

HARLEM RENAISSANCE: POLITICS, POETICS, AND PRAXIS IN THE AFRICAN AND
AFRICAN AMERICAN CONTEXTS

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ABSTRACT

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The 1920s in American history saw a political movement through the Harlem Renaissance. This literary movement gave itself the task of promoting black cultural values that were underestimated in American culture. In search for civil rights for African Americans under the intellectual leadership of W.E.B Du Bois and other N.A.A.C.P members, the Harlem Renaissance succeeded in wresting the black community's confidence from Booker T. Washington, who thought the solution to black problems should absolutely be integrationist. Because integration meant limited education and discrimination, Du Bois advocated the right of African Americans to higher education for the fulfillment of their political duties that the Constitution has assigned them. Starting from a theoretical approach to racial problems in his early books, Du Bois practically intervened in the concretization of Pan-Africanism. This project remains a political challenge to the black Diaspora to build a stronger cultural entity against imperialism today.

For my parents and my children

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God Bless America

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
PREFACE.....	vi
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER ONE. SOCIAL AND POLITICAL BACKGROUND OF THE HARLEM LITERARY MOVEMENT.....	13
CHAPTER TWO. THE NINETEEN TWENTIES AND THE BIRTH OF BLACK LITERATURE.....	37
CHAPTER THREE. THE IMPACT OF THE N.A.A.C.P. ON AFRICA AND THE AFRICAN DIASPORA.....	67
CHAPTER FOUR. CONCLUSION	101
REFERENCES	105

PREFACE

The motivation behind my choice to work on racism and colonialism lies behind the fact that not only do the two imperial forces connote the social and economic imbalances of colonized peoples in general and black people in particular, but also the culture denial is undeniably remarkable in both of them. Racism in the US on the other hand is the source of poverty and misery that are characterized by the lack of sufficient education necessary to equip the majority of African Americans for their active participation in civil and public services. The common US citizen is convinced that oppression and prejudices against blacks is a natural phenomenon revolving around the color of the skin. In effect, the task of this study is to explore, for the benefit of a common reader, the development of the US political and social changes on the status of the ex-slave and the impact of racism on the behavior and psyche of the victims of segregation.

The current work is concomitant to a series of research work that I have done in the context of African-Americans. The first work after my Bachelor of Arts was titled: “Personal Reflections on the Use of African-American Poetry in the Context of the Harlem Renaissance.” A few years later, and in order to obtain my Masters of Arts at the University of Lome –Togo – I worked under the theme: “The Black Poetic Aesthetics in the Context of the Harlem Renaissance.” Therefore, my intention to work on “The Harlem Renaissance: Politics, Poetics, and Praxis in African and African-American Contexts” is not void of ambition and goal. This study is for me a forum for cultural negotiations among the multiple black cultural entities on the one hand and a social understanding between black and white on the other hand. By social

understanding I mean the erasure of the conflictual behavior and the stereotypical assumptions that prevent black and white from fair racial interplay.

The necessity of looking at the American “center” as the creator of the “periphery” and vice versa as an issue of complementarities is part of the objective of this study. Another part of it is to consider colonialism and racism as the common necessary evils that bring together blacks all over the world in order to form a larger cultural and political landscape. By going beyond national cultural boundaries, by ignoring the individual nation’s historical facts in order to create a diasporic culture that emerges from the constant contact between the natives and the settlers, the political power of such a cultural unification becomes strong enough to block the way to capitalist and imperialist forces and, thus, lessen the despise that blackness is always met with.

INTRODUCTION

The issue of ethnicity is central to the formation of identity in American Culture Studies. Like the issue of class, ethnicity in the realms of culture is a great challenge to many theorists who find it very important to come to some intellectual understanding of racism by tracing the issue from its historical sources. The purpose of this historical search is, of course, not for a mere discovery of facts, but to review the pending concepts, ideologies, and myths regarding this issue. The objective of this retrospection is mainly to figure out how it is essential to remold the American racial consciousness in the scale of modern ways of thinking. The vast intellectual effort put forth toward outlining and analyzing this subject matter itself attests to the importance of ethnicity to the race conscious American society.

The nuance between ethnicity and race is clarified by the terms *active affiliation* and *passive affiliation*, in the sense that the former can host a group of people from different social and cultural backgrounds for the purpose of an active participation in the group's social struggle for a cause that is common to the category of those people. The latter is a passive affiliation to a category into which one happens to be born.¹ Racism, on the other hand, is not to see the world through the lenses of one's own culture, nor is it simply to notice physical or cultural differences. Racism is neither to detest specific members of a group, nor to dislike the cultural traits of specific groups. Racism, according to Ella Shohat and Robert Stan, "is the stigmatizing of differences in order to justify unfair advantage or the abuse of power, whether that advantage or abuse be economic, political, cultural, or psychological."² The issue of racism is thus a central element in the US national culture studies.

¹ Shohat, E. and Stam, R. *Unthinking Eurocentrism*. (NY: Routledge, 1994), 20.

² Ibid. 22.

Therefore, national and international cultures can be best understood through the knowledge that ethnic groups studies and researches produce. The rich historical facts that we consider in this perspective tell us about the movements and interactions among individuals, as well as collective groups. Even more central in the context of American studies regarding the issue of ethnic groups are: interethnic conflicts, collective struggles, and their respective motives. Paradoxically, the dominant American institutions agree with the idea according to which the US is a multicultural country, but they deny equal treatment for members of some specific ethnic groups such as African Americans. The members of this particular ethnic group have been specifically given the worst of despise. Racism and sexual discrimination in America are due to internal prejudices and historically constructed assumptions that cannot be easily altered if the aggrieved groups do not use formal ways and means to wrest their socially equitable justice from the American power holders.

Hence, the term “politics” as the process by which groups make decisions, or consisting of social relations involving authority or power best matches the Harlem Renaissance literary movement not only for its focus on the interaction of blacks with whites, but also for dealing with American political leaders. Because blacks in the 1920s were intellectually underestimated, “poetics” – the study of poetic works – was the most important tool that the Harlem movement used to put forth the intellectual strength of its members. The Harlem Renaissance itself and the impact it has had on the American cultural landscape and that of the black Diaspora constitute the translation of W.E.B. Du Bois’s initial theoretical work into action – “praxis.” It is in this framework that George Lipsitz, Eric Lott, Siobhan B. Somerville, Sheila L. Croucher and other scholars in African American studies such as W. E. B. Du Bois approach the subject of ethnicity in American studies in their respective ways. This thesis discusses the problems in and about

ethnic groups in American studies according to the above mentioned writers, with an absolute focus on its cultural relevance on the one hand, and the socially devastating aspects that it bears in itself on the other hand.

Collective struggle is understood in American studies as an impetus to new forms of knowledge and behavior. George Lipsitz's theory puts together well known histories of a number of ethnic groups and the national attitude towards them to make us understand an ethnic group's relationship with the power, as well as the latter's broader structures on various groups in terms of oppression. Therefore, the prime concern of George Lipsitz in *American Studies in a Moment of Danger* has to do with the functionality of an identity class in an earnest struggle for social and political rights from the power-holders. He wishes the oppressed groups could form one single force to face the threat. Thus, he argues that "Rather than being united by racial oppression into a coherent and unified polity, members of aggrieved racialized groups experience seemingly endless new forms of conflict, competition, division, and differentiation."³ It is in this respect that individual's self-hatred could be promoted in the interest of a larger collectivity in order to defend a common cause.

The study of Asian Americans as class in which the idea of a strong collectivity is sustained provides us with a good example of coalition. Despite the differences of individual members' origins, language, and religion, Asian Americans found it necessary from the beginning to forget those differences for a stronger group. Moreover, the case study of this ethnic group has served to determine the fundamental characteristics of the rest of ethnic groups which are constituted by coalitions, and therefore cannot be explained by purely national categories. However, the historical differentiations of ethnic groups is somewhat expressed in the present

³ Lipsitz, George. *American Studies in a Moment of Danger*. (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 120.

day's monolithic social treatments of individual groups. Thus, this variation in treatment leads us to a thoughtful consideration of the peculiarities of the case of African American ethnic group.

Due to the historical background of African Americans in the US, and in addition to their natural complexion⁴ and the media foregrounded criminalization of some of African Americans, this ethnic group receives the worst part of racism. This observation might have led Lipsitz to elaborate much more on the case of this group than any other ethnic group in his recent research work. In his book, and more particularly in the case study of African Americans, Lipsitz is struck by the fact that "The literature, art, and music created in communities of color frequently command more respect than the communities that created them."⁵ This passage is evidence to the intellectual endowment that is in the service of the blacks in America, and which is however, not useful enough to help them be integrated in the main stream, or at least, reduce the degree of racism they are subjected to. Therefore, to what extent can art – among other things – help communities of color solve some of their political problems?

The political construction of ethnic identities and ethnic conflict cannot be skipped by an American studies scholar who is in need of tangible facts in order to map out the American cultural landscape. For instance, the pitting of Blacks, Hispanics, and Anglos against one another for limited political, economic, and social resources in contemporary Miami is not out of reach of the hands of local political authorities. Sheila L. Croucher underlines that, "Various politicians in Miami seized the opportunity to manipulate the immigrant presence and the threat of a takeover for their own personal political gain."⁶ Not only do we consider the aspect

⁴ The skin color of blacks and their historical background are the tangible features that racism tends to hold for justification.

⁵ Lipsitz, 118.

⁶ Croucher, S. L. *Imagining Miami: Ethnic Politics in a Postmodern World*. (Virginia: The University Press of Virginia, 1997), 94.

of ethnic identity being a social and political construction, but also our attention is drawn by this writer to the ethnic conflicts that are fueled by the authorities in place to point out the fact that racial issues in the US are manipulated by politics with the command of politicians for hegemonic and economic ends. However, African Americans still suffer more than the rest of ethnic groups in Miami and the whole nation as well. The role played by authorities in the city of Miami is the illustration and some of the emulations of what motivated the Harlem Renaissance movement to denounce racial discrimination and to expose the disguised use of culture for imperial reasons on the national level.

Therefore, the issue of ethnicity in American culture studies is like a sword with two edges. That is to say, we can use ethnicity in the elaboration of conflicts as well as in collective struggles. And it is in the same respect that one can argue that what is more at stake in the context of American studies regarding the issue of ethnic groups are: interethnic conflicts, collective struggles, and their respective motives. But it is noteworthy that paradoxically, the dominant American institutions agree with the idea according to which the US is a multicultural country, but they deny equal treatment for members of some specific ethnic groups such as African Americans.

Moreover, since culturally our world today is becoming a global village, we are challenged by the need for cultural theories that not only envisage action but also transgress colonial boundaries to encompass a greater part of the globe through the role that intellectuals play in the society. The force of truth is wielded by intellectuals who do not criticize scientific ideologies or assume that their ways of thinking are most appropriate, but ascertain that they are able to propose new politics of truth. Thus, the importance and role of intellectuals in our

societies in general and the intellectual backgrounds of the activists of the Harlem Renaissance movement in particular are noteworthy.

The literary movement of Harlem of roughly the 1920s is the instance of the flowering of literary and other arts that was sustained by African American intellectuals. The task that they gave to themselves was to use art to explain to the American main stream about the mental capacity the black in general and the American Negro in particular is endowed, thus to claim their parity with whites. The use of arts for propaganda became hypothetical for the Harlem poets who felt the lack of artist freedom in the choice of what to express oneself on because a writer should not abide by a restricting law as to the choice of themes – writing about blacks should not be the only repertoire for a black writer.

In order to achieve a dialectical resolution between Western rationalism and Africanist “primitivism,” we need to turn to the role of intellectuals in developing cultural identities. Whereas Karl Marx believed that the proletariat within capitalism embodied the universal revolutionary aspirations of the people, Michel Foucault thought that “the intellectual, through his moral, theoretical and political choice, aspires to bear this universality in its conscious, elaborated form. The intellectual is thus taken as the clear, individual figure of a universality whose obscure, collective form is embodied in the proletariat.”⁷ Even when the problems encountered by intellectuals differ from the proletariat or the masses (problems generated by the same adversary), the specificity of the work of an intellectual encompasses his own professional condition, life and racial relations. This implies that from universality to specificity, the intellectual is entirely included in the everyday struggles since he is drawn closer to the masses by the question of real and material. Such was the concern of the Harlem Renaissance

⁷ Leitch, Vincent B, general edit. *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. (NY: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc. 2001), 1667.

intellectuals regarding the race issue in the US. These intellectuals sought to detach truth from the dominant American institutions and instill in the black ethnic group a new sense of self-esteem and responsibility through poems, essays, novels, periodicals, editorials, and stage shows.

This intellectual activism adopted for the Harlem Renaissance anti-racial struggle by W.E.B. Du Bois was a radical opposition to the accommodationist ideology that was advocated by Booker T. Washington, the then national leading spokesman for African Americans. Du Bois thought that Washington was elected to this position because of his call for blacks' accommodation into the white-dominated American society. This call satisfied the whims of whites. Washington's ideology meant limited economic progress, no claim for social and political rights, and no program for the pursuit of higher education for blacks. The lack of these elements in Washington's Tuskegee Institute – founded in Alabama – did not meet Du Bois's expectations which were more militant to include the development of an elite African American intellectual. This opposition enabled Du Bois to play a key role in the quest for rights for African Americans in the Niagara Movement, which then led to the founding of the NAACP. He served as director of this association's publications and research and extended his role over the US international borders because he thought that, without racial pride and prejudice, he could link racialism to universalism and nationalism to internationalism. It was in this perspective that Du Bois played an important role in the initiation of Pan-Africanism. In addition to this activist task in the anti-colonial and anti-racist movements, Du Bois was publishing books and articles as social critic, theorist, creative writer, and historian. He published many books, including *The Suppression of the African Slave Trade to the United States of America* in 1896 and *The Souls of Black Folk* in 1903. He was also the editor of *Horizon: A Journal of the Color Line* from 1907 to 1910, and the NAACP's monthly magazine *The Crisis* from 1910 to 1934.

The intellectual success that permitted Du Bois to write, publish, and edit offered him the opportunity to have virtual control over emerging African American writers in terms of influencing their choices of themes on which to write. He encouraged the openness and truth in writing about anything relating to blacks. But on occasion he turned out to attack the fact that Claude McKay – an African American writer from Jamaica – exaggerated about black sexuality in one of his writings. Du Bois charged him with aggravating the white stereotype about black sexuality. On the other hand, he regretted immensely the fact that black artists relied heavily on white sponsors and audiences.

In addition to this famous, radical, anti-racist activist and many of his peer figures in the Harlem literary movement is the poet Langston Hughes who did not spend much of his time in New York during the 1920s, but who collaborated with all the major figures of the Harlem Renaissance. Hughes wrote poetry with the themes in vogue which he published in the journals that constituted the literary portion of the movement. His way of writing served as an example to the rest of his black peers. One of his most important concerns was to see an African American writer feel black and assess blackness as beautiful. His motto in response to America's persistent racism was "I am a Negro –and beautiful." However, many scholars believe that Hughes was intimately persuaded that the best work will please neither the black nor the white audience.⁸ In order to remain objective, he often referred to Jean Toomer's *Cane* which was written in a neutral tone. Indeed, in one of his famous essays "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain" Hughes vehemently criticizes an African American who wants to be a poet but not a black poet. He states that

One of the most promising of the young Negro poets said to me once,
 "I want to be a poet –not a black poet," meaning, I believe,

⁸ Norton, 1312.

“I want to write like a white poet”; meaning subconsciously,
 “I would like to be a white poet”; meaning behind that,
 “I would like to be white.” And I was sorry the young man said that,
 for no great poet has ever been afraid of being himself.
 And I doubted then that, with his desire to run away spiritually from his race, this boy
 would ever be a great poet.⁹

The young poet Countee Cullen is still in the protest circle which is the core of the Harlem Renaissance movement. This will of being simply poet condones the black’s mental parity with a white. Moreover, Cullen tries by this controversial language to promote the black writer’s freedom to choose. Therefore, this position is far from controversy since the young poet is easing the two burdens from African American writers: he mentally competes with white poets, and he does not want to be told what to write about by the Harlem leaders.

Hughes’ ambivalence foretold how special he was in the choice of his themes and in addressing his audiences. And, as I said earlier, Jean Toomer’s example neither teaches us to run away from ourselves nor to keep the adjective “black” preceding “poet.” Rather, Toomer’s philosophy encourages the simple Americanness which was the main goal of the Harlem movement. One is a poet, or an American poet, deserving social and political rights without discrimination. The young boy’s desire sounds chimerical for his wanting the impossible thing – whiteness.

Indeed, Hughes’ influence on the Harlem Renaissance has been important in the sense of having anticipated the black power movement of the 1960s. Together with James Weldon Johnson and Alain Locke, the Harlem intellectuals labored for and expected some race genius to appear

⁹ Ibid. 1313.

and transform the source of the movement into high culture which was the dream of Johnson's protagonist in *Autobiography of an Ex-colored Man*.¹⁰

These scholars and many others were the cradle of the black cultural representation in the Harlem Renaissance movement of Manhattan. This cultural representation took the form of a social struggle seeking redefinition of public power relations and calling for an intellectual forum in which to negotiate with the political power holders the status of blacks in the US.

Arguably, the social and political stances of the elite of the Harlem Renaissance could not allow a slight fissure between them and the rest of the ethnic group since they shared the same adversary. Moreover, seeing the serious negative impact that colonialism was about to leave on the disunited African Diaspora on the one hand, and finding it natural to identify African Americans with Africans on the other hand, Du Bois extended the terrain of his influence to Pan-Africanism. This logic leads to the conviction that the issue of colonialism in the Third World is inextricably associated with that of racism in the denial of culture to dominated people by the dominant ones. It is this patriarchal position of the imperial forces that Du Bois in America and Fanon in Africa took to task in order to claim a normal restoration of dignity to humanity in general.

Contributions from Du Bois and his peer activists in the Harlem Renaissance literary movement and the initiatives by Fanon and his peers in African Negritude literary movement have formed what Paul Gilroy qualifies as a culture that is not specifically African, American, Caribbean, or British, but all of these at once; a black Atlantic culture whose themes and techniques transcend ethnicity and nationality to produce something new and, until now,

¹⁰ Huggins, N.I. *Harlem Renaissance*. (NY: Oxford University Press Inc., 1971), 16.

unremarked.¹¹ Regardless of the economic aspect of the countries of this cultural cartography, the black Atlantic culture embodies a solid political inspiration that can resist global imperial expansion. Is it not plausible to implement the racist activism of the Harlem Renaissance in the search for universalism and its nationalism for internationalism?

The thesis is divided into two parts. In the first part I will focus on the social and political background of the Harlem Renaissance in its cultural representative aspect. The 1920s that saw the elbow rubbing of American writers in Harlem – New York – is going to receive much attention. In this regard, the poets of the Harlem Renaissance movement and their work are going to be the essence of this part of my work. In order that I accomplish this goal, it is my duty to interrogate the racial and non-racial themes developed in the poetry and fiction of these writers in conjunction with the social and environmental forces that inspired them the themes they wrote on. With emphasis on the impact that Paul Laurence Dunbar's poems have had on the literary and racial activities of the Harlem Renaissance, I am going to discuss how paramount a poet is to human society and the kind of change his role brings to his culture.

Since the anti-racial theory in the literary movement of the Harlem Renaissance can be dialectically implemented to the anti-colonial struggle in Africa and the Diaspora, the second part of this work centers on the virtual dialogue between the activists of the Harlem Renaissance and those of the Negritude literary movement on the issue of nationalism. Nationalism calls for the formation of a group capable of governing itself. Though the imposition of form over heterogeneous elements can be seen as an oppressive act, the national consciousness requires the subordination of personal desires in the interest of the collective. Laura Chrisman argues that "The injunction to put oneself in the position of others can be considered a helpful safeguard

¹¹ Gilroy, P. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1993), 4.

against anti-social individualism.”¹² This explains Fanon’s theory on national culture in *The Wretched of the Earth* where he advocates that history and the pre-existing ethnocentric various cultures be overruled by creating a new national one that will be imposed by the new ways of life emerging from the contact of the natives with the colonists. The Algerian anti-colonial struggle illustrates this fact in the sense that parents and husbands ignored their traditional principles regarding women’s appearance in public to encourage their participation in the national liberation struggle. The same national culture will create the superstructure through which a nation could endeavor for its economic freedom, freeing itself from capitalist domination.

If nationalism is viewed to be important vis-à-vis anti-colonial struggle, it becomes unnecessary after independence and when there is a need to expand a cultural sphere for a larger community of people on the grounds that they share dialectically the same political or social backgrounds. The initiative of pan-Africanism is going to receive an emphasis in this perspective while a post-colonial theory that combines Africa and the Diaspora will inform this part of my work.

¹²Chrisman, L. *Postcolonial Contraventions: Cultural Readings of Race, Imperialism and Transnationalism*. (Manchester, NY: Manchester University Press, 2003), 129.

CHAPTER ONE: SOCIAL AND POLITICAL BACKGROUND OF THE HARLEM LITERARY MOVEMENT

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) that fostered the Harlem literary movement is not the first organization that has counteracted every negative assumption about blacks. Many groups such as, the Constitution League, the National Equal Rights League, the Niagara Movement, the National Negro Business League, the Universal Negro Improvement Association, and the American Negro Academy riposted to the stereotypical treatments afflicted to the black ethnic group. Each organization gained or lost support according to the way in which it dealt with the segregation and the means it used for the promotion of the black race's social rights. The conduct and the succession of those associations subjected to the social changes molded progressively the character of the victims of racial discrimination and gave incentives to succeeding leaders for different ways to revolt against racism. This chapter explores the sociopolitical highs and lows that gave shape to the type of movement that defended and still defends the black cause in the Harlem Renaissance. My argument here is that the Jim Crow laws and the social changes in individual states, as well as the Supreme Court's reinterpretation of some federal legislation on blacks during and after Reconstruction, form the basis of what a cultural analyst would call "the agent." By agent I mean the power that impelled the Harlem Renaissance advocates to use literature as a means to face up to traditional European characterization of blacks as less than human.

The Black in American Fiction of Post-Civil War

The blind men gathered about the elephant. Each one felt the part of the elephant's anatomy closest to him, the trunk, tusk, eyes, ear, hoof, hide, and tail. Then each became an authority on the elephant. The elephant was all trunk, or all hoof, or all hide, or all tail. So ran their separate truths. The single truth was that they were all blind.¹³

Although the early American authors made the black characters part of their writings because they are part and parcel of American life, blacks have always been linked, in fiction as well as in fact, to loyalty, mirth, servility, quaintness, exuberance, brutishness, or lust. The example of Anna Cooper's critique on American literature better illustrates the fictional misuse of generalizations and exaggerations on black characters. More precisely her criticism of William Dean Howells who, by the 1880s was generally considered a major American novelist and literary critic sustains that Howells makes the mistake of representing the colored church folk whom his octoroon heroine encounters and finds so disgusting as unmistakably representing the best colored society. Unwittingly, perhaps, Cooper exposes the class biases that existed among the black intellectual elite of her time when she criticizes Howells for his lack of knowledge about the more cultivated class of colored people and for basing his portrayals on his observations of colored 'menials and lazzaroni... He has not seen, and therefore cannot be convinced that there exists a quiet, self-respecting, dignified class of easy life and manners... of cultivated tastes and habits, and with no more in common with the class of his acquaintance than the accident of complexion, - beyond a sympathy of their wrongs, or a resentment at being

¹³ Brown, S. *The Negro in American Fiction*. (New York: Arno Press and The New York Times, 1969), 1.

socially and morally classified with them.¹⁴ This type of remarks constitutes a call to a generation of black writers, the writers of the Harlem Renaissance who could make the black racial issue and the black culture the basic elements of their literary works. It is for that reason that Cooper concludes that only black writers could write the appropriate fiction about their people. In 1892, she therefore hoped to see before her death black writers appreciatively portraying the Negro character as s/he is in fiction. Her dream became reality because, “By the time her essay was published, Charles Chestnut had already met that task in the novel; Frances Harper had gained considerable attention as a poet; and W.E.B. Du Bois was well on his way to becoming one of the twentieth century’s most influential American scholars.”¹⁵ Though it is widely agreed that Paul Laurence Dunbar’s black-centered poetry impacted heavily the Harlem Renaissance writers, the dialect poems that his publishers forced him to produce did not attract his peer poets of the late nineteenth century who formed the literary roots for the Harlem movement.

Therefore, the unfortunate black intellectual immaturity and the wrong generalizations about blacks in the white American literature in the immediate years following the Civil-War made it inconceivable to admit that blacks were human, and that they would be socially and politically equal to their white neighbors. Thus the social reforms undertaken by the Reconstruction, especially the issue of a society void of slavery, which was federally and democratically justified, became biased and reinterpreted. Since the implications of these reforms envisaged the domination of blacks, the southern planters and political leaders found in Reconstruction a threat to the socio-economic environment of their states that heavily relied on slavery to boost their economy.

¹⁴ Adell, S. *Double-Consciousness/Double Bind: Theoretical Issues in Twentieth-Century Black Literature*. (Chicago: The University of Illinois Press, 1994), 8.

¹⁵ Ibid.

In effect, the Reconstruction policies did raise and restore the black sociopolitical status in the US; they also helped establish many black training institutions and education buildings under the control of Freedmen's Bureau. Despite the fact that southern whites were opposed to blacks having any rights at all, and that the Bureau lacked military force to back up its authority, the Bureau was able to accomplish some of its goals, especially in the field of education. It established a number of colleges and training schools for blacks, including Howard University – named for General O. O. Howard – and Hampton Institute. Howard believed that the mission of the Bureau was a temporary one, wanting to avoid black dependency on the federal agency. He firmly believed that African Americans should obtain all their rights as quickly as possible, but failed to see that because of Southern white hostility long-term support was necessary for them to do so. The Bureau also failed to bring together whites and blacks in the South because it lacked the means to do so. It needed support from Southern and Northern politicians and received little from either. Its staff was cut significantly by 1869 and it ceased operations in 1872. The philanthropists who were sympathetic to blacks succeeded in that period to educate a substantial number of blacks. They could not do it thoroughly because of the strong opposing waves that were dissuading the federal government from condoning the sociopolitical parity of blacks with whites.

Unlike their younger brothers of the Harlem Renaissance in the “modern” America, African Americans of the period immediately after Abolition were less race conscious and did not have any serious approach to a cultural revolution. Though they faced the psycho-cultural injuries they could not protest. Even if they could there were so many factors that hampered the means through which they channeled their protest. Among hampering elements was the social Darwinism that increased racism at the turn of the nineteenth century. Moreover, there was the

tendency to restore slavery as to continue taking profit from the black servitude. For the predominant racial theory in the South at the turn of the century depicted blacks as an inferior and immoral race that would never achieve parity with whites. Slavery, it was argued, had Christianized blacks and restrained their baser tendencies, but freedom had resulted in a rapid reversion toward barbarism. Some southern writers even justified lynching as the only effective check against the black man's increasing tendency to rape, and argued that the only solution to the race problem was either colonization or extermination.¹⁶

These negative incentives and the pejorative assumptions about the human capacities of African Americans formed a progressive force that instilled in the Negroes the conscience of their race, the anxiety to be part of some larger meaning. The need to go from the southern states where discrimination was a social law to mostly northern cities was not only due to the will of leaving the plantations to newly industrializing areas; the economic crisis in the south was neither the only factor that pushed blacks out to northern or southwestern urban areas. It was rather the combination of these factors and, more importantly, the need to come together and form a social force that could bring forth a cultural representation that could stand defensively against white speculations and the stereotypical arguments vis-à-vis the black humanity. This, consequently, exhibited the need of a well organized racial protest with a black leadership that could help those white philanthropists in their endeavor for the black race uplift. The manifestations of that race-lifting organization with a solid intellectual leadership are obviously experienced in the Harlem Renaissance literary movement in its claim for racial equality.

¹⁶ Wintz, Cary D. *Black Culture and the Harlem Renaissance*. (Houston, Texas: Rice University Press, 1968), 10.

Succession of Leaders or Competition of Leaderships?

The succession of leaders in the black community from late 19th century to the economic depression in the US claimed the controversy and divergence of Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois on the one hand and between the latter and Marcus Garvey on the other hand. The racial uplift and the access to civil rights for blacks in post slavery faced strong sociopolitical and socioeconomic obstacles created by racism and racial prejudice. Injustice, corruption, and the complex of cultural superiority that racial segregation engendered prevented African Americans to benefit from the honor that the US Constitution has granted them. Though these immoral conducts helped the formation of the black race consciousness, they impeded the organization of blacks into a self-sufficient ethnic group under a consensual and national leadership. It is worth noting that, despite the foundation of some training centers and educational buildings for blacks, there was a specific type of education that whites supported or thought better for blacks in the early 1890s. This way of looking at things brought the controversy of ideologies between Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. DuBois. However, since the former did not advocate a liberal education for blacks and thought only for agricultural and industrial training, he received the helping hands of white patrons to support his Tuskegee Institute. And because the latter advocated the formation of a black elite and the pursuit of higher education, he could not make it possible until almost the death of the former. Nevertheless, they worked somehow together despite this clear difference of view for the well being of the race. On the other hand, the dominant religious aspect of Marcus Garvey's black unification ideology also held sway in the black ethnic group while the NAACP of Dubois was in vogue in the first decades of the 20th century. This passage explores the diversity and the complementarity of

leaderships that the black community received from post-Reconstruction that molded the psyche of the New Negro in the Harlem literary movement. The argument in this passage is not to judge one leader to the detriment of another, but to positively assess the usefulness of the individual ideology of each of them and the contribution each of them made to the formation of the New Negro who chose to use literature as means for social protest identifying himself altogether with blacks in the Diaspora.

Among the common denominators in the protest strategies advocated by the black leaders throughout the time are: race pride, self-reliance, and the reference to Africa and the Diaspora. Although what makes the difference between one leader and another is the way to approach the accomplishment of those goals set for the identity of blacks and for their mental and moral improvement, individual efforts stand as important icons in today's African America cultural debates. For instance, Booker T. Washington, in order to achieve the objective of self-reliance, thought that accommodation into the American racist atmosphere and a solely industrial training was not only compatible but also unavoidable for the black who was segregated in education among many other things. Thus, the importance of economic independence could not be equaled to classical or liberal arts education (conducive to social equality with whites) in Washington's view and according to the then American life constraints. In Wint's observation,

Industrial education enjoyed widespread popularity not only because it addressed the real needs of many black colleges and their students, but also because it met the needs of dominant elements in both the black and the white communities. Among blacks it was compatible with the concepts of self-help and racial solidarity. Industrial education had as its goal the creation of a race of thrifty, hard-working, industrious men and women focusing their energies on economic advancement rather than on political equality. In

addition industrial education appeased whites who had criticized classical or liberal arts curricula at black colleges as either not addressing the educational needs of blacks or, even worse, creating black college graduates who refused to work as manual laborers.¹⁷ Thus the black economic independence sought from industrial education as a means of black self-help was not an alternative for blacks, rather a restriction. That is to say that if Booker T. Washington wanted to establish an education system for blacks with the help of white patrons, he could not but condone what would satisfy the whims of his sponsors. But this was not totally independent from Washington's educational background.

Despite the fact that the American Constitution issued Thirteen, Fourteen, and Fifteen Amendments that respectively abolished slavery, instituted citizenship, and voting rights, Washington decided to implement some of the lessons he had learned from Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute near Norfolk –Virginia. This was a school for blacks that emphasized industrial education, founded by a white, Samuel Chapman Armstrong – a former Union army general. According to Moore, “Armstrong warned his students not to force themselves where whites did not want them. He advised using segregated facilities when they were available and not pushing for the vote until they were educated enough to use it wisely.”¹⁸ The same method of gradualism which consisted in getting assimilated through economic advancement and good manners was also the fundamental principle on which Washington's foundation of Tuskegee Institute was based.

If Washington had the intention of implementing what he learned from Armstrong's school, he did not emphasize the idea of gradualism that is explicitly expressed in Armstrong's

¹⁷ Ibid. 34-35

¹⁸ Moore, Jacqueline M. *Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. Du Bois, and the Struggle for Racial Uplift*. (Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources Inc., 2003), 25.

black education system. In his Atlanta Compromise, in order to persuade the white sponsorship and abide by the South's social order, Washington guaranteed that "blacks would agree not to push for social and political equality if whites would agree not to exclude them from economic progress."¹⁹ It is clear in this perspective that Armstrong's educational plans implicitly promised his students their access to social and political rights which is entirely excluded in Washington's compromise. Despite the lack of any future plans for the black access to civic and high education in the Atlanta Compromise, Washington began receiving more requests from around the country to speak; Tuskegee began taking in more donations; and politicians began approaching him to consult on racial issues. He even received praise from Du Bois who told him in his letter of September 24, 1895 that his speech was "a word fitly spoken."²⁰ It is worth noting that this admiration from whites was due to the emphasis Washington laid in his speech of the Atlanta Compromise on the fact that it was an abomination for blacks to push for political equality with whites; and that, "In all things that are purely social we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress...The wisest among my race understand that the agitation of questions of social equality is the extremist folly."²¹ He then encouraged whites to help blacks in order to avoid the southern part of the US doom into poverty. And whites agreed to help not only because the Tuskegee Institute was discouraging its black students from claiming their social rights, but also because those students were getting trained for only manual labor. For with this image blacks could maintain their self-respect while avoiding a direct confrontation with racism.

¹⁹ Ibid. 32-33

²⁰ Ibid. 33

²¹ Wintz, Cary D. *Black Culture and the Harlem Renaissance*. (Houston, Texas: Rice University Press, 1968), 37.

It is not surprising to hear Du Bois praise Washington after his speech. But what is important in this respect is the popularity Washington was gaining in the naïve black community of the south and the uniqueness of his action for the uplift of the black race. In effect, Du Bois did not belong to the first group of Washington's critics. He rather took to the side of the black leader and defended him against the upsetting criticism orchestrated by Washington's opponents. As it is clear in Moore's argument,

Du Bois pinpointed the exaggeration in the group's critics and remained friendly to Washington and even praised Washington in his review to *Up from Slavery* in 1901. He praised Washington for his efforts but said his accommodationist stand was only one of many approaches the black community advocated and that he did not have universal support.²²

The militancy and universalism of the Harlem literary movement to come is implied in this remark. Nonetheless, Washington deserved Du Bois's praise and the praise from many of today's scholars because economic advancement was the most essential need for blacks at that time. It was also to be one of the main objectives of the NAACP; and it continues today to be a great concern for the black community in the US and around the world.

The relevance of Washington's ideology of training blacks for industrial skills lies in the fact that the US industrialization was nascent and seriously in need of trained people. Even if industrialization was mostly felt to be in a rapid growth in the north, the status of a black man inside or outside the south was essentially to be adjusted by accurate financial support. This was not possible in a capitalist country where one class of people should be rich to the detriment of

²² Moore, Jacqueline M. *Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. Du Bois, and the Struggle for Racial Uplift*. (Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources Inc., 2003), 69.

another. Therefore, self-reliance was an unavoidable rule that urged Washington to emulate the philanthropic Samuel Chapman Armstrong by creating the Tuskegee Institute. Now, the question is: If it was an ideal action to help blacks rely on themselves, what then was the issue of dissention between Du Bois and Washington? Obviously, in Du Bois's agenda there were other amenities that could valorize black people as real citizens which were totally lacking in Washington's movement. The political aspect of Washington's racial uplift was absurd or misunderstood by the black community and most of non-blacks who were carefully following the trend adopted by the black leadership. Ronald Waters, the Director of the African American Leadership Institute argues that,

Blacks owned land at that time in a number of places, and some were even very prosperous. Washington was asking blacks to emulate that ownership while at the same time fitting into and not changing southern culture. But southern culture was for most blacks, both in and outside the South, anathema, something that needed to be confronted rather than fitting into. That's where Booker T. ran afoul.²³

The increment of the impact of the segregation laws in the South and the appealing facts of the Great Migration – from the cotton farms rural South to the industrializing urban North – made the control of the situation very difficult for Washington. The Jim Crow laws and the increasing will of blacks to claim their deserved Civil Rights incited vivid criticism in neutral observers and even in Tuskegee supporters against Washington's way of struggle for the racial uplift.

Even though the opposition did not find anything wrong with the ideology of blacks' economic advancement, the political aspect of the movement opened a wide overture for the opposing ideas to affect profoundly the Bookerite philosophy. The publication of Du Bois's *The*

²³ Carroll, Rebecca, ed. *Uncle Tom or New Negro? African Americans Reflect on Booker T. Washington and Up from Slavery One Hundred Years Later*. (New York: Harlem Moon, 2006), 31.

Souls of Black Folk, in which there is a chapter entitled “Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others” that criticized Washington’s ways of thought, announced publicly the division of the black community. But that did not separate the two leaders since the criticism in that chapter was a theoretical rather than a personal attack. The true divorce began with the foundation of Niagara Movement in 1905 with Du Bois as general secretary. That organization was to have chapters in each state and a national executive committee. The list of demands issued by the Niagara Movement included the right to vote, an end to segregation, equal employment opportunities, and equal access to education with a common curriculum for both races. Washington’s loyalty to his most famous friend Theodore Roosevelt even after he dishonorably discharged a whole regiment of black soldiers involved in Brownsville riot was an advantage for the Niagara Movement to weaken but not terminate Washington’s authority on the black ethnic group. Since Du Bois’s call to protest makes now more sense than Washington’s call for compromise, injustice, corruption and nepotism were to engage and victimize more blacks in general and the staff of Niagara Movement in particular.

Being unable to resist Washington’s threat, the Niagara Movement collapsed and left the chance to the key white Tuskegee supporters to react. John Milholland, a white who had earlier founded a biracial group – the Constitution League – to attack disfranchisement and other forms of discrimination through protest and legal cases, stopped working with Washington because of his persisting loyalty to Roosevelt after the Brownsville affair. However, his work with Du Bois came to an end because Niagara Movement was no more. This was the time when Milholland and other two whites – Oswald Garrison Villard and Mary White Ovington – became the key players in the founding of the NAACP. This association was going to serve as a banner under which Du Bois was going to pave a new way for the black claim for social justice: An

intellectual way to approach the black racial pride, self-reliance, and turn-to-Africa that was categorically different from that of Washington. However, the literary means that the NAACP used to condone black social parity with whites did not lack an alternative way to pursue the same goals on behalf of blacks. This alternative was the religious way that Marcus Garvey used under the banner of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) in the intention of gathering the blacks all over the world.

The economic nationalism and the social justice for the black race in the United States and elsewhere in the world have, in the long run, motivated the *raison d'être* of the UNIA. But why choose religious arenas to cultivate the awareness of a group of people on economic and social issues? Since no record attests that either Garvey or his associates have a high education in economy or sociology, at the outset, the conception of the UNIA was as a missionary religious association espousing the Brotherhood of Mankind, and the Fatherhood of God.

Not only is fund raising easier in religious gathering, but it is also easier to change someone's way of thought through religious language. The organization of an independent Church was to make it easier for the clergymen to explain the human religious history according to the new imposing circumstances. Thus, even if some did not go to Church just because the clergymen therein were white, obviously they would quickly run to a Church led by blacks. To maintain the population in this situation the clergymen have to tell the black church goers that God is black. This theological rethinking can be understood in the culturally important role played by the first Chaplain-General George Alexander McGuire in the black church. According to Randall K. Burkett, the West Indian-born McGuire

was elected to the post at the first annual International Convention of the Negro Peoples of the World in August 1920. Under his leadership, the religio-political nationalism

which was present in the UNIA from its earliest days was made ever more explicit and pervasive. One of his first deeds as Chaplain-General, for instance, was to compile the Universal Negro Ritual, published in 1921. The Ritual was modeled after the Book of Common Prayer on which McGuire was raised as a member of the Church of England and which he later used as a priest in the Protestant Episcopal Church.²⁴

Besides, if the black Church is now independent from other white denominations, and is now led by black clergymen, black Christians now expect any historical religious personality to be black. Therefore, the spiritual motivation of the society became strong enough to urge its members into acting the way their religion wanted them to, with regard to distinctive ritual that command blacks to a new social order. It is in this respect that d'Aquili *et al.* remind us that "To examine human ritual is to examine man in all his hues: his thought, language, society, physiology, individual and social development, and evolution."²⁵ By specific ritual, we understand the religious separateness caused by the rejection that blacks encountered in white church denominations.

Another religious aspect of the UNIA that sought to distinguish the African Episcopal Church from others was the issue of going back to Africa which was inherent in almost every speech by either Garvey or his associate leaders. In order to concretize this in the minds of black people, the clergymen had a very difficult task. However, Garvey was already standing for the prophet Moses; coincidentally, his middle name is 'Moses.' In effect, the issue of exodus was tacitly established before any elaboration on that because there was already Moses, his people (in

²⁴ Burkett, Randall K. *Garveyism as a Religious Movement: The Institutionalization of a Black Civil Religion*. (ATLA, N.J. & London: Metuchen, 1978), 29.

²⁵ D'Aquili et al, *The Spectrum of Ritual: A Biogenic Structural Analysis*. (New York: Columbia University Press 1979), 2.

servitude in America), and Africa was the destination. All it would take was a good organization and Moses would lead his people from slavery to freedom in Africa; in a movement like that one can figure out the possibility of having Pharaoh and his soldiers to chase Moses and his people and automatically conclude on the triumph of Moses and his people.

The similarities and coincidences between Garveyism and the historical prophet Moses played important roles on the sides of the most frequently cited Biblical passage by far, and the one which most often served as a text for sermon topics in Liberty Halls around the country, that was the one from Psalms 68: 31, “Princes shall come forth from Egypt; Ethiopian shall soon stretch forth her hand to God.” This Biblical prophecy was used by black clergymen to specify God’s special concern for people of African descent; the concern of Africa that was so central to the UNIA. Inferring from this is that God was working through the UNIA to create a nation, Africa and the movement to there was imminent. Burkett shares with us the following oft-asked questions:

Q. What prediction made in the 68th Psalm and the 31st verse is now being fulfilled?

A. ‘Princes shall come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall soon stretch her hands unto God.’

Q. What does this verse prove?

A. That Negroes will set up their own government in Africa, with rulers of their own race.²⁶

With this determination in mind the black churchmen and churchwomen implemented totally the religious injunctions that they received comprising moral guides that clergymen found necessary for the black community. The creation of catechism and rituals that specifically addressed the

²⁶ Burkett, Randall K. *Garveyism as a Religious Movement: The Institutionalization of a Black Civil Religion*. (ATLA, N.J. & London: Metuchen, 1978), 34.

needs of blacks was the main concerns of the clergymen in the UNIA. It was in this way that the Association was able to raise funds and gathered what led to the purchase of a ship. For “Ships,” according to Chaplain-General of the UNIA McGuire, “are the pride of every nation. They are bulwark of Britain and the protector of America and Japan. No scheme of colonization planned by this organization can become effective without ships.”²⁷ Many sources attest to the economic development of the organization and that of some of its members. And this, before Garvey, the founder, was caught in the net of those who found him to be in the position of doing away with the colonies of the powerful nations of the world.

Thus the religious gatherings through the UNIA served to sustain the social coherence and forward some important political and economical achievements. The black Church’s independence and the rewriting of some specific religious items that went into the black community’s interest stimulated the rigorous implementation of what the clergymen designed for their churchmen and women. It is noteworthy that the distinctiveness of the African Episcopal Church organized by McGuire played a political and economic role in the sense that despite the fact that the churchgoers received religious lessons from the Church, they were altogether enjoined to act in the racial interest and in their personal financial acquisition as well.

Unlike Washington’s strategy of turning to Africa which was undeniably exporting some agricultural techniques to Togo²⁸ (my country in West Africa), Garvey’s way of turning to Africa was profoundly ritualistic and biblical in the sense that driving all blacks from the US back to Africa became unavoidable. On the other hand, Du Bois’s involvement in the initiating efforts of Pan Africanism made him one of the latter’s founding fathers. It is noteworthy,

²⁷ Ibid.172.

²⁸ According to Cary D. Wintz, “On a more concrete level Washington established an agricultural project in Togo, invited African dignitaries to speak at Tuskegee, and sent a number of graduates to jobs in several African countries” (1988, 45).

therefore, that the combination of these various efforts from Washington, Du Bois, and Garvey make up the modern black character modeled in the New Negro of the Harlem Renaissance. He is now equipped with the spirit of self-reliance, aware of the use of economic independence, and able to go to a church where the divine color is black. Since all these cultural features have been inspired in the New Negro through the individual endeavor of the afore mentioned black leaders, it is necessary to look at the literary source that inspired him the way he chose to look for social parity; to use arts and letters in search for his race's social rights.

The Literary Roots of the Harlem Renaissance

Apart from black historians' way of rewriting black history with emphasis on the greatness of African civilization before colonialism, black clergymen on the other hand reinterpreted the divine scriptures for a positive assessment of the black humanity and the equality of blacks and whites in front of God. These assertions and reinterpretations gradually led blacks to the necessity to accept themselves and subsequently to their demand for racial equality. Therefore, the protest literature of the 1920s is a continuation of the heritage left by the combination of the prejudice against the black on the one side, and the endeavors by black historians, clergymen, and writers to face the challenge on the other side. Paul Laurence Dunbar – one of the Ohioan black poets of the nineteenth century – wrote his white friend Dr. Henry A. Tobey on July 13, 1895 that “I did once want to be a lawyer, but that ambition has long since died out before the all-absorbing to be a worthy singer of the songs of God and nature. To be able to interpret my own people through song and story, and to prove to the many that after all

we are more human than African.”²⁹ Thus, the generation of black writers that preceded that of the Harlem Renaissance paved the way for the latter to such an extent as to make racial identity claim the sole object for their literary works involving, on some occasions, a specific type of English language. Since nobody denies the fact that the dialect spoken by blacks in the US is the outcome of segregation in schools that denied blacks proper education, its use in literature depends on the writer’s option and should not be the mandatory means for written black literature. Moreover, for the need of a wide and easy readership, the use of dialect in written black literature should not be advisable or dictated as Howells did.

William Dean Howells whose example was used earlier to illustrate the white misrepresentation of black characters in American literature had a literary impact on the Harlem writers through his editing and publishing help that he gave to Dunbar. In Wintz’s observation,

He gained national recognition in 1896 when the foremost American literary critic, William Dean Howells praised Dunbar’s second book of poetry, *Majors and Minors*, in *Harper’s Weekly*. In his review Howells described Dunbar as the first black writer ‘to study his race objectively, to analyze it to himself, and then to represent it in art as he felt it and found it to be; to represent it humorously, yet tenderly, and above all so faithfully that we know the portrayal to be undeniably true’ Howells concluded these comments with extremely high praise for the young black poet, ‘I hope I have not praised too much, because he surprised me so very much, for his excellences were positive and not comparative.’ This review catapulted the previously unknown poet into national prominence and opened previously closed literary doors.³⁰

²⁹ Braxton, J.M. ed. *The Collected Poetry of Paul Laurence Dunbar*. (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993), ix-x.

³⁰ Wintz, Cary D. *Black Culture and the Harlem Renaissance*. (Houston, Texas: Rice University Press, 1968), 48.

This national recognition that Dunbar gained through Howells' review increased the latter's restrictions on the former. In other words Howells appreciated more Dunbar's poems written in black dialect to the extent as to refuse the publication of those in Standard English. Dunbar was urged to produce only poems in dialect on the grounds that they were "the most praiseworthy" and therefore the only ones that could be published. Thus, the rule of "Art for Art's Sake" was denied to Dunbar who earned his living from writing. The following poem expresses Dunbar's frustrations over Howells' intimidations:

He sang of love when earth was
young,
And Love, itself, was in his
lays,
But ah, the world, it turned
A jingle in a broken tongue.³¹

But despite the sentimental strength of this expression Dunbar maintained his relationship with Howells due to an essential reason: he earned his living out of writing. And according to Braxton, "Dunbar's conflict with this well-meaning white patron foreshadows the constraints imposed on the Harlem Renaissance artists of the 1920s by a white readership that insisted on stereotyped representations of black urban primitivism."³² The questions that arise from these facts are; What type of art is one conducive to produce under the dictum of another person? In other words, is the principle of "Art for Art's Sake" observed in a situation where art is perverted to satisfy a specific need?

³¹ Braxton, J.M. ed. *The Collected Poetry of Paul Laurence Dunbar*. (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993), 191.

³² Ibid. p. xvii.

Before *beautiful art* in Kant's judgment could be related to Cooper's definition of *truth*, the main requirement is the total freedom from any rules. The only canon is truth. For Cooper defines truth in terms of feelings, the imagination, and sense perception. And Adell argues:

Kant writes that for art to be beautiful it must show no trace of the 'rule' that guides the writer's mental powers. He calls that rule genius and defines it as a talent for producing exemplary models that 'serve as a standard or rule of judgment for others,' but for which no definite rule can be given regarding its own production. 'It cannot describe or indicate scientifically how it brings about its products, but it gives the rule just as nature does.

Hence the author of a product for which he is indebted to his genius does not know himself how he has come by his ideas.'³³

Whenever an artistic work exposes signs of obedience to a given rule, that work does not stand for art sake and in this case, it could be said to be in the service of a specific purpose which could be personal to the law dictator or the artist himself and be treated as such. However, it is not too serious a problem since Howells did not divert Dunbar from the main object of his poetry: the Negro character and life on plantations. Even if his work was arguably not entirely in service to the black race, it should be noted that Dunbar was not only able to write in Standard English but also in black dialect. Moreover the most important aspect of the literary heritage he left for the succeeding black writers was the choice to use art to represent blacks in a fresh light, art as a racial expression functioning not only as myth breaker but also, and more important, as a means by which to comprehend how positive self-identity could be developed and regulated. Also by his intellectual capability, Dunbar served as a role model to the Harlem poets and writers.

³³ Adell, S. *Double-Consciousness/Double Bind: Theoretical Issues in Twentieth Century Black Literature*. (Chicago: The University of Illinois Press, 1994), 6.

If Dunbar impacted the Harlem poets, surely enough, other writers like Charles W. Chesnutt – another Ohio born black novelist – did leave to their successors what to copy from. Unlike Dunbar, the novelist Chesnutt did not earn his living from writing and therefore enjoyed a literary freedom more than his contemporary Dunbar did. Consequently, Chesnutt ventured freely in the themes that Dunbar tended to avoid. Wintz observes that the difference between the two writers in the freedom of theme choice “is seen most clearly by the fact that while Dunbar generally refrained from directly confronting the issues of race and racial injustice in his work, Chesnutt made these problems his major literary concern. Consequently, while Dunbar anticipated the Harlem Renaissance through his New York connections and the setting of his last novel, Chesnutt anticipated it by his uncompromising focus on racial themes.”³⁴ Chesnutt’s position best illustrates the fundamental objectives of black literature because the sine quanon condition to write it is not only to demonstrate the cultural richness of the black ethnic group, but also to respond as the insulted party. The black writer’s task is not only to explain, but also to demonstrate that he, too, has a rich past to fall back and reflect on, contrary to the adverse rendering he was given by racist historians, anthropologists and men of literature. To do this, he draws on new evidence which helps him to demolish old idols and explode myths. In all this, his paramount aim is to establish his credentials, not only as an observer, but as an active participant and agent of social and political transformation. The emblematic black figure that stood for this was Du Bois who did not only write from black perspective of American life, but also actively participated in the sociopolitical transformation of American life for the benefit of minority groups in general and the black ethnic group in particular.

³⁴ Wintz, Cary D. *Black Culture and the Harlem Renaissance*. (Houston, Texas: Rice University Press, 1968), 55.

Du Bois's Harvard dissertation titled: *The Suppression of the African Slave Trade to the United States of America*, published in 1896, was alone sufficient to give incentive to Harlem writers. How much more when we consider *The Philadelphia Negro* (1899) and *The Souls of Black Folks* (1903) which entirely were dedicated to answering psychological questions about blacks in the US. Moreover, unlike Dunbar, Du Bois did not content himself with his theoretical contribution through his publications; he actively participated in the Harlem movement rubbing elbows with peer and emerging black poets and novelists. He tremendously had and still has intellectual influence on the choice of themes by blacks who learn from him the necessity to confine one's writing to boasting the African American cultural richness and claiming the black Civil Rights.

The social and political background of the New Negro can thus be assessed by taking into consideration the main historical events that have involved the whole American society in general and the link that has existed between blacks and whites in particular. In these facts or social movements, we look for situations from which emerge behavioral forces that automatically give a peculiarity to the way one ethnic group looks at or treats another ethnic group in the neighborhood. These social forces create cultural features from which flow many actions and reactions that give name to the everyday life led by the society under scrutiny. In the case of African Americans, especially, their choice of literature as a protestation means in the Harlem movement is due to many agents.

The political agenda regarding the black race after the Civil War obviously transformed that race into a class in the sense that the social relationship thereof became a tension that either party looked for ways and means to defend its ideologies. Thus the logic behind the Reconstruction was not only to repair the mistakes made to the National Unity, but also to

implement the morally justified Amendments to the Constitution that made blacks American citizens, and gave them their rights to vote. And since the choice is clear between the National Unity and the Civil Rights of an ethnic group, the Federal government had to support the segregation laws advocated by individual states that could not understand the parity between whites and blacks, therefore leaving the black race the task to defend itself.

Furthermore, the parody in the characterization of blacks in white American literature sought to keep the stereotypical assumptions about them and persuade the general opinion on their inferiority in order to justify the black servitude and deny them their Civil Rights. This is a powerful cultural agent that obviously the Harlem literary movement sought to defy the most in its use of arts and letters. To prove and explain the richness of the black culture through letters, and thus, exhibit the black intellectual ability to create became the main task that was given to Harlem artists by white American novelists who distorted the black image in their work.

Also, the black leadership that mediated for the race uplift also played a paramount role in molding the psyche of the writers and playwrights of the Harlem Renaissance. The changing strategies according to social changes brought into the playground different ideologies in search of the black race betterment. As complementary forces, the succession of those leaders and the synthesis of their individual approaches to the black socio-economic and sociopolitical problems gave birth to the New Negro with a multidimensional means to claim his social rights.

Finally, the Harlem Renaissance literary movement owes much to the generation of black writers who preceded it for the pioneering role they played in their choice to use various aspects of black life in the US and elsewhere in their poems and novels. Those predecessors did not only choose the themes relating to black life but they asserted positively the black image in defiance to what Eurocentric narratives had already instilled into the common mind. Therefore, the

literary tendency that preceded the Harlem Renaissance was of an inestimable importance and cannot be underestimated when it is time to look for the literary roots of African American literature.

Thus, the first chapter has given us the situation that motivated the Harlem literary movement and its particularities. The following chapter takes us to the tasks that the black writers and the intellectuals of the movement had on their shoulders, the task of destroying the American myths and idols about blacks, the task of exposing and extending the richness of blackness through poems, novels, and essays; and the type of action they had to take for the racial uplift and the birth of black culture, challenging by so doing the Eurocentric ideologies that have thoroughly poisoned the sociopolitical relationship between the West and the East to the benefice of the western imperial forces.

CHAPTER TWO: THE NINETEEN TWENTIES AND THE BIRTH OF BLACK LITERATURE

There, for the first time, I really saw the Negro, not as a pseudo-urbanized and vulgarized, a semi-Americanized product, but the Negro peasant, strong with the tang of fields and the soil. It was there that I first heard folk-songs rolling up the valley at twilight, heard them as spontaneous with gold, and tints of an eternal purple. Love? They gave birth to a whole new life – Jean Toomer³⁵

In the nineteen twenties a cultural dialogue was established between the minor black ethnic group and the main white ethnic group without an expressed will of either of the groups. The intertwining of blacks and whites in the American society is the essential element that motivated the Harlem literary movement. For, without white participation, the black endeavor in Harlem could have been vague and senseless. Therefore, this world is white no longer and it will never be white again because if only blacks were in America we could talk about human experiences. It is time we realized that the interracial drama acted out on the American continent has created a new white, too. For, there is no way whatever that will lead Americans back to the simplicity of this European village where white men still have the luxury of looking on a black man as a stranger. So a black man is not really, a stranger any longer for any American alive. Even America, throughout its history and often in its literature, is concerned with a search for identity, with understanding the meaning of its origins, with reconciling its practices with its ideals.

³⁵ Hubbard, D. ed. *The Souls of Black Folk: One Hundred Years Later*. (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 2003), 134.

In this chapter I consider the cultural changes that World War I brought to the New World, the birth of black literature with emphasis on the importance of the role played by white patrons and philanthropists in the promotion of the New Negro who stands for an ontology for the Harlem literary movement. I argue that the Harlem literary movement could not have known success without its dependence on many white cultural features that served as support to the nascent black culture; and that the black cultural catharsis emanated from the diverse nature of the American culture to which the emergence of black culture became a complement, with emphasis on the tacit use of art and letters as a means for producing black culture and for social protest by Harlem poets and novelists who refused to be prevented by their history from being part of American Dream and a better future. In short, this chapter deals with the political aspect, nationalism, and almost all important aspects of a literary movement that stands for a social movement.

The First Sparks of the Renaissance

The black soldiers' bravery in the war and their triumphant return to Harlem filled with pomp and acclamations accentuated their worries about the social injustice that victimized them, and increased their strong will to express louder their sociopolitical needs by all means possible. The more it became obvious that blacks deserved a proportionate social and political treatment with other American citizens, the more violence they encountered from whites. The America's coming of age in terms of freedom of arts and letters, its participation in World War I in general and the black bravery therein, in particular, and the accentuation of racism after war combined to urge the black intellectuals, with the help of white philanthropists to form a collective culture-

conscious black movement that would host black individual grievances and focus on the solutions to racial discrimination. This movement would take into consideration black expressive culture, not through slave insurrections, boycotts, or the underground railroads, but through intellectual incentives and artistic competitiveness with a set ideal of social equality. Hence, the creation of the New Negro as opposed to the pre-war Old Negro.

One could wonder why cultural matters have become a collective issue for blacks in America while they are an individual problem for whites. The most plausible response to that concern is that throughout the American history, the cultural features have always been the outcome of social movements. Thus, African Americans have always viewed themselves as a middle class which is a working class. Therefore, the black ethnic group's struggle with the American power holders over the black identity is similar to that of the proletarians with capital holders over the control of the labor products. However, that struggle can never be an individual business and should not be immediately qualified as "won," "lost," or "failed" since what is measured thereof is the long-term changes that occur along the perpetual relationship of the two entities, i.e. the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. In this particular case where blacks are trying to convince the American power holders to free their civil rights, the result should be measured by the long term changes that occur in the interest of African Americans. And the first event to make the Harlemites discover the force that the black ethnic group constituted was World War I, in which the African American soldiers did what nobody was expecting them to do in the defense of the American flag.

The American participation in World War I, especially the black soldiers' taking part in that fight, turned out to be a tremendous breakthrough for the Western world and for blacks all over the world concerning the black potentialities. Huggins argues that

Surely the ethnocentrism that generated self-determination as an Allied aim in that war informed a new racial awareness among blacks throughout the world. The war also forced a reevaluation of Western civilization and encouraged non-Europeans to esteem their own cultures as being as valid and civilized as Europe's. War-disillusioned white men 'American and European,' on the other hand, helped enhance a black self-concept through their own search for valid, authentic experience.³⁶

The evidence of this help lies in the fact that there were no black publishing houses to take care of the Harlem literary production and thus enable blacks to achieve the cultural exhibition goals that the movement set for itself. And this is one aspect of the dialogue that emanates from the cultural diversity that is not observed or positively used for the American cultural empowerment. For if white publishers were reluctant to publish black literature, the literary endeavor from Harlem could not have yielded any racial development and the black writers therefore could not have earned any thing from their intellectual efforts and the Harlem Renaissance could have contributed nothing to the American culture. The most obvious possibility in this cultural dialogue is that white publishers could not have continued accepting black literature if there were not a high demand from the white readership.

The post-war American literature is different from that of the pre-war era; consequently, the change that was brought by the World War I was general on the American culture. According to Huggins,

The decade of the 1920s, with the Great War over, was one of general liberation; everything seemed in flux. America was self-conscious about a newness and change which had actually begun in the years before America's entry into the European war.

³⁶ Huggins, N.I. *Harlem Renaissance*. (NY: Oxford University Press Inc., 1971), 7.

This had been the theme of Van Wyck Brooks's *America's Coming of Age* (1915).

Brooks announced that American arts and letters were at last free from the fetters of provincialism and Puritanism. The bracing winds from Europe had propelled the becalmed American culture and set it loose to find its own course. Van Wyck Brooks and the young intellectuals who had engaged in the prewar rebellion went into the war convinced that the day of American art and letters was at hand.³⁷

The general freedom gained by American art and letters explains the authority that the Harlem literary movement felt in their use of letters in their quest for social parity with whites. It should be noted that this paradigm shift in American letters has brought about important changes to the black ethnic group's view of things in the US as well as in the world. These changes included the formation of a black intelligentsia and the creation of a New Negro.

The New Negro

The most amazing aspect of the Harlem Renaissance is the individual differences in educational backgrounds that its members had while working for the same goals in different ways. Before gathering under the initiative of black elite in Harlem, several poets were already responding vehemently against the increasing black physical eliminations throughout the nation by means of lynching and assassination. Exacerbated by this barbaric resurrection of the Ku Klux Klan in 1919, a young Jamaican poet was driven by the bloody atmosphere surrounding the black ethnic group to strike a poem that called for strong resistance. Claude McKay exhorted blacks by these lines:

³⁷ Ibid. 53.

If we must die, let it not be like hogs
 Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot,
 While around us bark the mad and hungry dogs,
 Making their mock at our accursed lot.
 If we must die, O let us nobly die,
 So that our precious blood may not be shed
 In vain; then even the monsters we defy
 Shall be constrained to honor us though dead!

O kinsmen! We must meet the common foe!
 Though far outnumbered let us show us brave,
 And for their thousand blows deal one deathblow!
 What though before us lies the open grave?
 Like men we'll face the murderous, cowardly pack,
 Pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back!³⁸

McKay, by way of this sonnet, appeal first of all for help and rescue from death because any American philanthropist would be touched by the expression "If must die," and secondly, this passage constitutes a call to resistance from fellow American Negroes and at the same time an explanation of the tremendous and life daring task that awaits them for their survival from the death threat. In addition, this revolutionary tone is going to be the model of the literary works of the emerging Harlem artists. It should be noted that the provincial aspect of the black art is worthwhile because of its precise goal which is to consider Truth as Beauty and say it about

³⁸ Lewis, D.L. *When Harlem Was in Vogue*. (NY: Oxford University Press, 1979), 23.

blacks as well as about others. McKay's virtual invitation addressed to his fellow African Americans addresses also white American justice makers and philanthropists. And the response on behalf of the latter is the publishing of this piece which could have been kept unpublished had white publishers wanted so. The possible response blacks could give to this call was to be conscious about the threat pending on the black ethnic group in America; come together and devise peaceful means to stop the problem; and raise the awareness of black intelligentsia as to organize and sustain a black community in a united and active entity that could impose a social justice on the neighborhood by a good moral conduct and by intellectual competitiveness. For not only were blacks outnumbered by white, but also there was no way blacks could use violence to solve this kind of racial problem.

The world view of black artists is quite different from their white neighbors to the extent that they say the truth about the black ethnic group and the rest of the world which leads to the exceptionalism of the black art and letters. This perspective is to be explored to the benefit of the Afro-centrism and the anti-imperialist tendencies that make the subject matter of the black literary works. Because slavery and imperialism are known to be foundational to American culture, and because segregation has continued to undermine the black ethnic group, the artistic support of a special rhetoric became obvious in the Harlem literary movement. This rhetoric has grown to be associated with a language of minority as well as languages of race and ethnic identity. Therefore, the New Negro's approach to black social problems is almost universal because his/her standing point and the solutions s/he proposes in his/her art and letters can easily be implemented by other minority groups and any oppressed people in the world.

The New Negro is the creation of Harlem intellectuals who, knowing pertinently that art can play the role of propaganda, encouraged black writers to create pieces that could counteract

what white writers published that bore untrue stuff about blacks. The idea of art as propaganda is firmly sustained by Du Bois when he argues that

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.³⁹

The value of black literature, in this view, is to be found in its capacity to cultivate positive self-images by emphasizing on the forbearance and humanity of blacks in the face of hard conditions. Hence, the necessity to convene writers from the black ethnic group for the common awareness as to what type of literature to create and the strategies to adopt in order to heal the psycho-cultural injury caused by racism. And by doing this to conceive a resistant enterprise facilitating the political and existential empowerment of minority cultures and silenced voices.

Because the empowerment of minority cultures could not be an individual business, it became necessary to gather around literary intelligentsia for a sort of convention that would delineate the principles of black literature. In this respect, instead of expecting the mere political reformation, the African American cultural invention through the New Negro's literary work gave way to semantic revolution. For it was no longer the question of how to deal with prejudice but how to achieve racial identity. There was a need to lay a black literature foundation on which to build a black racial identity that became the goal set by the Harlem Renaissance. Thus, Wintz notices that:

³⁹ Mitchelin, A. ed. *Within the Circle: An Anthology of African American Literary Criticism from the Harlem Renaissance to the Present*. (Duke university Press, 1994), 66.

By the mid-1920s the stage was set for the birth of the Harlem Renaissance. Langston Hughes, Claude McKay, and Jean Toomer had laid the literary foundations. By 1925 they had been joined by numerous aspiring young black writers who had come to Harlem looking for excitement, color, and camaraderie, and hoping for literary fame. Langston Hughes, Wallace Thurman, Rudolph Fisher, and Zora Neale Hurston became the nucleus of a black literary bohemia that, together with other young writers such as Countee Cullen and Jessie Fauset, would dominate black literature for a decade.⁴⁰

The particularity of black literature does not entitle it to be bohemian literature. For if we consider the conditions under which this type of literature emerged and the type of culture that loomed in this social environment, we should rather qualify it to have the same strangeness that describes the American culture as whole. There is much room to observe the black literature through non-conventional angles rather than measuring it with pre-existing literary norms that do not match with the circumstances producing the black culture. Moreover, the black world critically assesses what is taken for granted by Eurocentric ideologies and white literature, the challenge of which is made possible by means of post-structuralism and through the philosophy of deconstruction. For post-structuralism refutes somehow the canon and the deconstruction the negative judgment of a piece of literature. How can we judge the assertive responses to social plight of African Americans? With perfect knowledge of the fact that physical resistance is not an element of Renaissance repertoire; and regarding language and thought as the canalizers of our behavior, is there any specific way by which to analyze the black expressive culture which is fully American? Carolyn Calloway points out that:

⁴⁰Wintz, C. D. *Black Culture and the Harlem Renaissance*. (Houston, Texas: Rice University Press, 1968), 80.

In *The Souls of Black Folk* Du Bois is careful to show how external and internal exploitation and coercion combined to make ‘complaining’ part of blacks’ communicative repertoire. Some scholars and critics would like to push further to claim that vestiges of those sociocultural happenings have had an electrifying effect on the communicative consciousness of the masses of blacks up to this very day.⁴¹

It is in this respect that the Renaissance poetry and stage show could not be exempted from the natural experiences that African Americans are living in the New World. And if we need to think about any sort of standard or convention that black writers need to abide by in their writing, then, it should be a black literature canon which has its own principles that focus on the way to create a black race identity in the US. In effect, a convention dealing with such issue could not take place before the birth of black literature.

I have praised in this work the whites’ participation in the uplift of black race; and it is in the same way that the birth of black literature saw the important participation of white editors, writers, and literary critics. Wintz informs us that

On March 21, 1924, Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, Jessie Fauset, and a small group of other young black writers and poets joined Professor Alain Locke, W.E.B. Du Bois, James Weldon Johnson, and a number of white writers, editors, and literary critics for a dinner hosted by Charles S. Johnson of the Urban League at New York’s Civic Club. The dinner, initially conceived as a small gathering to celebrate the publication of Jessie Fauset’s first novel, was transformed by Johnson into a major literary event that introduced the emerging black literary renaissance to New York’s white literary establishment. Notably absent from the gathering were Jean Toomer, who had been

⁴¹ Hubbard, D. ed. *The Souls of Black Folk: One Hundred Years Later*. (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 2003), 262.

invited but did not attend, and Claude McKay, who had already left Harlem and the United States by 1924. However, more than one hundred did attend the gathering, which one observer labeled ‘dress rehearsal’ of the Harlem Renaissance.⁴²

The white philanthropists’ contribution is important because to it belong the successes of black struggle to establish the recognition of blackness as human identity, make it an American cultural feature, and to consolidate American democracy. The white support to black initiatives has been clearly remarkable at least from Reconstruction through to the period when Harlem was in vogue. After O.O. Howard for the Freedmen’s Bureau; Samuel Armstrong of the Hampton Institute; and the three white initiators of the NAACP – John Milholland, Oswald Garrison Villard, and Mary White Ovington – it is now Alain Locke’s turn to help give birth to black literature and name the writer of the Harlem Renaissance: the “New Negro.” The New Negro’s willingness to struggle “showed,” according to Huggins, “that he was as anxious to make ‘America safe for himself’ as he had been to make the world safe for democracy.”⁴³ The New Negro’s labor is not to be exploited as the Old Negro’s had been in the past. He would insist on absolute and unequivocal social equality, which would be achieved by identifying his interests with those of the working classes. Since the Negro was mainly a worker, his leaders would refuse the idea of joining capitalism and the bourgeoisie in favor of a labor party. The New Negro would put emphasis on objectives that were directly related to his economic interest, working-classes’ goals: shorter working hours, higher wages, and more jobs. He would join white labor unions where he could, form his own when white unions discriminated. These and other priorities of the New Negro attracted the attention of white Americans who were willing to help African Americans achieve their social and political goals.

⁴²Wintz, C. D. *Black Culture and the Harlem Renaissance*. (Houston, Texas: Rice University Press, 1968), 81.

⁴³ Huggins, N.I. *Harlem Renaissance*. (NY: Oxford University Press Inc., 1971), 53.

A white American philosopher as he was, Locke understood better than any American that the black culture and what it bore was culturally rich and could enormously contribute to the American culture as a whole and constitute a field of intellectual research. *The New Negro* is his book “which he dedicated to the younger generation whom he believed represented a new vitality, and which he used to introduce the Harlem Renaissance, which he saw as the cultural embodiment of a ‘New Negro’ and the hope of the black race never before seen in black literature.”⁴⁴ Wintz quotes Locke’s unrestrained praise from that book where he argues that:

Negro life is not only establishing new contacts and founding new centers, it is also finding a new soul. There is a fresh spiritual and cultural focusing. We have, as a heralding sign, an unusual outburst of creative expression. There is a renewed race-spirit that consciously and proudly sets itself apart. Justifiably then, we speak of the offerings this book embodying these ripening forces as culled from the first fruits of the Negro Renaissance.⁴⁵

This book and Carl Van Vechten’s novel – *Nigger Heaven* – played an important role in the Harlem Renaissance not only because they were written by white Americans, but also they bore almost positive assessment of the black personality. The white audience got attracted by the black theaters, by those two books, and others which went straight forward into in-depth discussion about the New Negro, including the financial support that some Harlem writers received from white patrons whose only intent was to promote the black literature.

The confidence that the Harlem literary movement gained from white promoters constituted a backbone for the evolution of the black literature towards its tremendous contribution to the deeply diversified American culture. To some white promoters, the support to

⁴⁴ Wintz, C. D. *Black Culture and the Harlem Renaissance*. (Houston, Texas: Rice University Press, 1968), 81.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

blacks in their endeavors was motivated by the social justice that they thought was worthwhile; to others the reason was just curiosity about the strangeness of the black race and found their help essential in order to develop it to its full growth because it was an entire part of the American culture. Langston Hughes and Zora Neale Hurston, both Harlem writers, happened to have the same white patron: Charlotte Osgood Mason. Years after he had broken with her, Hughes still remembered her with a mixture of awe and affection:

My patron (a word neither of us liked) was a beautiful woman, with snow-white hair and a face that was wise and very kind. She had been a power in her day in many of the movements adding freedom and splendor to life in America. She had great sums of money, and used much of it in great and generous ways. She had been a friend of presidents and bankers, distinguished scientists, famous singers, and writers of world renown. Imposing institutions and important new trends in thought and in art had been created and supported by her money and her genius at helping others. Now she was very old and not well and able to do little outside her own home. But there she was like a queen. Her power filled the rooms. Famous people came to see her and letters poured in from all over the world... She was an amazing, brilliant, and powerful personality. I was fascinated by her, and I loved her. No one else had ever been so thoughtful of me, or so interested in the things I wanted to do or so kind and generous toward me.⁴⁶

This nostalgia and praise goes equally to all those who have not only the intention to help African Americans achieve their social goals, in particular, but also have been committed to see the Americans live in an inclusive democracy and in compliance with the country's constitution.

In addition to her patriotic engagement, Mason's fascination about the nature of blacks was discovered by Hughes in the following terms:

⁴⁶ Ibid. 181.

Concerning Negroes, she felt that they were America's greatest link with the primitive, and that they had something very precious to give to the Western World. She felt that there was mystery and mysticism and spontaneous harmony in their souls, but many of them had let the white world pollute and contaminate that mystery and harmony, and make something of it cheap and ugly, commercial and, as she said 'white.' She felt that we had a deep well of the spirit within us and that we should keep it pure and deep.⁴⁷

Mason was not the only white to patronize black writers and students; neither were Hughes and Hurston to benefit from white financial support. Philanthropic agencies such as William E. Harmon Foundation, the Guggenheim Foundation, the Julius Rosenwald Funds and the Garland Fund provided fellowships that several black writers used either to finance their education or to support themselves while writing. However, this state of affairs did not alter the Negro writers' aim to use their creativity in the black race interests.

The aesthetic creation of the New Negro stands for the total change of black struggling strategy, which stopped from being silence and awkward obedience to racial discrimination and became the subject of art and letters. Alain Locke expresses his optimism about the New Negro in the following terms:

The intelligent Negro of today is resolved not to make discrimination an extenuation for his shortcomings in performance, individual or collective; he is trying to hold himself at par, neither inflated by sentimental allowances nor depreciated by current social discounts. For this, he must know himself and be known for precisely what he is, and for that reason he welcomes the new scientific rather than the old sentimental interest....

Now we rejoice and pray to be delivered both from self pity and condescension.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Brown, S. *The Negro in American Fiction*. (New York: Arno Press and The New York Times, 1969), 60.

All these qualifications emanate from the freedom of expression and the author's ability to make his/her choice of what to write on without constraint.

Art started serving as means for protest. Using art for this purpose has two faces of blacks' intellectual maturity: 1) the content expressing the goal its author wants to achieve; and 2) the implication that a black has a capacity of producing a piece of literature. Countee Cullen proves this statement in his bitter sonnet, "From a Dark Tower":

We shall not always plant while others reap
 The golden increment of bursting fruit,
 Nor always countenance, abject and mute,
 That lesser men should hold their brothers cheap;
 Not everlastingly while others sleep
 Shall we beguile their limbs with mellow flute,
 Not always bend to some more subtle brute;
 We were not made eternally to weep.

The night whose sable breast relieves the stark
 White stars is no less heavenly being dark,
 And there are buds that cannot bloom at all
 In light, but crumple, piteous, and fall.
 So in the dark we hide the heart that bleeds,
 And wait, and tend our agonizing seeds.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Ibid.84.

This self-depicting Petrarchan sonnet with an octave rhyming abbaabba and a different sestet implicitly tells us how well cultivated this poet is likely to be. Moreover, the content informs us about the revolt of an oppressed with some courageous and vengeful plans. This style of expression is the goal that the New Negro has to achieve because he, unlike the Old Negro, did not have to turn the other cheek. And the question at that time was no longer whether the black was human, but whether black literature would remain forever protest and beggar for social justice.

The Nationalist Aspect of Negro Writing

Nationalism in the black literature should encompass every aspect of black experience in the US. Because the black cultural separateness in the US is obviously understandable, the black literature appears, to some extent, different from the white American literature. Among the particularities of black literature are the folklore, church songs, and blues songs expressing black sorrow and optimism about a more inclusive social future. This separateness is not deliberate but the outcome of the treatment culture receives from the American main-stream. While there was no deep concern on the part of white Americans as to the role Negro writing could play in American culture, the important subject matter in the black literature was to inform the white audience that blacks are not inferior and that their life is comparable to other American citizens. Thus the written literature stood aloof from non-written black literature. This issue turned to be an important concern for writers like Richard Wright and others who thought of a more inclusive black literature that should properly be a Black Nationalist literature and not limited to only written arts.

The purpose of cultural production being mainly to bring together and educate the black race, there was a need for black writers to stand shoulder to shoulder with black workers and the need to address in their writings problems concerning blacks themselves to eliminate the hiatus between the intellectuals and the black masses. It is by narrowing this gap that the Negro writer could stress the role he played in his society and make a difference between what he succeeded and what he failed to do in the lives of the Negro people. Because the topics developed in the Negro writings of the Harlem literary movement were entirely of protest characteristics, "Two separate cultures," according to Richard Wright, "sprang up: one for the Negro masses, unwritten and unrecognized; and the other for the sons and daughters of a rising Negro bourgeoisie, parasitic and mannered."⁵⁰ Thus a culture of Negroes which is theirs and has helped to clarify their consciousness and create emotional attitudes was not mainly addressed by the Harlem writers. This culture stemmed from the Negro church and the folklore of the Negro people.

The gateways of the church served as the first entrances through which blacks integrated the western civilization. It should be stated that the Negroes' struggle for religion in 1820s remained reasonably revolutionary until it began to serve as a solution for suffering and refutation. The religious source of freedom was still incarnated in the American Negro of the 1920s through the archaic morphology of Christian salvation. This is clear in Marcus Garvey's particular interpretation of Jesus' capacity to redeem where he argues that:

Give us the standard bearer of Christ; let him lead and we shall follow, Christ the crucified, Christ the despised, we appeal to you from the great memories of the past; we appeal to you for help, for succor and for leadership.... Oh Jesus the Christ, oh Jesus the Redeemer, when white men scorned you, when white men spurned you, when white men

⁵⁰ Napier, W. ed. *African American Literary Theory: A Reader*. (NY: New York University Press, 2000), 47.

spat upon you, when white men pierced your side out of which blood and water gushed forth, it was a black man in the person of Simon the Cyrenian who took the cross and bore it on heights of Calvary. As he bore it in the past to lighten our burden as you climbed your Calvary, so now, when we are climbing our calvary and the burden being heavy – Jesus we ask you to help us on the journey up the heights.⁵¹

Even if there was a polemic between the two black associations (NAACP of Du Bois and UNIA of Garvey), it is culturally important to state here the type of ideologies that the UNIA group was trying to put across and the black cultural features that this association bore which were not in the NAACP's agenda.

It was, on the other hand, in a folklore molded out of rigorous and inhuman conditions of life that the Negro achieved his most home-grown and complete expression. Blues, spirituals, and folktales recounted from mouth to mouth; the whispered words of a black mother to her black daughter; the exchange of sex experiences from boy to boy in a very specific form of colloquial speeches – all these formed the channels through which black wisdom flowed. Even if we consider these cultural features to be broad and general to American Negroes, it will be plausible to consider the specificity of the house-rent party that remained the staple entertainment for the majority of the black working class, and became a favorite hangout for many of the writers of the Renaissance. As Langston Hughes recalled:

Almost every Saturday night when I was in Harlem I went to a house-rent party. I wrote a lot of poems about house-rent parties, and ate many a fried fish and pig's foot – with liquid refreshments on the side. I met ladies' maids and truck drivers, laundry workers

⁵¹ Burkett, Randall K. *Garveyism as a Religious Movement: The Institutionalization of a Black Civil Religion*. (ATLA, N.J. & London: Metuchen, 1978), 54.

and shoe shine boys, seamstresses and porters. I can still hear their laughter in my ears, hear the soft music, and feel the floor shaking as the dancers danced.⁵²

Thus the Renaissance writing has been addressed in the main to a small white audience rather than a Negro one. It should be stated that the concentration of that literature on protest created the cultural dichotomy and the creation of the petty black bourgeoisie. The stress on the difference between what the Negro writers did for the lives of Negro people and what they should do is not an attempt to mean that the Harlem Renaissance writers presented a baseless and blatant nationalism. It is rather an effort to present a more inclusive literature that could take into consideration all that pertain to American Negroes.

Because there was a lack of fixed and wholesome features of culture, the Negroes had a folklore which embodied the memories and hopes of their struggle for freedom. This folklore was not yet caught in the Harlemit paint, or was feebly depicted in the poems and novels of that movement. Because racial segregation was the most obvious option for the Renaissance literature, the Negroes' most powerful images of hope and despair remained in the fluid state of the then daily speech. Negro folklore contains the collective sense of Negro life in America. Therefore, those who underestimate the nationalist implications of Negro life should have to consider this body of folklore, living and powerful, which rose out of a unified sense of a common life and a common fate. Alain Locke describes the cultural morphology of the American Negro by saying that "In the very process of being transplanted, the Negro is becoming transformed."⁵³ It is in this perspective that the American Negroes' artistic roots should not forcibly be referred to Africa as some scholars encouraged the situation to present

⁵² Wintz, C. D. *Black Culture and the Harlem Renaissance*. (Houston, Texas: Rice University Press, 1968), 92.

⁵³ Krasner, D. *A Beautiful Pageant: African American Theater, Drama, and Performance in the Harlem Renaissance, 1910-1927*. (NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 1.

itself. For it is undeniable that cultural production depends on the social environment which differs according to political milieu. That is to say, American Negroes are conducive to producing art and folklore narrowly linked to servility and the aspiration to freedom; and the nationalism therein is unavoidable because of the particularities inherent to American Negro culture.

The nationalist aspects of Negro life are as stridently manifested in the social institutions of Negro people as in folklore. There is a Negro church, a Negro press, a Negro social world, a Negro sporting world, a Negro business, a Negro school system, Negro profession; in short, a Negro way of life in America. Richard Wright argues that:

The Negro people did not ask for this, and deep down, though they express themselves through their institutions and adhere to this special way of life, they do not want it now. This special existence was forced upon them from without by lynch rope, bayonet and mob rule. They accepted these negative conditions with the inevitability of a tree which must live or perish in whatever soil it finds itself.⁵⁴

We can still contend that the crumbs of American civilization that American Negroes have got from this capitalist country have come from those institutions which are imprisoned in the Jim Crow political systems; and that there are no channels through which African Americans can move whether for progress or reaction apart from those cowardly and incompetent institutions just for the reason that other channels are closed to them. And this institutional segregation has always made the economic situation unlivable for blacks in the US. This economically difficult situation is the root of all the pejorative adjectives that are related to the black community. Hence, the basis and meaning of nationalism in Negro writing should be the emotional

⁵⁴ Napier, W. ed. *African American Literary Theory: A Reader*. (NY: New York University Press, 2000), 48.

expression of group-feeling which is the source of a high-culture society which whites, unfortunately, call “black chauvinism” just because it emphasizes too much on the black community.

Given the regulations that Negro writers set to themselves in their writings such as boosting or claiming the humanness of the American Negro, they must accept the nationalist implications of their lives, not in order to encourage them, but in order to change and transcend them. It is only by accepting the concept of nationalism that they can possess it and understand it and therefore transcend it. This position is justified by Wright’s argument in which he gives the definition of a nationalist spirit in the American Negroes’ writing as,

[A] nationalist spirit in Negro writing means a nationalism carrying the highest possible pitch of social consciousness. It means a nationalism that knows its origins, its limitations; that it is aware of the dangers of its position; that knows its ultimate aims are unrealizable within the framework of capitalist America; a nationalism whose reason for being lies in the simple fact of self-possession and in the consciousness of the interdependence of people in modern society.⁵⁵

But it should be argued in this respect that to some extent (as we shall see in the third chapter), and in the circumstances where the effects of racism and colonialism become the issues of artistic creativity, or situations where literature becomes a channel through which one could voice social injustices and claim political rights, that cultural nationalism should firstly be sought for social consolidation and national economic realities. It is noteworthy that Wright’s argument in the quotation above mostly regards the Negro writer’s responsibilities vis-à-vis the Negro people and the world as a whole. However, for a purpose of creativity the writer could possibly depict broad social movements which should purely deal with nationalist cultural features. On

⁵⁵ Ibid.

the other hand, the Negro writer is responsible of creating the picture of the world s/he wants to live in, which then will create him. In other words the Negro writer must be the creator of moral values that should govern the human race. This dual emphasis is expressed in the historian David Levering Lewis's description of the Harlem Renaissance as "divided between those who saw the value of the arts primarily in terms of service to civil rights and those who believed that artistic and literary freedom were the only civil rights worth having."⁵⁶ If we stick to the first group who think that arts should only serve in claiming the civil rights, we are still confining the Negro writing to Negro people which makes us fall back to a nationalist writing if there is no literary freedom to ponder on other aspects of life. However, the second group should not lose sight of the necessity of using arts to instill in Negro people racial pride and call for a social movement that could give chance to a racial unity and its upward mobility. This responsibility was taken in the political aspect of the Harlem Renaissance, and was emphasized in the intellectuals' activities in the movement.

The Political Aspect of the Black Writing of the Harlem Renaissance

The entire thrust of the Harlem intellectuals was to see black writers devote all their creative potentials in the search of solutions to their racial problems. Is it because of the failure of all efforts to end racism that Negro writers should give up making the black social issues the subject matter of their artistic works? Never assume that because an artist is supposed to look for social change and create standards that his/her readers and audience are to follow. In assessing

⁵⁶ Krasner, D. *A Beautiful Pageant: African American Theater, Drama, and Performance in the Harlem Renaissance, 1910-1927*. (NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 5.

Du Bois's concept of art, Baker, Jr. argues that "art that provides merely vicarious escapism will not suffice. Real human iniquities have to be exposed, and proper attitudes and values need to be molded. Art, therefore, is conceived of as a social institution, akin to government, religion, and law."⁵⁷ This argument supports Wintz's conclusion according to which, "James Weldon Johnson was convinced that a successful literary movement would undermine prejudice, win respect for black intellectual and artistic achievement, and consequently promote the cause of equal rights."⁵⁸ This range of ideas forms the basis of Du Bois's initiative. Thus, the Harlem intellectuals used these arguments to justify their efforts to repress literary expression, draw black writers away from ghetto realism, and create instead a literature of propaganda that would focus on the life and achievements of the black middle class. But, what differentiates the two, i.e. the literature of propaganda and the one dealing with ghetto realism? Are we trying to call propaganda what could only expose good traits of blacks even when there are none? Or conceal vital black problems when there are any? Then, where is the author's freedom of choice on what to write? Countee Cullen asks the same question:

Must we, willy-nilly, be forced into writing nothing but the old atavistic urges, the more savage and none too beautiful aspects of our lives? May we not chant a hymn to the Sun God if we will, create a bit of phantasy in which not a spiritual or a blues appears write a tract defending Christianity though its practitioners aid us so little in our argument; in short do, write, create what we will, our only concern being that we do it well and with all the power in us?⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Baker, Jr. H. A. *Afro-American Poetics: Revision of Harlem and the Black Aesthetics*. (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), 51.

⁵⁸ Wintz, C. D. *Black Culture and the Harlem Renaissance*. (Houston, Texas: Rice University Press, 1968), 191.

⁵⁹ Baker, Jr. H. A. *Afro-American Poetics: Revision of Harlem and the Black Aesthetics*. (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), 61.

The artists' independence being crucially important for the transparency of their work, and due to the fact that the Harlem authors understood the importance of this freedom, not all of them responded openly to the political situations or engaged in any political activity personally or through art. Because the New Negro was marked by self-respect – which at times, became self-preening – and by self reliance, the resulting poetry or art according to Sterling A. Brown,

had five major concerns: (1) a discovery of Africa as a source of race pride (2) a use of Negro heroes and heroic episodes from American history (3) propaganda of protest (4) a treatment of the Negro masses (frequently of the folk, less often of the workers) with more understanding and less apology and (5) franker and deeper self revelation.⁶⁰

This justifies the fact that nation's political issues were not at stake in the Harlem authors' preoccupations. If governmental politics were to be counted among the themes on which Harlem writers wrote, it was for a personal will rather than for the interest of the race.

However, the political aspect of the Harlem movement was to be seen in the editorials of two major black magazines: *Opportunity* for the Urban League and *Crisis* for the NAACP. Although these civil rights organizations pretended to guide the black vote to whatever political parties they found trustworthy, they were very cautious politically to maintain their non-partisan position during the early years of the Harlem Renaissance. Those years of racial riots, isolationism, according to Wintz, "led to the political retrenchment of the twenties under generally conservative Republican administrations."⁶¹ The twenties witnessed the beginning of long, legal struggle against political disenfranchisement in the South, and a reevaluation of long-established black political position in the North. The historian Mark Naison argues that:

⁶⁰ Brown, A. S. *Negro Poetry and Drama*. (Washington D.C.: The Associate in Negro Folk Education, 1937), 61.

⁶¹Wintz, C. D. *Black Culture and the Harlem Renaissance*. (Houston, Texas: Rice University Press, 1968), 190.

In the early 1920s, affiliating with the Communist Party represented a difficult choice for black intellectuals, a leap of faith that seemed to go against the direction of black political life. Prior to World War I, Harlem, like the rest of Black America, had no tradition of mass socialist activism. A handful of black intellectuals, including W. E. B. Du Bois, had ties to the Socialist Party, but the mass of Harlemites, overwhelmingly recent migrants from the South and the Caribbean, had no exposure to socialist organizations and were predisposed to look skeptically on doctrines of class solidarity. In a country where many trade unions drew the color line and white workers participated in lynch mobs and race riots, Socialists had to take a strong stand against Jim Crow to be creditable among blacks, and the prewar Socialist Party had refused to do this.⁶²

The Socialist Party only had to be antiracist in order to gain black support or have black members en masse join the party. Moreover, Du Bois's affiliation to the party was a great sign predicting the Harlem's future activism in the Socialist Party. Mostly attracted to the party were the most nationalist Harlemites to whom pertained the theory of Black Belt in the South, which was synonymous to a Negro nation within the Nation.

As segregation could not calm down and even went worst despite the black stringent mobilization against the denial of social rights to African Americans, the theory of a Negro nation within the nation came to dominate Du Bois's creative arena. After positively comparing the black socio political and socioeconomic powers with those of countries like Mexico, Yugoslavia, Spain, Italy, or Japan, he states that:

For a nation with this start in culture and efficiency to sit down and await the salvation of a white God is idiotic. With the use of their political power, their power of consumers, and their brain power, added to that chance of personal appeal which proximity and

⁶² Naison, M. *Communism in Harlem during the Depression*. (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1983), 4.

neighborhood always give to human beings, Negroes can develop in the United States an economic nation within a nation, able to work through inner cooperation, to found its own institutions, to educate its genius, and at the same time, without mob violence or extremes of race hatred, to keep in helpful touch and cooperate with the mass of the nation. This has happened more often than most people realize, in the case of groups not so obviously separated from the mass of people as are American Negroes. It must happen in our case, or there is no hope for the Negro in America.⁶³

This theoretical sociopolitical order could appear to be practically feasible only by joining the Socialist Party that seemed to stand against racism in the US and colonialism in the Third World. However, the mass affiliation of blacks to Socialism was not total but progressive. These Harlemites had to emulate Russian Jews who had joined the party just because of their friends and relatives' participation in the Russian Revolution, and steps taken by the Soviets to end discrimination against their countrymen. So "it was the Anticolonialism of the Bolshevik Revolution which commended their attention, not the organizational accomplishments of American Communists."⁶⁴ Thus, on the global level, the twenties witnessed a world left in turmoil by World War I and the Bolshevik Revolution. Like antiracism in the US, the twenties provided stimulus for anticolonial movements that took root throughout the third world.

When Coolidge, Dawes, and LaFollette were all US presidential candidates, *Opportunity*, without any political endorsements, simply commented on the fact that, those candidates were seriously bidding for black votes. Four years later the situation was still unchanged the editorial of that magazine only made some analysis and extended its coverage. Like *Opportunity*, *Crisis* did not endorse any political party but, openly reflecting the political orientation of NAACP

⁶³ Lewis, D. L. ed. *W. E. B. Du Bois: A Reader*. (NY: Henry Holt and Company, Inc. 1995), 568.

⁶⁴ Naison, M. *Communism in Harlem during the Depression*. (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1983), 7.

devoted more attention and space to political coverage than did *Opportunity*. However, both magazines did convince their readers in believing in what they found as result out of their political analyses; they finally tried to persuade their readers to envisage casting their ballot either for the socialist candidate or the communist one and breaking their ties with Republicans and Democrats for their poor records on racial issues. These political activities differed from the personal engagement that Hughes and McKay tried when they came into contact with Socialism and Communism.

A few responses recorded by some Harlem poets (at the beginning of the movement) are from Claude McKay in “If We Must Die” and Countee Cullen in “From a Dark Tower.”⁶⁵ These pieces however could be qualified as sociopolitical responses for the reason that their contents are primarily exposing some social imperfections and then seeking for justice to be made, or wakening the black consciousness to those social injustices. Nevertheless, McKay and Hughes illustrated themselves and their artistic works in the field of politics during and after their trips to Europe. Socialism has been the host to the artistic endeavors of these artists who found in this political system the freedom and race equality that their home country lacked. However, after long interactions with socialist ideologies, they were compelled to be far from that system by the lack of the writers’ freedom in socialist societies and the American restrictions on socialism. The details of this political engagement would need thorough research in the 1930s and 40s which is not in my scheduled plan.

The change that World War I brought to the world was particularized in the American cultural context. American literature, in general, found its freedom from European fetters and black literature, in particular, was born in the Harlem Renaissance under the careful eyes of white promoters and patrons. The birth of black literature in Harlem was by itself a cultural

⁶⁵ Refer to 34 and 44 of this document for full texts of these titles.

phenomenon that constituted a paradigm in American history in general, and in the psychological development of African Americans in particular. This cultural phenomenon was manifest in the aesthetic creation of the New Negro whose characteristics culminated in the use of arts as a means for social protest. The New Negro symbolized a change and constituted a new hope for African Americans in their sociocultural stability and their sociopolitical improvement in the 1920s. The 1920s that witnessed severe racial segregation against blacks also saw altogether an unprecedented cultural dialogue between blacks and whites which contributed to the aesthetic success of the Harlem poets and novelists. The intellectual availability of Alain Locke and his white peers instilled a tremendous hope and confidence in the black intelligentsia of Harlem. It served as host and care taker of the black rebirth; the moral and financial support they administered to emerging black writers represented, on the one hand, the American philanthropists who were committed to see the US implement the Constitution that gives America the real democratic title and, on the other hand, those who thought it was worthwhile to help raise black culture for the importance of the contribution it was going to make to the American culture.

The nationalism reflected in the Harlem literary movement was considered by some scholars as a component that confined black literature only to black social protest. Richard Wright, for instance, advocated a more inclusive black literature that took into consideration every aspect of the Negro people's culture, ranging from black church, blues songs, and all that embodies the Negro folklore. According to this argumentation, a Negro literature that does not include the Negro folklore does leave the black community in the US divided into two cultural groups: the culture that is written and the culture that is unwritten; thus creating a petty bourgeoisie among the black ethnic group.

However, the reverse face of nationalism in the Negro literature condones falling back to the use of African civilization and cultural assets for race pride, the demonstration of the cultural maturity of the black subject, and the cultural richness of the black in general. Even though the black intelligentsia longed to deflect away Harlem art from universality and keep it only in the service of black social cause, poets and novelists in the Harlem literary movement understood and kept to the freedom that art provided them with. About Contee Cullen, James Weldon Johnson said,

Cullen is a fine and sensitive lyric poet, belonging to the classic line.... He never bids for popular favor through the use of bizarre effects either in manner or subject matter... All of his work is laid within the lines of the long-approved English patterns. And by that very gauge a measure of his gifts and powers as a poet may be taken. The old forms come from his hands filled with fresh beauty. A high test for a poet in this blasé age.⁶⁶

This definitely classifies this Harlem poet among universal poets, free to write according to his will and without being imposed a subject matter. Although Cullen was reported to have refused the adjective 'black' to precede the noun 'poet' as far as he was concerned, he strongly took pride in writing about the black race. He argues that:

Let art portray things as they are, no matter the consequences, no matter who is hurt, is a blind bit of philosophy. There are some things, some truths of Negro life and thought, of Negro inhibitions that all Negroes know but take no pride in. To broadcast them to the world will but strengthen the bitterness of our enemies, and in some instances turn away the interest of our friends...⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Baker, Jr. H. A. *Afro-American Poetics: Revision of Harlem and the Black Aesthetics*. (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), 60.

⁶⁷ Ibid. 61.

The freedom of an artist does not excuse prudence and selectiveness of issues to present to people, and the importance of sticking to an issue regardless of the consequences. This writer freedom includes his/her free will to take part in politics or not.

The political result of the Harlem Renaissance literary movement was not a clear cut black massive participation. The main political issues were found on black magazines, the major ones being *Opportunity* of the Urban League and *Crisis* of NAACP. Because the 1920s were the years that witnessed the world left in turmoil by World War I, the political orientation of blacks turned out to be towards Socialist and Communist Parties. This was obvious not only due to the fact that the black intellectuals were attracted to the antiracist component of those political systems, but also due to the Soviet Union's anticolonialist stand on the international level. Unlike the 1930s and 40s, the black political activities in the 1920s were very limited to the leaders of the movements and did not include many poets and writers of the Harlem Renaissance.

This chapter has discussed the "Task and Action" of the Harlem Renaissance literary movement. Even though I did not explore the 1930s and 40s, the following chapter is going to focus on what I call the "Result" of the Harlem Renaissance. In this chapter, I will emphasize the Pan-Africanism that was the final objective of the emblematic leader of the NAACP: WEB Du Bois.

CHAPTER THREE: THE IMPACT OF THE N.A.A.C.P. ON AFRICA AND THE AFRICAN DIASPORA

What is happening to Marx's theory has, in the course of history, happened repeatedly to the theories of revolutionary thinkers and leaders of oppressed classes fighting for emancipation. During the lifetime of great revolutionaries, the oppressing classes constantly hounded them, received their theories with the most savage malice, the most furious hatred and the most unscrupulous campaigns of lies and slander. After their death, attempts are made to convert them into harmless icons, to canonize them, so to say, and to hallow their names, to a certain extent, for the "the consolation" of the oppressed classes and with the object of duping the latter, while at the same time robbing the revolutionary theory of its substance, blunting its revolutionary edge and vulgarizing it –

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V. I. Lenin, *The State and Revolution*, 1917⁶⁸

Turning to Africa has been an important step for almost all the African American leaders in their struggling plans for black race uplift. Booker T. Washington exported agricultural technology to Togo; Marcus Garvey purchased a ship that would frequently link the US with Africa and the Caribbean Islands. The most famous and stringent on the global level was Du Bois's Pan Africanist endeavor that is still the dream of African political leaders today. The most curious aspect of it is its facing as much unjust treatment from Western countries as the black race in the US. The failure related to this initiative is not due to the promoters' ill will, political immaturity, or the inefficiency of the means gathered for that purpose.

⁶⁸ Marable, M. *W E B Du Bois: Black Radical Democrat*. (Boulder, Colorado: Paradigm Publishers, 2005), vii.

The failure of Pan-Africanism has been the direct result of the lack of interest on the part of Western countries in general, and the imperial instinct inherent in the American foreign policy, in particular. Because the main condition for the success of colonialism is to divide the African continent among the European countries, the unity of African continent will remain forever subjected to the whims of Western civilization. And according to this civilization, Africans cannot govern themselves because they don't have any civilization; colonialism is for Westerners the process through which Africans could acquire civilization. These assumptions imply savagery and lack of humanness attributed to the black race all over the world. However, the denunciation of these imperial thoughts and their psychological effects on the black subject has always sounded great along the time from the onset of anticolonial movements in Africa and elsewhere in the world.

Like the Harlem Renaissance literary movement, the Negritude literary movement in Africa has been an efficient anticolonial weapon which did not only demote colonialism, but also demonstrated the black intellectual capacity. In order to express their peoples' agonies and aspirations, the Negritude movement brought together poets and novelists from Africa and the African Diaspora for the sole cause of cultural freedom and national independence.

In this chapter, I explore the link between the antiracist movement of the Harlem Renaissance in the US and the anticolonial struggle implied in the Negritude literary movement in Africa; my emphasis will be on Frantz Fanon's theory on national culture and black culture. My main argument is that it is up to African political leaders and the Diasporic intellectuals to make the continent's cultural unity a powerful weapon against the imperial forces; and for the Western countries in general and the US in particular to accept partial responsibility for the black continent's unification for the concretization of Democracy and its implementation for Africans

to rule themselves and freely use their natural resources in the absolute interest of African development.

The NAACP and Pan-Africanism

The Socialist ideologies that animated Du Bois after World War I took him to the total devotion of his intellectual energy for the sociocultural unification of Africa and the black Diaspora. Although there have been Pan-African activities before and after Du Bois, before and after World War I, Du Bois's particular role in linking people of African descent in America to Africa and the rest of the black world has remained a plausible vision to every black thinker who finds in African cultural unity a political strength that could have the mission of eradicating any exploitative attempts on the African Diaspora. This had to meet a covert opposition on the part of the US government in particular and the Western countries in general. The socialist affinity with Du Bois's political tendencies verifies the American opposition against his turning to the black togetherness. Even if racial separatism was not the main goal for Du Bois, the fear on the side of the US was that Pan Africanism was an attempt to conquer the black world in the interest of the European Socialist countries, such as Russia and other Communist states in Asia. Because Du Bois internally exposed his support to Socialism for its inclining to racial equality, the US government did not have to accept any Du Boisian progress, be it at home or on the international level.

At home, capital owners used blacks to scare white employees with, that if they don't stop protesting blacks would be employed to replace them at a very cheap labor price, or the labor could be taken away to countries where labor is cheaper. This verifies why blacks could

never get any social parity with whites, and why other countries of the Third World would never develop. They must be kept backwards in order to perfect proletarian exploitation. Thus, when Du Bois was about to attend the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 as the representative of blacks across the world, with the intention of organizing a Pan-African Congress, his plan for the establishment of political, economic, and educational reform in Africa was officially endorsed by the NAACP. However, when he wrote to President Wilson in late November 1918, Du Bois requesting American government support for the Pan-African Congress, Wilson's secretary, Joseph P. Tumulty, replied offhandedly that the material would be 'brought to the President's attention' but that a meeting between Du Bois and Wilson would 'not be possible.' Securing passage abroad was a major problem; however, Du Bois learned that Wilson was sending Moton to France on the press boat *Orizaba*. 'His duty was to speak to the returning Negro soldiers, pacify them and jump in before any attempt at agitation or open expression of bitterness on their return to the United States.' As Du Bois noted later, 'Under those circumstances my request also to go could hardly be denied.'⁶⁹

Without American government support, how could Du Bois achieve this international goal, which was to bar the Western countries from the exploitation of African resources? How could one think of an eventual success of the Pan-Africanist endeavor when the World War I was said to be caused by the misunderstanding among the Western countries about who is going to colonize where in Africa?

On the international level, the main reason for Du Bois to go to Paris was to take part in the international Peace Conference; however, that was also the only circumstance in which he could let the world hear the grievances of blacks all over the world. How was that possible, if the

⁶⁹ Ibid.100.

initial agenda was not focused on dealing with such matters as Du Bois was bringing with him?

Although failure was inevitable, according to Marable, Du Bois recalled later that,

My plan to have Africa in some way voice its complaints to the world was... without political backing and indeed without widespread backing of any kind. Had it not been for one circumstance, it would have utterly failed; and that circumstance was that Black Africa had the right to send from Senegal a member to the French Parliament.⁷⁰

But it has always been illogical to think that an African in the French government necessarily stands firmly for the cause of blacks. In this respect, the choice is clear between struggling for France and gaining fame from the French government or defending blacks and losing the political position in and citizenship of France. This situation obviously occurred with the Senegalese Blaise Diagne who pretended to listen to Du Bois but was not really against the French interest in colonizing West Africa. Thus, Diagne was always a Frenchman before being a Pan African. And according to Marable, “he insisted upon praising French colonial rule, while attacking the other European powers’ operations in Africa.”⁷¹ Du Bois’s success in this first attempt was entirely jeopardized by not being able to gather African promoters around his initiative and by the overt refusal of American delegates to the Paris Peace Conference to see such a congress being held, who then threatened that American delegates who would be willing to attend that congress would be denied American passports. Nevertheless, the congress came to a resolution that says:

The natives of Africa must have the right to participate in the Government as far as their development permits in conformity with the principle that the Government exists for the natives, and not the natives for the Government. They should be allowed to participate in

⁷⁰ Ibid. 101.

⁷¹ Ibid.

local and tribal government according to ancient usage, and this participation shall gradually extend, as education and experience proceeds, to the higher office of State, to the end that, in time Africa be ruled by consent of Africans.... Whenever it is proven that any African natives are not receiving just treatment at the hands of any state or that any state deliberately excludes its civilized citizens or subjects of Negro descent from its body politic and culture, it shall be the duty of the League of Nations to bring the matter to the civilized world.⁷²

The prime synonym to Pan-Africanism is self-determination, and the government of Africa by Africans under the watchful eye of the International Community. In this particular context, Du Bois put the Africans' lack of civilization into the justifying pot of colonialism; however, the civilizing mission claimed by colonists served as alibi to plundering the natural resources. For the first resolution Du Bois found it utopian to mention it or it should be clarified that the circumstances under which the first congress was held were sustained by the French Deputy Diagne whose only request to organize the congress was accepted by French authorities after Du Bois's had been rejected and who only agreed with racial equality but never with the slogan of France out of Africa. Du Bois's power in domestic racial struggle kept his optimism sparkling about the fact that his dream about Pan-Africanism would become one day a reality.

The democratic struggle of blacks in the United States, Du Bois understood, made a strong Pan-Africanist movement even more essential because any democratic advancement for people of color or oppressed nations throughout the world would have a positive impact upon the condition of Negro Americans. Unlike Marcus Garvey, it was not in Du Bois's agenda to help blacks return back to Africa. But in his pan Africanist endeavor the main objective was to bring

⁷² Reed, A. L. Jr. *W. E. B. Du Bois and American Political Thought: Fabianism and the Color Line*. (N.Y. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 80.

to the attention of the whole world the petition that contained all the sociopolitical grievances of oppressed nations in general and the blacks in particular. Thus the second attempt to hold a Pan African Congress was a success because it witnessed the participation of many well-intended personalities from almost all over the world. “Met in London August 28 and 29, 1921, in Brussels, Belgium, August 31, and September 1 and 2, 1921, and in Paris, France, September 4 and 5, 1921, the Congress was still presided over by M Blaise Diagne – the Frenchman from Senegal – and Du Bois as Executive Secretary.”⁷³ Unlike the first, the second Congress, because it generated an international support, highlighted the agreement on the global racial equality with almost no outlet for the issue concerning the European occupation of the black continent in particular, and colonialism in general.

The success of the second Pan African Congress attracted opponents’ accusatory remarks on the political position of Russia. Because Moscow was condoning independence to the nations under colonial powers, participants in the second congress were thought to be mounted by the Bolsheviks. Even though British Africanist Sir Harry Johnston chided the Pan-Africanist intellectuals, noting self-righteously that American ‘colored people ... know so little about real Africa;’ the British humor magazine *Punch* parodied the ‘Pan-African Manifesto;’ more seriously, the *Neptune*, a major Brussels newspaper, leveled the accusation that the Pan-Africanists Congress was ‘an agency of Moscow and the cause of native unrest in the Congo;’ and even though *Neptune* asserted that the Congress leaders had ‘received remuneration’ from the Bolsheviks, and predicted darkly that Pan-Africanist propaganda would ‘someday be the origin of grave difficulties in the Negro village of Kinshasha;’ though the *Manchester Dispatch* expressed the fears of many

⁷³ Lewis, D. L. ed. *W. E. B. Du Bois: A Reader*. (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1995), 670.

Europeans colonialists by saying that ‘the time may come when we shall have to submit ourselves to the tender mercies of our dusky conquerors,’⁷⁴ Marable observes that,

But even the most racists recognized the grace and power of the writings by the *Crisis* editor. The Belgian journal *Echo de la Bourse* admitted that one must ‘bow to [Du Bois’s] brilliant intellect and his devotion to black race.’ Du Bois was satisfied with the progress of the congress, and saw the movement’s advance in both color and class.⁷⁵

The accusations addressed at Russia constitute evidence that there was a total ignorance about the foreign politics adopted in the formation of the Soviet Union. As we shall see in the last section of this chapter, only Asian countries that surrounded Russia, and were colonized by Europeans benefited from the anti-colonialist movement advocated by the Bolsheviks. Moreover, the native unrest in Congo was obviously due to the negative impact of the exploitation of the country’s natural resources by European colonists. On the other hand, the fears of many European colonialists were evidently justified by the sabotage that the President of the first and the second congresses – Blaise Diagne – fomented to impede the Pan-African third congress.

The progress that the movement was making became so alarming to Europeans that Diagne had to “postpone the scheduled 1923 Congress until ‘finally without proper notice or preparation’ the sessions were held in London and Lisbon.”⁷⁶ However, despite the poor attendance, the sessions in London, with the support of Labor Party, were able to call for “‘home rule and responsible government for the civilized British subjects in West Africa and in the West Indies’ and demanded the initiation of educational, social, and economic reforms in all

⁷⁴ Marable, M. *W E B Du Bois: Black Radical Democrat*. (Boulder, Colorado: Paradigm Publishers, 2005), 105.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

colonies.”⁷⁷ However, the black subjects of France still resisted the African industrial issue and insisted on the reservation of some paragraphs from the third Congress resolution just because those paragraphs emphasized and particularized the accusation of greedy capital in Africa. According to Du Bois, the following words are the gist of those paragraphs the French wanted omitted:

If we are coming to recognize that the great modern problem is to correct maladjustment in the distribution of wealth, it must be remembered that the basic maladjustment is in the outrageously unjust distribution of world income between the dominant and suppressed peoples; in the rape of land and raw material; the monopoly of technique and culture. And in this crime white labor is *particeps criminis* with white capital. Unconsciously and consciously, carelessly and deliberately, the vast power of the white labor vote in modern democracies, has been cajoled and flattered into imperialistic schemes to enslave and debauch blacks, brown and yellow labor, until with fatal retribution, they are themselves today bound and gagged and rendered impotent by the resulting monopoly of the world's raw material in the hands of a dominant, cruel and irresponsible few.⁷⁸

This, at least, distinguished the black Americans from the black subjects of France in the sense that Du Bois and all American delegates to the congress insisted on the inclusion of the paragraphs in the resolution while French delegates wanted to reserve it for the fourth Pan-African Congress.

The successes that Pan-Africanism was accumulating through the NAACP's leader won the American neutrality towards the movement. This neutrality that Du Bois eagerly sought was vital because had the US opposed those congresses, there couldn't have had any chance for any

⁷⁷ Ibid.106

⁷⁸ Lewis, D. L. ed. *W. E. B. Du Bois: A Reader*. (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1995). 666.

American delegate to take part in them. The evidence justifying the American neutrality was Du Bois being “appointed by President Calvin Coolidge as Minister Plenipotentiary and official representative to the inauguration of President Charles King of Liberia.”⁷⁹ Not only did that appointment allow Du Bois to discover and study more the African societies, but also reinforced his Pan-African initiative that led the Congress to be held in New York in 1927.

Initially planned to be held in the West Indies in 1925, the fourth Congress finally met in New York City due to transportation difficulties that the delegates encountered. After four days of meeting the following resolutions were adopted:

The fourth Pan-African Congress, assembled in New York City, August 21, 22, 23, and 24, 1927, with representatives from twenty-three American states from nearly all of the West Indian Islands, from South America, Liberia, and British West Africa adopts this statement to express the legitimate aims and aims of the peoples of Negro descent.

IN GENERAL

Negroes everywhere need:

1. A voice in their own government.
2. Native rights to the land and its natural resources.
3. Modern education for all children.
4. The development of Africa for the Africans and not merely for the profit of Europeans.
5. The reorganization of commerce and industry so as to make the main object of capital and labor the welfare of the many rather than the enriching of the few.

⁷⁹ Marable, M. *W E B Du Bois: Black Radical Democrat*. (Boulder, Colorado: Paradigm Publishers, 2005), 106.

6. The treatment of civilized men as civilized despite differences of birth, race or color.⁸⁰

The specific and particular needs and reforms were stressed for countries like Haiti, British Africa, French Africa, the Belgian Congo, Abyssinia (Ethiopia), Liberia, Portugal, the West Indies, the United States; Missions, and peoples other than blacks.

Du Bois's international enterprise for the welfare of blacks was not without specific socio-economic and cultural goals: The turn to Africa, which was known as not aiming to encourage emigration of African Americans back to the black continent, was to Du Bois a complement to and an implementation of his book *The Souls of Black Folk*, published in 1903, in which he characterizes the American Negro as with double consciousness: an American consciousness and an African one.

The international arena was to him the last ramp of salvation for blacks because he realized that the theory of a Negro nation in American nation was an utopia and, according to Eugene Levy, Du Bois also knew that "blacks simply could not be integrated into American life because the mass of whites did not want them; what blacks could do was leave, fight for their rights, join the international revolution, or organize peacefully and separately."⁸¹ Pan-Africanism, then, was for Du Bois largely a means.

Although he built his Pan-Africanist vision on a foundation that stressed the spiritual ties binding people of African descent, Pan-Africanism constituted for him at most a basis for wide-scale racial organization within the context of a global pluralism. In this sense, his Pan-Africanism differed from the emigrationist or redemptionist orientation of Garveyism. Unlike those other tendencies, Du Bois's Pan-Africanism was an expression among blacks of the

⁸⁰ Lewis, D. L. ed. *W. E. B. Du Bois: A Reader*. (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1995), 672.

⁸¹ Price, K. M. and Oliver. L. J. eds. *Critical Essays on James Weldon Johnson*. (NY: G. K. Hall 1997), 163.

developmental logic of modern society. As his prevalence in the African political domain brought about numerous changes to the people of African descent, Du Bois's literary movement of the Harlem Renaissance had and still has a positive impact on the Négritude literary movement initiated by Senghor and Césaire. This is going to be my concern in the following section of this chapter.

The NAACP and the Négritude Literary Movement

Emulating the Harlem Renaissance literary movement, the black French sought to create a new black human subject to replace the white image of the black as a degenerate black child (*Nègre-enfant-taré*). This transformation or redefinition of the black subject was to be carried out through objective forms of cultural production. This task of black transformation was initiated by the Senegalese Léopold Senghor and the Martinican Aimé Césaire. The objective of this redefinition was a rediscovery, reconstitution, and reaffirmation of the history and culture of the peoples of African descent. Like the Harlem Renaissance, the goal for this cultural revamping was to instill in blacks the desire to honor the black culture, elevate the black character to a high standard, and erase from white minds the pejorative and stereotypical assumptions. The colonial forces over this group of blacks give them a somewhat different attitude toward white colonists, who claimed the lack of culture for colonized people as the root necessity for colonialism and to convince themselves that they were bringing civilization to African Negroes through colonization. The most remarkable feature of the French colonized black is that the Europeans picked and manufactured native elite, after some period of time in Paris or London, will occupy important places among their own brothers and sisters. Since they are sent home to represent the

colonist, their role is obviously to repeat what they were told in the colonist country and lure their people into brotherhood with colonists. In this section, I will highlight the impact of Du Bois's sociocultural movement on the African Diaspora. More precisely, I will emphasize the similarities and differences of these literary movements, namely: the Harlem Renaissance literary movement and that of Négritude with regard to dialogue between Du Bois on the one side and Senghor and Césaire on the other in order to confirm the cultural inclusiveness of the peoples of black descent in Du Bois's initiative and any black writing.

Négritude as an organizing concept of blackness draws its central element from the "double consciousness" brought forth by Du Bois in *The Souls of Black Folk*. The initiators recognized and returned the ownership of Négritude to Du Bois not only because of its educational intent for blacks and motivation to making the black life the source of writing for poets and novelists, but also because of its challenging aspect in front of European cultures. The Senegalese poet-philosopher-statesman Léopold Senghor paid tribute to Du Bois and thereby established him as a founding father of one of the most influential literary movements of the African Diaspora: black francophone Négritude. Senghor writes that it was Du Bois who first thought the problem of Négritude, which is fundamentally a problem of identity, in all its complexities. He quotes a few lines from Du Bois's famous passage on double-consciousness to support his statement that in order to understand the basic grounds of Négritude, Du Bois and *The Souls of Black Folk* are the points from which one must always begin.⁸² In her attempt to confirm Négritude's appurtenance to the Harlem movement, Adell observes that,

Senghor describes Du Bois's objectives and methodology as a two-part process. The first has to do with erasing from the minds of whites and blacks the image of the 'degenerate

⁸² Adell, S. *Double-Consciousness/Double Bind: Theoretical Issues in Twentieth Century Black Literature*. (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 29-30.

black child', and substituting it with one from an authentic 'classical' and self-sufficient African civilization. The objective is to promote a desire in Black Americans to model themselves according to this new image of Africans. The next step is to do away with racial discrimination, that is, all of the constraints – economic, political, cultural, and social – that have reduced blacks to the status of second-class citizen. As Senghor puts it, 'In short, it is a question of both an internal and external transformation of the American Negro. Internally, through education and training; externally, by an increasingly strong pressure exerted on public opinion and on the American government.'⁸³

The objectives set for this movement are similar to those set for the Harlem Renaissance in various ways. The Harlem's New Negro had to adopt an exemplary life to the extent that he/she almost entirely refused to live in a white neighborhood; the Harlem writer had almost totally stopped looking for inspiration from outside the black cultural sphere. Négritude on the other hand aims at the same target of black cultural promotion. But rather than claiming social rights, as in the case of American Negroes, African Negroes claim culture, civilization and their land from the colonists. Since all these endeavors converge in the black cultural promotion, the issue of ethnic group uplift that is essential in the Harlem literary movement is the same in the Négritude movement. The movement in the US was theoretically that of a nation within a nation which could not be verified in the context of the Négritude movement. However, in this perspective, the form of the movement could not be as important as the content of its literature and the psychological states of the subject at stake.

The psychic aspect of an African American subject viewed in the lens of Du Bois's theory of double consciousness is that of an internal battle that a black in America goes through

⁸³ Ibid.

in order to find a settling moral position in a segregated land. Du Bois describes an American Negro and his/her social status by noting that,

After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world, – a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity, one ever feels his twoness – an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings, two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.⁸⁴

This psychological analysis could be particularly appropriate because of the historical background that is solely the black Americans' and could not be shared with their brothers and sisters in the black continent. Because American Negroes share the immediate neighborhood with whites, the mutual rejection is conspicuous in the everyday life activity that always sends the darker side of the American society in the world of interrogations about itself. Du Bois went further in his psychological analysis to emphasize that,

The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife, – this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He would not Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a

⁸⁴ Du Bois, W. E. B. *The Souls of Black Folk*. (NY: Fawcett Publication, 1961), 17.

Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of opportunity closed roughly in his face.⁸⁵

It is worth noting that the psychological turmoil of a black in America makes him/her peculiar in comparison with a black in Africa. However, we cannot, a priori, emphasize the social environments to justify the difference between the two black entities; neither could we base our judgment on the color to prove their similarity. It becomes a little complicated to mark a separating line between both subjects as it is to separate racism from colonialism.

Du Bois's approach to the psychological understanding of an American Negro deals with the individual position in the society, what s/he represents in front of a white, and what is to be done for survival. In short, it deals with what we can qualify as a psychological therapeutic process for a black subject or community in America for a cultural fulfillment. It is in this perspective that the concept of the veil and *double-consciousness* has been adopted for ontology of blackness upon which is grounded the Black American literary tradition.

The same process goes with colonialism and African Negroes. This can be observed in Fanon's analysis of a black character's psyche with regard to the impact of colonialism on colonized people. In the context of Algerian fight for independence, Fanon argues that, "Because it is a systematic negation of the other person and a furious determination to deny the other person all attributes of humanity, colonialism forces the people it dominates to ask themselves the question constantly: "In reality, who am I?"⁸⁶ these psychological approaches not only do establish a methodological union between Du Bois and Fanon but also reminds us how intrinsically close are racism and colonialism. Furthermore, *The Souls of Black Folk* – the title of the book in which the issue of *double-consciousness* is emphasized – according to Adell, "is

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Fanon, F. *The Wretched of the Earth*. (NY: Grove Press, 1961), 250.

equally immersed in the European (German idealism) and American philosophical traditions.”⁸⁷

Therefore, the importance of the impact of European education that Du Bois got from the University of Berlin becomes clear. Considering the fact that he studied with William James and Josiah Royce at Harvard and with Heinrich Von Treitschke at the University of Berlin (which was in the midst of a ‘Hegelian revival’ when he arrived), it is reasonable to assume that, like most late nineteenth-century New England intellectuals, Du Bois would have been fairly well familiar with Hegel’s major philosophical texts. Joel Williamson points out in ‘W. E. B. Du Bois as a Hegelian’ that Du Bois’s “Strivings” essay is laden with words that were favored by Hegel. Words such as *consciousness double-consciousness*, *strife*, *self*, and *spirit* all point to a Hegelian metaphysics of the self. More importantly, through his very influential and very Hegelian formulation of the notion of double-consciousness, Du Bois inscribes himself – and the African American literary tradition – into the discourses of Western European philosophy.⁸⁸

In this search for true self-certainty in Hegelian philosophy, how can we generalize the state of strife or inner struggle to human race if this does exclusively involve an African American subject whose heart is swinging between Africanness and Americanness, and whose otherness and social environment tend to drive him out of the human race? If the search for true self-certainty can be applied to other human beings beyond blacks in America, then we can conclude that this philosophy permitted Du Bois to elaborate on the universalism of the psychological state of a black in America despite the unavoidable impact of racism on his behavior. For, it is undisputable that the physical features in general and slavery in particular highlight more the otherness of a black subject – on the white perspective – to the extent that could easily make him doubt about his humanness. In this case, the perpetual struggle for self-identity becomes

⁸⁷ Adell, 12.

⁸⁸ Joel Williamson in Sassing, D. G. ed *What Was Freedom’s Price*. (Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 1978), 34.

universal, and therefore calls into question the European ideologies that dehumanize black subjects and monopolize civilization. Adell points out that, “In any event, since James insists that consciousness stands as a function for knowing rather than a quality of being, it is to Hegel and the *Phenomenology of Spirit* that we must turn in order to more fully apprehend the philosophical implications of Du Bois’s ‘double-consciousness.’”⁸⁹ We can infer from this argumentation the assumption that due to its universalism, this Hegelian philosophy can be implemented on African Negro subjects, no matter what Senghor’s philosophical trend may be.

If Du Bois’s philosophy revolves around self-consciousness, Senghor and his Négritude philosophy may be obviously different since servility and the issue of double nationality are out of question in the case of African Negroes. The central motive that drives Négritude literary movement is culture. Senghor and Césaire initiated their philosophy to counteract European negative assumptions about the peoples of African descent lacking culture and civilization. Though he studied in Paris, Senghor and his cofounder of Négritude, Césaire, were also inspired by the same German philosophers who affected Du Bois but with one exception: the German ethnographer Leo Frobenius marked an important intersection between Du Bois, and Senghor and Césaire. Senghor began to study Frobenius and ethnography in Paris at the Institute of Ethnography. This led him to “rediscover” the German philosophers, especially Hegel, Marx, and Engels whose works he began to get through after his confinement in a German POW camp. Senghor explains that the German *Wirklichkeitssinn* (sense of reality) is what intimidated him most about German philosophy and inspired him after his liberation in 1942 from the POW camp to renew his acquaintance with its major philosophers.⁹⁰ This is evidence that Senghor, a priori,

⁸⁹ Adell, 14.

⁹⁰ Ibid. 31.

was having other European philosophers in mind before his incarceration and his discovery of the above mentioned German philosophers.

Now, the reason why Frobenius was singularized is that Senghor was initially similarly attracted to Frobenius because he felt that the German ethnographer was the first to present a theory of the origin of culture and civilization that was compatible with Négritude as it was articulated in the 1940s. Like Césaire and the other Négritude poets, Senghor considered Frobenius's *Histoire de la civilisation africaine* and *Le Destin des civilisations* as "sacred" texts.⁹¹ According to Adell, and this worth quoting at length:

In these works Frobenius argues persuasively that all cultures or civilizations, including African civilization, arise from the shock or *saisissement* experienced by man upon his contact with the real. According to Senghor, Frobenius calls this experience *paideuma*. Senghor explains that *paideuma*, as he understands Frobenius's use of the term, has to do with man's capacity to respond emotionally to the essence of things in such a way that it penetrates his *conscience paideumatique* or "cultural soul" and acquires a new form as it passes from emotion to speech and finally to myth and idea. Emotion is crucial to Frobenius's notion of culture. Thus it comes as no surprise that the Négritude writers and poets felt that Frobenius, by strongly emphasizing the importance of emotion in the development of culture, had called into question popular European beliefs about Africa's lack of culture and civilization. Frobenius had also called into question the traditional Western priority of discursive over intuitive reason. This is important, for as Senghor points out in "*Les Leçons de Léo Frobénius*," before encountering Frobenius who 'clarified for [them] such words as *emotion*, *art*, *myth*, and *Eurafrique*,' the young blacks of the Quartier Latin were taught by instructors who, following the Cartesian method,

⁹¹ Ibid. 32-33.

insisted that they were to always allow themselves to be guided only by discursive reason – by fact, not feeling (*Liberté* 3, 399). In contrast, Frobenius had argued against this ‘dogmatic belief in the value of scientific knowledge,’ to borrow a phrase from Michel Foucault, and its dominion over thinking in the modern Western world.⁹²

By the same European philosophical token the Négritude literary movement also found an outlet to universalize the cultural problem of the peoples of African descent. However, the binary opposition that Frobenius created is important in the sense that the discursive reason or the judgment basing on appearance is likely to be more disappointing than intuitional judgment. For if we take for granted that black, for instance, is negative and try to avoid always what is black because of its color, we will always be surprised or not believe whenever we hear about black having turned out to be positive. Such is the relationship between whites and people of African descent. Unfortunately, not every European is philosopher to grasp the fact from the human race essence, and to know that the skin color and other physical features found on human beings are only for identification, not for dehumanization. It is in this respect that the Négritude literary movement as well as the Harlem literary movement sought to use the aesthetic aspect of life to express their humanness and deny the pejorative assumptions embedded in the European eager-to-dominate convictions. Therefore, the similarities of the philosophical approaches and the goals set for both literary movements are clear enough. For, not only did the European philosophers inspire both Du Bois and Senghor, but the German philosophers happened to be their particular instructors whose lessons helped them give shape to their inner thoughts. In addition, even if Du Bois addresses the issue of self-consciousness and Senghor the issue of culture, both are committed to the positive assessment of the black race, the universalism of human behavior, and to condemning colonialism in all its forms. It suffices to look at the

⁹² Ibid.

common grievances blacks in the Diaspora have vis-à-vis whites to apprehend the oneness of the sociopolitical problems of both the American Negro and African Negro which was paradoxically contested by the active participants in both literary movements.

Unlike Senghor and Du Bois, who particularly converged on the understanding that their respective endeavors were for a same cause and that their respective followers were having the same sociocultural injury, and while Senghor paid tribute to the Harlem leader, Césaire – the cofounder of Négritude – denied any Harlem Renaissance impact on his poetic celebrity, and contended that “the Afro American writers played a minor role in his development as a poet and that the guiding key concepts for his aesthetics and his politics were derived primarily from French literature, Nietzschean philosophy, and the ethnography of Leo Frobenius.”⁹³ On the other hand, Richard Wright and other disciples of Du Bois vehemently criticized the cultural identification of blacks in the US with blacks elsewhere. And this, after Senghor’s elaborate presentation on “L’Esprit de la civilisation ou les lois de la culture négro-africaine” during the “First Congress of Black Writers and Artists,” which was held in Paris in 1956, and saw the participation of a group of African American writers who were scheduled to be led there by Du Bois who was refused the passport to travel to Paris. Wright’s intervention, according to Adell, was as follows:

I was stupefied with admiration with what Leopold Senghor said here today, and it is towards his remarks that I want to address myself.... It was a brilliant speech and a revelation to me – a brilliance poured out in impeccable, limpid French, about the mentality and sensibility of the African; – a poetic world, rich dynamic, moving, tactile, rhythmic. Yet, as I admired it, a sense of uneasiness developed in me.... I wonder where do *I*, an American Negro, conditioned by harsh industrial, abstract force of the Western

⁹³ Ibid. 51.

world that has used stern, political prejudices against the society (which he has so brilliantly elucidated) – where do *I* stand in relation to that culture?⁹⁴

Finding that Africa was complicit in its colonization, Wright could not find where to latch onto this African world. The indirect answer that Césaire gave to his question was based on colonialism being a common denominator for all blacks, including American blacks whose subject position in a modern racist society could only be understood as a form of colonialism. Americans were outraged by Césaire’s characterizing them as colonized people. Adell points out that, “But a cable from Du Bois explaining why he could not be present supported Césaire’s contention that Americans Blacks are similarly colonized.”⁹⁵ That is where it becomes difficult to separate colonialism from racism, thus, impossible to culturally sort peoples of African descent according to their geographical position.

In this perspective, Du Bois’s prevalence in the cultural field of Négritude is to be celebrated and taken into consideration as it aroused the pride of black race in blacks in the same way as his prevalence in Pan-Africanism aroused the spirit of anticolonial struggle in the peoples of African descent for the unification of Africa. *The Decolonization of Africa and the Diaspora* continues in the following section with vivid use of Frantz Fanon’s theory as well as other scholars’.

Decolonization: Du Bois’s Ultimate Goal

It is not culture which binds the people who are of partially African origin now scattered throughout the world, but an identity of passions. We share a hatred for the alienation

⁹⁴ Ibid.51-52.

⁹⁵ Ibid.52.

forced upon us by Europeans during the process of colonization and empire and we are bound by our common suffering more than by our pigmentation. But even this identification is shared by most non-white peoples, and while it has political value of great potency, its cultural value is almost nil –

Ralph Ellison⁹⁶

Albeit unconsciously, the white supremacist terror has brought the diasporic blacks to look in the same sociopolitical direction. From lynching in the South to land occupation in Zimbabwe, the black's time and space have been subjected to white management via racism and colonialism. And for the fact that the two white dominating tools are spelled like one, blacks on both sides of the Atlantic converge in a cultural sphere that finds its reification in Du Bois's pan-Africanist endeavors, Fanon's theory of nationalism, and Paul Gilroy's geopolitical study of the Diaspora of blacks. It is obvious that the cultural hegemony that is embedded in Western literature is followed by the imperial culture which, despite the uprooted colonial forces from colonies, still functions as a dominion tool over the subjugated peoples.

The participation of literature in Europe's overseas expansion, according to Edward W. Said, "creates what Raymond Williams calls 'structures of feeling' that support, elaborate, and consolidate the practice of empire."⁹⁷ However, national and regional consciousness of the dominated peoples could somehow be necessary for potent counter activities or resistance to the continuing imperial effects in once colonized parts of the world. Thus in this passage I am going to highlight the post-colonial cultural endeavors by scholars and civil populations interested in the Diaspora of blacks. Starting from Du Bois's monumental early attacks on racism in the US,

⁹⁶ Gilroy, P. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1993), 111.

⁹⁷ Said, E. W. *Culture and Imperialism* (NY: Vintage Books, 1993), 14.

his Pan Africanist advocacy, I move forward and consider citing other intellectual efforts in the process of African decolonization.

Given that African Americans were also colonized under the racial segregation policies in the US, the process of decolonizing in the context of the black part of human race was set up by Du Bois's creation of awareness firstly in the black ethnic group about the social environment they needed to create in order to stop the racial vandalism that victimized blacks in America. As the first African American to write a PhD dissertation condemning slavery in the US, Du Bois's intellectual opposition to racism at its early stage was generally directed to the protection of all minority groups of the world; and was particularly focused on the black race liberation from mental slavery and unjust rule of the European empire. It appears at the core of Du Bois's interpretation of modernity, in his positioning of slavery in relation to modern civilization, and in his emphasis upon the constitutive role of that terror in configuring modern black political cultures: 'the characteristic of our age is the contact of European Civilization with the world's undeveloped peoples... War, murder, slavery, extermination, and debauchery, – this has again and again been the result of carrying civilization and the blessed gospel to the isles of the sea and the heathen without the law.'⁹⁸

The role that literature plays in the imperial world is inestimable to the extent that neither political means nor economic power can stop its cultural production in the interest of the empire. Nevertheless, the quick apprehension of scholars from dominated countries about the importance of language usage changed the tendency of affairs. The use of literature to respond to Western narratives that easily minimize the cultural values of non-Western societies has become significantly inevitable. Griffiths *et al.* note that, "One of the main features of imperial

⁹⁸ Gilroy, P. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1993), 118.

oppression is control over language. The imperial education system installs a ‘standard’ version of the metropolitan language as the norm, and marginalizes all ‘variants’ as impurities.”⁹⁹

Furthermore, “Language becomes the medium through which a hierarchical structure of power is perpetuated, and a medium through which conceptions of ‘truth’, ‘order,’ and ‘reality’ become established. Such power is rejected in the emergence of an effective post-colonial voice.”¹⁰⁰ And

Du Bois’s psychological studies on the black character in his timeless book *The Souls of Black Folks* constitute a pioneering effort in the decolonization of the black diaspora. That book also provides a symbol for various conceptions of black commonality – Africa – and its associated black nationalisms, which have been extremely important in the conduct of black political culture in the age of overt imperial power. Therefore, the concept of diaspora and its logic of unity in differentiation make up Du Bois’s ultimate set goal for his intellectual endeavor that, according to Gilroy, “is often overlooked by African American critics who do not find this aspect of his work to their parochial taste. His writing sometimes operates in a more general, less particularistic tone, and his struggles to validate the concept of an African diaspora as an abstraction should not be read as a signal that smaller, more immediate or local shifts are unimportant to him.”¹⁰¹ Obviously this is the demand of the political aspirations of Pan Africanism and the sense of cultural elevation for down trodden peoples in general and blacks in particular.

The most effective strategy in this cultural evaluation is rooted in his radical opposition to the education system advocated by Booker T. Washington at the beginning of his struggle against western civilization. Du Bois’s image of the black University defended the idea of higher

⁹⁹ Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G., Tiffin, H. eds *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures*. (NY: Routledge, 1989), 7.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid. 120.

learning on which a new system of education was to be built in order to make it the source of life for the human race as a whole. Du Bois asks: “Where forsooth, shall we ground knowledge save on the broadest and deepest knowledge?”¹⁰² His battle with Washington shows how education emerges as a focus for political activity. This is clearly understood in the literary ontology that the New Negro had to implement in the Harlem Renaissance. For in the Harlem literary movement poets and novelists sought to emulate the example set by Du Bois, which uses literature for the black racial cause, developing black racial themes, and creating a positive black image in response to degrading attributes that undermined the black civilization. Du Bois’s initiative of choosing black political culture for his academic work represents a strong component in the struggle against imperial power. *The Souls of Black Folk*, a timeless book published in 1903, stands for a great icon in the American fight for justice and democracy.

The Souls of Black Folk and Decolonization

Du Bois’s *The Souls of Black Folk* is his sensitive approach to analyzing the particular, local histories and experiences of American blacks as part of the more general, sporadic, and quickly differentiated processes that contribute to a diaspora. His familiarity with German idealism, sociological, and historical sensibilities characterize Du Bois’s writing and help the reader understand the relationship between race, nation, and culture. Every chapter of that book is prefaced by two songs that describe the message that the written text will convey; one song is drawn from the European canon while the other is an extracted piece of sorrow songs to which the final chapter is devoted. Whatever terms they use to describe them, most critics agree that the book falls into three fairly discrete sections. Chapters one to three are mostly historical; chapters

¹⁰² Ibid. 121.

four to nine are basically sociological in focus, and chapters ten to fourteen leave these fixed perspectives behind to explore the terrains of black art, religion, and cultural expression with a variety of voices including biography, autobiography, and fiction.¹⁰³ Gilroy argues that:

The book is directed at and expressive of the experience of blacks in America – a people swathed within the folds of the veil of color. Yet it is also somehow addressed to the worlds beyond that constituency. It speaks directly to white Americans, challenging their sense of color-coded civilization and national culture, and it is also addressed to a wider transnational community of readers both in the present and in the future. It aspired to give the particular post-slavery experiences of western blacks a global significance.¹⁰⁴

This book and the preceding dissertation that was published in the book form in 1896 under the title *The Suppression of the African Slave Trade* provide Du Bois's clear determination to resist the American internal cultural imperialism as well as the international colonial powers that are marginalizing underdeveloped nations. Because he understood race and class to be the crucially related fictions by which modern nations justified the inequitable distribution of wealth and power, he viewed with special clarity the degree to which cultural work become indispensable to colonial hierarchies both at home and abroad. From this came his understanding of the power of culture to combat imperialism by challenging such hierarchies and building powerful coalitions of the oppressed to resist domination.

The two first books have made Du Bois an unprecedented African American scholar who sought to understand the disguised American use of culture for its political and economic reasons. John Carlos Rowe qualifies him as, “a forerunner of contemporary cultural and postcolonial criticisms of the role culture has played in disguising the imperialist practices of the

¹⁰³ Ibid. 125-6.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

United States.”¹⁰⁵ Due to his cultural understanding and the role it plays, Du Bois vehemently advocated in the Harlem Renaissance movement the ultimate use of such cultural backgrounds in the US to promote black cultural liberation, and thus motivate the social equality in the psychic of the black subject. To justify Du Bois’s insistence on and the necessity of culture use for racial uplift in the Harlem literary movement, Rowe observes that,

Du Bois understood from his earliest works that African American intellectuals and artists would have to provide alternative cultural resources to challenge such arbitrary but entrenched powers. The task of reconstructing the history of African American culture and political activism was particularly urgent, because he saw it as crucial to resist myths of US identity and culture that both excluded the contributions of women and people of color and played ever greater roles in the exportation of the ‘American Dream.’¹⁰⁶

The importance in this respect is the fact that Du Bois’s first success in his struggle is converging points of view that higher learning was very essential for blacks to enable them be politically active. Even if an African American intellectual is not interested in black cultural promotion, his intellectual personality and the good moral conduct that he leads in his society is a symbol representing black dignity and civility that challenge the Eurocentric false allegations about the dark side of the human race. I insist on this point because Du Bois did not succeed to convince all African America poets and writers to make social justice and black culture promotion the exclusive themes of their works. However, the fruition of his anticolonial theory in his early books was practically manifest his later work and in his Pan Africanist endeavors.

Among many factors that draw Du Bois to Africa are his blood tie and his determination to give voice to voiceless minority groups of the globe. But we could not correctly trace his link

¹⁰⁵ Rowe, J. C. *Literary Culture and U.S. Imperialism: From the Revolution to World War II*. (NY: Oxford University Press, 2000), 196.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. 197.

to Africa until he was in the middle of his activities in the interest of Pan Africanism. From *Dusk of Dawn*, Gilroy quotes Du Bois where he attempts to answer the interrogation as to why he is extremely concerned with Africa and to clarify the type of tie he has with Africa:

As I face Africa, I ask myself: what is it between us that constitutes a tie that I can feel better than I can explain? Africa is of course, my fatherland. Yet neither my father nor my father's father ever saw Africa or knew its meaning or cared overmuch for it. My mother's folk were closer and yet their direct connection, in culture and race, became tenuous; still my tie to Africa is strong... one thing is sure and that is the fact that since the fifteenth century these ancestors of mine have had a common history, have suffered the same disaster, and have one long memory... the badge of color [is] relatively unimportant save as a badge; the real essence of this kinship is its social heritage of slavery, the discrimination and insult; and this heritage binds together not simply the children of Africa, but extends through yellow Asia and into the South Seas. It is this unity that draws me to Africa.¹⁰⁷

It sounds in this quotation as if suffering and social injustice draws Du Bois to Africa more than his blood tie that unites him to Africa through his mother, because in this declaration, he emphasizes what unites African children with Asians and people of the South Sea. And if we pay attention to the geographical positions of these peoples, we could realize that they are in third world countries. Therefore, if Du Bois identifies himself with peoples sharing the same social problems regardless of their genealogy, then it would not be a matter of surprise to see him devote all his potential for the decolonization of the black diaspora through Pan Africanism.

¹⁰⁷ Gilroy, P. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1993), 126.

The essence of Pan Africanism is not only the sociopolitical unification of African Diaspora, but also the demotion of colonial ideologies and the promotion of self- government and nationalism. Nationalism, as we understand it, calls for the formation of subjects capable of governing themselves. Defined by Laura Chrisman as “organized political struggle and structural economic analysis,”¹⁰⁸ nationalism remains a consciousness that every colonized subject needs in order to free the nation from foreign authorities and become his/her own ruler. This national consciousness leads to the use of any possible means to defend the dignity of the nation. It becomes obvious, in this respect that some or all pre-existing cultural norms should have to be rid of for the sake of the country’s independence. Using the example the Algerian battle with France over the Algerian autonomy and considering the place a daughter occupies in the Algerian family, it would happen that a girl would be sought after by the police or that several members of the group she belonged to would be arrested. The necessity to vanish, to make her getaway, would become urgent. The militant would first leave her family and take refuge with friends. But soon orders would come from the network leadership to join the nearest maquis. After all the previous shocks – the daughter relinquishing the veil, putting on makeup, going out at all hours heaven knew where, etc. – the parents no longer dared protest. The father himself no longer had any choice. His old fear of dishonor had become altogether absurd in the light of the immense tragedy being experienced by the people. But apart from this, the national authority that had decided that the girl should leave for the maquis would have no patience with such reticence on the father’s part.¹⁰⁹ Fanon observes that,

Challenging the morality of a patriot had been ruled out long ago. Moreover, there was the overriding consideration of the combat –hard, intense, and implacable.

¹⁰⁸ Chrisman, L. *Postcolonial Contraventions: Cultural Readings of Race, Imperialism and Transnationalism*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 91.

¹⁰⁹ Fanon, F. *A Dying Colonialism*. (NY: Grove Press, 1965), 108.

There was no time to lose. So the girl would go up into the maquis, alone with men. For months and months, the parents would be without news of a girl of eighteen who would sleep in the forests or grottoes, who would roam the *djebel* dressed as a man, with a gun in her hands.¹¹⁰

Thus Algerian fathers and husbands ignored traditional principles regarding women's appearance in public to encourage their participation in the national liberation struggle. It is without doubt from the contact with the colonist and with the loss of some customs, a different culture would emerge. That hybrid culture is not only going to give a participating position to women in the Algerian political field, but it is also going to impose a homogenous national culture. The same national culture will create the superstructure through which the nation could endeavor for its economic freedom, freeing itself from capitalist domination.

If nationalism is viewed to be important vis-à-vis anti-colonial struggle and for a national culture, which then becomes the basis of the nation's superstructure that defines its economy, the nation-centered culture or Afrocentric nationalism becomes antithetical to transnationalism. In other words, the nationalist cultural impulses should be replaced internationalist cultural impulses for a more powerful sociocultural entity. Laura Chrisman argues that "The injunction to put oneself in the position of others can be considered a helpful safeguard against anti-social individualism."¹¹¹ In this respect, the nation-centered conception of culture is incompatible with what Paul Gilroy calls the black Atlantic. The cultural values and critical perspectives of Black Nationalism are, according to Gilroy, "antithetical to the rhizomorphic, fractal structure of the

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Chrisman, L. *Postcolonial Contraventions: Cultural Readings of Race, Imperialism and Transnationalism*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 129.

transnational, international formation of black Atlantic.”¹¹² The black Atlantic culture is not specifically African, American, Caribbean, or British, but all of these at once; a black Atlantic culture’s themes and techniques transcend ethnicity and nationality to produce a geopolitical field that constitutes a distinctive and more emancipatory antinomy of nationalism. Gilroy reminds us that “The distinctive historical experiences of the Diaspora’s populations have created a unique body of reflections on modernity and its discontents which is an enduring presence in the... struggles of their descendants today.”¹¹³ Regardless of the economic aspect of individual countries of this cultural cartography, the black Atlantic culture embodies a potential political inspiration that can resist global imperial forces.

The local and global results achieved by the initiative of the black movement in the Harlem Renaissance are certainly worthwhile, especially for the African American sociocultural advancement in the US on the one hand, and for the black Diaspora’s feelings for their commonality with Africans on the other hand. Du Bois’s involvement in the Pan Africanist organization is the demonstration of his attachment to and his will to help less developed peoples. Pan-Africanism for Du Bois was an international movement that inspired sociopolitical confidence for his endless struggle for the uplift of the black race. The congresses that were organized in this context constituted a witness on the part of participants from all corners of the globe as to their will to see Africans change the social position they occupy in the world. And it is only through a termination of colonial rule and by way of a diasporic cultural unification that a concrete change can occur. Thus the most important decisions taken from those Pan African congresses underlined the strict opposition to colonial invasion of the continent and the unjustified exploitation of natural resources by the settlers. What retained most Du Bois’s

¹¹² Gilroy, P. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1993), 4.

¹¹³ Ibid.

attention was an efficient modern education for blacks that could enable them to rule their respective countries.

Another important issue that saw Du Bois's involvement is the interaction between the Harlem literary movement and the Négritude literary movement. Under the leadership of Léopold Senghor, the Négritude literary movement recognized its appurtenance to the Du Bois initiative of the New Negro. The interaction between the two literary movements revealed a philosophical approach commonality that unites them and the common goals that they have set to their literary activities: the positive image of a black character and the promotion of black culture. More importantly, the coming together of these black literary movements shed light upon the fact that American Negroes as well as African Negroes were all colonized; that they were all facing colonialism in their respective geographic locations.

Decolonization and the dismantling of American imperialism at home and abroad are the fruition of Du Bois's earliest works. *The Suppression of the African Slaves* (1896) and *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) place Du Bois in the first position of those who understood quickly the American use of culture in disguising its imperialistic practices. Rowe contends that, "Whereas Henry Adams develops a complex aesthetic modernism to disguise the more material and practical consequences of US imperialism, Du Bois coordinates his conception of African American culture with his critical analyses of the economics and racial politics of US expansionism."¹¹⁴ The two early books made him the forerunner of the postcolonial theorists. His methodological union with Fanon on the one hand, and the realization of the founders of the Négritude movement that Du Bois is the father of their initiative on the other hand, demonstrate

¹¹⁴ Rowe, J. C. *Literary Culture and U.S. Imperialism: From the Revolution to World War II*. (NY: Oxford University Press, 2000), 197.

the functional unification of racism and colonialism, and that Du Bois's struggle for African Americans is a universal endeavor that gives voice to voiceless of the world.

CHAPTER FOUR: CONCLUSION

The global tension that nourished the Harlem local social movement was the outcome of American cultural dynamism and the fruition of the intellectual endeavors of the black ethnic group in the US. Motivated by the American racial policy, the Harlem Renaissance literary movement was an ethnic-centered, antiracist organization that defended and sustained the social rights of the minority groups in general and the social parity of blacks with whites in America in particular. As a sequel to slavery, the racial policy that consisted in segregating black ethnic group from so many social and political fields became an American cultural paradigm from the Constitutional act of Reconstruction after the Civil-War.

The Reconstruction policies that were meant to rehabilitate the victims of slavery met strong opposing forces from individual states. The most stringent opposition from the Southern states succeeded in convincing the Supreme Court in reinterpreting some Amendments – the Thirteen, Fourteen, and Fifteen – that respectively freed, gave citizenship, and the right to vote to blacks. This was due to the fact that the Southern states derived their economic force from the continuation of the plantation economy.

Another important force that motivated the Harlem literary movement was the wrong representation of the black character in white American literature. The image of a savage, dishonest, and cruel nature was advanced to disqualify the black character in order to justify the servile role that s/he was supposed to play in American society. For this important challenge, and before the Harlem Renaissance, black poets and novelists such as Lawrence Dunbar, Charles Chesnutt, James Weldon Johnson, W. E. B. Du Bois had made black subjects the themes of their

literary works. And these writers who had taken the task of validating black culture constituted the literary background of the Harlem's New Negro writers of the 1920s.

The 1920s saw the birth of a black literature that was forerun by the event of the US participation in World War I in general and that of black soldiers in particular. The most important change that the war brought to the US lay in its cultural freedom from European fetters. The particular effect the war had on blacks was the change it brought into their means of struggling for their social rights, which went from passive to more active. This change of militancy was incarnated in the New Negro who represented the type of person an African American ought to be which was totally different from the Old Negro. Because s/he was from the middle class, the New Negro had to identify himself with the working class and advocate shorter working hours and high wages. The New Negro writer had as a task to revamp the black cultural values, present a positive image of a black character, and always turn to Africa for themes and inspiration.

However, the freedom of the artist that Harlem writers took from the American life did not allow the total establishment of a nationalist literature. Although the intellectual leaders condoned an ethnocentric type of arts by Harlem writers, it was discovered that not all black cultural features were taken into account. Cultural elements like folklore, blues, spirituals, and folktales were not very much considered in the Harlem movement, which divided black culture into written culture and non-written. Therefore, a true nationalist black culture should focus on folklore which embodied the memories and hopes of blacks' struggle for freedom, rather than sticking to propaganda or political literature.

The political aspect of the Harlem Renaissance is the use of literature for a political end which Du Bois and other talented black leaders advocated met Cullen's opposition on the

grounds that a writer is free. The other political aspect of the movement was personal involvement in the nation's political affairs which did not see much Harlemitic participation apart from the journals – *Crisis* for NAACP and *Opportunity* of the Urban League that commented on national elections of the 1920s and their encouragement to vote one party or another. However, Du Bois's conviction in the racial equality promoted in Socialism drew his attention in praising that political tendency.

Because Du Bois's socialist ideologies were made manifest, his Pan Africanist congresses met with strenuous criticism that identified his activities with that of Russian Bolshevik's. Nevertheless, Pan Africanism saw a successful turn by the active participation of members all over the world and was reinforced by Du Bois's official nomination as minister plenipotentiary to Liberia by President Calvin Coolidge. His attachment to Pan Africanism was much more the symbol of his identification with marginalized peoples of the world than the sign of his blood tie with Africa. Because Pan Africanism meant discouragement to colonial forces and the blacks' self-government, Du Bois's focal point in this international endeavor was accurate education to colonized peoples for their better future and the best use of their national riches.

Another important step that the Harlem literary movement achieved is the tribute that Senghor paid to Du Bois's initiative of the New Negro. As the leader of the Négritude literary movement, Senghor recognized that his idea of Négritude and its literary essence is emulation of the Harlem literary principles. A thorough analysis of the central ideologies of the two movements reveals the commonality of their philosophical approaches to the diasporic black sociocultural problems. While the New Negro ontology is centered on the black subject's double consciousness in the US, in a perpetual psychological disruption for a well defined identity, the

ontology that guides Négritude claims the cultural possession of blacks, which is antithetical to Western civilization. And the two literary movements constitute a strong source of force against colonialism which is the common denominator for blacks all over the world.

All these local and international anticolonial movements are the practical phases of Du Bois's post-colonial theory that motivated his earliest academic works, namely: *The Suppression of the African Slave Trade* (1896) and *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903). With a quick apprehension of the use of culture and the role it plays in the American imperial policies at home and abroad, Du Bois advocated the unification of colonized peoples to form a strong opposition to imperial forces of western countries. It is that sociocultural unification of the black Diaspora that Paul Gilroy advocates in *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993), which forms a trans-national Black Nationalism and opposes the nation-centered culture that covers only a very tiny group of people.

It is now, firstly, the responsibility of the intellectuals of the black Diaspora to concretize this geopolitically unified part of the world that we call the black Atlantic. It is their responsibility and the responsibility of political leaders of individual countries of the black Diaspora to start coordinating their efforts towards the cultural unification of this diasporic nation for a stronger sociopolitical force that could bar the way to any imperial force. The second responsibility goes to the world of civilization to see to the concretization of this Black Nationalism by supporting the project of African Unity (AU). There is no alternative to make effective any social, political, or economic help to Africans if it is not through a united Africa.

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