plus, when these two texts are studied beside each other, one can see the complex and even paradoxical realities of lower class minority women. These texts reveal women in tragedy and triumph, in anxiety and assurance, and in oppression and opportunity – situations lower class African American women may experience simultaneously. In the first work Hurston submits a for the new literary journal, she offers tragic play of a young dark-skinned woman who creates her own tragic downfall. Hurston's play offers a rather interesting perspective to perhaps one of the best illustrations of tragedy for the common people, even before Arthur Miller attempted it. In addition, Hurston's second submission could be classified as a tragedy, where a character creates his own demise; rather, the story is more of a folklore, a trickster tale where the antagonist of the story receives his comeuppance, with nature as the avenger. The main protagonist finds the courage to speak directly to that which threatens her and she then rises to a point of apathy and indifference, where the enemy is no longer a threat. The goal for Hurston, and for all the contributors to *Fire!!*, is to provide an assortment of characterizations and illustrations in African American art. Again, diversity in character is perhaps the truest guarantee of authenticity.

Arguably, the opposite standard was common for female authors and their female characters during the Harlem Renaissance. Typically, the heroine was of one or two types: the Victorian elite whose heart is pure, or the tragic mulatto whose tragedy is never finding her place. The educated, pure-hearted elitist character can be vividly seen in the first play of the Harlem Renaissance, Angelina Grimke's Rachel (1920). Rachel is an educator and a care-taker for African American children in her community, and the play revolves largely around her relationship with some of her students. Rachel is also engaged to a man who is devoted to her, Tommy; however, as Rachel comes to learn, rather naively, of the lynching of the parents of some of her students, Rachel's heart is quickly turned against marriage. She resolves to never marry and bring a new generation of African American children into the world if their futures are to be so dangerous and violent. The tragedy of the play is both the lynchings and the lack of justice served to the offenders, but also the reality that the only possible solution is to end African American motherhood altogether, even for those women most fit for the job. This is the quintessential formulaic play – it has an elegant, educated heroine who is determined to use her education to better the lower or less educated of her race. However, she is limited or prohibited by the atrocious reality of lynching and violent racism. This play demonstrates the virtue and intelligence of African American women and highlights the racist abuse against African Americans. The play one of the first of the propaganda plays of the Drama Department of the NAACP. When it was first performed the program stated "This is the first attempt to use the stage for race propaganda in order to enlighten the American people relative to the lamentable condition of millions of Colored citizens in this free republic" (qtd in Sutherland 1). This play was the beginning of art as propaganda, as a means of pushback against social degradation; therefore, this was the play that shaped Du Bois' understanding of the role of art in African American culture.

The other representation for African American women in particular was that of the tragic mulatto. Nella Larsen's *Quicksand* is a great example of this format; however, Larsen's goal in telling this mulatto tragedy sheds light on why such representations are deadening to African American female characters in art. *Quicksand* details the life of Helga Crane, a mixed-race woman who struggles to find her place in a segregated world. The epigraph of the novel, from Langston Hughes' poem "Cross," details the struggle Helga faces: "I wonder where I'm gonna die, / Being white nor black?" (lines 7-8). The novel centers around the various types Helga puts on to find the right balance between racial uplift and respectability and personal expressive freedom. Helga goes from the Naxos Academy of racial uplift to Copenhagen, and finally to marriage to a southern preacher. The most telling of the tragedy is the contrast between the two stations and rooms Helga finds herself in from the opening of the novel to the conclusion. In the opening, Helga is surrounded by luxurious oriental and colorful belongings in her small room at college. This room is furnished and it serves as her respite from classes and other stresses of college life, particularly with the faculty and other students. Her room is comfortable and relaxing with bold colors. The tone of the text throughout reveals her middle-class sensibilities and her educational success. By the conclusion of the novel, Helga has traveled to various locations and tried on different personalities in attempt to find a space that affords her true self-expression, even sexual expression. In the end she finds sexual expression in the confines of marriage, but that leads to children which deplete her entirely. She remains in “the four rooms of her ugly brown house…obliterating the starkness of its white plaster walls and the nakedness of its uncovered painted floors...the choppy lines of the shiny oak furniture and subdued the awesome terribleness of the religious pictures” (Larsen 121). Helga embraces this bland life at first, and is met by the other women as uppity and arrogant in her suggestions for community improvement. However, she soon finds childbearing limits her ability to build the life she wants, and Helga wastes away in a bed of disappointment, considering herself a fool for choosing marriage and children so rashly. While the novel posits questions about mixed female liberties and limitations, it is a telling account of the elite woman who struggles to find her happiness in various communities. Also rather interesting is the term “tragic mulatto.” These accounts of individuals trapped in a society defined so rigidly as black and white, when they are neither, is not truly the definition of tragedy, in Westernized classical terms. To be tragic the character brings about her own demise by a tragic flaw, by her own doing, but Helga and other mulattos in a segregated society are victims of social injustice – more pathetic or sympathetic than tragic.

Both *Quicksand* and *Rachel* provide characters who are educated, middle-class, and set on bettering the station of African Americans through education and discipline. Lower class African Americans from the southern region of the United States were characters that were frowned upon because of the close representation to blackface minstrelsy. The further away from the ‘darky’ stereotype an author could go, the more positively it was perceived as race propaganda, except where Zora Neale Hurston was concerned. Her characters were mostly lower class southerners with clear African American vernacular dialects, but her characters were more developed and more dimensional than the caricatures on the minstrel stage, perhaps because she understood and could capture the nuance of "authentic" African American culture.

The play *Color Struck* details a community of cake walkers who have gathered to hold the first ever state level cake walk in the state of Florida. Emmaline Beazeby and John Turner of Jacksonville, who are cake walk partners but also lovers, arrive on the train car; however, the main point or conflict in the story is not about the cake walk, but about colorism and its tragic effects on Emmaline. Even on the train, Emma is overwhelmingly jealous of Effie, who is a mulatto girl with "…a yaller [*sic*] face" (Hurston, *Fire!!*, 9). This obsession with skin pigmentation and preference shapes an inferiority complex in Emma. Interestingly, colorism is typically group prejudice in favor of lighter skin color, but in this story the only one stressing skin color is the darker skinned protagonist. No one else in the story is color struck against Emma; however, she is still greatly shaped by the assumed colorism of her community, especially the assumed light-skinned preference John should have in favor of the mulatto Effie and against her own dark skin. These assumptions weigh heavily on Emma, who cannot escape the jealousy and her perceived inferiority of her own skin.

This inferiority is the main tension in Emma and John's relationship, and by John's admission, it is a regular occurrence as well: "Emma, what makes you always picking a fuss with me over some yaller [*sic*] girl. What makes you jealous nohow? I don't do nothing" (Hurston, *Fire!!*, 8). Emma admits she is madly jealous of the lighter-skinned girls, and that jealous love is the only love she has for John, largely because of her own dark complexion. It shapes and shades every interaction with people, particularly lighter-skinned women, for in the cast of characters Hurston describes John as "a light brown-skinned man." John is devoted to Emma, but Emma presumes that John, as a light-skinned man, would prefer the lighter skinned women in their community.

However, the opposite is true. John reassures Emma repeatedly that he could choose a lighter-skinned partner, but he chooses her because “De darker de berry, de sweeter de taste!” (Hurston, *Fire!!* 10). Emma does not accept this but rather lets her insecurity dominate and control her emotions and her reactions. Even when it is time for the cake walk, Emma almost opens up to John on what is really happening inside her mind: “John let’s we all don’t go in there with them. Let’s we all go on home… Cause, all them girls is going to be pulling and hauling on you…John, Ah’m skeered. I loves you” (11). Emma is afraid of losing John to the lighter skinned girls, but she has no basis so far in this play to validate those fears. Where does Emma’s insecurity originate? There is no proof of colorism against her dark skin by anyone in her community or at the state-wide cake walk. Rather, everyone praises her and expects Emma and John to be the cakewalk champions of the state. The only colorism that happens in the story is that which Emma has against her own self.

Emma is not from Eatonville, but Jacksonville, Florida, and that perhaps is significant. In “How it Feels to Be Colored Me” Hurston elaborates on the overwhelming confidence she feels as a child in Eatonville and that her sense of darker skin and Otherness does not occur until later in her educational career when she attends school in Jacksonville. Even in Eatonville there was no clear protection from colorism, but rather some protection from white racism in an all African American town. Instead, in a town full of African Americans, some preferential treatment was common among townspeople toward the lighter-skinned community members.

So even if Emma has not directly experienced colorism in the few scenes of the play *Color Struck*, it has already occurred in her past and shaped her understanding of the social hierarchy. It is so deeply ingrained in her psyche that Emma seems to be the only one in the play who is actually color struck, which leads to her own tragic downfall.

Outside research proves just how profoundly racism and color preference is on the consciousness of those who are affected by it, the darker-skinned members of a group. Ironically, Emma is confronted by Eurocentric, westernized beauty standards that have been defined and reinforced by white men in a way generates an inferiority complex and hatred of self:

> Both raced *and* gendered, black females are presented with *white* male beauty perceptions (light skin, long hair) which, as a double whammy, also impact the influence of *black* males, and major determinant of *black female* beauty perceptions and sense of overall attractiveness. (Robinson-Moore 67-68)

The colorism is, but is a reactionary result of lighter skinned preference in the dominant white culture. If "whiteness" is the standard, lighter skinned minorities are closer to the standard. Emma, as a darker-skinned female, fails to meet the American beauty standard, and this has a larger effect on her security in the future beyond just her relationship with John alone.

Whereas traditionally the tragic mulatto is in a position where she does not belong and becomes isolated, this genre of tragic mulatto fails to be a tragedy in it truest definition. It is not tragic, but pathetic because the mulatto protagonist has no control in the situation to bring about her own downfall. Rather, she is a victim to social situation she cannot control. In addition, the mulatto, even during slavery, was commonly given more opportunity and advantages, and by the twentieth century lighter skin-color illustrated a superior status in both dominant culture and African American communities. The mulatto who chose to pass as "white," did so usually after great deliberation, knowing the consequences of social isolation from the African American community. The tragic mulatto is not tragic because her actions are not a result of a tragic flaw, but a biological social preference. Emma however, reacts to her situation and chooses, more than once, isolation over happiness with John. Her choices prompted by anger and jealousy, Emma's tragic flaw, lead to her own demise.

Arthur Miller is best known as the playwright who brought tragedy to the common man in his play *Death of a Salesman*. To qualify the death of Willie Lowman as a tragedy against the traditional Aristotelian definition set forth in *Poetics*, Miller wrote "Tragedy and the Common Man," an essay that reveals how even a lower class individual, if given the power to choose his or her own destiny, would or could choose a worse fate than that which would elevate his or her status or happiness: "..the tragic feeling is evoked in us when we are in the presence of a character who is ready to lay down his life if need be, to secure one thing – his sense of his personal dignity" (Miller 1). It is the character's determination to establish her rightful place and the actions, good or bad to achieve this, that determine tragedy. So what is Emma's sense of personal dignity, and how is it being attacked if she hates her own skin color? She is fully convinced that John should and does prefer lighter skin and smoother textured hair despite his words to the contrary. As soon as John shows any sign, no matter how innocent his behavior maybe, Emma's assumptions are proven true and John a liar. To secure her dignity and restore her rightful place, Emma dismisses John completely rather than consider any other options.

Hurston's Emma in *Color Struck* is not the tragic mulatto, but the tragic darker-skinned counterpart. Emma is also truly tragic in that she is never victimized in the play for having a darker complexion; however, she rejects John's offer to dance the cakewalk because of her hatred of lighter skinned mulatto girls. John, who has been practicing the cake walk for almost a year, quickly grabs a replacement, light-skinned Effie. Although Emma gave him no other options than to go home or dance with the only other available partner, Emma sees this as an affront to her dark skin and to herself as a person. John's choice of Effie is justification to end the relationship completely, and she does not blame John but half-white people: "Oh, them half whites, they gets everything everybody else wants! The men, the jobs – everything! The world is got a sign on it. Wanted: Light colored. Us blacks was made for cobblestones" (11). While research can possibly validate the reality of colorism in a segregated society, Emma has no experiential proof of this preference in this text other than what she has created in her own mind, and the situation she has fashioned.

The play's final scene reveals just how tragic her decision is; the reader sees her downfall as it extends to 20 years in the future. Emma is in a one room shack, caring for a bedridden, white-skinned child. This sick child is hers from a miscegenation relationship. Nothing is really known about the father of the child, but the condition of the house and the condition of her sickness indicate that Emma is poverty-level and struggling to provide for herself and her own. With the lack of details within the gap of 20 years, one could argue that this scene is not necessarily tragic; that Emma's lot in life is not due to her own rejection of John at the cakewalk. Emma and her child are truly victims of a society that does not afford the same opportunities for women and people of color. The poor condition of Emma's child and home are not on Emma's hands. That is not tragic put full of pity. However, the final scene of the play and Emma's response leave little room to question Emma's tragic downfall by her own choices and her inferiority complex.

John enters the shack and acknowledges his continual love for Emma as well as his desire to resume the love affair and marry her. Without hesitation John professes, "…my wife is dead now and so I came as soon as it was decent to find *you*. I wants to marry you. I couldn't die happy if I didn't" (13). Emma again assumed his deceased wife was a light-skinned girl, a compliment to his own light-brown tone, but John admits he married someone as dark in skin tone as Emma. At first Emma is embarrassed by the state of her house and her own aged dark-skin and refuses to let him light a lamp. However, it is the girl in the bed, the mixed child that perhaps she is most afraid for John to see. Immediately, John teases her for having a white husband: "Talkin' bout me liking high-yallers – yo husband musta been pretty near white" (12). Emma explains her desperate situation as a single mother with no skills to earn a respectable wage and provide a decent life for herself or her daughter. This is also a product of colorism in American society. Historically, it the darker-skinned minorities who result in lower socio-economic status and are often unemployed. Even in recent studies, this statistic is true. In a study published by *The Journal of Race & Policy*, “Darker-skinned black women, more likely to be under-educated, and under-employed, are also more likely to be poor than lighter skinned black women” (Robinson-Moore 68). Emma has struggled to provide with what resources she has, but she admits “I ain’t got a whole lot…Nobody don’t get rich in no wite-folks’ kitchen, nor in de washtub. You know I ain’t no school-teacher an’ nothin’ lak dat” (Hurston, *Color* Struck, 13). Ironically, Emma knows she the opposite version of both Rachel and Helga, women who are able to use their status to educate and help her race. Emma’s resources come from labor performed for the dominant culture, and the compensation is not enough to elevate herself, much less others in her race.

John, as a lighter-skinned man, has returned to her from the North, where he has been highly economically successful. Although his profession or occupation is never listed, he assures Emma twice of his wealth and status by describing the material wealth he has obtained in Philadelphia. He glances about the humble shack and then asserts, “…wait till you see dat little place in Philly! Got a ‘Rolls-Rough,’ [*sic*] too – gointer teach you to drive it, too” (13). John’s success provides further proof that lighter-skinned individuals, even in minority communities, have more opportunities.

Despite Emma’s lower class status and her mixed half-white child, John is not deterred; rather, he immediately calls the child “our girl” to denote his instant reception of this child into his life. His determination and praise of Emma, his acceptance of her perhaps at her lowest, releases some of her own thoughts of inferiority when she asks pleadingly “John, you love me – you really want to marry me, sho’ nuff? [*sic*]… we could git married tomorrow” (13). Also, Emma assumes was “some high-yaller dickty-doo,” yet John claims his deceased wife was “jus’ as much like you as Ah could get her” (13).

The consideration that John does in fact prefer a darker skinned woman allows Emma to hope that John means what he says and he truly cares for her no matter her social rank or skin pigmentation.

In a study to determine how romantic relationships influence body image and self-esteem, authors Suman Ambwani an Jaine Strauss report that "the discrepancy between how a woman sees herself and how she perceives her partner's ideal woman was predictive of her body dissatisfaction and general psychological functioning…that women who believed that their husbands were satisfied with their bodies also tended to be satisfied with their own bodies" (14). As Emma begins to believe that she is John's ideal woman, she finds confidence in his offer of marriage and even suggests they marry the very next day.

John offers to pay for a doctor for the sick girl and sends Emma off to bring the nearest doctor to her home. Emma quickly prepares to leave but hesitates when John comments on the girl's long full hair: "Gee, she's got a full suit of hair! Glad you didn't let her chop it off" (13). The girl's hair is an indication of her white heritage. Skin color has been a primary means to discriminate against individuals, but hair texture, particularly among African American women, has been historically and even presently used to discriminate and belittle individuals. An African American woman's hair is often considered "good" or "bad" depending on how closely it fits with the Eurocentric beauty standards of long and straight (Robinson-Moore 79). Emma's daughter has more of the lighter skin and longer hair, more in compliance with the Western beauty standard. When John acknowledges the length, he in essence is subtly praising way this girl's hair meets the ideal.

Hair can be styled and manipulated so it comes with social norms and beauty standards as well. However the Eurocentric beauty standard has been the dominant one since slavery. Hair beauty standards in Western American culture have to do with beauty and self-image. However, in Africa, even as far back as the fifteenth century, hair styling and maintenance is about cultural identity and bonding among women the Yourba, the Mende, the Wolf and the Mandingo people (as cited in Majali, Coetze, and Rau 158). Colonization and imperialism led to European beauty standards and the intersection of race, and culture, and gender. African females in a predominantly Western culture were separated from the beauty norms and practices expressed in hair styling from Africa. Instead, natural African hair came to have negative associations as "bad" hair, and those with straighter, silkier hair that fit more closely to the European standard came to have "good" hair. This was also an indication of the genetic process of mixing race offspring. Those with mixed features came to have more mobility, even during slavery. Those advantages again, continued post slavery throughout the twentieth century and even into the twenty first.

After slavery, women of African heritage with smoother hair also received more economic and status mobility. Desire for this smooth hair of Eurocentric white standards came with it new means to generate this hair and thus an entire beauty industry devoted to chemically processed hair that is straighter and therefore considered "good" hair. Countless hours and amounts of money have been spent in pursuit of "beauty standards that reject and exclude distinguishing features of African Black women" (Majali, Coetzee, & Rau 160). Even Madam CJ Walker, an African American entrepreneur became one of the wealthiest African American women in America from a line of hair care products she created for African American women. She created the market for products such as hair softeners and hair straightening combs that would give African American women hair that conforms to the American beauty standard – the standard that denoted higher social status. Walker clearly became very wealthy with her hair products, but it was the desire to look like a higher social status that many women spent large amounts of money to fabricate this standard. In other words, Walker became wealthy by taking them money wealthy, but even not so wealthy women who wanted to manufacture an image that denoted higher status and wealth. Walker is an entrepreneur of an entirely manufactured commercialized racial uplift.

Hurston here in *Color Struck* is not creating a drama for the woman with smooth processed hair, but rather the poorer woman without the means for medical care for her child and certainly not the economic means to change her looks and hair texture through chemical treatments and products. The point to be made here is that the obsession with straight hair as "good" hair comes with it an obsession to purchase products that manufacture that "good" hair. If one does not have the means to change her natural curly, kinky hairstyle by industry products, her hair is consistently "bad," but worse her social status is consistently expressed by her hair care and styling of lack thereof. The African American woman with "bad" hair in the twentieth century is typically also one of lower class and status. The woman with straightened hair is one of the elite perhaps – one of the Talented Tenth even, who projects the "best" or "purest" version of African American beauty by Eurocentric standards. This is akin to Cullen's approach to sonnet poetry, providing the best version of African American content contained and produced in Eurocentric classical poetry standard or form. Hurston is not making a propagandist drama here as prescribed or assigned by Du Bois; rather her play is not of the elite class but the lower class. Emma is desperate and rather destitute, and while the text does not go into descriptions of her hair texture in particular, one can infer that her skin color and her jealousy over her daughter's straighter, longer hair denotes that Emma's hair texture is more naturally African than European. Her hair texture is possibly an additional marker of her social status, and Emma's behavior indicates that she believes her external looks in hair and skin color are justifications for her lower status and downtrodden state.

Worthy of note is the connection to the wealth generated by Madame CJ Walker and her status and the status of her daughter at the height of the Harlem Renaissance. Walker's daughter A'Lelia Walker was the host of "The Dark Tower" – a meeting place in Harlem where black and white artists met to discuss the avant-garde movement in art. Madame CJ Walker's wealth attained in creating tool by which African American women could more closely meet European or American beauty standards, afforded her and her daughter the means by which they could then have money and status enough to not just meet the standard, but even meet the dominant culture.

To have the straighter, smoother hair many African American women have paid a high price, and those of the lower classes have not had enough resources to spare on beauty products. Just as the darker skin creates an association with a certain race, so too the curlier and kinker hair texture denotes the lower socio-economic status and a lack of resources. These two indicators are beyond the control of individuals, but they place poorer, darker-skinned African American women at a huge disadvantage, even among others within the same race.

Returning to Grimke's *Rachel*, Nella Larsen's Helga Crane, and even the Winold Riess' type illustrations found in the *Survey Graphic*, the type or standard was one of urban, elite, wealthy, and civilized stock. The women in particular were represented as clean, pure, of virtue and respectability. In *Survey Graphic*, Winold Riess submitted a collection of portraits entitled "Four Portraits of Negro Women." These illustrations are of the respectable sort with titles like "The Librarian" and "Two Public School Teachers." The point of these illustrations was to show the quality and sophistication of African American womanhood. The last of the four illustrations was a portrait of Elise Johnson McDougald, who appears the palest of the four with her hair also looser and straighter. After the publication of *Survey Graphic* McDougald commented that the illustrations felt to be more a sort of propaganda for the white race than an accurate illustration of the black one (qtd. in Stavney 541).

Emma is the antithesis to this propagandist respectable womanhood. Emma is poor, with dark skin, kinky hair, limited resources and education, from a Southern segregated community, and Southern rural vernacular to match her station. Emma's experience closely matches that of the minstrel mask.

However, she is still a full member of the race of women, and her story and her status are worthy of representation. The fact that her inferiority complex comes from situations beyond her control make this story truly pathetic, but her active participation in her continued unhappiness and downfall are what make it truly tragic.

While Hurston is writing about the proletariat here and giving a human face to what was once only known as a minstrel mask, she did not mind writing about the success of the African American community. According to Carla Kaplan's *Life in Letters* Hurston attempted to write a novel about Madame CJ Walker and her success as the first African American billionaire. In 1951 Hurston set about writing *The Golden Bench of God* and was somewhat excited to revise and expand if from novella to full length novel. When writing to her agent Jean Parker Waterbury, Hurston states, "You know, never a truly indigenous Negro novel has been written so far. Punches have been pulled to "keep things from the white folks" or angled politically, well to show our sufferings, rather than tell a story as is. I have decided that the time has come to write truthfully from the inside. Imagine that no white audience is present to hear what is said" (qtd in Kaplan 656). Rather than reject the success of Madame CJ Walker and continued success of her daughter A'Lelia Walker, Hurston chose their story as the basis for what she deemed the indigenous inside story of the African American experience.

To return again, to Hurston's play… Emma hesitates at the sight of John admiring her daughter's hair, but retreats to find the doctor. When she returns, Emma attacks John for simply standing so close to the sick girl's bed, even though John was nearby to offer a drink and comfort to the young ill child. Emma angrily screams, "I knowed it!…A half-white skin…Let me go so I can kill you. Come sneaking in here like a polecat!" (14). Just the proximity of John to Emma's mixed child generates an explosion of jealousy. Even though John's actions could be interpreted as fairly innocent and not openly antagonistic toward Emma, she interprets these actions differently. John's praise and proximity to her daughter's longer hair, proves in her mind once again that John is a liar, and that he is more attracted to Western or Eurocentric beauty standards. Emma chases John away, both broken from the impossible reality of Emma's hatred of herself. John leaves broken hearted saying, "She so despises her own skin, that she can't believe anyone else could love it!" (14). Emma's self-loathing of her skin, coupled with resentment towards her own child's skin, creates the tragedy of this play. In Ambwani and Strauss' study on romantic relationships and body image, they reported also that "individuals who experience self-doubt [or low self-esteem] tended to underestimate the intensity of their partner's love" (15). This is true of Emma and her relationship with John. Her low self-esteem and self-hatred cannot allow her to trust the words and even the innocent actions of someone who has come to elevate her status and be a source of security and happiness, so she dismisses him again.

To fully understand the value of the tragic fall, one must understand the basic definition of tragedy. Tragedy depicts the downfall of a basically good person through some fatal error or misjudgment, producing suffering and insight on the part of the protagonist and arousing pity and/ or fear on the part of the audience. To explain this definition further, consider the following principles or general requirements for Aristotelian tragedy: the tragedy should evoke pity or fear on the part of the audience, the tragic hero is essentially good and admirable to the audience, and the tragic flaw comes by the hero's personal error or decision. In *Color Struck*, pity is evoked in the last scene, where John leaves sorrowfully. The doctor then arrives to inform Emma that it is perhaps too late to save her child, and the curtain falls on Emma by "*the window rocking in an even, monotonous gait, and sobbing*" (14). The entire scene evokes pity where Emma was to be John's happy ending, John was to be Emma's as well as the means by which the sick child had hope of recovery, but all of that has tragically been reversed or cut short by Emma's tragic flaw.

In addition, Emma is classified as admirable and good throughout the play, except for her tragic flaw of inferiority or jealousy. She and John recount their younger years together and how Emma was playful and fun, such a joy to John's heart: " 'Member how Ah useter pull mah necktie loose so you could tie it back for me?" (13). Even at the cakewalk the two share an ice cream and flirt and John openly admits to Emma, "you certainly is an ever loving mamma- when you aint mad" (10). Emma is likable and even sweet when she is not plagued with jealous thoughts. Audiences cheer when the bad guy goes down. On the other hand, the downfall of an essentially good person disturbs an audience and elicits compassion. As a rule, the nobler and more truly admirable a person is, the greater will be the anxiety or grief at his or her downfall. The same is true for Emma; she is admirable and the potential to see her life take a turn for the positive generates hope in the audience. That reversal of her situation and the desperation of the final scene conjures pity in the mind of the audience for her.

Lastly, in a true tragedy, the hero's demise must come as a result of some personal error or decision. In other words, there is no such thing as an innocent *victim* of tragedy, which again begs the question of the term for the "tragic mulatto." In addition, a genuinely tragic downfall cannot be purely a matter of blind accident or bad luck. Instead, authentic tragedy must always be the product of some fatal choice or action, for the tragic hero must always bear at least some responsibility for his or her own doom. Again, Emma fits this criterion. She is responsible for her own downfall in dismissing John because of her own insecurities. It happens twice in the duration of this short play. Emma, enraged, ends her relationship with John at the cake walk because of her enviousness over light colored skin. In the final scene of the play, one can see just how devastated that choice has made Emma the past 20 years: "Ah been havin' a hard time, John, an' Ah lost you- oh, ain't nothin' been right for me! Ah aint never been happy" (13). Emma admits here that she has paid dearly for the decision to end their relationship years ago, but in this scene Hurston gives Emma and John a second chance. Emma may rectify her tragic situation and find a happy ending after all. But her tragic flaw of jealousy and self-loathing, rather than the tragic flaw of pride and hubris that usually accompanies Western classic tragedies, causes her to make the same mistake, the same error, rejecting once again her chance at happiness. Emma is the first tragic hero for the common woman.

In a letter to W. E. B. Du Bois in July of 1926, Hurston agrees to revise a play she had submitted according to his suggestions: "Will turn my attention to the revising of the play at once" (qtd in Kaplan 87). The footnote Kaplan provides to the suggested play is possibly *Color Struck.* One indication Kaplan gives for this being the play mentioned in the letter, is that in June of 1926, Du Bois writes a letter to Hurston with a review of a recent play. In Kaplan's words, "Du Bois wrote enthusiastically, calling the work 'beautiful' and requesting revisions to that her black characters not view blackness as a curse" (footnote on 87). Du Bois was against the idea of characters hating their darker skin color as if it were a curse of the impetus for self-hatred and downfall. While Hurston agrees to revise this play, *Color Struck* as it is published in the journal *Fire!!* has not removed the curse per se. Self-hatred of darker African skin and natural African hair texture still exists in this play.

In *Color Struck* Huston provides a complex tragic hero, but in the second story she submitted to the journal was once of triumph and revenge. "Sweat" has been interpreted as Adam, Eve, and serpent retelling of the Garden of Eden. The story certainly lends itself to an easy read of marital strife with an evil snake at the center of their conflict, and much scholarship has been devoted to the African American vernacular English and the metaphor and witticisms used throughout the story. Doris Day's article "'De Talkin' Game': The Creation of Psychic Space in the Selected Short Fiction of Zora Neale Hurston" argues that this story is "double-voiced, evincing that persuasive voice of Hurston the storyteller, but also depicting characters whose voices claim ownership of their own psychic spaces" (269). This is true for Delia who confronts the snake in this story, and it is true of Hurston the author, who readily takes ownership of Eatonville and the culture that town embodies.

Throughout the story, Delia speaks and stands up for herself against Sykes and the snake, the two things she has feared most. "Sweat" has been interpreted as a retelling of the Judeo-Christian narrative of Adam and Eve from Genesis, but it is also the blending of African and American mythology, revealing the stance Hurston and the other contributors to *Fire!!* take about art, particularly African American art in the American modern art movement. By highlighting the various masks and mythologies surrounding the snake, earth, and sweat of humanity, Hurston is uncovering "Sweat" as a multi-layered artifice; a blending of mythologies of the trickster snake. The snake is both the belly-crawler who terrorizes the woman and destroys man, as in the serpent in Genesis, but at the same time this snake is the Damballa, of Haitian voodoo culture, the serpent god of cosmic equilibrium who exacts justice for Delia when no other power would avail. Just as mythologies merge and echo each other, Hurston is exposing the merging qualities of culture. Perhaps the short story is hinting at the multiplicities of art and culture that African Americans would have known both from within the Veil and from beyond its margins. By blending these two mythologies, Hurston is intricately connecting African culture and literary history with American literary history.

The story opens with Delia soaking white laundry of white people, a ritual she performs each Sunday night after church. Similar to Emma in *Color Struck* Delia is not educated nor in a position to use her status to elevate her race. Her status as a washerwoman is particular in a few accounts as she is the anti-thesis to the New Negro Woman and therefore more akin to the mammy character of minstrelsy. She is also the primary financial provider of the residence. Barbara Ryan makes note of the washerwoman's labor and the invisibility of male labor in her article "In/visible Men: Hurston, "Sweat" and Laundry Icons" where she acknowledges that the washerwoman's role as provider in the home and the process by which she is sent into the white world to do that job, creates a visible sign of her presence in the dominant culture; whereas, an African American man's job, if more invisible, reified the stereotype that African American men were lazy and abusive against their women. In her article, Ryan compares Delia to Carter Woodson's argument in his account "The Negro Washerwoman Gave Her Life as a Sacrifice: Negro Washerwoman, A Vanishing Figure." Ryan also mentions the story of "Sweat" in comparing it to the Langston Hughes poem "Song to a Negro Wash-woman" published in the January 1925 issue of *The Crisis.* Both Woodson and Hughes depict and elevate the washerwoman as one whose work sustains her family and her spiritual life. Ryan argues that "Sweat" does not fit the script for the washerwoman as defined by Woodson and Hughes; something is amiss. Ryan concludes that "my findings help analysts see more in 'Sweat' as a stand-alone. But they also put 'Sweat' into conversation with 'Song' and 'Vanishing.' The eye-opener is, as so often, greater knowledge of historical context" (Ryan 84). In other words, looking at "Sweat" as a type of Judeo-Christian or as a Genesis account alone, and the salvation of Delia through her diligence and service, does not fully square; rather, more information is needed.

While "Sweat" provides an easy villain in Sykes, justice cannot be had by various levels of authority within the community. Delia remains defenseless despite having her injustices known and publicized in town and in church. These two locations should be sources of justice for a faithful member. However, neither the community nor the church is willing or claims to have the authority to help. Rather Delia, changes churches and hides from public view because she knows that the institutions of humanity in a patriarchal society favor her husband and exploit her.

In the text the town, including Mayor Clarke, discusses the mistreatment of Delia and the villainy of Sykes. Everyone knows that Delia is a faithful washerwoman and that her employment is necessary for her survival: "' Hot or col', rain or shine, jes ez reg'lar ez de weeks roll roun' Delia carries 'em am' fetches ‘em on Sat’day.’ ‘She better if she wanter eat’ said Moss. ‘Syke Jones aint wuth de shot an’ powder hit would tek tuh kill em” (41). It is common knowledge that Sykes Jones is a useless and worthless man who does not provide a living for himself or his wife; rather, he takes from his wife and leaves her to provide for herself. The entire town is in agreement regarding the unfair treatment, but no one dares to interfere. In this patriarchal culture, where the economic and religious institutions are led by men, few men are willing to fight to dismantle the authority of another man even though they see the injustice of it. Some of the men even confess, “‘There oughter be a law about him,’ said Lindsay. He ain’t fit tuh carry guts tuh a bear.’ Clarke spoke for the first time. ‘ ‘Taint no law on earth dat kin make a man be decent if it aint in ‘im’” (42). Even though everyone on the porch knows that Sykes is emotionally and financially abusing an oppressed woman, no one will act on her behalf; rather, the subject is changed to the heat and a watermelon, the cooling and feeding of their bodies from the oppressive heat, and Delia’s oppression is forgotten.

When Delia changes church congregations she reveals just a bit about the lack of authority this community institution has on her behalf. Once Delia acknowledges her deep hatred of Sykes, she also acknowledges that she has changed her church membership because she is unable to attend church and participate in a sacrament with sin in her heart: “...Ah got mah letter fum the church an’ moved mah membership tuh Woodbrides - so Ah don’t haftuh take no sacrament wid yuh” (43). Interestingly, Sykes has admitted openly to her and to others in the community that he harbors hatred for Delia, at least in part, because she is a skinny woman; however, he has not been convicted or held to account at the church, or encouraged to attend another congregation. His sins go unpunished and he is unrepentant. Granted, repentance perhaps is a personal affair, and Delia’s changing churches could be a sign of her own personal guilt for hatred, or even her lack thereof. She cannot attend church with someone she hates and is unwilling to forgive. However, Sykes equally hates Delia, but no such change in lifestyle is mentioned or expected from him or from the church, at least none that is revealed in the text. Rather, Sykes, even while condemned in word by the community, is not held accountable for his oppressive abuse of Delia emotionally or financially. The point to be made here is that Western Eurocentric notions of the patriarchy permit his abuse because it reinforces other patriarchal means of power.

In Judeo Christian Eurocentric traditions, the Genesis account marks the woman as the initiator of the first disobedience, the man with passive responsibility, and the snake as the trickster who brings about the fall for both of them. However, in Afro-Haitian tradition the snake, or serpent, is worshipped as a god of justice and balance in the earth, connected to water and rainfall, and a participator in creation. Damballa is the god of the intellect, and he restores equilibrium to the universe. Damballa is one of the most important of all the loa. Rather than look to the patriarchal institutions for help, "Sweat" looks to spirituality to heal and sustain a counter-colonial oppressive struggle.

When looking at voodoo as a literary means of telling or revealing African American cultural identity, often the direction is toward more contemporary writers of the *Negritude* movement that challenged intellectuals to reject Western ideology in favor or a more 'back to Africa' approach. Where most scholars acknowledge the Christian symbolism in "Sweat" they also cannot justify Delia passively allowing the death of her husband while she "sits by the four o'clocks" just outside the house (Hurston, "Sweat," 45). Cheryl A. Wall claims that the good Christian woman commits murder by choosing passivity; as if willful assertion is more damning than omission of power. In her article "*Mules and Men* and Women: Zora Neale Hurston's Strategies of Narration and Visions of Female Empowerment" Wall asserts that in commintting an act of mirder-by-omission, a Christian woman "risk[s] her soul's salvation" (671). Delia is complicit in the death of Sykes by her own passivity as her husband perishes; however, in Afro-Haitian folk tradition, her indifference or lack of interference is what permits the serpent god Damballah to avenge her injustice.

Voodoo is a religion of the black diaspora with origins in slavery, colonization and cultural plurality. Although it is open to blending with other cultures, there are still certain beliefs which inform voodoo ideology like the trickster, spiritual possession, and a blending of time and events between past, present, and future. These can be seen clearly in “Sweat.” The snake is the obvious trickster sent wandering in the house, sending vengeance to evil-doers. The snake also possesses Sykes and transforms or shape-shifts him into various animals, as if to punish him for his inhumane treatment of Delia. Delia, herself, undergoes a conflation of past and present as she separates herself from the guilt of hatred of Sykes. A voodoo reading of “Sweat” reveals a justified Delia, even as the “surge of pity too strong to support bore her away...” (“Sweat” 45). The question remains, for whom is this surge of pity? It is pity for her own circumstance not pity for Sykes. Damballa the snake had brought justice for Delia.

In the opening of the story, Delia stands her ground against Sykes and even threatens him with a skillet when he comes home and tramples on the clothes she has sorted to wash. Sykes usually comes home and the two of them argue over her washerwoman job. Typically, Sykes attacks and abuses her; however, this time “Delia’s meekness seemed to slip from her shoulders like a blown scarf” (“Sweat” 40). The assertive Delia scares Sykes just a bit, but even more it causes Delia to reflect on her own thoughts and opinions of her marriage and her husband: “She lay awake, gazing up on the debris that cluttered their matrimonial trail. Not an image left standing along the way...too late now to hope for love, even if it were not Bertha it would be someone else….too late for everything except her little home” (41). She is tired of fighting for the marriage or even fighting against her husband. Rather, she begins to feel “a triumphant indifference to all he was or did” (41). This triumphant indifference is the key to why she gains vengeance by the snake. She chooses not to be involved, even as her hatred increases.

Sykes responds by bringing the snake into the house, a trick to keep Delia in check. Delia, who is deadly frightened of snakes, is forced to have one outside her doorstep. It becomes so widely known that people in the community come to see it: “The village soon heard that Sykes had the snake, and came to see and ask questions” (43). Even here, the injustice of bringing an object of which Delia is afraid is not addressed. Sykes is not confronted for scaring his wife in her own home; rather, the village hates the snake as well, but no one confronts the patriarch in his own home, even if that home is paid for by his wife’s sweat. Delia is made to live with both the husband and the snake of whom she remains afraid. Delia also is made to hide from the community even after changing church membership because her husband’s paramour Bertha, is now in town indefinitely: “She avoided the villagers and meeting places in her efforts to be blind and deaf” (“Sweat” 42). She does not want to know or have to acknowledge the affair that she knows others have been made aware of. Sykes has made the affair public and has paraded Bertha around town promising her whatever she wanted from his own money, and arguably from money he stole from Delia. Yet, it is Delia who hides in shame, not Sykes. The society remains passive to her abuse and slow destruction, and is therefore as guilty by omission, or a failure to act on behalf of Delia’s oppression, as Delia is guilty the death of Sykes by failure to act on his behalf when attacked by the snake.

The snake however is the trickster here who wanders along once removed from the soap box to enact justice and create order out of chaos. When the rattlesnake has digested his meal of frogs, he slithers from the soap box and hides inside the laundry basket, as if to target Delia. However, she flees the house and hides in the barn where she takes time in “a period of introspection, a space of retrospection, then a mixture of both. Out of this an awful calm” (“Sweat” 44). By looking inward, and looking back, Delia finds peace and calm within her own soul. She even acknowledges to herself and to the universe, “Well, Ah done de bes’ Ah could. If things aint right, Gawd knows taint mah fault” (44). The process of merging time and memory, Delia reassures herself that she is guiltless.

Rather than harming Delia, the snake manages to attack Sykes when he returns home. Interestingly, this final scene reveals Sykes is to blame for his own destruction in more than one way. Sykes destroys the soap box that he ensnared the snake as soon as he arrives, perhaps providing some wood for Delia’s washerwoman job. However, chopping up the box means he is aware that the snake is on the prowl. He knows the snake is loose somewhere. Additionally, Sykes had used up all the matches that Delia had purchased, and his oversight leaves him fumbling in the dark next to the stove under which the snake is coiled and hidden. Delia takes the last match when she lights the lamp and heads to the barn, but even in that time she admits that Sykes “would’nt fetch nothin’ heah tuh save his rotten neck, but he kin run threw whut Ah brings quick enough. Now he done toted off nigh on tuh haff uh box uh matches” (“Sweat” 44). This last match in the matchbox is used for Delia’s protection and illumination as she heads to the barn, but when Sykes is being attacked repeatedly in the dark, he cries for a light to see. Sykes used most of the matches so that there were none in his time of need, and he set the snake on the front porch to attack his wife, but finds himself attacked instead. This would appear tragic, except for Sykes’ villainy. His wickedness towards Delia and the injustice he has afflicted without penalty deems the scene an evening of the score. Delia is avenged by Sykes’ own foolishness.

As to the continuing discussion of the voodoo aesthetics, the snake attacks Sykes, but he seems to possess him as well. The narrative states that as Sykes wrestles with the snake, his “ability to think had been flattened down to primitive instinct and he leaped - onto the bed. Outside Delia heard a cry that might have come from a maddened chimpanzee, a stricken gorilla. All the terror, all the horror, all the rage that man possibly could express, without recognizable human sound” (42). Sykes has been taken possession by the snake and all that remains is animalistic sounds, as if he has been reduced to an inhuman state to represent retributive justice for his inhumane treatment of Delia.

Damballah, the serpent god of equilibrium, restores rightfulness and balances out wrongs. The community fails to fight for Delia despite their knowledge and authority in this situation, and Delia's passivity removes her from interfering with the work of the snake. As Sykes is calling out, Delia is right outside the window listening to his suffering. She cannot move; her legs are too weak to step in on his behalf. However, she does slowly creep to the doorway as Sykes crawls in the same direction for assistance: "She saw his horribly swollen neck and is one open eye shining with hope. A surge of pity too strong to support bore her away from that eye that must, could not, fail to see the tubs...She could scarcely reach the Chinaberry tree, where she waited in the growing heat." (45). She sees the damage and the transformation of Sykes by the snake but she is moved by pity and leaves him in his torment. What type of pity is this? If she were moved by pity or compassion on behalf of Sykes, she would have spoken or tried to help; however, she leaves him and lets him die without a word even spoken. Perhaps the pity she feels is one of regret, disappointment, or even shame for stepping in so close or even leaving the tubs and the laundry nearby for now "that eye which must know by now that she knew" (Hurston "Sweat" 45). Her pity is perhaps on her own behalf, as if to suggest that she is not regretful for his death, but regretful that he discovers her proximity as he dies. The surge of pity is from an understanding that the snake had exacted justice on her behalf and had pity on Delia. She was now free of her abuser, and still has her home and the tubs, her means of financial support. Her indifference leads to her independence.

"Sweat" when read as a retelling of the Judeo-Christian Genesis account falls short of that interpretation at least in part because of the guilt by omission or passivity of Delia. How devout is she if she changes church congregations so that she may participate in communion without guilt, but will silently let her husband die while he cries to her for help? The lack of assertiveness could be read as a return to her previous meekness, but even that is questionable due to the fact that Delia confronts the snake with confidence and even descends from the barn "without fear" (44). Rather, her meekness is not a sign of her righteousness or her fear, but again of her triumphant indifference that allows Damballah, the serpent god, to fight and avenge her. This story is a conflation of Western and Haitian tradition, a creolization of religious myth, ritual, and recompense. The use of the Haitian god Damballah, the god of the mind and equilibrium, one can see a greater appreciation for Delia's inactivity. Where the Western social structures of the town and the church fail to remove oppression for Delia, Voodoo is the source of resistance for her.

By conflating the Voodoo account of Damballah with the Genesis account in "Sweat," and by endowing the characteristics of classical tragedy on a lower class African American woman in *Color Struck,* Hurston is achieving the goal of the Niggerati in showing that the lower class proletariat are worthy of artistic expression and that African American art is diverse and pluralistic. More than one representation and more than one definition will suffice.

Chapter Four:

Flames from the Dark Tower of Modern Verse

The poetry section of the journal *Fire!!* was primarily Langston Hughes' area of concentration in his contribution to the content of the journal. Hughes himself selects two of his own poems in the poetry section, but he also selects six other poets to contribute a poem. The other poets are Countee Cullen, Helene Johnson, Edward Silvera, Waring Cuney, Arna Bontemps, and Lewis Alexander. The collection of poems in the journal is again a variety of African American expression for they contain poems by both Cullen and Hughes. Wallace Thurman, the editor-in-chief, compared Cullen and Hughes to the two distinct groups during the Harlem Renaissance. Cullen was the poster child for Du Bois and the old guard of form and even content. He frequently uses sonnets and referenced and all but copied English Romantic poets in his poem; whereas, Hughes uses blues and jazz poetry with free verse and folk colloquialism in his poetry. Also, Lewis Alexander was a student and master of Japanese haiku form, and his poem "Streets" is a modern haiku on par with Ezra Pound's "A Station in the Metro." By examining the variety of poetry, both in form and content, the cultural plurality and diversity is celebrated in the Dark Tower of poetry. By even including Cullen, the respectable poet of the Harlem Renaissance, Thurman and Hughes were showing even their acceptance, at least in a small part, for old forms, as long as other forms are also allowed.

The title "Flames from the Dark Tower" is significant as in its reference to A'Lelia Walker's palace in Harlem where African American and dominant white culture often met and held rent parties – a location where the elite of the dominant culture and the elite and wealthy of the African American culture came to mix and mingle. Langston Hughes wrote about this 'Dark Tower' in his article "Parties":

> A'Lelia Walker was the then great Harlem party giver…big-hearted, night-dark, hair straightening heiress, made no pretense at being intellectual or exclusive. At her 'at homes' Negro poets and Negro number bankers mingled with downtown poets and seat-on-the-stock-exchange racketeers. Countee Cullen would be there and Witter Bynner, Mureil Draper and Nora Holt, Andy Razaf and Taylor Gordon. And a good time was had by al....A'Lelia Walker had an apartment that hale perhaps a hundred people…Her parties were as crowded as the New York subway at the rush hour. (Hughes, *Big Sea* 244)

Walker's home was called the Dark Tower where whites and African Americans met and often mingled. This title is reflective of the obsession with which white Americans were interested in African American culture, not as only as low art, but as a new high art to be exploited. However, the senior editor Wallace Thurman or perhaps the editor of the poetry section, Hughes himself, selected the title of the poetry section to be called "Flames from the Dark Tower" as if to suggest that this is what the *Fire!!* is about - that the goal of the journal is to burn up the white exploitation and middle class gentility, and to burn up the prescriptive nature of white patronage and create autonomous African American art.

Ironically, as these poems are examined, they reflect a movement from the English sonnets to even white Modernist poets, as if the poets cannot fully separate from the dominant culture, but are connected to it always in part because of a shared cultural history. However, while a few of these poems may follow a similar form or pattern of the dominant culture, the content is reflective consistently of African American culture. Some poems make clear indications of race, while others have no racial markers, but have content that implies race. Perhaps the goal of the poems as they are arranged in the journal is to show the diversity with which these younger artists could wield words in their poems. Rather than stick to one form or propagandist content, these poets provide a snapshot into how fluid and varied they are with ideas, and that by extension, how divergent African American culture and life is beyond the stereotypical definitions. Certainly the content or persons of the poems are more commonly of the folk rather than the elite middle class group.

It is rather interesting to position the poems selected and arranged in “Flames from the Dark Tower” in relation to Hughes’ essay “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain.” In the essay, Hughes begins by mentioning a fellow poet who wishes to be known as a poet, but not a racially indicative one. By avoiding racial content and form, this poet, Hughes assumes, wishes to be white and considered as good as white and accepted by white audiences and publishers. It is commonly known that Hughes was referencing Countee Cullen in these first few paragraphs, and Hughes continues to understand why Cullen holds the artistic stance he does based on his middle class, Eurocentric upbringing. However, the point and thesis of “…Racial Mountain” is to denounce that logic and help the younger artists of the Harlem Renaissance to embrace the beauty and distinction of African American culture, particularly lower class folk culture. Hughes argues adequately that by denouncing the complexity, humor, and pathos of African American folk in favor of Nordic white “virtue” and value, the African American artist is missing a huge opportunity to even reveal to African American communities how lovely their race and culture can be.

The collection of poems begins with a submission from Countee Cullen, the would be “white” poet. The first poem is entitled “From the Dark Tower” almost to assume that Cullen’s poem is the essence or mantra of the poetry collection entitled “Flames from the Dark Tower”; however, upon close analysis, one can see that Cullen’s poem is simply the starting point, and not the end game. Cullen’s poem, though racial in content, is perhaps the source of contention for the manifesto for the younger artists, or at least the first step where so much more distance should be covered in literary expression. The Dark Tower is the African American equivalent of the Ivory Tower in white intelligentsia, and the Dark Tower represents the middle class values of Du Bois, Locke, and Johnson. By letting Cullen be the first submission, the reader can see the starting point based on the older generation – that the goal of art for African American artists is to practice racial uplift, to show how virtuous and good the race can be against a century of racist minstrelsy. However, as the following poems progress, the flames begin to consume the Dark Tower and destroy that single thesis. Rather than elevate the race according to Victorian virtue, these poems reveal more of a rejection of Victorian culture, a celebration of folk culture, and attempts at modernist poetry with raciated content.

When examining Countee Cullen's "From the Dark Tower" and knowing of his fondness for English poets like an appreciation or complexity of the Dark Tower reference gains a bit of depth. Just as Hughes makes reference to a poet who does not want to sound black, and therefore, doesn't want to be black, Cullen sends a retort or a comeback to Hughes comment.

In Cullen's poem "Uncle Jim" the voice of the poet is remembering a conversation with his Uncle Jim about the status of white people and how foolish the poet is to want to copy them in his work: "Young fool, you'll soon be ripe" (Cullen, "Uncle Jim," line 8). The poet, or possibly Cullen, references a friend who takes all his joy. Cullen has a high appreciation for the English poets and as he copies some of their work; however, he cannot get past his friend's words and the admonition that by his Uncle Jim that he is too naïve, "too green." Is it Uncle Jim who is just too formally uneducated to appreciate the beauty and artistry of Romantic Poetry, or is the poet who is too young and naïve to see the truth behind the phrase "White folks is white"(line 1)? The friend who "eats his heart / Always with grief of mine" is possibly Hughes himself, who though just a year his elder, seems to also side with Uncle Jim. That the adage "White folks is white" actually suggests not that color is simply color, but that race implies a social and cultural hierarchy, and that Cullen as non-white, is not of the culture of the white culture. Rather, as Hughes would suggest in "Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain" by trying to 'act' white, Cullen is hiding his own racial distinctions as if to be ashamed. In the final stanza of "Uncle

Jim" the poet is in the grass with his peer and friend, studying Keats' "Ode to a Grecian Urn" yet his mind reflects back to the words and opinions of his friend and uncle. This has now perhaps tainted the way in which he can view and appreciate English poetry. Reading this poetry now with a better understanding of the racial hierarchy, the poet cannot stay focused on it without also feeling a sense of betrayal toward his own race.

This is as if John Keats, the reference to the Dark Tower generates thoughts not of the Walker mansion alone, but perhaps also of the Robert Browning poem "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came." In Browning's poem, the young knight is the last of his company of knights, the last one to complete the mission to the dreaded Dark Tower. As the last of his kind and as one who may be walking towards his death, this youth contemplates whether or not to keep progressing or whether to abandon his mission since so no one else is with him and no one else would know. In the poem the young knight keeps seeing the dangers ahead, but he presses to achieve his goal and conquer the beast within the tower. The reader does not know if this knights is successful, but his success is not as important to the poem as his perseverance to keep going despite the obstacles. Near the end of the lengthy poem the knight comes to the dark tower unsure of what he will encounter once inside. The knight cries, "*Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came*" (Browning, line 204).

As with Browning's poem, Cullen is about perseverance, pressing on, knowing that a day is coming when things will shift in balance and power, when the path of oppression will end, as it does for the knight in Browning's poem. Ironically, just as Cullen in some ways is borrowing from the Victorian English poets, Browning's title comes from a line in William Shakespeare's *King Lear*. Edward, son of Glouster, in the guise of Tom Bedlam quotes these lines as if to appear mad. Edward does so to save his life from a false accusation. Similarly, Cullen's voice in "From the Dark Tower" knows that certain behaviors serve as disguises that also preserve life: "We shall not always plant while others reap/...Nor always countenance, abject and mute/...We were not made eternally to weep" (Cullen lines 1-8). The subjected status is not gladly accepted; rather, many are biding their time and waiting for the truth of their own agency to come to light as they shed their masks of self-preservation.

"From the Dark Tower" is an English sonnet, which states a tension that is somewhat resolved or eased by the conclusion. In classical English sonnet form, the first eight stanzas state the problem or reveal the tension in the poem, and the remaining 6 lines solve the problem or at least ease the tension overall. It also contains 14 lines, but the rhyme scheme does not fit with the English or Italian sonnet requirements. Rather, this poem's rhyme scheme is of abba, abbba, ccdd, ee. Even though the rhyme scheme does not fit with English sonnet conventions, the English Romantic reference, even in part, to Robert Browning's poem "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came" and Shakespeare's *King Lear* reveal Cullen's desire to be a good (white) poet. This makes this poem rather idyllic in the ways it represents the goal or aim of African American art and the artist at the Racial Mountain. Not only is the line number, rhyme scheme, and content English or Eurocentric in nature and form, but the content of the poem, though racial, is suggestive of racial uplift. Rather than celebrate lower class proletariat life, this poem suggests that over time African American culture will be culturally elevated to the same prominence and validity as the dominant culture.

The language of the poem is clearly not the colloquial language found in the jazz poetry of Hughes and others, but resonates with elitist and highly educated verbiage: "Not everlasting while others sleep / Shall we beguile their limbs with mellow flute" (lines 5-6). The language choices made by Cullen are filled with poetical, nay even non-prosaic in quality, as if Cullen deliberately rejected the commonplace language of the masses. In addition, "From the Dark Tower" is about the tension of racial subjugation and oppression. Even in the first two lines it reads "We shall not always plant while other reap/ The golden increment of bursting fruit" (lines 1-2). Cullen is acknowledging the laboring class of

African Americans who has done the excruciating work of capitalism, but has not gained the “golden fruit” – the monetary or economic return for that labor. The poem even acknowledges the harshness of that labor: “Not always bend to some more subtle brute; / We were not made eternally to weep” (lines 7-8). This oppressed group has been under the brutal force of a prominent power, but rather than reflect that struggle in the ordinary language or the people under that oppression, Cullen selects the language of the oppressor, but the language that he assumes will elevate the potential of his race. Perhaps as a member of the Talented Tenth, Cullen is only elevating his own potential as a student of English poetry.

The second stanza is the shift or resolution in the tension in the poem. Where the first stanza acknowledges the violent abuse and economic thievery of the dominant culture, the second stanza highlights the promise and beauty of the darker race. In the first few lines of the second stanza it reads “The night whose sable breast relieves the stark. / White stars is no less lovely being dark” (lines 10-11). The poem compares the dominant white culture as stark white stars who need the dark night sky to really be seen. The dominant culture is in a more prominent and politically and economically stronger position because it has used and abused other minorities to maintain its status. In other words, without the contribution, labor, and ideas of the darker race, white America would not be as advanced or economically secure. It is because of that abuse that those in power remain in power. However, the contribution and the effort put in by the minority parties, has provided America with creations, art, inventions, theories, and stability. The poem ends with a slightly ominous conclusion. Rather than provide a clear solution to the problem as is common in sonnet poems, “From the Dark Tower” provides almost a solution on the vein of Booker T. Washington. The last two lines of the poem state the solution Cullen provides to inequality and oppression: “So in the dark we hide the heart that bleeds / And wait, and tend our agonizing seeds” (lines 13-14). Cullen begins the poem and the tension of the sonnet with an analogy of planting seeds and never reaping, but he ends the poem with the same tension. Nothing has been relieved. Rather, the answer the poem provides is to wait and continue the servile work. It resonates with Booker T. Washington's "Atlanta Expo" speech in 1898; the speech that Du Bois challenged in *Souls of Black Folk.* Washington's aim in opening the Tuskegee Institute was to provide labor skills and technical training to southern lower class African Americans in areas that would not pose a threat to the social status quo of a racist territory. In his famous speech, Washington called on all the audience to "Cast down your bucket where you are!" (690). To the African Americans in the audience he was calling for them to use the servant class skill set they already had from slavery and poverty and enhance those skills and prove their worth even as laborers. He was calling on them to give up on the goals of the Reconstruction of a quality education, political office, and social equality with the dominant culture. To the white members of the audience in Atlanta, both from the North and South, he was encouraging them to hire the laborers of the African American race - laborers whose skills have been proved from as far back as slavery. His goal was to give them jobs and a wage, not political and social equality. He was writing this during the repeal of Reconstruction, when African Americans were issued violent consequences for stepping out of line or out of place. His solution to problem of racist oppression in the Atlanta Expo speech was to continually prove the worth, dedication, and faithfulness of the African American race so as to win the favor and trust of the dominant culture. By winning this trust, eventually equality would arrive. The subjugated race would just have to wait it out and keep working, sowing, planting.

In his *Souls of Black Folk* Du Bois provides a counter or criticism of Washington's ideas in a completely separate chapter. The overall goal of *Souls of Black Folk* was indeed to counter the blackface minstrel stereotype and its effects on African American life. Washington's educational philosophy kept the African American population, particularly in the South as second class citizens, "happy and grateful" for that status at least in theory. In his chapter "On Mr. Washington and Others" he acknowledges the obvious short-comings of Washington's pedagogy. According to Washington's apologetic and assimilationist positions the African American culture, under his direction, would be forfeiting three primary things: access to higher education according to ability, unhindered right to vote, and civil or social equality. By not demanding social and political equality or access to higher education for at least a Talented Tenth or the race, African Americans were politically, socially, and economically inferior. They, as a people, were just one vote away from slavery without the right to vote, and they would never be able to challenge the social and economic position of dominant white culture if they did not have the skill, education, and access to the jobs and power. Du Bois understands well the oppressive nature of the region, since he wrote the account in part in response to what he witnessed while at Fisk in Nashville, TN. However, his call for change in *Souls* is one that demands change now, not the wait and see approach. Rather, Du Bois calls for equality in the present age.

While Du Bois criticizes Washington for his 'wait and see' approach, his poster child of the Harlem Renaissance poets, Countee Cullen provides a poem that reflects more a blending of both Washington and Du Bois. The content of planting but never reaping, both to open and close the poem and the call to wait it out, resounds with Washington's approach to the gradual uplift of his race. However, the English Romantic style and elevated language is reflective of Du Bois' goals for how to mobilize the race. This is the Dark Tower - this is the intelligentsia's view point to look down upon the lower classes and dictate to them what the goals and solutions will be. Interesting that Hughes and Thurman permitted this poem to go first in their "Flames" section, for this is the sort of writing and solution approach they wish to demolish and consume in *Fire!!* Cullen's "From the Dark Tower" is just the starting gate; the rest of the poems in the collection scorch the 'wait it out' approach by either setting the record straight and highlighting the urgency of the need for change, or by using colloquialisms and distinctive racial content that elevates the lower classes rather than looks down upon them.

The next poem in the poetry section is Helene Johnson's poem "A Southern Road." This poem details a lynching in language that resonates with ritual and sacrifice. Johnson seems to show great complexity with her understanding of how culture is learned and shared. While painting a picture that shows the trauma and violence of lynching, Johnson also shows the perception of how a social group can justify and celebrate the bloody destruction of another human. The lynched victim is a "blue-fruited gum, / like a tall predella" (lines 13-14). He is an altar where the lynch mob has verified their cultural reality of racism and white power through the brutal killing of another. This death is in a shady forest – a "hidden nest for beauty / Idly flung by God" (lines 9-10). Where the beauty of nature resides, this evil also occurs as if to suggest that to the racist, this is natural, and as beautiful as the trees in nature. The lynching is also on a Saturday night, "Before the Sabbath" (line 12) as if it is connected to the religious traditions of the culture as well as the social practices. This, to the riff raff, is a spiritual purging before the worship on the Sabbath. They have left the "tortured shadow" swinging alone in the forest "pregnant with tears" (line 8). These lines indicate that the victim and others are not willing participants to this sacrifice or ritual. They have cried in desperation over the savage death while the lynchers celebrate and bask in the beauty of the ritual. "A Southern Road" skillfully shows the cultural multiplicity of a lynching. For the lynched it is a cruel annihilation without reason or retribution; for the lynchers it is an alluring portion of the liturgy for the status quo. By revealing both extremes to this single event, Johnson is highlighting the reality of cultural diversity and the multiple perspectives called upon during modernism.

Edward Silvera has two poems published in this collection of ten poems. "Jungle Taste" and "Finality" tell of the life and death, the vitality and casualty of life. "Jungle Taste" contains racial markers to African American culture in particular; denoting that the distinctiveness of black culture is only fully appreciated by black culture. Interestingly, in Helene Johnson's "A Southern Road" it is white dominance and privilege that permits the white lynchers to hum "a lazy little tune" and ignore the cries and tears of the African American community during a public murder. That same privilege makes it nearly impossible for white culture to see and appreciate African American culture fully. *Fire!!*'s poetry section opens with Cullen's appreciation of African American and English Eurocentric culture in "From the Dark Tower," Johnson's poem highlights the ignorance the dominant culture has toward oppression, and here Silvera's first poem acknowledges a quality in African American men and women that dominant culture cannot see.

In the lines, Silvera notes a "...strangeness / In the songs of black men / Which sounds not strange / To me" (lines 5-7). The voice of the poet is one that fully understands the way culture is created and represented. This is an acknowledgement that the usurpation of another culture in art, such as in blackface minstrelsy creates a convoluted art expression. Likewise, the beauty of black women is not fully appreciated or even seen except by black men. The voice of the poem calls it a "Jungle beauty" that is unique to African American women, referencing again the title "Jungle Taste." Silvera's poem seems to make commentary against the ideas of primitivism at the hands of dominant culture artists. While white patrons are paying for the creation and distribution of primitive art forms during the Harlem Renaissance, Silvera's poem seems to indicate that the true beauty and artistry of African American culture can only be truly appreciated, noticed, and validated from those who share the experience. African Americans are the ones who understand the complexity and depth of that experience, so they are the only fitting ones to fully grasp the significance of their culture represented in various art forms.

While in some ways "Jungle Taste" resonates with primitivism and even echoes Du Bois' *Souls of Black Folk* with the goal of giving life and vitality to the songs and visages of African American life, "Jungle Taste" is not just a primitive or Du Boisian poem in content. Where Du Bois wishes to give a more fully developed picture of African American life to white dominant culture Americans than the one they have previously known through blackface minstrelsy, "Jungle Taste" is simply stating that the depth has always been there and is not for the dominant culture to discover or exploit. It has been there for those who know enough to see it, and to those from whom it has remained hidden, it will continue to be a 'weird strangeness' to them. Whatever culture is gleaned from Africa or collected from the shreds of oppressive slavery in America, African Americans have a vibrant artful expression all their own – perhaps even one that does not need a social or racial consciousness or dominant culture validation to be real and beautiful.

Silvera's other poetic contribution to the journal is the poem "Finality," which provides no clear racial markers whatsoever, but rather provides a symbolic parallel to humanity's natural state and the unknown state of the psyche or soul to the ethereal. "Finality" compares the human soul to the tree rather than the human body. Typically, the soul and the body are at odds with one another where the body represents a natural state but the soul is that which reaches higher or longs for greater purpose, a longing for something more than what can be known in nature. However, in "Finality" it is the soul of humankind that is the tree rather than the body. The soul is "reaching skyward" (line 2) while the roots remain grounded in the dirt. The dueling dichotomy is not a struggle between spirit and flesh but between perhaps good and evil - of things of lower 'earthly' consideration to that of things which draw the soul "nearer to God" (line 4). Ironically, it is death of the body which brings triumph of the soul (lines 7-8), where roots and tree, the good and evil sides of man may lie buried and forgotten. The poem seems to suggest that death is not the end of the struggle with the flesh and therefore the release of the soul to an eternal chasm of heavenly proportion; rather, "Finality" suggests that death is simply the end of the struggle altogether. That peace for humanity is not found in an afterlife, but in an after death where the soul and body are buried and "must lie forgot - / To rot" (12-13). The struggle ends when life ends. The poem is beautiful in its simplicity but universal in its content. The struggle for worth, for purpose and the struggle for acceptance of self and by others is a universal experience and the only ones not burdened by the struggles of life are those who are no longer living. Silvera's poem "Finality" reveals the universal humanity of African American experience. As deftly as "Jungle Taste" exposes the distinctive, yet often hidden elegance of that same culture, "Finality" reveals the universal nature of all humanity.

Waring Cuney was born in Washington D.C. in 1906 and attended Lincoln University with Langston Hughes. Cuney won first place in an *Opportunity* poetry contest in 1926 for his poem "No Images" which also sheds light on the hidden beauty of African American women. In "No Images" the beauty has been so well hidden that even the African American woman of whom the poem discusses, does not know her own grace, elegance, strength, and beauty. Her lower class minority status has led her to see the world through someone else's perspective, much like that of Emmaline Beazely in Hurston's play *Color Struck*. The poem states that if she could see herself in a primitive Africa surrounded by palm trees and clear river water, dancing freely, this woman would have an entirely different outlook on herself and her world. However, "dish water gives back no images" (lines 12-13). As a washerwoman she does not see her reflection, but also in a dominantly white culture, even a commercialized one, she cannot see images of herself as anything else but domestic help. "No Images" subtly reaches back to the blackface minstrelsy as well, denoting the limited representation as well as limited opportunity for African American women and how this shapes the cultural mindset of African American women in general during the twentieth century.

In Cuney's poem "The Death Bed" the man in the poem is on his death bed but this man is wanting no solace or comfort at this time, but to be left alone. The man also wants no prayers spoken over him or his soul at his death, which confuses his family who are there to comfort him: "There is no need of prayer / He said, / No need at all" (lines 4-5). The family leaves to abide by his wishes, which gives him some relief, but some of them simply go to the other room and continue to pray for him despite his requests. The last stanza remarks, "All the time it worried him / That they were in there praying / And all the time he wondered / What it was they could be saying" (lines 22-25). Even while he does not want prayer, the man is curious what the friends and family are saying and to whom. This man dismisses the need for prayer for a smooth transition to some afterlife-heaven experience, as if the Judeo Christian tradition is the white tradition and not his own. Rather, he perhaps ascribes to the tenets set forth in the Silvera poem "Finality" and his death is a happy release from the struggles of life. It is not the afterlife he is longing for, but the "after-death," where he can find rest in the silent grave.

It is not only "Finality" that "The Death Bed" echoes. Rather while alone in the room, the dying man tries to remember a tune, a song he once knew that would be of comfort to him but struggles to create a clear sound. Lines 17 through 21 state "He tried his nerve / On a song he knew / And made an empty note / That might have come, / From a bird's harsh throat." This song is not readily recalled by the dying man nor is his voice clear and strong enough to create a melody, but his harsh bird throat resonates again with an Edward Silvera poem on the opposite page of the journal. In "Jungle Taste" the coarseness of the songs of African American men are strange to dominant white culture, but those same coarse sounds are common and comfortable to the voice of the poem. Perhaps the dying man is also familiar and comforted by the coarseness of an old tune that resonates with African distinctness devoid of the oppressive culture of white America. While there are no racial markers in "The Death Bed," and the poem therefore could be read as a universally human experience, "The Death Bed" in the middle of "Flame from a Dark Tower" collection of poetry in the journal *Fire!!* is more than just a dying man's reflections. This poem is a manifestation of both "Jungle Taste" and "Finality" in the life of the dying man. He knows a culture with beauty, songs, religion, and ideology that is separate from the socially expected Eurocentric norms, but he also knows well that this culture has been oppressed from all sides, even from birth to death and even afterlife ideologies. What this man wants is to be free from the oppression, even in death.

When the man in the poem says there is no need at all for prayer, his thoughts resound with Langston Hughes' poem "Song for a Dark Girl." In this poem this girl has witnessed the lynching murder of her lover, and she asks "the white Lord Jesus/ What was the use of prayer" (lines 7-8). At this desperate this girl clings to whatever help she can find, and she calls out in prayer to the Judeo-Christian deity, hoping for some help. Since it is white culture who has murdered her lover, this girl begins to realize that the religious faith and practice of the dominant white culture may also be just as oppressing and offer no real hope. Perhaps religion from the dominant culture has been another tool in the arsenal of social and economic control. "Song for a Dark Girl" was published in 1927, and *Fire!!* was published in 1926, so it is more likely that "The Death Bed" influenced Hughes' "Song for a Dark Girl" and not the other way. However, in this poem, the next in the poetry section, not only are these poets acknowledging the blindness with which dominant culture approaches African American culture, and the distinctive beauty only visible to those in the minority culture, the progression now seems to be an abandonment of Eurocentric norms, not just in life but also in death.

Langston Hughes is the poet laureate of the Harlem Renaissance and for good reason, but he is also the author of the supposed manifesto for these younger artists, the Niggeratti who joined artistic and economic powers to produce *Fire!!* In his essay "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain" Hughes announces the largest problem of African American artists - "this urge within the race toward whiteness, the desire to pour racial individuality into the mold of American standardization and to be as little Negro and as much American as possible" (Hughes "Negro Mountain" 40).

He contributed two poems “Elevator Boy” and “Railroad Avenue” in the poetry selection, and his are placed right in the middle of the ten poems included. Both poems are minimal in racial content in regards to skin tone; however, they are both rife with African American lower class folk culture. “Elevator Boy” tells of a young man and his job at the Dennison Hotel in New Jersey. The upward and downward motion of the elevator is similar to the success and failure of this young man’s struggle with steady work and regular pay: “Jobs are just chances / Like everything else. / Maybe a little luck now, / Maybe not” (lines 6-9). The voice of the poem realizes his life is a matter of chances, some good and some bad. However, by the end of the poem, the young man come to terms with his station and reality. The title “Elevator Boy” could possibly suggest that this young man may be able to elevate himself with hard work, commitment, faithfulness. That by following the tenets of Washington’s educational philosophy, or even that of Du Bois and show a Puritan work ethic, that he may be elevated to a new, higher paying position. This young man knows that philosophy will not pan out. The jobs are like chances rather than strategic moves towards advancement. He knows he gets a job perhaps more by luck than skills, more by chance than education or quality of his work. The man states, “…Somebody’s else’s shoes / To shine, / Or greasy pots in a dirty kitchen” (lines 18-20). No matter how diligent or faithfully he works, there is always another service job to be done. His lot in life is labor or working class, and his position or socio-economic status will never climb higher than the first level, unlike the elevator. Hughes ends his poem with the young man taking the only choice he has in this desperate situation: “I been runnin’ this / Elevator too long. / Guess I’ll quit now” (lines 21-23). The young man decides to quit his job since he has no other chance at promotion or salary increase. He has two choices, stay where he is and remain stagnant or he can choose to quit and try his luck at some other vocation. The young man chooses to leave so that things, at least, can change. They may change for the worse, but a change is a chance just like his job, just like his life. The option of something new in any capacity keeps him from falling into despair. Unlike Booker T. Washington, and even the ideas in the Countee Cullen poem “From the Dark Tower” this young man, and by extension, Hughes cannot simply sit still and wait until things change. He chooses to make something change while he has the power to do so.

“Elevator Boy” has no obvious racial markers, and the poem could be read as any lower class individual struggling with an oppressive social class standing; however, the use of the African American Vernacular English as well as line 11 which states “Step out o’ the barrel, boy” (line 11) reveal that this is a poem addressing a lower class African American youth, or even a grown man. The reference to ‘boy’ in the title as well as in line 11 is indicative of the demeaning status often used in reference to African American men of all ages by the dominant culture. To reference a grown man, even an older man, as ‘boy’ is to suggest that he is once again in suspended youth or adolescence, not fully grown into adulthood and the responsibility and respectability that would accompany it. If someone refers to another adult as a child or youth it denotes an inferiority, and the widespread use of ‘boy’ to refer to African American men by dominant white culture, is more proof of the vast influence blackface minstrelsy had on the racist assumptions the dominant culture held for this minority group. “Elevator Boy” in the context of white racist opinions and verbiage, could denote even an elderly man who is done with the service level life and wishes to quit, as in to retire, rather than to find another job. The African American Vernacular English and the racist terminology reveal that this poem, though not clearly marking skin tone or African American culture, is perhaps more racial in substance than Cullen’s “From the Dark Tower.” Indeed, “Elevator Boy” attempts to give artistic expression to an underpaid, underrepresented African American man, the likes of which would not be readily presented by the elite intelligentsia. It is a poem of classism and the economic divide of various economic levels, but it is also a poem that reveals the added divide created by the race of that oppressed individual. In addition, in his essay “Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain” Hughes states

> Certainly there is, for the American Negro artist who can escape the restrictions the more advanced of this own group would put upon him, a great field of unused material ready for his art. Without going outside his race, and even among the better classes with the "white" culture and conscious American manners, but still Negro enough to be different, there is sufficient matter to furnish a black artist with a lifetime of creative work. (41)

In "Elevator Boy" Hughes reaches into the depths of the lower class male experience to show how humor, rhythm, warmth, anger, and tears all coalesce into this experience. It is not an elevated picture; this man will not be the source of racial or even individual uplift, as the title would suggest. Rather, the economic and social struggles combine to create a greater profundity of experience. Those who have struggled more, have more material with which to make art. Hughes appreciates and chooses to use that material in all its shades and layers.

The other poem submitted and published by Langston Hughes in *Fire!!* is entitled "Railroad Avenue." The poem is in free verse with limited rhyme scheme, a relatively common poetic style of Hughes. However, this does not mean that the poem lacks meter or rhythm- quite the contrary. Hughes' poems attempt to convey the feel and flow of jazz by using repeating words and phrases, similar to the call and response and repeating of verses in jazz melodies. "Railroad Avenue" offers a snapshot of a street in Harlem and the imagery is more of the buildings and surroundings than of people in the place. The poem opens with a verbal picture of "Lights in the fish joints, / Lights in the pool rooms. / A box car some train / Has forgotten / In the middle of the block" (lines 3-7). On Railroad Avenue, people are not seen, but the surrounding gathering places are. The lights in the pool hall and fish eateries denote, however, that these locations are in operation as watering holes for the community. Even if the community is not yet seen in the poem, these spaces are already prepared, as if simply waiting for their arrival. The title of the poem and the box car suggest the industrialized nature of Railroad Avenue, but the neglected nature of the empty box car is perhaps abandoned because the train line has moved on from the area implying the loss of jobs and even possible unemployment in the area. This is a poorer part of town, possibly. The lights in the rooms are on, presumably, but there is still no sign of life in on Railroad Avenue.

However, by line 8, sources of music and sources of life enter the poem: "A player piano, / A Victrola, / 942 / Was the number" (Hughes, "Railroad Avenue, lines 8-11). The introduction of musical instruments is followed by a boy and girl. Not much is given about these two; however, the girl is described as "A passing girl / With purple powdered skin" (lines 14-15). Perhaps the girl is just passing the boy on the street; he is just "lounging on the corner" after all (line 13). The girl could also be passing for white, but her it is unlikely, for her skin color is mentioned and Hughes has established himself as interested in the poetry and art for African American people. Whoever these two are, their presence heralds in more life into the poem. "Laughter / Suddenly" the poem proclaims (line 15-16). This laughter of the boy and girl, or perhaps others, regenerates the gathering spaces. The term "laughter" is repeated four times in the poem, and as it is repeated it increases in power, not in volume, but in influence. Lines 22 and 23 read "Laughter / Hardening the dusk dark evening." Laughter is transforming the night. To use the word "hardening" denotes two possible outcomes: either laughter has made the night air more severe and less sympathetic, or it has made it more defined, thicker, and fuller. It is the latter, for this laughter is "Shaking…[and] Rolling" the light in the public spaces. As people gather and commune in the fish eatery and the pool hall, things begin to move. It is the laughter of people that brings a change, a transformation in Railroad Avenue.

While Hughes' poem "Railroad Avenue" opens with inanimate objects akin to a town abandoned by economic and financial opportunity, Hughes allows a transformation of an empty strip of town to come alive through the laughter of the people in the community. While they may have limited access to industry having “untouched the box car/ Some train has forgotten,” they have no need for the box car or the money it represents to celebrate and laugh loudly. Rather, their laughter is transformative to this street. Hughes highlights the potential power and life in a lower class African American community. They are not the bourgeois that Du Bois uses as propaganda for racial uplift. They are the proletariat, but their laughter and enthusiasm for life is uplifting to the African American neighborhood, transforming a quiet dusk hour into a bustling environment for food and entertainment. There is more than one way to elevate African American people.

Arna Bontempts’ poem “Length of Moon” is an imagist poem with no racial markers. The poem discusses a future where time will seem to slow and almost come to an end. It is a poem of aging and reflection. It is, perhaps written in youth but that has the wisdom to see what life with entail in the future. The voice of the poem sees how life can and will change in old age; how time will pass at a different speed. Things will no longer have the same sense of urgency or permanency. With age and experience the voice of the poem knows his perspective and priorities will change as wisdom comes.

The poem begins, “Then the golden hour/ Will tick its last” (lines 1-2). The golden hour is the prime of life and this time has passed. “And the flame will go down in the flower” (Bontemps line 3). The flower of life has begun to wilt. The strength of a young man, the hope, possibility, and potential of his life has also begun to wane a bit. In line 4 and 5, the poem states “A briefer length of moon / Will mark the sea-line and the yellow dune.” This is in reference to the passing of time and the way it goes by more quickly as the young man ages. Perhaps more responsibility and greater busyness creates this illusion, but time passes quickly and there seems to not be time enough for everything. Not only has time changed in speed, but memories and recollections have changed with age: “Then we may think of this, yet/ There will be something forgotten / And something we should forget” (Bontemps line 6-8). Just as strength begins to fail in old age, so does memory and mental strength. The youth in the prime of life could recall most things, both positive and negative, but in old age, the mind cannot remember or recollect everything. Some things will be forgotten; however, somethings that should be forgotten will still plague the mind. Things like slights, insults, critical comments that sting the core of this man in his youth, cannot seem to be forgotten in old age. Yet, these are the things that should be expunged from his memory and recall so that he can live his life free of others' opinions. The things he has forgotten that should be remembered are perhaps the encouraging words, the good memories and the compliments.

Line seven and the inability to remember connects to Paul Watson in Gwendolyn Bennett's "Wedding Day." This story was Bennett's contribution to the journal, and it tells of an ex-patriate American boxer in Paris who falls in love with a white American woman. This story will be discussed in greater depth in the next chapter; however, Paul has a moment on the train station after his world has been turned upside down. He has taken down his guard and begins to trust and love a white woman after years of hatred against the American white population. The woman has promised to marry him but on the day of the wedding, she gets cold feet and rejects him because "white women just don't marry colored men..." (Bennett, *Fire!!* 28). In the midst of the rejection, Paul heads to the train station in a daze. He is confused by his reality and is lost in questions of identity. At one point in his stream-of-consciousness, Paul struggles to recall facts: "What was that thought he was trying to get ahold of—bumping around in his head—something he started to think about but couldn't remember it somehow (Bennett, *Fire!!* 28). In his moment of flux Paul cannot remember and cannot forget. In Bennett's "Wedding Day" Paul is a rather young man whose sense of reality shifts as culture around him shifts. In Bontemps' "Length of Moon" the questions of reality are not from shifting culture but from the shifting of time.

As time passes the voice of this poem knows that his understanding of the temporal and of his own temporariness will be even more vivid than in youth: “It will be like all things we know: / A stone will fail; a rose is sure to go” (Lines 9-10). With age and wisdom comes the knowledge that nothing is permanent, even the passions with which he pursued life in youth. The remaining lines of the poem almost speak a contradiction to the earlier lines. The poem seems to address the awareness a young mind has regarding the passing of time and changing of perspectives with that time. In lines 4-5 the voice acknowledges that time will pass more quickly as age comes; days will run into each other with the “briefer length of moon.” However, in the final lines of the poem, the voice states, “It will be quiet then and we may stay / Long at the picket gate, - / But there will be less to say” (lines 11-13). In old age this individual knows that time in some ways may pass quickly, but in other ways time will pass slowly and he will have more time to reflect and try to remember and try to forget. In age and wisdom, the poem asserts he will have less things to say, or he will learn the beauty of silence rather than having to say everything as if to change the world. Silence is an indicator of the wisdom that will come with age. Bontemps “Length of Moon” is the voice of a young soul wise enough to know things will not remain the same.

Lewis Alexander wrote the final two poems in the selection. The poem “Little Cinderella” expresses the hope and excitement of a night out that surpasses the drudgery of daily life. The poem is told from the voice of a young woman who is dressed and ready for a night of dancing and drinks: “I knows I’m neat, -/ Little Cinderella from head to feet” (lines 2-3). This young woman is perhaps leaving her daily job to have a bit of fun with friends, but she also knows she is more beautifully dressed than usual. She is ready for the party. In the first line, this woman commands that her date observe her appearance. Even if he does not show his approval, she knows she is sharply dressed and she feels beautiful in her attire. Her date’s opinion of her is of little relevance to her opinion of herself. The clothes give her confidence and prepare her for what is to come: “Drinks all night at Club Alabam, - / What comes next I don’t give a damn!” (lines 4-5). With the inclusion of alcohol into the evening, she knows the night will be exciting. She is ready for a night of fun, and even if the next morning comes with a return to reality, she will ignore that for the sake of a good time. She does not care about the reality of work, bills, responsibilities – at least not for the night.

It is not just the woman who is sharply dressed, but based on her opinion of her date, he is nicely put together this night as well. The woman looks her date over and gives her approval overall: “Daddy, daddy, / You sho’ looks keen! / I likes men that are long and lean” (lines 6-8). This man is tall and slender and apparently her type, at least for the night. She even praises his sparkling eyes: “Broad Street ain’t got no brighter lights / Than your eyes at pitch midnight” (lines 9-10). It is at midnight that his eyes look the brightest to her. Her confidence in herself as well as her approval of her date so late in the evening reveals that this is no casual and mutual date. Little Cinderella is possibly a prostitute attracting men with her appearance and seducing them with her praise.

Cinderella is a European fairy tale of a young woman in unfortunate circumstances who suddenly finds remarkable fortune after removing an article of her clothing. It can be assumed our young woman of “Little Cinderella” is a lower class woman from her dialect. She is not the college educated nurse, secretary, or teacher many Negro colleges had graduated attempting to find respectable employment in the North. From her non-standard vernacular she either is too young to receive the education, never received it at all, or choses an informal means of expression during her off hours. She is also unafraid to be seen at all hours drinking in a club.

This Cinderella is attempting to secure some financial security by seducing the young man before her. She compliments his shape, but she makes no mention to his attire. Perhaps he is not dressed in the cleanest or most sophisticated attire. Rather, she focuses on his shape and his eyes. If she can ensnare him she can also capture some of his resources, his money. This money will help her from her unfortunate circumstances, but to do so she, like Cinderella will need to remove some articles of her clothing.

"Little Cinderella" is a poem about the necessity of prostitution for economic stability of some women, perhaps many women who came to larger cities during the Great Migration. This poem resonates with Wallace Thurman's "Cordelia the Crude," the first story of the entire journal. This Cinderella could even be the voice and mind of Cordelia. This woman has increased her confidence to secure a paying customer to the point where she is not threatened by the stroke of midnight as with the fairy tale.

The last poem Lewis Alexander published in the journal, and the last poem in the poetry section of *Fire!!* is a haiku-like poem entitled "Streets." "Streets" does not fit with the rigid Japanese form of three lines, seventeen syllables; however, the poem does express a single idea or image. In fact, it is a kind of miniature snapshot in words of urban roadways. "Streets" is a poem that follows in the tradition of the Imagists like Amy Lowell, H. D. and Ezra Pound. The Imagists believed that everyday language rather than elevated 'poetic language' should be employed in poetry, that a hard and clear image was crucial, and that poets could use complete freedom in their subject matter. An image alone is not an idea: "An image, therefore, cannot simply be a picture, vision, or symbolic representation...the image, then, is best considered as a disposition to see, feel, and /or to think, in a certain way, an indefinable inclination to read poetry into the world" (Lumsden 257). An imagist poem takes an objective thing and transforms it into a subjective, inward reflection of humanity. The same is true here with "Streets."

The poem opens with names of roadways, but the types of roads named are also important. A street is a public road, and everyone in the community has access to streets; however, the term 'streets' is only seen in the title. The brief poem begins, "Avenues of dreams / Boulevards of pain (Alexander lines 1-2). In most cities avenues are wide streets that often have shade trees planted on either side. Whereas, boulevards are wide streets with trees typically planted in between opposing lanes. "Avenues of dreams" (line 1) seems to denote a hopeful journey. Those who wander the avenues have the shade trees to protect them as well as a closeness to fellow travelers. Even those travelling in the opposite direction remain near the others. In contrast, those travelling a boulevard are separated from the travelers going another way. The tree line, which may make the road more pleasant and beautiful, separates those on the road. Divisions among them has caused the "boulevards of pain" (line 2). These wide public roads suggest a populated urban area where many people come and go. That is the image, but the result of the imagist poem is more than the object. Rather it is the humanity lived out on those public roads that gives the mere object its subjective dreams and pain. Hopes are stirred and dashed in these public streets.

The next two lines of the poem read "Moving black streams / Shimmering like rain" (Alexander lines 3-4). These "moving black streams" are very likely Model T Fords driving down the streets. Automobile production had begun in the early twentieth century, but the paint jobs of most cars matched that of other machinery like trains. At the time of mass production in the 1920's Henry Ford is to have announced to his management crew that a customer could have his car any color he wished so long as it was black. The earliest cars were actually painted green and blue: "The original early greens and blues were all but black, and could easily be taken as black" (McCalley 144). By the 1920s the most popular car was the Model T, and the most popular color of that car was either black, or a green or blue that was indistinguishable from black. These vehicles were filling the streets of more urban towns as the Great Migration progressed. Alexander's poem here sees the moving black cars as streams flowing in and out of town. Roadways often followed the course of rivers and the movement of various cars on a busy street reflect the movement and flow of water as well as the flow of time. The cars also shimmer like rain. In rain these cars would shimmer and glisten, but even on sunny days, the lacquer finish of these cars create a shimmery finish. In good or bad weather these cars reflect light as drops of water. "Streets" is a modern imagist poem that takes a simple object - a public road, and connects it to an aesthetic human feeling. The object then becomes emotionally complex and subjective. Perhaps the road is the start of a new and exciting journey, or it is an isolating and lonely thoroughfare filled with disappointments. Imagism strives to substantiate ordinary images and objects in its natural color and size and bring them from the objective to the subjective.

"Flame from the Dark Tower: A Section of Poetry" is a poetic manifesto for the author-editors of the journal *Fire!!* Langston Hughes was selected to edit the poems that were submitted for the poetry section; however, as one thumbs through these poems a progression of artistic, aesthetic, and content development emerges. The section begins with a Countee Cullen poem in the form of an English sonnet with content harkening back to English poets like Robert Browning. This being the first poem in the section reveals quite a bit about the artistic limits these author-editors imposed on the artists who submitted work. The goal of the journal was to create a strictly artistic journal without socio-political agendas attached and driving the engine of publication. Interestingly, a poem that would fit the propagandists agenda is included and has gained top billing. Why? There are three reasons. One, all art and its representations are permitted. Even the prescriptive rules for art that had been limiting to their creative ability is still useful in representing a portion of the African American group. If these younger artists were to reject or restrict the poems based on propaganda initiatives, they would be deemed hypocritical. So Cullen's sonnet is included.

Second, the order in which these poems are arranged serve as a glimpse into the evolution of African American poetry into the modern period. The section opens with the English sonnet and closes with a modern imagist haiku. In between is seen a progression of African American culture from southern towns and lynchings, to a racial community connected through song and struggles, until the poems shift to urban streets and city occupations, from an elevator boy to a prostitute. The haiku pays homage to the streets and roads that gave access to the opportunities, but also acknowledges the pain and suffering that has been seen in the cities as well.

Third, as these poems progress in the section, there are fewer and fewer racial markers seen therein. The first three poems in the section have clear racial indicators. “From the Dark Tower,” “A Southern Road,” and “Jungle Taste” each make reference to dark skin tones. However, except for a line in “Railroad Avenue” referencing a woman’s purple skin, no other poems make explicit racial distinctions. Rather, the content addresses the passing of time, the economic issues faced by lower class people, and the struggles faced by people living in urban areas. These poems seem to move away from a strictly racially identified consciousness to a more class consciousness. These poems are still racial, but they clearly are not only racial.

Chapter Five:

Gwendolyn Bennett's Social Belonging in "Wedding Day"

In the journal *Fire!!* Gwendolyn Bennett published her short story "Wedding Day." The main protagonist Paul Watson is an African American prize fighter in Paris with a complex cultural identity connected both to the more blatant racist social ideologies of American white culture and the more furtive racial tones at play in France. The story is told frequently through the voice and perspective of the others in the community, reporting the information and providing opinions and assessments of the events as they occur. Paul is the main protagonist but he rarely takes control of the narrative. He is represented by others for what they deem him to be. Even Mary, his white American female love interest, is open to social commentary and rarely takes control of her own role in the story. The significance here is that these two ex-patriots are permitting others to tell their story and to identify them. Not only are their stories and identities being defined by others, there financial security is tied to objectification, cultural expectation, and the entertainment of others. Being defined and shaped by the narrative of others and lacking agency in their own identities cultivate more of that uncertainty for both of them. Mary's inability to transcend cultural expectations, creates a massive downfall in Paul's own transcendence from that society. His shiftless wandering at the close of the story exposes the reality even in Paris, no real community can be found for the likes of Paul.

In "Traveling Harlem's Europe: Vagabondage from Slave Narratives to Gwendolyn Bennett's 'Wedding Day' and Claude McKay's *Banjo*," Michael A. Chaney makes the assertion that Paul Watson, the main protagonist in "Wedding Day" is ensnared by conflicting identities as an American prize fighter in Paris who has a vehement hatred for American whites. Paul leaves America and slowly finds community in Paris following World War I. Chaney does an adept job at describing the lack of home sense in Paul that necessitates his need to board the train without conscious thought. As a vagabond rather than a tourist, Paul is not fully welcome anywhere. While his boarding the train without thought is telling of his lack of a sense of home, an interesting detail is the reality that the white American woman has not fully separated from her cultural identity either. It is not Paul who cannot marry Mary, but Mary who cannot marry Paul. It is Mary who cannot escape the previous racist, classist, and socially-sanctioned tendencies. While the story reveals how minority or outsider individuals are often welcomed when they fit a narrative of the collective; it also reveals the difficulty with which an outsider can fully become a member of an established group not only in the story of Paul, but also in the story and response of Mary.

Again, much of what is shared about Paul and Mary is shared from the mouths of others. This is key to seeing and understanding their social position in the community. Others write, distribute, and reinforce the narrative, and the main protagonists have minimal contribution and authority establishing much of it. Being the topic of town gossip both positive and negative often solidifies one's standing in the community. One is noticed, and in Paul's case he is welcomed in the Montmartre district: "Passing him on the street, you might not have known or cared who he was, but any one of the residents about the great Montmartre district of Paris could have told you who he was as well as many interesting bits of his personal history" (Bennett *Fire!!* 35). All of the residents know him and know his history, or at least the version they wish to share. Paul boards the train, in part because he is a vagabond, as Chaney describes, but he also leaves because the life and identity given to him in Paris does not hold. Mary cannot remove herself from social construction and their cultural implications, and Paul's identity and sense of purpose fractures. "Wedding Day" reveals a modern man in a social crisis of identity who has been objectified and othered so much that his person reality that is broken and unsustainable. He is a man with no real community at all.

At the turn of the twentieth century dominant white America had blackface minstrelsy of white men parading in dark face paint as a type of cultural catharsis for white men and women both performing and viewing the staged performance. While white performers acted out an appropriated cultural representation they rarely allowed African Americans themselves on stage to perform. However, across the Atlantic, France was embracing African American culture, and putting the culture on the center stage, in particular, in the boxing ring. Many African American boxers came to France on the promise of greater racial tolerance and were often met with fame and success, but they were not entirely free from racial tensions, even in the City of Light. Rather, France's relationship with African American sports and performing arts is subtle and nuanced in colonization and primitivism. African Americans performed in front of established French society and were often highly celebrated for their exotic antithesis to the civilized audience. In particular, the pugilists received wealth and status from boxing and being overly brutal and violent, as if to fulfill the stereotype blackface minstrelsy projected. It was as if white "civilization" was witnessing black "savagery" in a controlled and socially sanctioned way. By putting the African American man in the ring and giving him incentive to fight with grit and aggression, the African American was escaping the stereotype of inferiority by embracing and becoming the stereotype of ferocious assailant.

France's obsession for African American sports and performers can be viewed as an acceptance of African American culture, especially pitted against the intolerant and stark segregation lines drawn in America. In "Visible Men: African American Boxers, the New Negro, and the Global Color Line" Theresa Runstedtler argues that African American boxers were placed in the ring against white fighters or even fighting each other was a demonstration of primitive manhood as white colonial culture was beginning to decline as a power: "While French fears of white degeneration centered on their declining birthrate….the African colonies emerged as the ultimate resource for national revival" (64). In other words, France is attracted to African American stereotypes of masculinity in part because of overall waning French colonial supremacy. These pugilists were put on display as contrary to French "civilization" with their violence in the ring, and their power held within a manageable and confined space also allowed French citizens to observe and celebrate their strength as a revitalization for a waning culture.

African American boxers from the early twentieth century who boxed in France like Jack Johnson, Sam McVea, and Joe Gans performed before French elite, but they each were of lower class status, and not only contrary to French 'civilized' society but against the ideals of the respectable African American intelligentsia, and the savagery and violence with which they gained status and wealth was reflexive of minstrelsy that Du Bois, Locke, and others were striving to erase or minimize at least. As lower class ruffians who became instant celebrities within French culture, these pugilists were at the crosshairs of African American colonial identity. From the lower class, in connection with white upper class, praised for their primal physical masculinity as long as that masculinity remained contained within the cage of the ring. Many of these African American boxers came to France to escape racism, but rather faced still a complex cultural position that made their identity in France still shaky.

In "Wedding Day" Paul arrives in Paris before World War I and before many other American expatriates have arrived, but the narrator opens by describing him as fairly typical compared to any other African American man in Paris. The narrator hints at this idea more than once: "…he might have been any other Negro of enormous height and size" (Bennett 25). There is nothing in particular about his appearance that distinguishes him from any other African American male in the town of Paris, but the narrator also compares Paul to the boxer Joe Gans in that he "didn't have the fine way about him that Gans had and for that reason luck seemed to go against him" (Bennett 25).

Joe Gans was born most likely in Baltimore in 1874. He became boxing champion in 1902 when he defeated Frank Erne in the first round with one knockout punch. Most of Gans opponents were white because Al Herford, his manager knew that two African American boxers in the ring meant white patrons would not attend the match. Gans was also knew how to behave in the ring and tended to his defeated opponents (Gildea 42). His politeness and brute physical strength was widely celebrated in America, and he was financially compensated once he began managing his own fights. He opened the Goldfield Hotel and Salon in Baltimore, and was the first African American man in Baltimore to own a car, a Matheson. When Gans died in 1910 of tuberculosis his funeral was the largest for an African American man in Baltimore's history (Gildea 43). However, all of that success and recognition was not enough to satisfy his need for authentic validation. Riding on a train nearing Baltimore, Gans and his manager Herford are conversing:

> "Joe and I were seated opposite each other in a parlor car. Joe was wrapped in deep silence, his sad expression even more doleful than usual.
>
> 'Isn't it wonderful, Joe,' I asked, 'being champion and all that it means? To have all of those folks enthused about you, and all of the money you are going to make? I'll bet your mother is proud.'
>
> Joe didn't say anything for a long moment. Then he said wistfully, 'Yes, Mr. Herford, it sure is wonderful. But do you know what I'm thinking?'
>
> 'What?' I asked.
>
> 'That I'd give it all up - the money, the fuss, the championship, everything - for just one thing.'
>
> 'What's that?' I asked.
>
> 'For a white boy's chance in the world.'" (qtd in Gildea 39)

Gans was phenomenally famous, but he is still not content. He claims his discontent comes from not being white; however, it is from not being fully accepted for who is because he is African American.

Gans often had to lose to white opponent he could easily have bested and he could never lose his temper in and especially outside of the ring. He fixed matches and essentially wore a mask fitted to him by dominant culture. Gans was clear headed and calm, yet "regardless of such positive stories, the African American boxer's popularity...ultimately stemmed from his embodiment of primal black physicality" (Runstedtler 63). It was his primitive manhood pitted against civilized manhood that drew white crowd. Boxing became a part of a commodity culture in American and internationally in France that was frequently fixed and set. Because of this "the performances of black American prizefighters in rings and theaters around the world must be placed in the context of what historian Robert Rydell has called the 'broader universe of white supremacist entertainments,' including blackface minstrelsy, world's fairs, and so-called Wild West Shows" (Runstedtler 61). African American pugilists were an extension of entertainment that reinforced social norms.

In "Wedding Day" Paul Watson is a boxer who has ex-patriated to Paris where he has found more lucrative fights, and even fights with other African American boxers. However, "when he was in the ring he was like a mad bull, especially if his opponent was a white man" (Bennett 25). Paul does harbor hatred for white Americans; however, he also knows the game of boxing for him is more performance than sport. So while the narrator may compare Paul to Joe Gans in stature and appearance, his experience is more akin to the likes of Sam McVea and Jack Johnson: "Black American sportsmen ventured abroad precisely because they found profitable markets for their performances. Race was a commodity to be performed and consumed, and the ability of African American boxers to stage a particular brand of masculine blackness was integral to their survival in this marketplace of race"

(Rundstedtler 62-3). Boxing and blackness was a performance in France at the turn of the twentieth century, just as it was in America.

Paul feels the mask of white supremacist entertainment imposed on him not just as a celebrated boxer, but also as a well-mannered jazz man in a small cafe. Even as a jazz man, Paul is a performer, an entertainer to mostly French patrons, and his good behavior is partly the reason he is so well liked in the community. Ironically, even the band members are shocked to realize that seven years progress without Paul attacking a white American: "The members of that first band often say now that they wonder how it was that nothing happened during those first seven years, for it was generally known how great was Paul's hatred for American white people" (Bennett 25). The first café in which Paul was a jazz performer was rather small and only frequented by French and a few African Americans, so the lack of incident can be justified by a lack of white American people frequenting the smaller location. However, when he moves to a larger café and more tourists from America enter, Paul repeatedly attacks anyone that uses the word 'nigger' against him. The narrator again gleans the story from the band and town members and finds different versions of the story, each with its own hint of truth to it: "I've heard almost every Negro in Montmartre tell about the night that a drunken Kentuckian came into the café where Paul was playing…I have often wished that I had been there to have seen the thing happen myself. Every tale I have heard about it was different and yet there was something of truth in each of them" (Bennett 25). Even without being present, the narrator has heard various accounts of Paul's reaction against racist white Americans. Again, his story is not his to tell; even the community of other African Americans in Montmartre tell and retell it. As the entertainer in and out of the ring, in and out of the jazz band, Paul does not have the agency to assert his identity outside of the mask given him.

Paul even earns the name "black terror" in response to his frequent outbursts, but even when sent to jail frequently, "there was something likable about Paul" (Bennett 25). At least this is what the residents claim in their perception of Paul and his outbursts. Despite causing a recurring disturbance in town and paying fines and replenishing furniture at the café, Paul is still liked and celebrated among the town. However, his outbursts against white Americans, destruction of property, and even jail time could not seem to dissuade people from forgiving and excusing him: Always some diving power seemed to intervene in his behalf and he was excused after the payment of a small fine with advice about future conduct" (Bennett 25). Paul is so easily forgiven because the outbursts are part of the mask- the angry black man persona typically seen in the ring. The patrons and even local police gain the chance to see the primitive boxer without paying for a ticket.

Paul's hatred against racists causes trouble, for he ends up shooting two American soldiers and is imprisoned, but when World War breaks out, Paul is enlisted in the French army and is pardoned. Imprisonment and war does not change Paul's opinions, but rather his strength in warfare earns him a "place in French society as a hero" (Bennett 26). Ironically the strength, bravery, and physicality of African American boxing men is used as entertainment in the ring as the antithesis to the civilized. During war time the same strength, bravery, and physicality of African American men is used to preserve that civilization. Even in war, Paul is a commodity for Western culture.

The narrative takes a shift in point-of-view after Paul returns from war, and the reader sees the narrative from Paul's eyes and perspective for the first time. It is no longer the narrator or the townspeople who are telling or retelling the events of the story when he shares his distrust of women. However, as if it were a comedy, immediately following his admission that women are not for him, Paul encounters a white American woman on the street who begs him to befriend her. At this point in the short story, the text reads as if the vowed bachelor and hater of white Americans will eat his words and be humbled by the reality of loving a white American woman. While this scene is set up like a romantic comedy, events take a different turn, especially as the community continues to tell his story and manipulate events, expectations, and identities.

Mary pleads with Paul to not hate or dismiss her and even sobs on him when he tries to send her away: "please don't hate me 'cause I was born white and an American. I ain't got a sou to my name and all the men pass me by cause I ain't spruced up" (Bennett 27). Mary is without community and friends here. She is the vagabond, at least in appearance and at least according to her own words. Paul eventually takes pity on her and quickly adopts her as a pet project, feeding her at the Gavarnni's for dinner each night. Paul takes pity on the one who has no real family or community. She is also a performer who is used to putting on the show to entertain people who never see or get to know the real her. When Paul asks if she is American she answers, "Used to be be'fore I went on the stage and got stranded over here" (Bennett 26). She is now alone and managing however she can. At one point she makes it known that she is "a street woman" (Bennett 28). She may be a white American woman, but her social standing and immigrant status in France has generated an understanding and a connection with Paul. Paul understands how it feels to put on a persona and mask just to survive in society, and he quickly makes her a part of his own close knit family with a proposal of marriage.

In "Traveling Harlem's Europe" Chaney argues that the point of the community narrative is to parallel a slave or travel narrative with Paul becoming the focus of the story:

> Paul Watson's typicality as a protagonist derives from his ideality as a topic of gossip within the story. That Paul is constructed in the story as a story, as the locus for a typical discourse about love and race, demonstrates the way that tales of vagabondage, contrast with an established imperative…Revealed in the process is the manner by which subjects reinscribe this discourse of American racialization through acts of narration – through story-telling, story listening, and in Paul's case, through acts of story being. (63)

Chaney claims that the community accounts of Paul's life are evidence of the vagabondage status of Paul's experience. Paul is a protagonist in the community's constructed narrative. His story is fragmented and broken due to the multiple perspectives surrounding the various authors of his story, yet Paul himself only gets a portion of the story to tell. Everyone knows and shares his story, but his lack of participation and limited voice shapes or contorts not just the narrative but Paul's identity. Even in the gossip, he is still a narrative, a constructed story told for the entertainment of others.

Mary's lack of community is what separates her from the others and makes her so desperate to have companionship. She is also a commercial commodity, a means of entertainment for mostly Western men and as a source of gossip, she is also the product of others' narratives. Even as Paul takes her under his wing, she still resists his generosity and rejects, immediately his proposal of marriage: "At first she kept saying that she didn't want to get married cause she wasn't the marrying kind and all that talk" (Bennett 27). Mary has made a point to share honestly about her past and her history, but Paul is undeterred in his love and pursuit of her as wife. He understands that she is a product of being severely objectified for the pleasure of others, as he has been. He will not take no for an answer: "Then she began to tell him all about her past life. He told her he didn't care nothing about what she used to be jus' so long as they loved each other now" (Bennett 27). She too is a vagabond, and that is what draws him to her.

According to the community, who now knows as much about her as of Paul, Mary rejects his proposal of marriage because of the kind of woman she is. She was a stage performer, but by her shabby appearance, her hungry demeanor, and her low self-esteem that she has survived by prostitution. The town, who knows what kind of woman she is, agrees when one comments, "She was right – she ain't the marrying kind" (Bennett 27). The fact that the cafe has a determined opinion of what kind of woman she is and what role she can perform in a relationship with Paul, speaks to the cultural expectations so rigidly enforced in society. And why is late nineteenth and early twentieth century so set on reinforcing sexual morality? A nation's health is easily quantified by its birthrate. Sexual discourse began by defining 'normality' and often define the sexual parameters through "a discourse of abnormality and deviance" (Smith 32). Abnormal groups were those individuals whose sexual behavior limited healthy offspring; in other words, they were "non-procreative people - homosexuals, prostitutes, single women, and persons with venereal diseases" (Smith 32). As a prostitute, Mary is outside respectable society; however, according to August Bebel's *Women and Socialism*, "Marriage represents one side of sexual life of the bourgeois world, and prostitution represents the other. Marriage is the front, and prostitution the back of the medal" (qtd in Smith 39). Bebel uses the term 'medal' to infer a coin since according to many critics of bourgeois life, the patriarchy sees marriage and prostitution both as business transactions. As a prostitute Mary is removed from 'proper' society, but her role is a well-known necessary evil to keep unmarried men sexually satisfied while they earn their fortunes to support the right kind of wife and children.

Paul does not care that her life is riddled with what others would call impropriety; rather, he dismisses her past and necessary sexual occupation altogether. Paul and Mary are both products of bourgeois culture who out of survival have had to perform even oppressive and violent ways. It is at the intersection of race, sex, and class where Paul is able to see Mary as a fellow victim of exploitation like himself.

This change of events for both Paul and Mary brings about the primary talk of the café: In every café where the Negro musicians congregated Paul Watson was the topic of conversation. He had suddenly fallen from his place as a God to almost less than dust" (Bennett 27). Paul's dethroning is not because he chooses to be with a woman, or even marry. The town was eager to see the devout bachelor fall for a girl; the downfall comes from the type of woman Mary is and Paul's lack of hesitation in marrying her. Even when Mary tries to explain to Paul why she cannot marry him, and the events of her past life, he silences her and makes promises all the more. Her troubled past is a problem for Mary and the rest of the community, but until the final scene it is never a problem for Paul.

Mary's lack of community makes her perhaps more of a vagabond than Paul. Paul seems to have found community with Mary, a fellow objectified and oppressed individual. He has managed to see beyond the cultural mask that Mary has to wear and is able to even remove his mask for her. This vulnerability however makes him somewhat naive, for on the day of their wedding, Paul awakens to hopefulness and pleasant thoughts of his bride. Mary on the other hand, awakens to doubts, rejections, and a need to flee the scene rather than commit to another person, especially one like Paul if she is who she is. Despite Paul's firm belief that the two of them would be happy, Mary has not been able to separate herself from her cultural construction, or from Paul's. Social construction and bourgeois respectability is so entrenched in Mary's conscious that she sees their union as a taboo on two fronts - the taboo of interracial marriage her change in status from a woman of ill repute to a reputable one. In a message to Paul on their wedding day, Mary acknowledges that she "just couldn't go through with it...white women just don't marry colored men and she's a street woman too" (Bennett 28). Paul knows her history and her past, but perhaps he felt that the community, that belonging would help her overcome her insecurities and that the townspeople would readily accept her as they had Paul. However, Mary does not gain the benefit of community outside of Paul; Paul is her only community. Rather, Paul is a life raft of sorts, that Mary has used for economic security, and her rejection on the wedding day is not about Paul's race, but perhaps more about her past indiscretions. There is no proof from the words and actions of Mary that she is a racist white American; rather, there is repeated proof of her shame from her prostitution desperation. However, Paul jumps to racist conclusions and determines that even a white "street woman" would not choose to marry a "colored man."

This scene also resounds with real African American pugilist history. In 1912 African American boxer Jack Johnson was arrested for violating the Mann Act by transporting his wife across state lines. The Mann Act was also known as "The White Slave Traffic Act" even though the wording stated that it was a felony to transport "any woman or girl for the purpose of prostitution or debauchery, or for any other immoral purpose" (qtd in Runstedtler 33). However, the white slave traffic was known as sex trafficking and prostitution. In the case of Jack Johnson, he was arrested for transporting his wife, not sex trafficking a white woman. The government did not know the difference, in part, because African American men and white women at this time were both seen as commodities. In a white patriarchal bourgeois culture no other reason could exist for why a white woman would be travelling with an African American man. Mary is the product of this same culture, and marriage to Paul could end in similar results. She may deeply love the individual man named Paul, but she, nor he, can escape the socially constructed roles that have been so heavily entrenched upon them.

Paul abruptly leaves; he boards a train to remove him from the community that had shaped and told so much of his story. Now, Paul leaves not only Mary, but Montmartre, needing to seek out new community, which is the source of Mary's entrapment. As he boards the train he even considers returning to America: "Wouldn't he have a hell of a time if he went back to America where black was black. Wasn't white nowhere, black wasn't" (Bennett 28). This return is almost laughable. While he clearly has been objectified as a performer in the ring and in the jazz bar in France, in America even more limitations would be put upon him, more restrictions to his individual development.   With Mary beside him, Paul was transcending the peer pressure to conform to the norms. Again, he has removed the mask, has been an individual, and has forgotten the racial and gender norms of his day. With Mary's removal and rejection of him altogether, Paul feels displaced not just within society, but even within himself. Paul had created his own sense of self in the second half of the story, despite being a marketable and objectified commodity throughout his life. Seeing Mary as another commodity generated his acceptance of her, and helped him see his individuality apart from social construction. However, Mary's letter deconstructs that individual identity. Even on the train, Paul does not want to go anywhere in particular and keeps forgetting what or where he is going. His disrupted identity, and Mary's lack of place in it causes him to blindly and thoughtlessly search elsewhere, knowing that in Western capitalist society, his identity and individuality perhaps cannot be found.

While he is at the train station, Paul keeps forgetting what is to remember as he tells himself: "What was that thought he was trying to get ahold of – bumping around in his head – something he started to think about but couldn't remember it somehow" (Bennett 28). Paul has just undergone a personal tragedy of sorts and his stream of consciousness thinking is reflective of his experience. However, his lack of remembering resonates with Arna Bontemps poem "Length of Moon" also encased in the journal *Fire!!* In the lines of the poem in the middle stanza it reads "There we may think of this, yet / There will be something forgotten / And something we should forget" (lines 6-8). In the poem "Length of Moon" the voice of the poem is discussing how life is quickly passing by; that time and experiences are fleeting. Things are not permanent, so each experience should be savored in some way. Even the negative experiences that scar individuals are many times only short-lived, and many of the negative moments should be forgotten rather than carried forward. Similarly, Paul is struggling to remember what he is doing and is absent-mindedly leaving town so as to forget the incident and the embarrassment altogether. However, he cannot completely forget it.

In addition, he has not been able to master the French language, even though he has been a citizen and a part of the community for years. Even as he boards the train, he chuckles at the language gap: “funny how these French said descend when they meant get off – funny he couldn’t pick up French – been here so long” (Bennett 28). While he cannot seem to forget the tragedy of Mary’s note, he also cannot seem to remember French, even though he has been speaking and living in France for many years both before and after the war. The hesitancy with which Paul refuses to embrace the language of the town is further evidence Michael Chaney uses to argue that Paul is still a vagabond, not a tourist, not a townsperson, but a drifter with no real community. The term vagabond is synonomous with wanderer, and certainly by the story’s close Paul is wandering from Montartre. Vagabond can also suggest homelessness, and that is more fitting for Paul as well as Mary. Paul and Mary had found a home in each other, and when Mary separates herself from Paul, he is homeless, as he’d been all along. Only this time, Paul is even more aware of his transient status.

Gwendolyn Bennett traveled to Paris and experienced black culture in the City of Light. “Wedding Day” is revealing in that it highlights the reality of French tolerance of African American migrants into their culture. Where France may have seemed far more accepting and even lavishly fascinated by African American skin tones and textures, consider Josephine Baker, for instance, in reality France was practicing minstrelsy by another name. African Americans in Paris were accepted and even celebrated, but it was to serve as an illustration of savagery pitted against civilized bourgeois society. Dark bodies, both male and female, were used for entertainment and were expected to perform in limited and socially approved ways. Through the telling of “Wedding Day” Bennett highlights the intersection of economics, class, race, and gender in capitalist societies. These cultural norms are so enshrined in the minds of individuals, particularly among those exploited by these capitalist societies, that even when given the opportunity to escape exploitation, they refuse it.

Paul is a lower class African American man earning wealthy white man’s money by displaying savage manhood against a waning Western civilized culture. He is positioned at the junction of race and class. Likewise, Bennett and the other author-editors of *Fire!!* are at the junction of individual and artistic liberty and the desperate need to satisfy subscribers and support themselves. To truly have creative liberty means they would not worry about cultural or audience expectations, but to fail to meet expectations would come at a great cost to the individual creators. This intersection of society and the individual is a tug of war for not only minority groups who are often exploited for their labor. Society versus self is a tension felt by all members of a capitalist society. Just how much that tug of war affected the integrity of the journal *Fire!!* came at the challenge to get it banned and to violate social norms so as to generate higher funds.

Chapter Six:

Aaron Douglas and the Role of the Artist

Aaron Douglas is perhaps one of the most widely known artists of the Harlem Renaissance. He is best known for his primitive cubist murals depicting various aspects of African American life. Douglas came to Harlem in 1924 from Nebraska to experience a wider world and gather new ideas in art, and under the direction of Winold Reiss, a German born artist, Douglas expanded his skill set to fully appreciate European art forms as well as primitivism with an Africanist theme. Douglas knew well the push and pull of publication of his art, the pressure to conform to the editors' demands. There was often pressure to create art to fit the expectation of the white patrons, who following the Great War were looking for primitivism, pre-colonial non-Western ideas in art. However, there was pressure to use art for 'racial uplift' from the propagandists' African American leaders like Locke and Du Bois - to represent African American life in more European forms of portraiture. Douglas succeeded in both of these forms, but in the summer of 1926, when he was a part of the younger artists and the creation of *Fire!!* Douglas created three drawings and the cover for the issue. The cover is of the primitivistic form and creates almost an illusion to the eye, but the three drawings contained inside the journal are distinctive to most of Douglas' known work. In being afforded editorial rights to create art to represent the African American culture, it could be argued that these three drawings represent Douglas' stance on the role of art and the artist for the African American race. In addition, Richard Bruce Nugent submitted two illustrations for the journal. Though these two images appear somewhat similar to Douglas other work, even the cover of *Fire!!* through close analysis, Nugent is making a statement as to the struggle of the African American artist and even submitting Nugent's own aesthetic. Self-edited *Fire!!* gave both

Douglas and Nugent a space to make their own visual arguments with regards to art and the role of the artist during the Harlem Renaissance.

Typically, Aaron Douglas is known for the primitivistic murals that feature various stages of African life from freedom and an almost tranquil stage in pre-colonial life, to the captivity of slavery, and even the Great Migration into urban spaces following the turn of the century. This narrative progression of his artistic style his perhaps how he best met the expectations of both the primitive style which looks backward to pre-civilization as well as the earliest of civilization, and the "racial uplift" mandate of using art to elevate the race, which looks forward towards progress and eventual equality.

Douglas' style has been a blend of Egyptian, African, American, Christian sacred art forms. The murals, in particular have a way of reaching vertically to heaven, but also expanding horizontally both into the past and projecting into the future. Inspired by the March 1925 issue of *Survey Graphic,* especially Winold Reiss' depiction of Roland Hayes portrait on the cover, Douglas was encouraged to head to Harlem and begin attempting that which Locke suggested. In his essay, "Art of the Ancestors," also published in *Survey Graphic*, Locke states,

> The Negro in his American environment has turned predominantly to the arts of music, the dance, and poetry, and emphasis quite different from that of African culture...Surely this art, once known and appreciated, can scarcely have less influence upon te blood descendants than upon those who inherit by tradition only. And at the very least, even for those not especially interested in art, it should definitely establish the enlightening fact that the Negro is not a cultural foundling without an inheritance. (Locke, *Survey Graphic*, 673)

Understanding the need to unearth African culture from history, Aaron Douglas embraces "African traditions with European modernist trends...This style comprised boldly flattened silhouettes that occupied complexly fractured spaces and were overlaid with transparent layers of geometric atmosphere" (Knappe 123). The blending of European with African, and modern with historical traditions, created a style that also give Douglas a name for in art circles. However, within the pages of *Fire!!* Douglas abandoned that motif in his art, for something modern or contemporary, but not in keeping with African traditions. What Douglas does with these drawings, reveal a complexity of thought concerning the present and future debates about artistic representation, propaganda, and the role of the artist than in revealing the African artistic history and heritage of African American art.

When examining Douglas' three drawings inside the journal *Fire!!* immediately his technique is markedly different than his typical creations. Rather than provide the silhouette forms and stark contrasting colors of his primitive murals, in these drawings Douglas provides contour drawings of three different individuals: the preacher, the artist, and the waitress. When examined individually details can be seen and analyzed at the significance of both the person and the profession in the drawing. More interestingly, is the image the three drawings generate collectively as if they represented three panels side by side. The three characters in these panels seem to speak to each other and make a claim as to what art can be and what role the artist can play in moving the culture forward. With the artists in the middle, Douglas makes the statement that the artist is the purveyor and provocateur of cultural critique and representation, but that artist is not without pressure from those represented.

To understand and appreciate the thesis, the examination needs to begin with middle image, that of the artist. However, all three contour drawings need to be understood by the style of realism Douglas used for only one other drawing, that of an untitled drawing for the National Urban League in February of 1926 (Fig. 2). In that untitled drawing the curvy contour effect was also used where the lines on the bagged harvest, and the lines on the pant leg of the farmer are shaky but confident. The farmer gazes off to his left and the sun is at his back. He stands in the middle of several bags of potatoes or another round vegetable with trees in the horizon. The sun is slightly shaded by curvy clouds, and in the distance there appears to be another farm hand carrying a sack of harvested produce. The centered farmer holds a full sack of vegetables in his right hand, his sleeves are rolled up to the elbow and his shirt is open to the middle of his torso. The expression of this farmer shows a confidence in himself and possibly in his completed harvest season. He does not smile, but his determined facial expression reflects that he is not defeated, but proud and strong. This February 1926 drawing came a few months before the drawings enclosed in *Fire!!* but this drawing seems to be an attempt by Douglas to create a type for African American art that escapes the stereotype. This drawing, and those in the journal, give faces rather than silhouettes. Those faces have expressions and subtle African American tropes like thicker wavy hair on the men. In addition, the setting and the occupation of each member represented is typically an American role. Africa is not in these contours; African Americans are. Rather, when given the chance to be his own editor and to create art with his own publishing choices, Douglas provides images of the African American race in America - images that reflect the varying and perhaps conflicting socio-political spheres for African Americans as well.

In February of 1926, Douglas was commissioned by *Opportunity* magazine to illustrate an industrial issue for them. The cover followed some of Douglas' more popular cubist style with monochromatic contrasting black and white silhouette forms. The cover depicts two men blacksmithing, surrounded by triangular shapes that denote both the sparks of the mallet on hot metal and the energy that is needed and generated by industrialized labor and the progress it promotes. While the cubist modern style was common for Douglas, inside this particular issue of *Opportunity* Douglas submitted a contour drawing of a farmer in a field gathering vegetables. In her book *Aaron Douglas: Art, Race, and the Harlem Renaissance* Amy Helene Kirschke states the drawing "consisting of a series of uninterrupted lines, with no shadows. A figure, dressed in pants and shirt, holds a sack of vegetables (potatoes?) and looks to the side. In the background of this contemporary rural scene, perhaps meant to take place in the South, other laborers are carrying sacks of food away" (75). This drawing could have been rendered using the cubist style; however, Douglas chose this style of contour drawing that is not as frequent in his portfolio.

In the same style of the untitled farmer, the artist is a figurative drawing with realism at work. The artist is in the center of the three drawings, but his legs are bent and appear shaky, as if he is a bit uncertain on where he stands. Likewise, while the brush is held firmly in the artist's right hand, his arm is curvy, perhaps also shaky. His left hand is extended out in a flat plane with his palm level with the floor as if he is either steading his resolve as he paints his picture or perhaps dismissing outside influences, pushing them aside to create his own art for himself. The artist's tools are on a wavy-legged table behind him, he has a cloth in his right pocket to clean up any mess, and his eyes are locked on his canvas in front of him. This stern gaze is a look of concentration but the furrowed brow above his focuses eyes suggests a frustration. That wrinkled brow coupled with the flat left-handed palm, and even his shaky legs suggest he is frustrated with the outside entities putting pressure on him. Perhaps it is the pressure from those to the left and the right of him as he creates his work. The images on either side of him, in many ways, represent at least two groups who influence this artist (Fig .4).

The image to the left of artist and the first image in the three is that of the preacher, or spokesman for the race. He stands tall behind a podium in which a large open text site. This preacher's legs are long and straighter than the artists. His right leg is curvy or bent, but his left leg is straight and strong. He is bearing his weight fully on that leg while the right leg rests comfortably. The emphasis on the preacher's legs to that of the artist's is a confidence or assurance the preacher has on where he stands with his views of the African American race. His arms are also curvy because they are bent - one in the direction of his audience. The right hand is extended with his palm upwards, and if one views the three drawings as panels in context with each other, the preacher is directing his message to the artist. The preacher's left hand is positioned on his left him in a fist. Interestingly, the preacher's face is turned to the right, but his eyes glance askance to the audience, to the artist. The expression on the preacher's face is not one of joy, but of confirmed judgment. He is glaring at the artist, perhaps attempting to get a glimpse of the art he is creating. The preacher's face is stern and his brow is also furrowed. Both he and the artist have thick, wavy hair of possibly African American texture (Fig. 2).

The preacher, in many ways, represents the primary race leader with the voice of authority for the future of the race. During the Harlem Renaissance, the race leaders, like Du Bois, who are confident in the direction and projection of how art should be used to represent and uplift the African American race. The leader wants art to be by the book, to be purposeful- like propaganda, perhaps. And this preacher is looking resolutely at the artist, pressuring him to produce art that represents the standards he has espoused.

The third panel or drawing is of a waitress, a female server in a cafe or restaurant (Fig 5). The waitress stands sure-footed as well, similar to the preacher. She stands in high heels but her knees and legs are not drawn with the same curvy lines. Rather, she stands in heels with knee-high stockings. The knee-highs are slightly rolling down her legs, as if to suggest that the elastic is worn, the knee-highs are stretched, and she has been working on her feet for some time. However, the rolled and worn knee-highs, and perhaps tired feet are less shaky than either the preacher or the artist. Perhaps because she is not in the spotlight and not under public scrutiny as are the other individuals in their vocations, she can stand more confidently in who she is. Her role as a table server and perhaps her status as lower class affords her the liberty to be who she is rather than live up to someone else's cultural expectation. The waitress's arms are carrying a tray with dishes consisting of a plate, a tea cup and saucer and a water bottle. There is also a round table behind her with another plate and two water glasses on it. The arms of the waitress are wavy as she carries her load, but the height of the tray indicates that the woman is in no way struggling to stand on her own. Her face is also glaring to the right, toward the artist as if to see what he is painting or how he will represent her in his art. Will the lower classes be fairly represented, or will they be dismissed as minstrelsy? Will women be represented in fair numbers, or is the movement led by men going to limit the space for women in representation? The woman's face is firm, but she is less grimaced with little to no consternation across her forehead. Her status as lower class and as a woman make her underrepresented in throughout the Harlem Renaissance, but Douglas and the rest of the contributors to *Fire!!* have chosen to represent both lower class urban and rural life and give equal attention to women as serious subjects in their art.

The three drawings in this journal are so vastly different from the other Afro-cubist primitivism that Douglas is known for, it begs the question the reason Douglas would implement almost an impressionist line drawing technique, which although lacking layers or three dimensional qualities, the emphasis of facial expression, in the journal in which he had editorial authority. These three panels of contour drawings center on the role of the artist and seem to acknowledge the centrality of art to define and explain his ideas of what African American art during the Harlem Renaissance should be, what it should represent. By these three panels and the conversation the eyes of each subject make with each other, Douglas could be making the claim that art is central to cultural change, but that artists are pressured to select the best perspective, and that more than one is appropriate for art. The pressure from the voices of authority profess art that meets a standard to maintain a status of middle class or even elitist values. To use art to support, maintain, and even elevate the status quo. However, the waitress reflects the need for an artist to represent more than one individual, gender, vocation, and socio-economic brand. And the use of the modern art deco line form contrasting to the expected forms, reveal how Douglas too understands that for African American art to be fully authentic it needs to be culturally diverse and autonomous.

Aaron Douglas not only provided these three line drawings. He illustrated the cover and provided the incidental art decorations throughout the journal. The cover and the incidental drawings are similar in style to many of his other works, with a cubist and silhouette form. These drawings highlight the influence Winold Reiss had on Aaron Douglas, but Douglas imparts his own interpretation to it. The cover of *Fire!!* is in stark and bold red and black. These two contrasting colors correlate well with the title of the magazine. The term Fire!! is in red on a black background, signifying the flames and heat the issue with hopefully generate. Below the title sits a sphinx also in dark red. This sphinx connects to ancient Egypt and by extension African cultures. However, the rear of the sphinx seems to be chained, as if to suggest slavery and oppression. When one's view zoomed out the chain is actually the earring and ear of a silhouetted figure. The black background behind the title and sphinx is actually a man's face with red outlines for his ear, eye, nose, and lips. He and the man are both facing the same direction; their faces almost bearing the same expression of solemnity. The bottom of the cover image are approximately seven red triangles, signifying Egyptian pyramids, perhaps. However, just as the use of silhouettes in starkly contrasted colors is common in other publications of the period, triangles are also a commonly used shape in Harlem Renaissance artwork. The cover is bold and eye-catching, but it is also very much like the contents of the journal (Fig. 6). The surface image and idea is emphatic, but upon a second and closer inspection, so much more is offered in the layering of images. Just as the author-editors of this journal wanted the freedom to express art in multi-faceted ways, this image reaches back into African heritage, even while flipping that heritage on his head a bit. The earring, which also appears as a chain of oppression possibly suggests that the older traditions are just as stifling and limiting to creative ability. Not only that, but the ideas which the traditionalist Victorians fear, freedom devolving into decadence, is the freedom that will symbolize the younger generation overall. It is not a chain; it is an earring. It is an accessory that symbolizes beauty and individuality. It is this accessory of individual choice rather than social obligation.

It is worthy of note, that while the three figure drawings Douglas renders for the journal are vastly different from his other works, Douglas still continues in his Africanist tradition with the cover and incidental drawings. Douglas and the other younger artists are not directly opposed to the ideas and creative ideologies of other forms of representation for the group. Just as Cullen's "From the Dark Tower" is in the poetry section as a valid example of African American art, the 'primitive' perceptions of race are given even on the front cover. These images are similar to the many images in Johnson's *Opportunity* and Alain Locke's *New Negro*. These younger artists are the creators of many of these primitive and Victorian texts during this time. That representation is not excluded from this journal; however, the images and projections of the race in more diverse and even modern ways are also included. The goal of *Fire!!* is seen from the Douglas' cover and his three panel contour line drawings.

The incidental drawings consist of a repeated image of a warrior mask and a warrior pose image at the conclusion of Gwendolyn Bennet's "Wedding Day" story. This mask is in geometric shape with the war paint along the nose resembling an arrow. The warrior mask is perfectly symmetrical. To complement the repeating mask square is a rectangular image of ta warrior lunging on his legs with his arrow poised to strike. The warrior is in the middle of grass with a small river beneath him. His hair is pulled back and his face appears to have the warrior mask on it, even though only the profile is given. These incidental images reflect the Africanst tradition of Douglas and several of his other works. The warrior posed and the warrior masks also speak to the struggle for representation that was occurring all during the "New Negro Movement." Yes, these images match with the primitive, but they also reflect a desire to be distinct. A mask is worn for defensive protection or worn for identity. These masks are perhaps both.

But Douglas was not the only one providing illustrations for this journal. Richard Bruce Nugent also provided illustrations to complement two short stories in *Fire!!* The first image was to accompany Wallace Thurman's "Cordelia the Crude" and has been discussed previously in chapter three of this study. The other drawing or illustration is found between the poetry section "Flames for the Dark Tower" and Gwendolyn Bennet's "Wedding Day." The unnamed drawing is similar to the Cordelia image in that it is bold silhouetted image of a woman standing within a curved corner. Her arms are out in front of her, palms turned down. This woman is exceedingly strong with the outline of her muscular form evident in the silhouette. The woman's face is toward the viewer, but the specific features of her face are lost in the dark pattern of the image. Instead, there is an outline for her eyes, eyebrows, and full lips. Her hair is possibly natural Afro-textured hair, for the fullness of it is prominent in the silhouette. The corner in which she stands appears to be tiered at the top left, like steps above her head. The bottom left corner is a curve that eventually flattens into the smooth, flat surface she stands upon. Along the outside of the curve and steps to the left of the woman is the same triangular pattern that Nugent used in the Cordelia drawing with a double line traced beside the triangles (Fig 7).

The illustration preceding and complimenting "Cordelia the Crude" has a woman leaning to her left against the curving wall. She is relaxed and slouching a bit, as if waiting for someone. In this illustration between the poetry and "Wedding Day" the woman is standing erect and actively pushing the air with her open hands. She is not relaxed; the muscles in her entire body are engaged, particularly in her arms. The odd shape of the figure to the woman's left almost appears to be half of a vase or vessel in which she is entrapped. Rather than push against the side of the vessel or wall, this woman stands in full strength and power amid them. Although she may be building her strength, particularly in her arms, in preparation against the wall before her.

This woman is the opposite representation depicted in "Color Struck" as well. In Hurston's play, Emma rejects her skin color and her hair texture as deserving of love and acceptance. However, this woman stands in confidence alone, without the approval of others to validate her worth. She is what Emma could become if she only saw herself as strong and beautiful. She is also another manifestation of what these artists and writers of *Fire!!* wanted - to create their art and let it stand and speak for itself without bowing to the approval of others for publication and validation.

While this image is of an image about to break out of a vessel on the left side of the page, to the right there is nothing holding her back. Rather, the vessel with the triangles at the bottom and the circles at the top left of the image, seem almost as a one-dimensional creature about to devour her. She is almost in its trap. There is space to move, breathe, and find expression if the woman in the image would just turn around or change her perspective. This woman appears to be strong enough to push against the curved and tiered wall before her, but her arms and body may not be gearing to fight, rather, they are stretching, expanding and becoming more aware of every portion of her body. As the woman is stretching, her face, though not clear, appears more confident than angry. Her lips are pursed. Viewed from a perspective of idle stretching, this woman is confident and self-controlled, even in inaction, rather than angry and oppressed - preparing to fight against a system of oppression. This image of confident idle stretching would fit considering that the woman is free to move around if she were to just turn around.

Richard Bruce Nugent has been labeled a bohemian and a dilettante both in his lifestyle and in his approach to art and literature during the Harlem Renaissance. He is repeatedly acknowledged as talented with a flare for genius. In the Foreword to *Gentleman's Jigger* Arnold Rampersand asserts that Nugent is kind of a "skilled amateur" who did not produce enough work to be considered a major player in the movement: "I believe that [Nugent] saw his own life as his finest possible work of art. With is

Italianate good looks and his intelligence and sensitivity…he might have become more than *merely an occasional actor*..He had undoubted gifts as an artists…but he left behind a relatively small body of such work for someone who lives as long as he did" (Foreword viii). Nugent was noticeably talented, but also noticeably lazy. Nugent's first published poem "Shadow" was found by Langston Hughes in a trash can and plucked out and sent to Charles S. Johnson for consideration in *Opportunity* (St. Clair 284). Nugent was haphazard with his approach to art and his writings. In an interview with James Hatch, Nugent confessed that his own drawings "copied Nell Brinkley with tragic fidelity" (Hatch 85). Nell Brinkley was a noted cartoonist for New York magazines. Nugent, though talented, did not seem to have a problem with thinking outside the box, or even plagiarizing someone else rather than do the work himself.

The two drawings that Nugent submitted for *Fire!!* are not copies of Brinkley's cartoon images; rather, they are similar to the work of Aaron Douglas in form and contrasting colors. It is worthy of note that when Douglas decided to submit artwork for this new journal, of which he was also editor, he chose contour line drawing that he had not used in publications previously. Nugent offers to fill the journal with his artwork, and Nugent's work looks more like the type of work Douglas usually would have submitted for other journals. While Douglas is experimenting with new forms and creating images of African American life in new ways, Nugent is in essence copying the style that gave Douglas his artistic celebrity. It is as if Nugent submits these pieces not just as complements to the readings, as with "Cordelia the Crude," but also as a way to provide art that was to be expected by Douglas' audience. This 'copying' of Douglas' style could be interpreted as more laziness on the part of Nugent. Rather than create something new and original, he gives what is expected, or perhaps what audiences would expect of a journal with Aaron Douglas' name included in it. However, Nugent is not just being lazy; his artistic choices, though not as blaringly original, are deliberate and still profound.

In Cody C. St. Clair's "A Dilettante Unto Death: Richard Bruce Nugent's Dilettante Aesthetic and Unabmitious Failure" he argues that Nugent's artistic choices and dilettante lifestyle were purposeful. Nugent's reputation for laziness was not just his refusal to work because of a faulty work ethic. Rather, Nugent "embraced dilettantism as a political inactivity of the self that deconstructs racists stereotypes of the 'lazy Negro' even as it rejects the classist and professional ideologies of racial uplift and black bourgeois respectability" (273). In other words, his laziness is not a character flaw in his personality, as would be interpreted by the bourgeois. His laziness in his lifestyle and even in his art, such as the art contributed in *Fire!!* is a political stand. Nugent is failing to produce completely original work, perhaps, but he is also failing to "participate in a system of valuation that is predicated on exploitation and conformity" (Munoz 174). Nugent seems to have a keen awareness of the capitalist game during the Harlem Renaissance. To publish or be published, an African American artist had to submit to commercial and social norms and expectations. That submission meant a subjection of the self. The New Negro Movement was a capitalist venture predicated on the literary and artistic production of black minds and bodies. And those who fully participated submitted more than art or writing samples to the publisher. Nugent never fully participated in the game of publishing. He chose to be 'lazy' to avoid capitalist exploitation. Rather than be known as a 'great writer' or a 'great artist' Nugent was known for his talent but his refusal to fully commit to the work. More about this lazy artistic approach will be discussed in the following chapter.

How does this lazy, dilettante approach manifest itself in the two illustrations Nugent supplied for *Fire!!*? Other than the fact that the style is a copy of Douglas himself, both the illustration for "Cordelia the Crude" and the illustration that precedes "Wedding Day" have signs of Nugent's bohemian dilettantism. The illustration that accompanies "Cordelia the Crude" directly precedes the story in the journal. It is the first illustration and the first submission audiences will see when reviewing the collective efforts of this writer-editor journal. A full description and discussion of the image is seen in chapter three of this study; however, it is worth noting how the woman in this first illustration mirrors the woman in Nugent's second illustration and how they both represent Nugent's dilettante aesthetic.

In the "Cordelia the Crude" drawing, the woman is leaning against a palm tree in a very relaxed, almost lazy pose. She is entirely naked, yet she seems to feel no shame. She is comfortable in her skin. Like the woman in the second drawing, there is a curved wall with double lines and triangles on the left of the image. In chapter three it was discussed that the curved wall was a part of the theatre where Cordelia goes to find men when she is bored at home. Rather than just being the theatre and curtain backdrop for a woman whose body earns her wages, these curved, and triangle lined barriers might also represent the social standards and the politics of respectability. Both women are naked; both are posed beside rigid triangles, which might represent the strict expectations of femininity at this time, or even the strict expectations for artists. The woman in the first image has her back to the structures and triangles behind her. She is leaning against the tree and is not affected by the standards at all. She is in a position of full repose in complete nakedness with her back to what she should be doing. Rather than striving to be a woman of respectability, this woman has found more freedom in opting out altogether. Her body is full; her muscles are not flexed. She is not fighting anything, and in rest, her body finds full expression as a woman. Likewise, Nugent's laziness as an artists during the creative explosion that was the New Negro movement, was not a moral failure. He found more creative freedom by dabbing in the arts from time to time than in fully committing to becoming a successful artist and writer. To become a success would mean to know and met the standard, even if that standard was pressed hard against you. To commit would mean to fight; there is more freedom for Nugent in repose than in resistance.

In contrast, the woman in the second drawing is facing the triangular tiered structure – the social restrictions and norms. If she is preparing to fight, she has an oddly shaped wall to push against with no sign of weakened integrity. The curved and tiered wall is solid with triangular reinforcements. This woman, who at first glance, is perhaps trying to break out, will find this structure rather impenetrable. However, were she to change her perspective and reorient herself, she would find no struggle at all. Like the "Cordelia the Crude" image, she is fully naked, but this woman is flexing every muscle in her body. She is gearing up to fight. Perhaps, she is representative of the artists who wants to be great, but in order to do that he must produce quantity and quality work. To be published, this artist must meet audience and editor expectation and approval. During the Harlem Renaissance, the struggle of representation and publication came from many different angles, like the angles created by the tiered vessel. This woman is the "negro artist" in the artistic vessel. She is like Hughes, or maybe even Thurman who is fighting to create works worthy of publication, but plagued by a sense that the works will never measure up to the Western cannon. Even the moneyed interest from white patrons came with oppressive and exploitative costs. Ironically, if the woman would just turn around, she would be free to move about and relax her muscles. In this and the first illustration Nugent is offering another option to the artists of this movement, the option of boycott. While so many race leaders, younger artists, and white patrons quibble about what African American art should or could be, as in the survey questionnaire sent out by Jessie Fauset in January of 1926, Nugent is revealing that these artists still have more than a few options. They can choose to publish works that meet the respectability standard, like Countee Cullen. They can choose to give more primitive images and narrative of pre-civilized Africa as white patrons had requested and paid handsomely for. They also could struggle to write stories and poems of the proletariat, like that of Hughes and Hurston. But there was still another option afforded to these younger artists. They could choose to refuse to play. They could generate art for their sake truly, as Nugent attempted throughout his life. Creating art with few expectations and even fewer deadlines, would free these artists from being exploited from any group that would pay for their productions. As an artist Nugent is like the woman in the first illustration, but the second illustration is his interpretation of other young artists in the movement. He sees his publishing friends as the woman in the second illustration, being pressed and prodded from various level and angles to fit with their norm and demands. If these artists would just reorient their perspective as artists, freedom to move, create, and recreate would be theirs.

For Aaron Douglas, the entire experience of creating his own journal depicting the race was a highlight in his artistic career: "Collaboration was the essence of the movement, and though he enjoyed his work at *The Crisis* and *Opportunity*, it did not compare to the experience of putting together *Fire!!*" (Kirschke 89). While he may have produced more art in other venues, Douglas thought that his time as artist-editor with his work with *Fire!!* was outlandish. For Douglas, it was rather startling to that he and his other young artist friends were "daring enough to come forth with a thing like that. It was outrageous…for us to do that…well, certainly we thought that was the greatest thing" (Collins). Having the freedom to create his own ideas in visual art, Douglas created three contour line drawings, a style he rarely used before or since. These three drawings also offer an interpretation to the intensity and pressure artists felt during this movement. Through these submissions in *Fire!!* Douglas provides a critical interpretation of the Harlem Renaissance as a whole.

Similarly, Nugent's artistic contributions to the journal by the younger artists, gave him the space to present his aesthetic as well. For Nugent, art was about life. Yes, the pieces his creates can be interpreted as illustrations of certain stories, and his is known for that. However, his minimal about of work over the course of his long life, is a life lived in repose. His life, and his "Cordelia the Crude" illustration are options for artists as well. Ironically, Nugent mimics Douglas style with his two illustrations, but that met expectations of the audience, perhaps, while giving Douglas the opportunity be the artist who frees himself from those expectations and creates art for himself. In general, Nugent is the woman in repose, the woman of the first illustration with his back to artistic standards, and Douglas is perhaps the artist depicted in the second illustration, struggling to find the art that fits the life his represents. However, when Nugent took up the mantel of the primitive in his drawing submissions in *Fire!!* Nugent became depicted the struggle, but he did so in a way that was critical of the struggle. In so doing, he gave Douglas greater space to explore new techniques and forms, allowing Douglas to find freedom in art without editorial restrictions. Through *Fire!!* Douglas finds freedom in ignoring the standards, becoming the relaxed woman of the first Nugent image. Both artists explore their abilities and their aesthetic principles through the exercise of being their own editors.

Chapter Seven:

Richard Bruce Nugent's Modernist Bohemian Propaganda and Artistic Boycott

When Wallace Thurman and Richard Bruce Nugent gathered together to discuss the content and editorial nature of a literary journal "for younger Negro artists," they both knew that to make an impact the journal would have to contain exceptional work and stellar artistry. They also knew that to win the financial game of publishing, they would have to promote and sell enough copies to pay the printers. One strategy to promote the journal and quickly sell copies was to attempt something along the lines of an Oscar Wilde, or H.L Menken success scandal. Get the journal banned, get a scathing review from Du Bois and the propagandist group, and the journal would become like forbidden fruit. According to historian Eric Garber, "[Wallace] Thurman decided that in order for *Fire!!* to be truly daring, two particularly sensational pieces were needed: one on homosexuality, the other on prostitution. He [Thurman] flipped a coin to determine who [Thurman or Nugent] would write what" (qtd in Cobb 330). Thurman's "Cordelia the Crude" was to be the opening, and with its portrayal of prostitution in Harlem was daring and scathing enough, but Richard Bruce Nugent opted to push the banned button a bit more. His short story "Smoke, Lilies, and Jade" is the first story in African American literary history depicting a homosexual love affair. The affair between Alex and Beauty is moving and skillfully told; however, the reasons behind the story and its subtle connections to even the Foreword of the journal prove just as telling.

By creating text deliberately to be banned for promotion and sales or commercial reasons, it could be argued that Thurman and Nugent are violating the mantra of art for art's sake. Instead, "Smoke, Lilies, and Jade" was deliberately written to be "banned in Boston" on the hope that a banned journal would be a best-seller. However, in writing a story for commercial reasons rather than artistic ones, the editors and creators are creating art that is propaganda, art that they claim this journal rejects and burns up. Perhaps this story, though forward and modern in content, defeats the goals set forth by the Niggeratti. By writing a text that would cause a commercial stir and hopefully a subsequent success, Nugent was playing a risky propagandist game and creating art for shock value, rather than for art's sake. However, this story also contains in-depth modernist critiques of the other artists, their techniques, and questions of art aesthetics. Also, the stream-of-consciousness, elliptical prose style provides a modernist introspective style and those introspective thoughts are likely autobiographically Nugent's. This provides a space for multiple perspectives and reflections on art in both Eurocentric and African American circles. These inner thoughts reveal Nugent's thoughts on the role of the artists in society; the role private lives play in public figures; and the place of African American art in the modern art movement. Upon closer review, there is more to "Smoke, Lilies, and Jade" than just the shock. The narrative style, the copious literary references, and the artist's struggle to find the words that describe the depths of his human soul, all articulate additional means by which these editors strove to create art that reveals the complexity and duplicity of the African American experience.

The story opens with Alex in bed searching for motivation to leave the comfort of his bed. It reads like a modern revision of John Keats' "Ode to Indolence" where Alex, just like the voice of the poet, is running through the different things that excite him and energize him, even the necessities, and each one is dismissed as not as enjoyable as the reposed position the man is currently in. In "Ode to Indolence" the voice of the poem is haunted by three shadows that represent motivation to work: Love, Ambition, and Poetry. These three are strong motivators for anyone to work hard, even when desire to do so wanes. However, the narrator rejects all three of them and calls out:

> Was it a silent deep-disguised plot
>
> To steal away, and leave without a task

My idle days? Ripe was the drowsy hour;
The blissful cloud of summer-indolence
Benumb'd my eyes; my pulse grew less and less;
Pain had no sting, and pleasure's wreath no flower.
O, why did ye not meld, and leave my sense
Undaunted quite of all but – nothingness? (lines 13-20).

Despite the fact that the motivation is strong and present, the voice of this poem refuses to do what he ought. He would rather waste the day in idleness or nothingness than work to provide for his love, make a name for himself, or pursue his passion in art. Despite the usually motivations, the voice of the poem will not be stirred from his lazy status.

The narrator of "Smoke, Lilies and Jade" is also consumed with indolence. He knows the reasons for needing to do something, but cannot seem to move from his bed or apartment: "he wanted to do something... to write or draw…but it was so comfortable just to lay there on the bed…to think and smoke…why wasn't he worried that he had no money…but he had been hungry…he was hungry still…all he wanted to do was…lay there comfortably smoking" (Nugent, *Fire!!*, 33). Just like the voice of "Ode on Indolence" the narrator here feels and sees the need to write and do something that would bring in money, support and feed him, and even satisfy an aesthetic longing in his being, but he cannot move from the reclined position. This narrator, though not clearly discernible as Nugent himself, bears a likeness to the author. Nugent, as the youngest of the Niggeratti was often the laziest who also borrowed money, cigarettes, and even clothes from other members of the creative group: "Born in 1906, he was the youngest member of the Niggeratti--a fact which seems to have influenced his lifestyle. he felt free to behave like the group's 'clown,' opting for the role of the 'flamboyant one' - a position acknowledged by various scholars who refer to as the 'ultimate bohemian.' Nugent would cause excitement, being unwashed and wearing neither shoes nor a necktie" (Schwarz 121). His youth perhaps gave him the liberty to be more bohemian, but more than that, his self-identification, his lifestyle, and his approach to life seemed to be a perpetual rejection to convention. "Smoke, Lilies, and Jade" is also a continuous rejection of convention and socially normalized behavior.

"Smoke, Lilies and Jade" takes the same indolent perspective; the narrator knows he should work but he refuses to do so. Not only is the content indolent, the elliptical prose style is also representative of an indolent style. Rather than form full and complete sentences, Nugent creates broken fragmented phrases that express his ideas with the least amount of effort. For an insolent writer, the elliptical style is perhaps the best. However, it is also reflective of a stream-of-consciousness style of the modern era. This fragmented style reflects the ways in which words and ideas are formed in the mind organically. Rather than follow a set pattern of logic, reason, and even plot structure, elliptical stream-of-consciousness self-interrupts in part and makes leaps in time and topic. Michael L. Cobb in "Insolent Racing, Rough Narrative: The Harlem Renaissance's Impolite Queers" asserts that the elliptical style fails to meet the definition of ellipses in omitting narrative material. The coherency of the ideas in the story remains intact. However, the ellipse dots serve to disrupt the sentence style and standard "proper" grammar of the American English language in the same way the contents of the homo-erotic relationship disrupt the polite collective of the race being prescribed by the likes of Du Bois and Locke.

In remarking on the recurrence of the death of the queer in literary history, Cobb states, "The establishment of a queer black literary tradition might need a dead corpse, a dead, decadent form…it is a possible truism: queers die within the parameters of most literary and filmic forms" (343). The death of the queer, the decadent individual who blatantly dissents from hetero-normative behavior, reiterates the survival and influence of the culturally approved racial uplift narrative. "Smoke, Lilies, and Jade" does not end with the death of Alex or even Beauty, his mixed-raced male lover, but Nugent destroys the grammatical conventions at the sentence level. To disrupt the sentence, is to disrupt the paragraph and even completed work entirely. Even to look upon the work on the paragraph level, few paragraphs have obvious indentation marks; rather, they ramble and disjointedly like a perpetual rant of inner thought. By destroying the narrative, Nugent is creating the death of norms and pushing the conventions of art beyond the artifice of style to perhaps the source and "soul" of art. Nugent is not just breaking away from heteronormative ideas in this account; he is violating the norms that have validated narrative.

The ellipse dots also vary in length and frequency, as if to reveal the lapse of thought or the silenced portion of the culture, the things unsaid. Joseph Allen Boon offers an interpretation of the ellipses as narrative renderings of self-censorship of "the unsaid or repressed" (225). Perhaps repression is expressed through the varied lengthy dots, but the abundance of thoughts shared in the content of the novel denotes that Nugent's first person narrator Alex has not repressed or hidden anything. Alex is direct and elicit in his descriptions of past thoughts as well inner dreams of Beauty (Cobb 344).

The ellipse dots represent a stripping away of the artifice of civilization. The conventions of grammar, like the conventions of social norms are simply socially agreed upon measures. The sentence, the paragraph, the chapter, and the novel have definitions that fit a majority standard. The non-standard form acceptable at the time, vernacular or primitive, also fails to reveal the real substance of Alex experience. The African American vernacular English, of which Hurston is adept, does not suit Nugent's character Alex, and it would feel forced to impose such language deviations upon him. The primitive representation that was also commonly used, even as a white preference at the time, also fails to fit the needs of Alex and his ideas. His experience is not primitive, not of Africa but of Harlem. Nugent is striving to find the essence of ideas for Alex and illustrate through the use of ellipses how those ideas come to artists and are composed.

Richard Bruce Nugent was familiar with the thirst for the primitive. He was first published in Alaine Locke's *The New Negro Anthology.* Nugent published the short story "Sahdji," also an elliptical style story. This story is brief, but it recounts the life of a "favorite wife" of a chieftain who is also loved by the chieftain's son. Nugent describes Sahdji's physical features: "…her beautiful dark body…rosy black…graceful as the tongues of flame she loved to dance around…over-full sensuous lips... she knew how to dance too" (Nugent, "Sahdji," 113). The narrator is describing for the audience a picture he has drawn of Sahdji, elaborating that he saw her while in East Africa. By establishing himself as someone who has been to Africa and seen the people and culture, the narrator is someone of an expert in the African primitive. The story reveals the customs and social norms of an East African culture. Sahdji's husband Konombju, has several wives and the hunting practices with bow and arrows leads to the supposed accidental death of the chieftain. This African story of a primitive people reveals that Nugent understood the expected primitive style and could easily create that atmosphere in a story. However, the story also contains the repeated ellipses. In "Sahdji" the ellipses also vary in length, and the passage reads like a casual conversation the narrator is having with his audience about a drawing he has rendered.

Aaron Douglas was commissioned to create the drawing or illustration of Sahdji for *The New Negro*. Locke had it preceding the short story in the anthology as if to give a visual to the verbal descriptions Nugent provided. In the drawing, Sahdji is in the center of the page, standing tall and strong. The shape of her curvy body is in silhouette. The strong sun is in the top left corner, its beams bearing down on a pyramid that towers over the scene in the distance. The other wives are to the left of Sahdji, aslo in the distance, dancing in a line, perhaps at the funeral of Komonbju. Sahdji, is also dancing, her hand raised in the air, but she is not with the other women. Rather, she is alone. The left side of the drawing shows stability and order, shapes and images have clear distinction. On the right of

Sahdji's body appears chaos. Shapes of cubes, triangles, and circles all blend in a way that is almost indiscernible. Sahdji's face is also a barrage of shapes, as if she is wearing a mask. The left side of the picture reveals the outward forms, the cultural norms and order of the society of Warpuri, the village where she is from. The right side of the painting reveals the chaos and confusion of Sahdji beneath the mask of grief. In Nugent's account, Sahdji dances at the funeral and even smiles at Mrabo, the chieftain's son and new chieftain at his father's parting. However, as she dances, Sahdji "gave herself again to Komonbju… the grass-strewn couch of Komonbju" (114). Douglas reveals through his illustration the confusion and grief of the narrative Nugent has provided.

Nugent uses the primitive in "Sahdji," but he also uses the elliptical prose style. In this version the ellipses reveal pauses in conversation as the narrator gathers his thoughts for the next idea. Or perhaps in describing the African village of Warpuri, standard English grammar does not suffice. Likewise, in "Smoke, Lilies, and Jade" standard English grammar is too inadequate to fully express the thought process. Alex is a highly educated man living in Harlem and creating art. He bears the characteristics of the Talented Tenth of Du Boisian ideology. However, Alex's creative process transcends the formalism. The language Alex uses reveals his education, but the ellipses also point to the failure of the civilized standard to truly reveal the depths of human experience overall.

The artists Nugent mentions in the text of "Smoke, Lilies, and Jade" also speak to the struggle Alex, and by extension Nugent, had with creating art that represented the marginal in an authentic way without being dismissed or even silenced for the effort. One author that Alex repeatedly references is that of James Branch Cabell. In the 1920's Cabell was famous for his work entitled *Jurgen,* mostly for the trial of censorship and obscene boiler plate images that were included in the work. The trial lasted two years, but it created instant notoriety and fame for the author. Cabell also received fairly great reviews for *Jurgen* Cabell is first mentioned in a list of authors that Alex knows that his family seems to mock him for knowing: “Why did they scoff at him for knowing such people as Carl … Mencken … Toomer … Hughes … Cullen … Wood … Cabell…oh the whole lot of them” (Nugent, “Smoke, Lilies, and Jade, 34). His brothers have steady jobs, nice clothes, and are building wealth, while Alex is blowing smoke and discussing aesthetics. These authors in this list are modern authors of the 1920’s, some of the Harlem Renaissance, and others of modernist aesthetics from the dominant culture. Later, Alex even quotes portions of Cabell’s *Jurgen* and deliberates on the character from the novel and his creator. While contemplating on the idea of a new form of art that blends color and music, Alex muses “…but after all he was a monstrous clever fellow…Jurgen had said that…Funny how characters in books said the things one wanted to say…he would like to know Jurgen…how does one go about getting an introduction to a fiction character…but Cabell was a master to have written Jurgen…and an artist…and a poet…Alex blew a cigarette” (Nugent, “Smoke, Lilies, and Jade,” 35). The phrase “he was a monstrous fellow” relates back to the novel *Jurgen* whose main eponymous character calls himself the same thing. Alex is mesmerized by Cabell and his novel, as well as the character he created, but there is more to Jurgen than just this one phrase that cements Alex, Nugent, and the Nigeratti to James Branch Cabell.

The overwhelming success of the trial and success Cabell immediately received created the formula for success that Wallace Thurman and Richard Bruce Nugent wanted to attempt for their journal. The goal was to create a work of such lewd material that the work would be sent to trial and eventually banned from the public by the Society for the Suppression of Vice based in New England. Cabell’s novel *Jurgen* was banned for the sexually suggestive nature of the fantasy tale. It is mostly double-entendres and word play in regards to his lance or sword he displays when he meets various women and how he uses these weapons in the text. For example, when Jurgen meets Anaitis,

> Jurgen lifted Anaitis from the altar, and they went in to the chancel and searched for the adytum. There seemed to be no doors anywhere in the chancel: but presently Jurgen found an opening screen by a pink veil. Jurgen thrust with his lance and broke this veil. He heard the sound of one brief wailing cry: it was followed by soft laughter. So Jurgen came into the adytum. (qtd in Keeley 2)

Just this suggested lewdness of the sword thrusting through a pink veil prompts the trial against Cabell, but after two years, Cabell and his lawyers won the suit citing that the suggestive nature may be there, but there is also an obvious innocent layer to it also. The lawsuit and trial was free publicity for Cabell and his novel became a best-seller.

Where Cabell's novel has only suggested obscenity, "Smoke, Lilies and, Jade" has within its content more direct sexual content between Alex and Beauty. The two stories are clearly somewhat unrelated. *Jurgen* is set in as a medieval fantasy tale with implicit imagery; "Smoke, Lilies, and Jade" is set in the twentieth century with an inner monologue of an artist's thoughts about his personal life and art criticism and more explicit sexual content. However, Cabell's novel and Nugent's story share more in common than the first glance would suggest. Nugent's short story is entitled 'a novel' in the table of contents of *Fire!!* The final thought of the short story also ends with the parenthetical statement "*…To Be Continued…*" (Nugent, *Fire!!*, 39). Nugent intended for this to be a serial novel with chapter installments in later editions of the journal for the younger generation. This story was also one Cabell's novel also began as a short story that H.L. Menken then published in his literary magazine *The Smart Set* in January of 1918. The name of the short story was entitled "Some Ladies and Jurgen." H. L. Menken praised the short story and encouraged Cabell to extend it to a novel. "Some Ladies and Jurgen," does not exactly match Nugent's "Smoke, Lilies, and Jade" in content, but the common initialism of the titles, Nugent's intention to create a novel from his short story, and the frequent reference to Cabell and his character Jurgen seem too similar not to note. Nugent is using, even suggestively the same strategy as Cabell.

Rather than simply be suggestive in the text, as in Cabell's novel, Nugent describes the sensuality of Alex and Beauty's encounter with descriptive detail. Alex meets Beauty on the way home from a friend's party where he Beauty asks for a match in Spanish: "perdone me senor tiene vd. fosforo…Alex was glad he had been addressed in Spanish … to have been asked for a match in English … or to have been addressed in English at all … would have been blasphemy just then" (Nugent, *Fire!!*, 36). Standard English grammar is insufficient to represent the real soul or nature of humanity in Nugent's story, so he employs the use of the ellipses to reveal more internal thought. Here, the very use of the English language at the meeting of Beauty, Alex counts as something profane. The Spanish language affords a newness, a language understood but just removed from his current culturally sanctioned one. This alternate language also generates a space for the alternate love story. This encounter with Beauty supersedes language when the two of them are in Alex's apartment: "Alex turn in his doorway … up the stairs and the stranger waited for him to light the room … no need for words … they had always known each other … as they undressed in the blue dawn …" (Nugent, *Fire!!*, 36). Just as there are no words for some of the thoughts Alex feels, and ellipses must be the substance of thought beyond words, the blending of Spanish and English as well as the acknowledgement that sometimes language is not needed for intimate communication.

Alex is not just blending time and memory in his thoughts, nor is he blending languages with non-verbal cues to reveal the fluidity of thought and ideas contained within humanity. The story "Smoke, Lilies, and Jade" also reveals the fluidity of sexual identity. While many have rightfully argued that Nugent's story is the first homoerotic narrative in African American literary history, Nugent also addresses the complexity of sexuality. Nugent's character Alex is mesmerized by the power Beauty, also named Adrian, has over him:

> Alex wondered more and more why he like Adrian so … He liked so many people … and they were friends … but Beauty … it was different …he knew other people who were beautiful…but he was never confused before them … while Beauty … Beauty could make him believe in Buddha… no one else could do that… that is no one but Melva… but then he was in love with Melva … He would like Beauty to know Melva … because he loved them both. (Nugent, *Fire!!*, 36)

Beauty affects Alex in ways other loves and friends have not, perhaps except with Melva. His feelings with Beauty and Melva are compounded and even more confused by Alex's dream of the poppy fields. This dream and reality mixture as well as Alex's struggle between the visual and written world complicated or adds more layers to a complex story about art, thought, creativity, identity, and sensuality. The entire work lends itself to highlighting how much more complex African American soul and African American flesh can be. Du Bois's *Souls of Black Folk*, though revolutionary in its scope and topic, reveals only a portion of what is contained within this group of Americans.

Not only Jurgen mentioned repeatedly as a fictional character but also Kroeger. Mid-way through the elliptical prose, the narrator imagines Jurgen having a conversation with Tonio Kroeger: "suppose Jurgen had met Kroeger...what a vagrant thought...Kroeger...Kroeger...Kroeger…" (Nugent, *Fire!!*, 35). Tonio Kroeger is the main character and title to a Thomas Mann novella published in 1903. Through this novella Mann questions the role and place of the artist in society. Kroeger, as with the Nugent and the narrator of "Smoke, Lilies, and Jade," has doubts about his ability as an artist because of his own middle-class heritage and up-bringing. According to Siegfried Marck's "Thomas Mann as a Thinker," "the bourgeois conscience of Tonio Kroeger makes him 'see in the artist's life, in all irregularity and all genius something suspect'" (54). *Tonio Kroeger* is the story an artists surrounded by the trappings of capitalism and the bourgeois. He feels superior to them and wishes remain an outsider from them. The artist who is free with his art, is an artist free of capitalist exploitation.

So far the reading of this text, with the close analysis of the various and repeated artists that are mentioned, seems to denote that Nugent took great care to craft this text with deliberate consideration toward the number of ellipse in between thoughts and modern Western writers who represent a similar aesthetic as artists in a capitalist society. However, according to Coby C. St Clair, Nugent wrote "Smoke Lilies and Jade" in a random, frivolous manner: "In his 1982 interview, Nugent briefly discusses his writing of 'Smoke' and explains that, because he often had no place of his own, he would stay with Hurston and write on toilet paper, paper bags, and other discarded scraps that he could find (284). Nugent's writing process is willy nily and sporadic, just as the quantity of his work and even the content of his work is sporadic. He did not produce many works, and the elliptical style is a repeated trope of his. His frivolous approach to writing and the process of creating and producing work worth selling and/or publishing seems thoughtless and careless on his part. His characterization of Alex, the random stream-of-consciousness, the elliptical prose style, and the "To Be Continued…" are all a part of his bohemian, dilettante style. Alex, like Nugent himself, is outside the norms of society in social, sexual, and even economic means.

Much scholarship has been done, in particular, about the first sex-sex African American narrative. Considering the erasure of positive queer identities in literary and social history, having such scholarship creates a possibility of finding "gay heroes" of the past. In the 1989 anthology *Hidden from History*, the editors state: "It has long been reassuring for gay people, raised in a society offering them no positive images of themselves, to claim gay heroes, ranging from Sappho, Julius Caesar and Shakespeare to Willa Cather, Walt Whitman, and Gertrude Stein" (Chauncey, Duberman, and Vicinus 3). However, these gay heroes recovered from the past can be difficult if they convolute and minimize the accomplishments these heroes have made by elevating the non-normative sexualities of these individuals. Nugent who was "more gay than black" perhaps does not need the non-normative spotlight put upon him. His sexual fascination with men was not hidden nor coded, but by placing him on a pedestal of a "gay hero" scholars are "presenting the most respectable version of a figure who outright rejected respectability's normalizing pull" (St. Clair 274). In other words, while focusing on Nugent's sexuality and the diverse non-normative sexuality of his characters is a worthy thing for scholars to examine; in so doing, they are making him representative of homosexual studies when Nugent's goal as an artist often was to defy representation.

In Michel Foucault's *The History of Sexuality* he projects that the emphasis and keen interest with sexuality came with the rise of capitalism that shapes sex into modes of production, or the means by which labor is produced. He claims as industrialization occurred the need for labor and the push for population growth increased: "In the eighteenth century, sex became a 'police' matter – in the full and strict sense giving the term at the time: not the repression of disorder, but an ordered maximization of collective and individual forces" (24). In other words, population management emerged from the need for more labor, so governments began tracking birth and death rates, life expectancy, fertility, and state of health. At the heart of this government note taking or population tracking, and as means to maximize population growth, sexual practices became closely analyzed, normalized, and deviants were either diseased or criminalized. Sexuality, in particular homosexuality, also slowly became an identity rather than an incident:

> As defined by the ancient civil or canonical codes, sodomy was a category of forbidden acts; their perpetrator was nothing more than the juridical subject of them. The nineteenth-century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a

> type of life, a life form, and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology (Foucault 43).

Since homosexuality and other ‘deviant’ forms of sexuality could potentially stifle population growth rates, industrializing, capitalist, bourgeois society set about to manage it to full capacity by putting into operation an entire machinery for effective production and formulate a uniform truth of sex.

According to Foucault’s argument sexuality and capitalism cannot be easily separated; likewise, publishing art and capitalism cannot be easily separated. Nugent was keenly aware of the pressure to publish and the requirements that demanded on him and on his art. He was well aware of the primitive, pre-civilized Africanist pressures by some publishers, the urge to uplift the race by other race leaders, and even the desire for some to represent the submerged tenth, the proletariat folks at the bottom of the hierarchy. Everyone had expectations, arguments, strategies, and everyone was fighting for validity and ‘authenticity.’ Being aware also, that any publishing required capital and continued involvement from investors, Nugent resisted the process altogether. Yes, he contributed to *Fire!!* and other journals, but often his contributions were submitted by others, they were haphazardly put together, or they were never fully completed. Rather than be a manifestation of the stereotypical “lazy Negro” Nugent staged a quite resistance to the entire game. He did not take up his mantle and vocally or violently forge ahead for his definition of art to take the commercial and social center stage. For his art to take precedence and commercial preference would not be a sign of victory for him. Rather it would be to succumb to capitalism’s definition and identity of the artist, just as sexuality had gained an identity and definition through capitalism.

Rather than advocate for his own style of art in a capitalist commodity culture, Nugent abstained from every fully committing or participating. He, like Alex, was occasionally lazy, but it was a boycott of productivity, a sort of political resistance to the demands of publishing. So if he is abstaining from participating in the artistic machinery that is the Harlem Renaissance, then why was he tasked with the assignment that would hopefully be "banned in Boston," create a scandal, and then produce the economic stability that the journal needed? Why would he participate in this venture, if it meant participating in the capitalism of selling copies and collecting on monetary promises of others? Nugent's involvement was present both in the collaboration, discussion, development, and publication of the journal. He also submitted more than just "Smoke, Lilies, and Jade." He submitted two illustrations in the similar vein of Aaron Douglas. However, these drawings and this story each reveal how dedicated Nugent was to art but also how disconnect he was to the publication and solicitation process.

Thurman and Nugent set out to write material that was risqué and illicit so as to gain the status as a banned publication that would then be a best-selling publication. Thurman and Nugent both knew how the publication and consumer culture game was played. The goal was to have a two sensational pieces, one of a prostitute and one of homosexuality. According to Eric Garber the two men flipped a coin to decide who would write which, but it is striking that Thurman wrote the prostitute narrative in "Cordelia the Crude." Thurman was well read in Western literature and always seemed to fear his works were not up to par. "Cordelia the Crude" has one of the best dénouement to be found in American literature, and his skill as a master storyteller is evident in the details and point of view of the narrative. Just as interesting is that Nugent was assigned the homosexual narrative on the whim of a coin toss. Clearly Nugent could use personal experience to develop this narrative, for Nugent "stood as the *only* African American to write from the perspective of a man who not only acknowledged but openly celebrated his erotic fascination with other men" (Wirth 56). Even though the homoerotic scenes are indeed scandalous for the time, Nugent gives more food for thought in the internal thoughts of Alex. "Smoke, Lilies, and Jade" clearly contains sensuous and scandalous homosexual tensions, even within the bedroom, but Alex is a character that is difficult to characterize. Alex is attracted to Beauty, but is also longing for Melva, a female lover. Both Beauty and Melva are sources of pleasure and as the story draws to its abrupt end Beauty and Melva are conjoined into a similar experience: "Alex stood on the steps after she left him and the night was black…Beauty…Melva…Beauty…Melva…one *can* love two at the same time" (Nugent, *Fire!!*, 39). Here it can appear that Alex may be slightly confused regarding his own sexuality having dualing feelings for two people – one male, one female. But if one considers that Alex love of someone is not as strictly attached to his identity as bourgeois capitalist definitions would warrant according to Michel Foucault, then perhaps the love of these to different people make his awareness of self completely clear.

In the effort to get the journal banned to improve its economic standing, Nugent is meeting that effort; however, he is also doing more. He is presenting the life of the bohemian artist, who in some ways could be the urban version of the stereotypical "lazy Negro." However, upon close inspection the bohemian is not just lazy due to lack of effort, but politically inactive against a consumerist culture. Nugent also references James Branch Cabell whose "Some Ladies and Jurgen" earned him a success scandal and notoriety in popular culture at the time, and while the title is similar in alliterative order, Nugent mentions Cabell as a foretelling of what he hopes will happen with his own narrative. Lastly, Nugent includes the homosexual erotic scenes in the text, but it goes beyond clear definition. Just as Nugent's artwork does not quite easily fit into canonization, Nugent's life and work production is atypical of an artist of skill when there is also high demand. Just like Alex, Nugent did not want to be clearly defined by social norms and definitions. If his short story of "Smoke" did the job of getting the journal banned, so be it. However, if the journal did not gain notoriety, as happened, Nugent would never likely feel its loss.

Conclusion:

Reaction and Response to *Fire!!*

Fire!! did not only contain art by "the younger negro artists." It also contained editorial responses to current events and publications as well as commentary on the on-going debate surrounding representation in art during the Harlem Renaissance. As an official art magazine, it contained commentary on the literary and cultural critics by Arthur Fauset entitled "Intelligentsia." The journal also contained commentary on a previous review Wallace Thruman had given to Carl Van Vechten's novel *Nigger Heaven*. Here in *Fire!!* one can see the continued stance that these artists had about the role of art and the artist in cultural consciousness. Both Fauset and Thurman are critical of the superficiality of certain brands of art and of certain types of art critics. These two editorial pieces connect fairly well with the justifications for creating the journal initially. The author-editors who produced and published *Fire!!* did so because more diversity in artistic representation was widely needed, and any work that provided a new perspective on African American racial consciousness and variety of life was often viewed negatively.

Fauset and Thurman were critical of the society and of the rejection of certain literary and artistic endeavors, but shortly after the publication of *Fire!!* critiques of the journal quickly appeared. These critical reviews were frequently unfavorable, however, the attention was never negative enough to get the publication banned, as Thurman and Nugent had wanted. Rather, the negative reviews were a quick and only slightly painful public reaction to the group's efforts. Mostly, the journal went unnoticed. The lack of buzz generated from the journal and the reviews was the death knell for the journal's business prospects. Without the advertisement that comes from banning and censorship the journal could not generate enough money to fund another issue of this particular journal. The experiment of an African

American all arts journal would have to come to an end, at least with this particular group of young artist as they each returned to school and other more prosperous endeavors.

The experience was not completely lost nor forgotten on these artists. Five out of the six primary contributors make a nostalgic response to the summer of 1926 and their time creating and producing *Fire!!* for themselves. Wallace Thurman, Zora Neale Hurston, Langston Hughes, Aaron Douglas, and Richard Bruce Nugent each authored or generated a text that provides a glimpse back to that summer or perhaps back to the possibility of what the journal *Fire!!* could have been as well as commentary on why the journal and the movement failed to generate enough flames to keep the Harlem Renaissance moving forward for another generation.

Wallace Thurman wrote *Infants in the Spring* a roman a clef about the artists and the struggle to publish. Richard Bruce Nugent wrote a very similar account of the same experience in *Gentleman's Jigger*. An examination of both texts provides a three dimensional view of the Harlem Renaissance from the lens of the younger generation. Zora Neale Hurston published *Their Eyes Were Watching God* in 1937. It has received plenty of scholarship; however, this chapter wishes to examine the novel as a manifestation of Hurston's experience during the Harlem Renaissance and her movement further south into more folklore and anthropology. Langston Hughes wrote his autobiography *The Big Sea* in 1940 and in it he depicts his life accounts from his childhood to his literary quarrel with Zora Neal Hurston over the rights to *Mule Bone*. However, Hughes gives a first-hand account of his experience with *Fire!!* during the spring and summer of 1926 within the autobiography. In 1934, Aaron Douglas illustrated a cover of a magazine entitled *Spark: Organ of the Vanguard*. While this painting is a magazine cover, little is known about a magazine entitled *Spark*. This illustration is perhaps Douglas' nostalgic look back at his time working on *Fire!!* Gwendolyn Bennett did not continue her art production. There is no retrospective work for her within this argument; however, her life as it unfolds in the mid-twentieth century is a possible revised version of her own "Wedding Day."

Through the editorials of Fauset and Thurman the standards that these younger artists have set for themselves is made even more clear. The critical reception of *Fire!!* after its publication reveal that it was not enough to generate momentum for further issues, but through the retrospective texts written and created by these artists, years later, reveal that even if *Fire!!* did not generate enough heat to burn up the old conventions, it was an experience that remained with them for years afterward.

In what appears to be a possible editorial retraction from his September review of Carl Van Vechten's *Nigger Heaven* Thurman begins his "Fire Burns" editorial with an admittance that his prophecy regarding Vechten and his popularity in Harlem has not happened:

> I made the prophecy that Harlem Negroes, once their aversion to the 'nigger' in the title was forgotten, would erect a statue on the corner of 135th Street and Seventh Avenue…So far my prophecy has failed to pan out, and superficially it seem as if it never will for instead of being enshrined for his pseudo-sophisticated, pseudo-serious, semi-ludicrous effusion about Harlem, Mr. Van Vechten is about to be lynched, at least in effigy. (Thurman, *Fire!!*. 47)

Within the few months from September to November clearly this honor for Van Vechten was not to be. Rather, public opinion about the author and the novel *Nigger Heaven* generated more sales among white audiences, and more talk among African American communities. Vechten's novel was one of the success scandals that Thurman and Nugent strove for their first issue journal to be. The novel was initially banned in Boston, and perhaps because of that *Nigger Heaven* achieved an immediate sellout of sixteen thousand copies. Interestingly the novel was advertised to the white and African American race with different images both from Aaron Douglas. The cover image of *Nigger Heaven* that was predominantly sold to white audiences is an illustration of the segregated balcony loft reserved as cheap seats in some theatres. The cover Douglas illustrated for the book that was to be purchased mainly by African Americans depicts Harlem as a heavenly city with a ladder, a stairway to heaven on the left-hand side (Pfeiffer xii). The popularity and success of the novel, as the best-selling novel of the Harlem Renaissance, also generated violent protests against it, particularly from those in Harlem of W. E. B. Du Bois' propagandist camp. At one point, the book was burned at a protest against lynching in the South (Pfeiffer xiii).

Nigger Heaven is a fulfillment of a prophecy Van Vechten made when he reviewed Alain Lock's anthology *The New Negro* in 1925. Van Vechten writes "if the Negro writers don't utilize the wealth of material at their fingertips, white writers, naturally, will be only too eager to exploit it" (citation need). That is what Van Vechten is doing, using the material of humanity that is teeming in Harlem to write a story that was intriguing and reveals the diversity of life in Harlem that other African American writers had failed to represent in their works. The plot of the story also addresses this issue by having the main protagonist Byron Kasson being a struggling writer in Harlem where life is happening all around him, and he has nothing to write about, or nothing he would be permitted to write about and successfully publish. So Van Vechten publishes it for the Byrons of the Harlem Renaissance and with great success.

In his first review of the novel, Wallace Thurman states "the author has been most fair, and most sympathetic in his treatment of a long mistreated group of subjects…once the characters cease discussing the 'Negro problem,' once they cease spouting racial equality epigrams, and anti-racial discrimination platitudes, the novel begins to move – begins to pulsate with some genuine rhythms" (Thurman, *Collected Works* 191). Thurman sees the account of the lower class portions of Harlem as close renditions of Harlem life, and the most intriguing portion of Van Vechten's account is that of the Black Mass: "Where, oh where is this Black Mass in Harlem, for it is too good to be merely a figment of the writer's imagination - I mean too good in the sense that it should not be such a selfish, subjective creation, I, for one, would love to see" (*Collected Works* 192). Van Vechten has captured the essence of a religious service that has enticed Thurman himself. Thurman's review acknowledges that Van Vechten's accuracy with the details in Harlem will leave his to be accused of being "another Negro writer" (*Collected Works* 192). Van Vechten has reported and written the story that an African American writer of the Harlem Renaissance, the Byron Kasson, should have written for himself.

This is not Thurman's first review of a white author with the courage to represent African American subjects. In May of 1926 in *The Messenger* Thurman gave a review of I. A. R. Wylie's *Black Harvest*. In the review he states that African American readers will rail against the representations given by the novel because of a few indiscretions of certain characters, in particular, Hans Felde: "It is to this that our fellow Negroes will object, and mutter the accusation that these terrible white novelists just won't write truthfully about Negroes. Well, what if they don't, as long as Negroes won't write truthfully about themselves or won't recognize themselves when they are presented truthfully?" (*Collected Works* 182). In this review Thurman is acknowledging the issue African American readers and critics will have with the idea of a white author depicting the race in a less than positive light or presentation. Positive propaganda has so consumed the understanding of what African American art can or should be, take for instance the Jessie Fauset survey questionnaire discussed in the introduction, that no other presentation can be permitted, even if it is true to life and sincerely rendered.

In his second and follow-up review of *Nigger Heaven* Thurman is acknowledging that the effects of the novel have not led to Van Vechten's statue to be erected; rather, Van Vechten is being lynched, and certainly his book, or portions of it have been roasted at a rally fire. Thurman's follow-up reiterates his initial critique- Van Vechten's novel may be slow in some places, but there are occasions where real teeming, volatile Harlem life is seen on the page. However, Thurman's issue with the reception and rejection of the novel, particularly by African American communities is that many of the most vocal critics have not even read the book they are boycotting. He writes, "Group criticism of current writings, morals, life, politics, or religion is always ridiculous, but what could be more ridiculous than the wholesale condemnation of a book which only one-tenth of the condemnators [*sic*] or will read" (*Fire!!* 47). While the group may be condemning the book, most of the group has not even taken the time to read the book. They are basing their opinions on the reviews and opinions of the few who have read it, but they mostly are rejecting the idea of a white man representing the cabaret life of Harlem for fear that white readers will believe that all Harlemites are the low-class, cabaret night club types. To this criticism, Thurman offers this counterpoint:

> It is obvious that these excited folk do not realize that any white person who would believe such poppy-cock probably believes it anyway, without any additional aid from Mr. Van Vechten, and should a person read a tale about out non-cabereting, church-going Negroes, presented in all their virtue and with their human traits, their human hypocrisy, and they human perversities glossed over, written, say, by Jessie Fauset, said person would laugh derisively and allege that Miss Fauset had not told the truth. (Thurman, *Fire!!* 47)

In other words, while all art may be propaganda to some, for people who have already made up their minds about the African American race, the novel *Nigger Heaven* will do no more damage than Jessie Fauset's *There Is Confusion* has done in support of the race. If Van Vechten had created all positive, though rather dull, representations of the characters in Harlem, then Harlem residents would put a statue in his honor, certainly.

This entire critique speaks to the vapid understandings and perhaps desperate need some Harlem artists and race leaders seem to have concerning white validation and cultural cogency. As seen in chapter two of this study, the weight of black face minstrelsy bears heavy on representation and cultural actualization for the African American race at the turn of the twentieth century; however, for Thurman it is time for art of the race to take shape. In an editorial review of Walter White's novel *Flight* in May of 1926, Thurman acknowledges that "it is about time for the ballyhooing to cease and for the genuine performance to begin" (*Collected Works* 183). It is time for African American art and African American race as such to finally be about the business of art. Thurman has been striving for this for some time in various editorial reviews in *The Messenger*. Thurman's work on the journal *Fire!!* is just one of his many attempts at moving the race both as a serious subject and creator of art devoid of heavy socio-political agendas attached.

Fire!! was published in November of 1926, and reviews came near the end of 1926 and mostly in 1927 in that were mostly unfavorable. The primary reaction was one of shock to the Victorian sensibilities, which was exactly what the editors of this journal were aiming for . The *Baltimore Afro-American* gave the headline "Writer Brands Fire!! as Effeminate Tommyrot" (qtd Hannah 162). Langston Hughes recounts one review for the Rean Graves, the critic of the *Baltimore Afro American*, said,

> I have just tossed the first issue of *Fire* into the fire… Aaron Douglas who, in spite of himself and the meaningless grotesqueness of his creations, has gained a reputation as an artist, is permitted to spoil three perfectly good pages with his pen and ink hudge pudge. Countee Cullen has written a beautiful poem in his "From a Dark Tower," but tries his best to obscure the thought in superfluous sentences. Langston Hughes displays his usual ability to say nothing in many words. (qtd in Hughes, *The Big Sea*, 237)

The journal entitled *Fire!!* went into the fire. However, Graves, here at least, fails to even speak of the homosexual piece that was written in attempted to get the entire journal banned. But Graves wasn't the only one a similar review.

Alain Locke gave a review of *Fire!!* in *Survey*, and he attempts to give it a least a modestly favorable review, at least in regards to connecting it to modernism. Even though Locke appreciates and sees what these younger artists are attempting with the journal, to move African American literature further in toward modernism, he is hesitant to give all high praise to their efforts. Yet, he does not start the review with an immediate reprimand to his more conservative or traditional aesthetic. He claims, "A good deal of it [*Fire!!*] is reflected in Sherwood Anderson, Sinclair Lewis, Dreiser, Joyce, and Cummings, recast in the context of the Negro experience. This alone would be significant as an opening up of the sluice-gates of the closed and long stagnant channels of the Negro thought; but there is back of this obvious rush toward modernism also a driving push toward racial expression (qtd in Cobb 331). He seems to appreciate the modernist attempts being made through this journal, but he gives his audience a warning regarding the lewd nature of the journal as well as a criticism that this journal misinterprets what the primitive is to be as an anti-thesis to Victorianism:

> But if Negro life is to provide a healthy antidote to Puritanism, and to become of the effective instruments of sound artistic progress, its flesh values must more and more be expressed in clean, original, primitive, but fundamental terms of the senses and not, as too often in this particular issue of *Fire*, in hectic imitation of the "naughty nineties" and effete echoes of contemporary decadence. Back to Whitman would have been a better point of support than a left-wing pivoting on Wilde and Beardsley. (qtd in Cobb 332)

Locke has already praised the editors for generating a modern journal, and he has listed modern white authors as mirror representatives of the journal's aesthetic goals. However, he advises the editors to not look to the moderns, but to go further back to Whitman for their muse and white counterpart of inspiration. Also, ironic, Locke clearly understands that the goal of modernism is to move away from Puritanism, or rather Victorianism, and that the use of primitive or pre-civilized tropes is a common avenue of inspiration. But by primitive he does not mean decadent. By connecting this journal to Wilde and Beardsley, Locke is assuming that pitting decadence would generate more problems than produce benefits, not just for the journal but the race as well.

It is worth noting the irony of Locke connecting these younger artists and the journal to the moderns as a positive, but connecting them to late Victorians as a negative. The late Victorians are also rejecting the social norms of their time using decadence and the shock factor, but Locke's suggestion is to go back to the democratic ideals of Walt Whitman of the 1830s. His goal is to advise the younger artist to mirror dominant culture artists of generations past rather than of the current generation. However, this is in direct opposition to what he promises in "The Negro Youth Speaks" in *The New Negro*. Locke in that essay, as discussed in chapter two, promises the younger generation of writers and artists that through their abilities and creative works the race will have its uplift, and that the younger artists will not need to play the role of the apologist. Actually, he claims in that essay that race will not even be a factor and that these younger artists will be free to write with the same expressive liberties as the white dominant culture. Here, in his review of *Fire!!* he retracts or rather revises his ideas. These younger artists can write with the same expressive freedom of white artists from almost a century before. White and African American audiences are not ready for African American authors to be as critical of culture or as edgy as Wilde. The editors of *Fire!!* have reached too far too fast, according to Locke.

Countee Cullen, who is the poet of the first poem in the journal also reviewed the journal in its entirety in *Opportunity*. Cullen's poem is entitled "From the Dark Tower" and his editorial column in *Opportunity* magazine is entitled "The Dark Tower." However, his review of the journal collectively states "There seems to have been a wish to shock in this first issue, and though shock-proof ourselves, we imagine that the wish will be well realized among the readings of *Fire*. However, ample extenuation for what some may call a reprehensible story can be found in the beautifully worded, *Smoke, Lilies, and Jade* by Richard Bruce" (qtd in Cobb 330). Cullen is a contributor to this journal he is reviewing, all he can fixate on is the reception or rather repulsion some readers will have with Nugent's story. Ironically, Cullen acknowledges that only "some may call a reprehensible story" and he calls it "beautifully written." Cullen sees the merits in what his peers have created, but he cannot get past the homoerotic story and prepares the audience for the shock that is to come when reading the journal.

Between Graves, Locke, and Cullen the editors of *Fire!!* may have enough shock to potentially get the journal banned, which would be the impetus for it to quickly sale more copies. However, the question remains, why is the issue of the homosexual narrative the focal point of the majority of reviews? There is also a story of prostitution in "Cordelia the Crude," a domestic abuse account in "Sweat," and colorism in "Color Struck." Why is "Smoke" the story that ensnares and shocks the most? With all the other representations and complications of African American life depicted in the journal, why is the bohemian sexualized dandy the image most seize upon as problematic? If the goal of the New Negro movement was to offer to the American society a wealth of new literature from the perspective of the darker race, one that was rife with Africanist primitivism that precedes civilized respectability, why is the bohemian aesthete leaning towards decadence that perhaps exceeds civilized respectability so troubling? The issue is the tension between the primitive and the decadent, which both lie outside the realm of civilized 'authenticity.' While primitivism is pre-civilized it represents African culture, even if completely fabricated, before Western social integration – a social pre-integration. In the dominant culture's view this is an image of a people's closer to their 'natural' selves before capitalism corrupts and misshapes them, and before civilization comes to perhaps 'save' them. However, decadence is a post-civilized scenario of Western social disintegration. Even dominant culture white authors, like Wilde paid a high price as an example of this decadent disintegration; however, his efforts are a clear attempt at dismantling the respectable bourgeois status quo.

If civilization, industrialization, and capitalism create a space where sex is governed and managed to produce maximum population growth numbers, then reaching backwards into primitive, pre-civilized images and ideas could possibly reach back to less governed sex practices. Primitivism is encouraged as long as it maintains a certain 'authentic' or clean representation of the African American race, as Locke asserts in his review. The decadent bohemian character is central to the idea of the black image and became a symbol of the challenge posed by the younger generation because it deconstructs the politics of respectability of the middle class and subverts the idea of 'authentic' African American identity surrounding the entire Harlem Renaissance. This 'Effeminate Tommyrot' would be the story that upended the understanding of image of respectability and challenged what some would have considered the authentic New Negro, but by challenging the label of respectability and authenticity, this work creates a more diverse and therefore a more authentic picture of the African American community during the Harlem Renaissance.

The journal was receiving some negative reviews, which was promising for the aims to the editors. In his autobiography *The Big Sea* Langston Hughes even offers Du Bois' opinion of the journal: "None of the older Negro intellectuals would have anything to do with it. Du Bois roasted it" (237). While Hughes says this regarding Du Bois review of the journal, no publication of Du Bois' official review has been found. Perhaps Du Bois railed against the journal to the young artists personally, but publicly Du Bois seems to have paid little attention to the journal at all. Rather, it is reported that Du Bois asked Gwendolyn Bennett to come give a reading of her story from the journal that the young folks had put together at a lecture series for the NAACP. Du Bois asks Bennett to read her story "Wedding Day" and makes no public mention of the edgier story Nugent submits for the same journal. Why would

Du Bois give this journal so little attention when it clearly goes against his argument for art as propaganda and art to be used for racial uplift? Du Bois shines a spotlight on perhaps one of the least controversial stories in the journal and acknowledges the journal's existence, but he gives *Fire!!* no fuel to burn. Du Bois knows the publication game, and he knows James Cabell Branch and Oscar Wilde success scandals. He knows what these younger artists are trying to start, and he knows how to put the fire out.

So the spark of *Fire!!* never took to a full flame. Thurman, Nugent, Hughes, Hurston, Bennett, and Douglass were hoping to "burn up a lot of the old, dead conventional Negro-white ideas of the past, *epater le bourgeois* into a realization of the existence of the younger Negro writers and artists, and provide us with an outlet for publication not available in the limited pages of the small Negro magazines then existing" (Hughes, *The Big Sea*, 235). They created a shock, but not enough to banish the book from respectable audiences. Rather, Du Bois casually addresses to the respectable audience during the lecture series, but it is so minimal, the assumption is this journal is just another of the same, and it is largely ignored.

The young artist group, the Niggeratti, each go back to work or to school, except for Nugent who tries to collect and go door to door to sell the journal, but by the end of 1927, the artistic experiment was over. However, *Fire!!* published in November of 1926 was a full journal-length answer to the questionnaire posed by Jessie Fauset in *The Crisis* that following January. The first question asked, "When the artist, black or white, portrays Negro characters is he under any obligation or limitations as to the sort of character he will portray?" The highly approving review of Carl Van Vechten's *Nigger Heaven* provides the group's answer to this first question. These younger artists appreciated the honesty with which Van Vechten portrayed Harlem life, and aside from some weak character and plot development gave the book highly favorable reviews. Perhaps the only negative resistance they would have would be that it was indeed a white man who was first given permission to tell a more accurate tale of the Harlem Renaissance, and it was this novel that also became the best-selling book of the era.

The second calls upon a point of extremes: "Can any author be criticized for painting the worst or the best character of a group?" This question assumes that only the worst or best are options, another either-or fallacy for group representation. These younger artists depict a variety of class and gender, providing a naive young girl unaware that she is participating in prostitution unaware in Harlem, to a highly successful pugilist in Paris who struggles with his own racist reactions when he falls in love with a white American woman. There is also self-hatred of dark skin in Hurston's play *Color Struck* that perhaps delves into colorism and texturism inherent in African American communities of women under the pressure of white female beauty standards. These characters are depicted as complex characters with their own struggles, issues, and vices, but also with human potential for empathy, love, and understanding. Rather than follow an either-or script of best or worst characterizations, these artists strove to provide more diverse personality-types, and to provide plots and storylines that generate context and justification for their choices and behavior.

The third question on Fauset's questionnaire is directed at publishers specifically, asking if they are in some way responsible or accountable for the quality of work being published. The question reads, "Can publishers be criticized for refusing to handle novels that portray Negroes of education and accomplishment, on the ground that these characters are no different from white folk and therefore not interesting?" Here Fauset is acknowledging the complaint that even these younger artists have toward publishing limitations. One of the most important reasons to self-publish the journal *Fire!!* was for these young artists to step away and be free of the highly limited elevated representation. Again, Fauset is admitting that she, and by extension Du Bois, is aware of the way certain depictions of African American life as educated, high-class white life, is rather boring and unoriginal - as if black artists acting white could erase the racism attached to blackface minstrelsy. While the justification for such representations is plentiful, however, the repeated representations are becoming stale. White culture had already abandoned many of the Victorian representations following World War I and were creating new forms, new content. While some writers were hoping to attempt those new forms, such as Nugent's elliptical prose which mirrors a stream-of-consciousness, or in the haiku poem by Lewis Alexander in the poetry section, other contributors of *Fire!!* were wanting to represent rural African American life, as in Hurston's "Sweat." By broadening the variety of forms, content, and characters, so much more material could be used to fuel the furthering of the New Negro movement. The continuation of the same, uninteresting style could lead to the death or decline of the movement if allowed to continue.

Questions four through seven, the remaining questions on the survey, are directed specifically on the representation of African Americans in art as their worst selves and that representation's effect on race relations in the country. The questions ask what African Americans are to do if their depictions in art, by both white and black artists, continually paint them as "the sordid, foolish and criminal among Negroes convincing the world that this and this alone is really and essentially Negroid, and preventing white artists from knowing any other types and preventing black artists from daring to paint them?" The perpetual negative representations are clearly creating certain stereotypical assumptions of the group by the dominant culture. However the second half of question six in this questionnaire, seems to directly contradict question three. In question 3, Fauset states that the educated and accomplished African American narrative is uninteresting and a facimile of white middle to upper class culture, as if to suggest that such depictions are overdone and worn out. However, in question 6, she suggests that the "sordid, foolish and criminal" depictions are the only ones being published and produced and therefore dominant white culture is not getting to see any positive representations. If the racial uplift style is overdone, how then can she then express that the negative characterizations are also overdone? She contradicts herself in these two questions, revealing the real motive for the overall questionnaire. Even though Jessie Fauset was a first-rate mind and editor, her agenda of racial elevation tainted any other art forms. The idea of African American artists telling a story that reveals both the positive and negative aspects of black life and culture only seems to her to fuel the blackface stereotype and its influence. By promoting such limited criteria for artists, the art produced is plastic and inauthentic. Diverse characterization is the truest sign of authenticity.

Question 7, the final question in the survey also posits a slight contradiction, and perhaps a call to action on the part of these younger artists: "Is there not a real danger that young colored writers will be tempted to follow the popular trend in portraying Negro characters in the underworld rather than seeking to paint the truth about themselves and their own social class?" This questions harkens to the positive reception of some of the younger artists of Van Vecthen's novel where many of the African American community and several older race leaders decried the novel's title and popularity. However, the question also is a contradiction in that it assumes that the "underworld" or lower class representation full of vice and decadance is not the world or social class of many of these artists. In truth, these younger artists were struggling to pay bills and purchase food. While their names became famous, their bank accounts often remained rather empty. Also, in crowded Harlem the variety of social ranks as well as human conditions were evident and have been recorded in many newspaper and police reports. While the newspaper and police could be exaggerating the negative stereotypes of African Americans in Harlem, many credible reports from the time have validated, that many in Harlem were living in poverty and perhaps were living in the 'underworld' during the New Negro movement. As Fauset suggests, the younger artists of the Niggeratti: Thurman, Nugent, Hughes, Hurstson, Bennett, and Douglas, chose to "paint the truth about themselves and their own social class." The truth is free of identity politics, the truth is free of uplift propaganda, and the truth is free of social science agendas. Each contributor to

Fire!! provided a different perspective to African American art, pulling the New Negro movement into the Modern period, questioning old norms and standards, and revealing that diversity in representation is the truest sign of authenticity in art.

Appendix

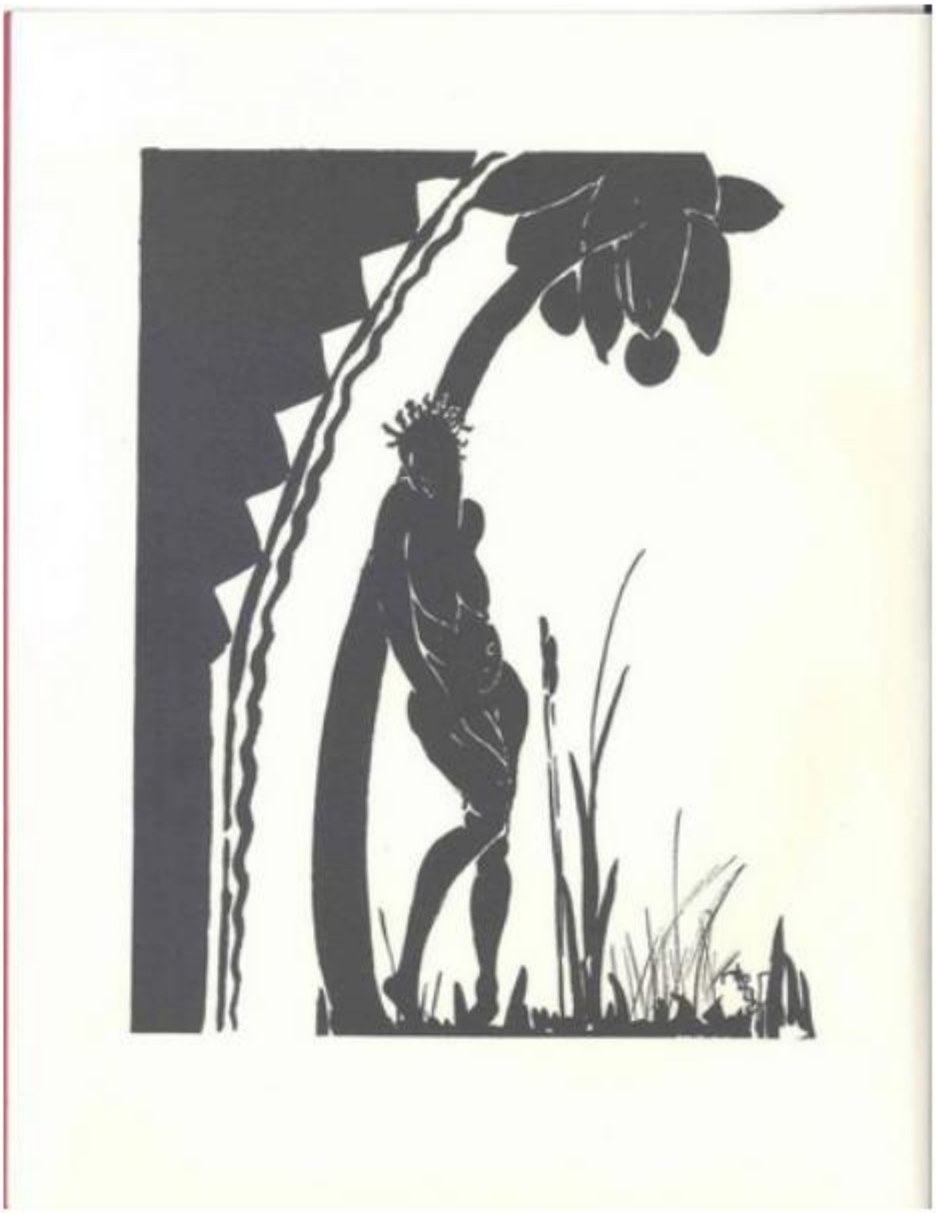


Fig. 1 Richard Bruce Nugent, “Cordelia the Crude” *Fire!!* November 1926

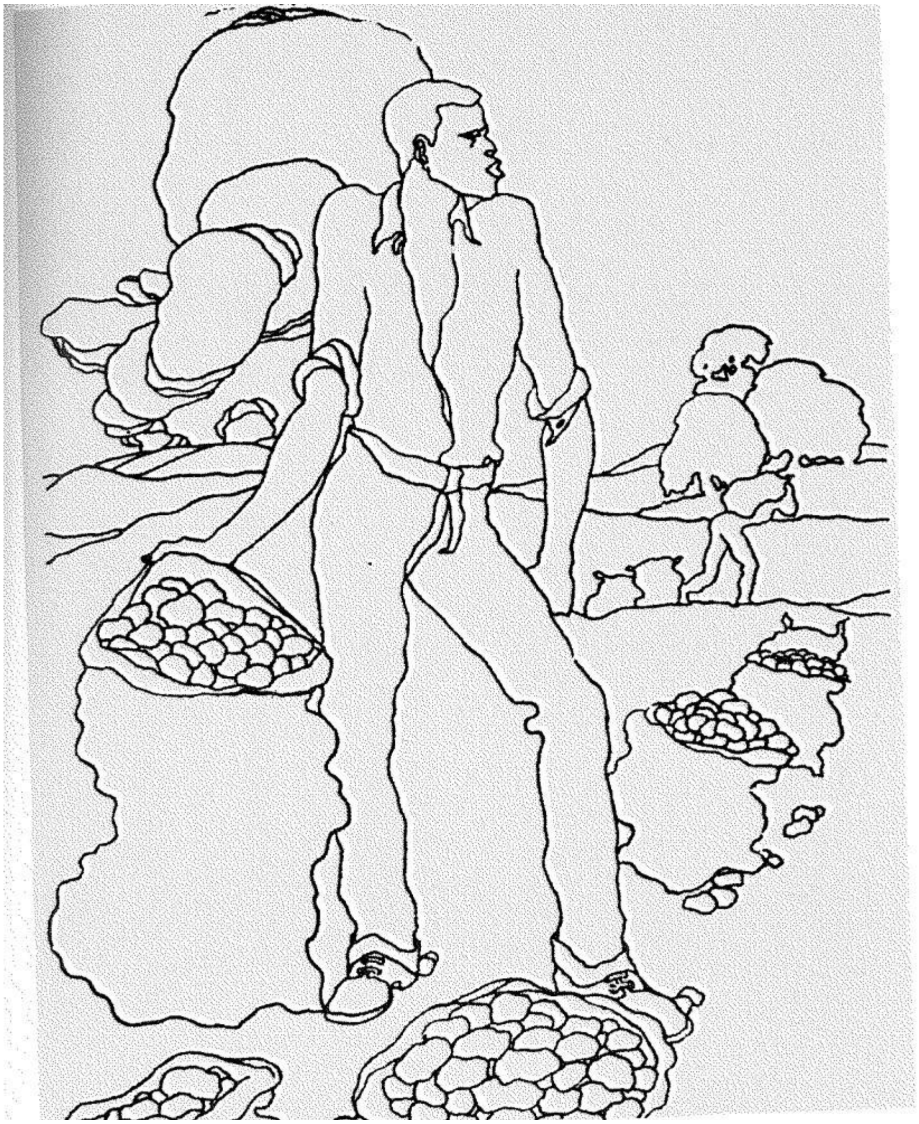


Fig. 2 Aaron Douglas, *Untitled* (Farm life), *Opportunity*, February 1926

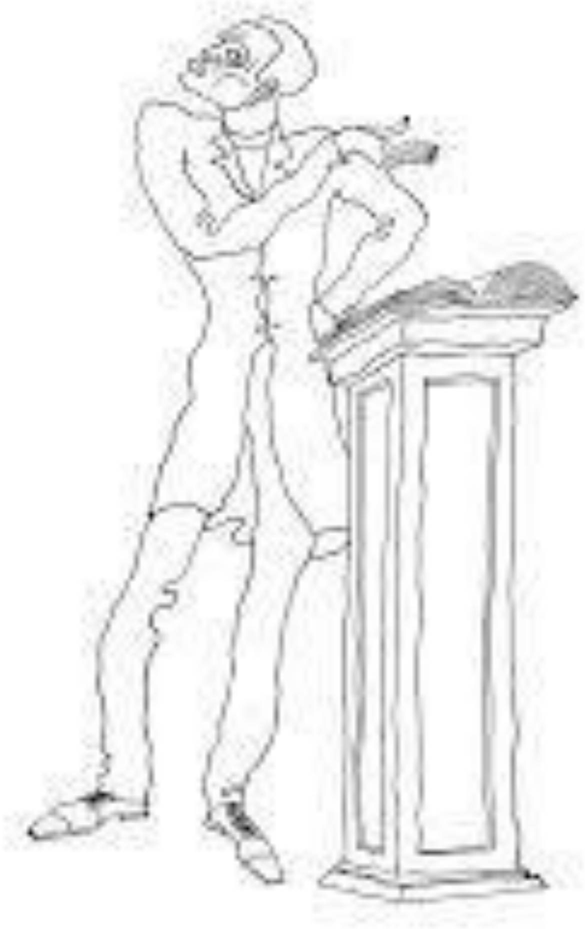


Fig. 3. Aaron Douglas, “Untitled,” (Preacher) *Fire!!,* November 1926

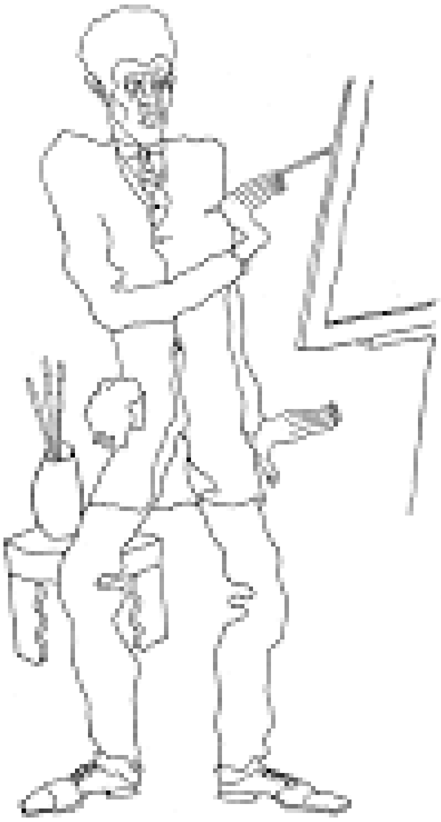


Fig. 4. Aaron Douglas, “Untitled” (Artist), *Fire!!*, November 1926

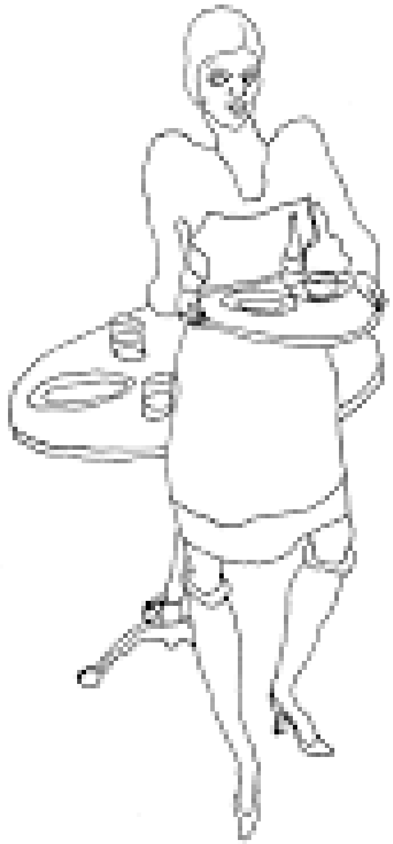


Fig. 5. Aaron Douglas, “Untitled” (Waitress), *Fire!!*, November 1926

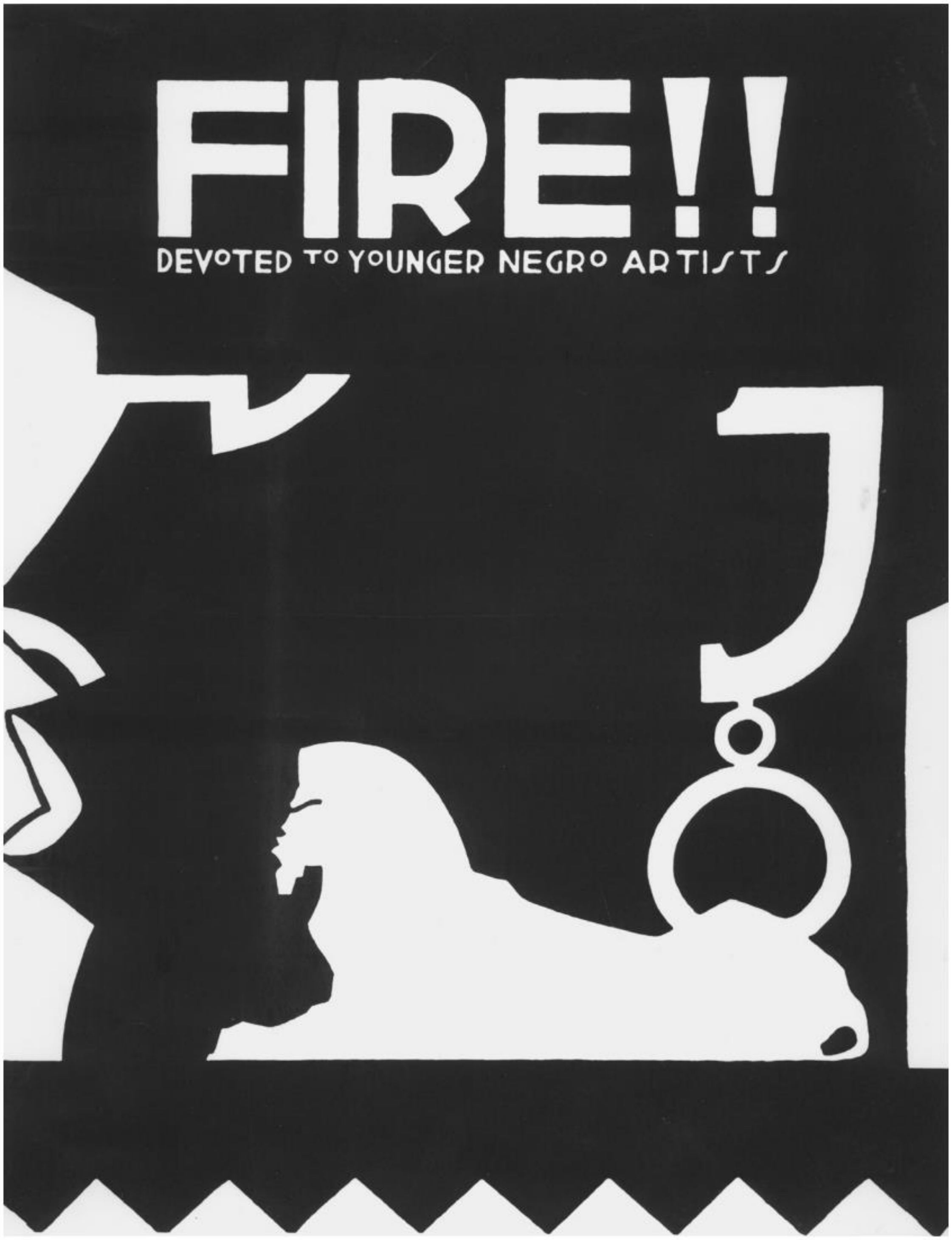
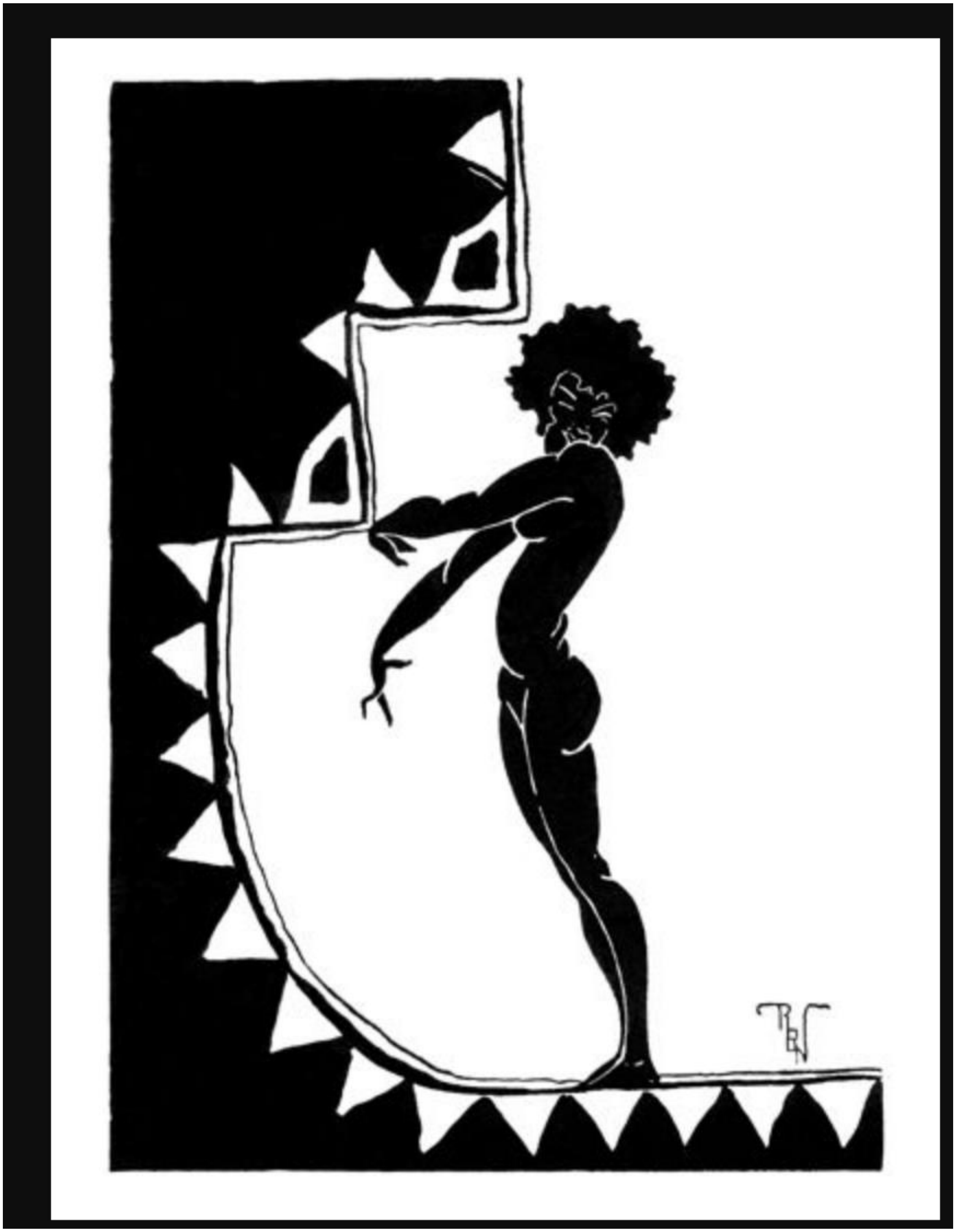

FIRE!!
DEVOTED TO YOUNGER NEGRO ARTISTS

Fig. 6. Aaron Douglas, Cover of *Fire!!*, November 1926

Fig. 7. Richard Bruce Nugent, “Wedding Day,” *Fire!!*, November 1926



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