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The Communist Debate

Socialism as a Political Discourse in the Harlem Renaissance

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Ah, stern harsh world, that in the wretched way
Of poverty, dishonor and disgrace,
Has pushed the timid little feet of clay,
The scared brown feet of my fallen race!
Ah, heart of me, the weary, weary feet
In Harlem wandering from street to street.

Claude McKay
from "Harlem Shadows"

We cannot use Russian's methods, as they only and at best prove that the economy of an agrarian nation can be leveled to the ground; Russia's thoughts are not our thoughts. They are, as it is in the spirit of the Russian city intelligentsia, unphilosophical, and highly dialectic; they are passionate logic based on unverified suppositions. They assume that a single good, the destruction of the capitalist class, weighs more than all other goods, and that poverty, dictatorship, terror and the fall of civilization must be accepted to secure this one good.

Walther Rathenau
Kritik der dreifachen Revolution
Critique of a Triple Revolution

If there ever existed an era in which socialism palpitated some sort of communal significance in African America's cultural infrastructure—a significance that might have altered America's entire sociopolitical discourse—then that very, preeminent, ideological hour was starkest within the reign of The Harlem Renaissance. My research should seek to reveal how ideological clashes between The Social Democratic Party and The Communist in Europe affected the intellectual agencies working in America, in particular, inasmuch as to better understand what challenges both the gendered and ethnic voices of the working class were up against in an era dominated by white heteronormativity.

Using Claude McKay's *Banjo* as a primary source for this emblematic postulation of the larger conflict and concerns among black intellectuals of this era, insofar as to conceptualize historical significance of their battle with social inequality and political identity in America, I will show how the socialist model in McKay's *novel* underpins how authors like McKay, Hurston, and Wright worked openly for a climate that would question social injustice in America as well as abroad. Yet, doing so by displaying how vulnerable those "Harlem" artists made themselves to stateside hostilities that were innate, postcolonial hostilities, which were not embracing the importance of an ideology that might have proven useful to the "utopian socialist" agendas of previous generations elsewhere in Europe (Mackenzie 23). Thus, my research should not only reinstate how powerful these African American author's ties with socialism and communism were; yet, too, argue specifically, that one need only look amid the female intellectuals, artists, and writers of the Harlem Renaissance to gain an unequivocal worldview of how their writings and forums challenged the existing sociopolitical discourse of capitalism in America at the turn of the twentieth century. All the same, with this study, I hope future scholars do insist on asking, just how close did African Americans during the Harlem Renaissance come to being the one political entity that was in any genuine position to implement socialism into the political framework of American politics?

Historical Development of Socialism

Although American capitalists wish to conceive it as such, the influx of socialist and communist influence onto our shores did not just stem from the post-Marxist or -Leninist ideologies existing respectively in Germany and Russia. The widespread notion of socialism settled across Europe decades prior to any Marxist contextualization regarding its industrial emphasis. One can trace the origins of socialist doctrine to Plato. In advising Athens on what all was expected of a utopia that would create the ideal republic, Plato sought to construct a democracy where all Greek citizens—from Guardians to the poets—would be granted equal freedom and support within Athens’ realm. Others recognized Christianity as the crux of its origins through the deeds and miracles bestowed upon others apropos of Christ’s mercy, and many, “with greater plausibility, to radical movements in the English Civil War in the seventeenth century. However, modern socialism [as we know it], with its continuous set of ideas and movements, emerges in early nineteenth-century Europe” (Newman 1).

Though there are oblong debates on the subject, it is widely agreed that social changes and rapid economic growth associated with urbanization and industrialization were of particular importance. Such industrial progress not only undermined the rural economy, but also led to a “breakdown of the norms and values that had underpinned the traditional order. Liberals of the era welcomed this transformation, regarding capital enterprise and the new individualism as the embodiment of progress and freedom. However, socialists dissented from two aspects of the liberals’ outlook. First, rather than individualism, they tended to emphasize community, cooperation, and association—qualities that they believed to be jeopardized by contemporary developments. And, second, rather than celebrating the proclaimed progress arising from capitalist enterprise, they were preoccupied by the massive inequality that it was causing, as former

peasants and artisans were herded into overcrowded towns and forced to work in new factories for pitifully low wages. It was in this context that the term ‘socialist’ was first used in the *London Co-operative Magazine* in 1827” (Newman 1).

Moreover, it is good to mention that the first serious charge by an individual on behalf of the agency of socialism itself was French social theorist Étienne Cabet. Cabet (1788-1856), who was born in Dijon, had worked as a lawyer becoming a crusader for workers’ rights. In 1834 he was prosecuted for writing an antimonarchist article and was exiled to England for five years. It was while in England that he read “Thomas More’s *Utopia* (1516) and this inspired him [in 1839] to write his own utopian novel, *Voyage to Icaria*” (Newman 4). Cabet’s “Icarians” were to form “a society founded on the basis of the most perfect equality, in every walk of life, from their clothing underscoring these principles” (4). For example, today, outside the realm of our military servicemen—though this is not a fair example, since our servicemen do not have equal rank amid their domain—such a degree of regulation and uniformity might seem repulsive. Cabet’s society “was also highly democratic in terms of the popular participation it envisaged and, at the same time when the French working class was suffering from extremes of destitution, it appeared to offer hope for a far better future. With between 100,000 and 200,000 adherents, this was also the most working class of all the utopian socialist movements, attracting fairly low-status artisans, fearful of their position with the development of modern factories. Icarian societies were established all over France, and a group also sailed to America in 1848, with one community remaining there until the end of the nineteenth century. However, while Cabet had considerable contemporary influence, the key utopians, in terms of longer-term impact, were Henri de Saint-Simon, Charles Fourier, and Robert Owen” (5).

Henri de Saint-Simon's alignment to socialism is a tale for the big screen. Saint-Simon (1760-1825) was a French aristocrat and student activist. Imprisoned by his father for refusing to take Communion, he escaped, joined the army, and fought against the British in the Revolutionary War. Influenced by the absence of social privilege in America, "he renounced his title at the beginning of the French Revolution and became convinced that science was the key to progress" (Newman 8).

Charles Fourier (1722-1837) also viewed himself to be a realist and believed he had discovered fundamental laws that needed to be implemented to create a new society. He believed that it was society, not the individuals, who needed to change. It was the "stifling impact" of France's current society that was the primary cause of human misery (Newman 6). This notion in itself would appeal to any Black American wishing to uplift the race in the thirties—and although Fourier certainly did not desire Saint-Simon's "barrack-room equality within his phalanx" (Mackenzie 22), he believed that wealth was feasible, if it was achieved by joint productive means. Even if his beliefs still seem eccentric, Fourier's concern was that "every individual would be guaranteed a minimum standard of life" (22). Such political notions underscore, as well as define, the model which surely influenced Bismarck's era's ideological framework for a socialist-democratic co-existence of statehood. The fate of the colonies founded on Fourier's model in both Europe and America "was a structure of society by example" (23). In the colonial America "success went to the men who were transforming the face of the world by the development of industry and commerce, not to those who spent their energies in the formation of idyllic self-supporting communities Robert Owen had envisioned" (23). However, to understand the global impact of socialism on our own shores better, it should be pointed out that Robert Owen's notion—that both society and the individual needed to change—is a most

befitting notion toward understanding what Du Bois, Locke, Johnson, and McKay accepted as a compelling enough model to uplift the Negro.

“If Saint-Simon’s critique of existing society was based on a kind of class analysis, and Fourier’s on the stifling of passions, Owen’s owed far more to a condemnation of irrationalism. His enduring belief was in a form of environmental determinism that meant that people were not responsible for their own characters, which were molded by the circumstances in which they lived. In his view, the dominant influences in current society were those of religious dogma and laissez-faire economics. He thought that people would act in superstitious and selfish ways because the whole environment promoted such behavior” (Newman 9).

In *A New View of Society* (1813-16), based upon his arrival at New Lanark, Saint-Simon claimed:

The population possessed almost all the vices and very few of the virtues of a social community. Theft and the receipt of stolen goods was their trade, idleness and drunkenness their habit, falsehood and deception their garb...they united only in a zealous systematic opposition to their employers. (Newman 9)

In order to change all this, Saint-Simon’s innovations included the upbringing of children, the approach to crime, the design and location of buildings and leisure facilities, the relationship between the sexes, and the way in which work was organized (Newman 9). This teaching, “in a simplified form, became associated with the discontent among the growing working-class of France. Its enthusiasm for vast public works found an echo in later French socialism” (Mackenzie 23). Thus, it is with such reasoning as this that these two Frenchmen, along with Owens, impact France’s possibly most modern and significant socialist philosopher,

Jean-Paul Sartre. [At some later point, I will explain Sartre's influence on Pan-Africanism and black consciousness.]

Noteworthy is it to also mention that some of the Saint-Simonians, a group of distinguished young men in their own right, became very successful businessmen and engineers; in particular, they became renowned for the building of the French railway system and the Suez Canal.

By 1830 new forces are prevalent. "The 'utopian socialist' as they were later and finally classified by Marx and Engel in the Communist Manifesto, had laid the groundwork for their successors in the age of industry and had little more to say or do. In their day they were men of remarkable, though erratic, insight. They arose in a period of transition. They never had to face the problems of a highly-organized industrial system" (Mackenzie 23). And therefore, because of this new demand upon the souls of men, and the birthright of these two aforementioned thinkers, to try to attain some sort of understanding of this industrial madness, the political systems of Communism and Capitalism were introduced. No modern working-class movement as we know them now had ever developed. The men and women had no real idea of how to go about deciphering or acknowledging how "a new social order could be set up" (23). They had no rational doctrines and "lacked any adequate sense of the pattern of historical development" (23), by which it was feasible to note that ruling classes do not voluntarily relinquish their sovereign.

They believed that it was only necessary for a man of genius to appear and proclaim the need for a new and regenerated society for all men to realize that their prosperity and happiness depended on the acceptance of his doctrine. Yet, for all their weaknesses, these men were the pioneers of modern socialism. Most of them devoted their lives to the struggle to free their fellow men from want,

misery and oppression. More than that, in their time, they could not do.

(Mackenzie 24)

To rush fast-forward a bit, in which to get one beyond the well-documented spectrum of revolutions taking place in Europe between 1812 to 1911, and in lieu of foreshadowing demands placed on both the collapse and ruin of a few monarchies and the growing distrust and discontent among the Europeans, which led to such revolutions, it seems a consistency of division across Europe about these two ideological extremes within the Marxist frame was central in socialism's inability to gain influence in Europe immediately following World War I. "Italy, one of the weakest and most backward capitalist nations, had gained nothing of value from the war and had suffered a series of disastrous defeats" (Mackenzie 144); defeats that seemingly hurt Italy until this day. "The only thing upon which the majority of Italian socialists agreed was opposition to the war" (144).

To complicate matters further, all across the entire continent, clashes developed among labor movements and landowners in Italy. The country continued to be in a political crisis. "It was an ideal situation for Mussolini, the former socialist journalist, and his newly-formed Fascist Party. The Italian middle-class, to say nothing of the landlords and capitalist, were terrified at the prospect of revolution, and they turned eagerly to a mass movement which seemed able to defend the interests of property. The fascists, moreover, appealed to the nationalist sentiments of a people which believed itself to have been cheated out of its legitimate reward for joining the Allies in the war" (Mackenzie 144). Thus, Left and capitalist fractions were left immediate at extremes of support for one another, and made room for a dictatorship inevitable.

The rise of fascism was indeed noteworthy to socialism's collapse in Germany. From the offset fascism seemed to be a "phenomenon characteristic but in Italy" (Mackenzie 145). How-

ever, Germany too was at unrest. Public street clashes between Social-Democrats, Communist, and Nationalists Right-wing fractions loomed in cities throughout Germany. The so-called triple revolution was finding some sort of perilous inertia. And so, naturally, in Germany, a similar movement had begun to take shape.

In Munich, the National Socialist German Workers' Party, propelled by the Austrian, Adolf Hitler, sided with co-leader Gregor Strasser and established what appeared at first to be as humble a party as any, and no "different from the scores of parties which had sprung up in the Weimar Republic, consisting mainly of war veterans who hated communism, the Jews and democracy with equal venom" (Mackenzie 145). Then, suddenly, the party made it openly clear that they were going to destroy the economic prosperity of the Jews. "Germany, [they] said, had been betrayed by this unholy trinity, which had led the country into defeat, economic ruin and political chaos. They formed armed bands which placed themselves at the disposal of anyone, even the socialist Minister, Noske, who would offer then the opportunity to shoot or otherwise terrorize the members of the growing communist movement" (145).

I have long been potently opined of Hitler forewarning civilization in *Mein Kampf* of what horrors lied ahead. In this section alone we get early glimpses of his forthcoming coinage of the phrase, as well as his hatred for, *Die Rhineland Bastards*:

The black-haired Jewish youth lies in wait for hours on end, satanically glaring at and spying on the unsuspecting girl whom he plans to seduce, adulterating her blood and removing her from the bosom of her own people. The Jew uses every possible means to undermine the racial foundations of a subjugated people. In his systematic efforts to ruin girls and women he strives to break down the last barriers of discrimination between him and other peoples. The Jews were

responsible for bringing [N]egroes into the Rhineland, with the ultimate idea of bastardizing the white race which they hate and thus lowering its cultural and political level so that the Jew might dominate. For as long as a people remain racially pure and are conscious of the treasure of their blood, they can never be overcome by the Jew. Never in this world can the Jew become master of any people except a bastardized people. (Hitler, Chapter 11)

The genocide of Jews would get documented. Yet, the influx of Turkish Muslims and merchants who travelled into Germany and Belgium's African troops—sent to guard the Rhineland during French occupation—, along with their bastards' "adulterating" bloodline, were not human beings worthy of receiving any honor of documentation following their slaughter(s). As Ruth Kluger exclaims in *Still Alive*:

There was a type of prisoner who had given up, whose will to live had been destroyed, who acted and reacted as if sleepwalking. I don't know the source of the moniker *Muselmänner*, Muslims, which was used to describe them, but no racial slurs was implied, since Islam wasn't an issue either for the Nazis or for the inmates of the camps. [Still] The *Muselmänner* were walking dead men who wouldn't live long, I was told. (90)

In Auschwitz, however, many Jews known as "Kanadians," who were dressed in "finely tailored" uniforms while working the collection quarters of the brigades of Jewish possessions (confessed openly, as to extend Kluger's claims...), considered themselves blessed and living on the "other extreme" of those Muslim prisoners—whom the "SS men often killed idly as if they were flies" on a wall (Hellman 32). This news and its horrific consistency has been a consistent, but unimportant additional tale to the Holocaust's saga.

In campaigning that The National Socialist Party was acting in the best interest of both nationalist and socialist Goebbels states:

We are SOCIALIST because for US THE SOCIAL QUESTION IS A MATTER OF NECESSITY AND JUSTICE, and even beyond that A MATTER FOR [THE] VERY EXISTENCE OF OUR PEOPLE.

SOCIALISM IS POSSIBLE ONLY IN A STATE WHICH IS FREE INSIDE AND OUTSIDE.

DOWN WITH POLITICAL BOURGEOIS SENTIMENT: FOR REAL NATIONALISM!

DOWN WITH MARXISM: FOR TRUE SOCIALISM!

UP WITH THE STAMP OF THE FIRST GERMAN NATIONAL SOCIALIST STATE!

AT THE FRONT THE NATIONAL SOCIALIST GERMAN WORKERS' PARTY! [...]

WHY DO WE OPPOSE THE JEWS?

We are ENEMIES OF THE JEWS, because we are fighters for the freedom of the German people. The Jew is the cause and the beneficiary of our misery. He has used the social difficulties of the broad masses of our people to deepen the unholy slit between Right and Left among our people. He has made two halves of Germany. He is the real cause for our loss of the Great War.

The Jew has no interest in the solution of Germany's fateful problems. HE CANNOT HAVE ANY. FOR HE LIVES ON THE FACT THAT THERE HAS BEEN NO SOLUTION. If we would make the German people a unified community and give them freedom before the world, then the Jew can have no place among us. He has the best trumps in his hands when a people [live] in inner and outer slavery. THE JEW IS RESPONSIBLE FOR OUR MISERY AND HE LIVES ON IT.

That is the reason why we, AS NATIONALIST AND SOCIALIST, oppose the Jew. HE HAS CORRUPTED OUR RACE, FOULED OUR MORALS, UNDERMINED OUR CUSTOMS, AND BROKEN OUR POWER. (Kaes 137)

Goebbels' powerful rebuke should have shocked the world immediately; however, there were far too many living within the realm of Christendom who were not concerned. And far more frightening, instead of opposing such overt hatred spoken against Jews, The Social-Democratic Party leaders, who were indeed influential after the war, found themselves merging into coalitions with nationalist, Catholic Church, and conservatives. Once they had decided to

adopt a policy of compromise and conciliation, they found it difficult to make a stand against the National Socialist German Workers' Party. "There was a continual threat of insurrection (doomed, in the circumstances, to result in failure and further divisions among the German workers) from communists, whose influence among the German workers increased as the socialist tried to damp down trade union activity for fear it might hamper the revival of the German economy, as they called out the police and the *Reichswehr* to break strikes and demonstrations, and as they seemed unable to take any decisive steps to change Germany into a socialist State" (Mackenzie 146).

I mention specifics as such about the collapse of this pre-Marxist socialism in Germany—in its aftermath of Third Reich sovereignty—because many Americans (both black and white), who make it worth their while to decipher some sort of association to socialism as a political frame, usually link the ideology to that of the Nationalist Socialist Party's reign (or better yet: takeover) and do not make reference enough of socialism as that nexus of an ideology predating its "pseudo-composition" in Nazis Germany (Mackenzie 146). Even if Gregor and Otto Strasser took the socialist left-wing of the Nazi Party seriously, Joseph Gobbels was vague with his intentions; and, consequently, the "social dimension of Nazism" was for Hitler just a useful slogan (Kaes 119). Hitler wanted nothing to do with an international solidarity among men. He would destroy all that that was not (politically, culturally, or biologically) linked to the Aryan notion of white supremacy. (It seems all but one Jew, Dr. Eduard Bloch, who had cared for his dying mother and Hitler during his youth, would be permitted to leave Europe on Hitler's pardon.)

I found it significant that McKay noted, "When I was going [to Berlin] the French black troops were in the Ruhr" (Banjo 146). And although history continuously resonates news of this,

the *Rhineland Bastards* were at the top of Hitler's cleansing solutions—which also included sterilization and annihilation. On March 7, 1936, with Hitler's remilitarization and occupation of the Rhineland, he got what he wanted; no immediate war against the French or the British recurred, and so his covert massacre upon them was realized. For the Nazis had complained for decades that Germany's sorry state was due to "its betrayal at home since 1914 by Jews and socialists, and even Africans in the service of foreign powers" (Weitz 95). Some 375,000 Germans would be "sterilized" and a huge number of them would be those children of nonwhite fathers (95). Of course, many were simply killed. At least the lost lives of Jews who were murdered and gassed would be corroborated and remembered by future generations.

Falsehood of Socialism in Germany

Due to this misleading fusion of socialism by the Nazis, most Americans never come to grips with the fact that socialism and communism do remain two separate political ideologies. On the contrary Nazi history, as we know it, might have been altered had the German Socialist-Democrats dared to clash head-on with the party's formative years in Bavaria. Though it is believed "the social-democrats and the liberals hesitated to take the emergency power needed to suppress the Nazis, lest they were accused of destroying the last remnants of democracy they were struggling to keep alive; the communist alone, and themselves subject to police persecution, were not strong enough to forestall the Nazis" (Mackenzie 147). Truth is, well before 1930, The German Worker's Party (precursor NSDAP) already had a stark political *Mechanism* in place; Hitler would join this group in 1919, in which this corruptive entity would remain sovereign and no one could counter it well enough to forestall its evolution as The Nazi Party. During the course of a few years a slew of assassinations recurred.

The first six months of 1919, right-wing assassins killed Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Liebknecht, Leo Jogiches, Kurt Eisner, and Hugo Hasse, all esteemed leaders of the socialist and communists, Eisner even the minister president of Bavaria.

Luxemburg and Liebknecht were murdered in particularly brutal fashion by a Freikorps unit, the others by individual assassins. ...None of the murderers ever served more than a token sentence, protected as they were by conservative judges and officers and other well-connected members of the establishment. (Weitz 99)

If one were courageous enough to connect the dots, one would see the terror did spread to other representatives of the Weimar Coalition parties. Any democratic process was being dismantled, and those who had attempted to reform a post-war Germany were its targeted victims.

Matthias Erberger, the leader of the Center Party was gunned down in August 1921. Then, tragically, ten months later, Walther Rathenau—proving that all who were within striking distance to resist the DNVP’s political ambitions—would be murdered. Some German historians might care to argue that Rathenau’s murder had very little to do with his being Jewish, but I find it taunting to ask if it was an accumulative factor of sorts, since Eisner was himself Jewish. While on the topic of Jews in Germany, let me add one other fact to my discourse; although Bismarck is often linked positively with socialism’s rise and practice in Germany; on the contrary: Bismarck’s rebuke against the socialist was far more overt and controversial. Furthermore, I might care to underline—hereby warning myself that this study cannot afford to get into too great a detail about Bismarck’s relationship to communist, socialist, and Jew...whom many were a part of either one or the other coalitions—how deeply and openly the facticity of belligerence was against Jews, even as early as 1873.

“A popular tract entitled *The Stock Exchange and the Founding Swindle in Berlin* argued that the Jews were attempting to strengthen their own financial empire by destroying the native German middle class” (Large 23). Furthermore, Otto Glagau, a Berlin journalist writing for a family magazine known as the *Gartenlaube* scorned Jewish prominence in German life, especially among Jews living in the capital:

The richest people in Berlin are the Jews, and Jews cultivate the greatest pretense and the greatest luxury, far greater than the aristocracy and the court. It is Jews who in the main fill our theaters, concerts, opera halls, lectures, etc....It is [the] Jews who primarily engineer the election to the Die and the Reichstag...God be merciful to us poor Christians. (Large 23)

So, not only was Bismarck leading the colonial charge into Africa, the monarchy was also permitting public figures to condemn the Jews in his own backyard.

Why is this history so important to me in this paper? I take the initiative to state this as to also ask why weren't the many Americans visiting Germany more vociferous toward those political atrocities which were recurring over the course of so many decades prior to the Third Reich's dominance; and several key figures from the Harlem Renaissance—Du Bois would study at the *Humboldt Universität* as early as 1892—while travelling through Germany, were even left dumbfounded by the pageantry and rise of Nazism in Germany. McKay offered accolades in *Banjo* on behalf of the cleanliness and order of Germany, stating through the lens of his aspiring author, Ray (someone who could arguably be the prototype to James Weldon Johnson, Du Bois, Wright or McKay, also...):

...In Germany I felt something quite different from anything that impressed me in other white country. I felt a real terrible honesty that you might call moral or religious or national. It seemed like something highly organized, patriotic, rooted in the soul—not a simple, natural, instinctive thing. And with it I felt a confident blind bluntness in the people's character that was as hard and obvious as a stone wall. (McKay 145)

These words were simply devastating in all its ambiguity and accuracy about Germany in the mid-twenties. Bringing attention to the fact that the war and inflation had crippled the Germany economy McKay's Ray goes on to say, "I was there when the mark had busted like a bomb in the sky and you could pick up worthless paper marks thrown away in the street. There were exchange booths all over Berlin—some of them newly set up in the street. I saw Americans as heedless as a brass band, lined up to change their dollars in face of misery that was naked to the

eye at every step. Yet never felt any overt hostility to strangers there as I do here” (McKay 145). Ironic to the set of circumstances that would proceed Hitler’s reign, McKay’s perceptions of Germany were plausible. In an article first published in the *Sozialistische Monatshefte* in August 1929, Felix Stoessinger observed this:

Germany actually is adopting more and more of the manners and external appearance of a newly won English colony; it looks down like a parvenu on all the people who refuse to allow themselves to be Anglicized, and considers this state of affairs to be Americanism. Whatever catchword one might choose to designate this process, it is important to establish that the Anglicization sweeping over us like a storm is not, as is so often asserted, the course of the world in general against which it would be senseless to rise up, but that it is we who are diligently applying this new Indian coloration to ourselves. (Kaes 408)

The harsh reality of Xenophobia is overtly prevalent here. Stoessinger goes on to exclaim, “In no other nation is the inferiority complex in relation to Anglo-Saxonism as pathologically immense as in Germany. The material superiority of America has simply overpowered us. Is, however, American material superiority really the same as intellectual superiority” (409)?

This was worthy of denoting as being-something-in-your-face, à la trash-talking-hype, long before Germany ever even loss of *its* Second World War.

“Harlem Types”: The Black Bourgeoisie in Transatlantic Flight

“France is no better than America. In fact, America is better every time for a colored man” (McKay 73), one character exclaims in *Banjo*. Such sentences spoke volumes in defining the ambiguity amid young black males choosing to remain in Europe, versus those returning home to America, in the aftermath of the First World War.

In 1918, following World War I, Germany was in ruins. The German economy has been turned upside down, even crippled in consequence of the Treaty of Versailles. Germans were desperate. In an inflation-ridden Germany, with foreign currency, especially if one had dollars, foreigners lived “very high off the hog” (Large 177). That the purchase of German goods was such a steal in Germany, American tourist flocked to the country like maggots. In our contemporary lens, the norm of the German mark was roughly the ratio of a dollar to two point five D-marks. In early February 1923 the mark went into “free fall” and it hit 12,000 to the dollar, in July 160,000, in August 3,000,000” (174).

All the major cities of “Berlin had always had its share [of] economic predators, but in the inflation era the city became a paradise for profiteers, or *Raffkes*, in popular parlance” (Large 177). With very little amounts of foreign currency they bought up the furniture and family heirlooms of desperate widows. “They purchased companies for \$500 and met their payrolls with worthless marks” (177). Hugo Stinnes, a self-made magnate, was the most entertaining *Raffke* of all. He built a coal-mining empire out of “dubious credit” (177). With foreign currency he managed to build one of the largest economic empires the world has ever known. But, the empire collapsed when its founder, Stinnes, died in 1924.

Ernest Hemingway and his wife Hadley visited Germany via France in September 1922. “For ten francs they received 670DM, or about ninety cents in Canadian money (Hemingway

was then reporting for the Toronto Daily Star). ‘That ninety cents lasted Mrs. Hemingway and me for a day of heavy spending and at the end of the day we had one hundred and twenty marks left!’ he reported to the paper” (177).¹

(And, inevitably, the Nazis took advantage of the country’s vulnerability.)

Thus, with African American troops lingering behind in Germany after World War I, with musicians and artists discovering Paris and Berlin to be “far more tolerant than the United States,” news got out like wildfire about the good-life overseas (Weitz 51). The black soldiers out of Africa and America had discovered an unexpected elegance in the streets, in the buildings, and in the women of Paris and Berlin. Yet more so than just a mere representation of American GIs spending their dollars in a collapsed market, cheerfully roaming the streets of Berlin and Paris; notwithstanding, and, of far more historically significant than ever, Johnson’s, McKay’s, and Larson’s prose implied an enormous influx of blacks were travelling transatlantic. This new black bourgeoisie, within a “black elite that was urbane, sophisticated and civilized,” whom Fauset insisted were worthy subjects in her novels...be they in Harlem or overseas...had arrived to the international scene (Carby 9). So, politically speaking, what I can envision happening was this, affluent Europeans were sailing across to America and getting to Harlem and hearsay was getting Harlem artists back over to Europe, and most importantly, the pipeline between Red Russians and Black Americas had been sealed, particularly as a result of McKay’s visit to Russia.

McKay received rock-star treatment during his journey to Russian “because he was also thought capable of providing African-American-style entertainment” (Maxwell 73). As McKay pointed out in his autobiography, the “insistence of Mayakovski’s wife that they ‘dance a jazz’ in

¹ By the standards of its value at the dawn of the Euro in 2002, I could possibly buy two Big Macs, a coke, and large fries for five marks on the KuDamm. So, just imagine how Hemingway felt with that much money left in his pockets back in 1922...

a Gypsy cabaret and [her] disappointment when he ‘did not measure up to the standard of Aframerican choreography’” (74) baffled many a Russian and caught them totally off guard; and truth of the matter being, McKay had not impressed them at all! Also, McKay may have indeed had the last laugh, as his thoughts shuffled wildly with: *When June comes dancing on the death of May, / With scarlet roses staining her fair feet, / My soul takes leave of me to sing all day / A love so fugitive and so complete*” (Selected Poems 99). All the same, “McKay traced most of his hosts’ excitement to the fact that he was among the first blacks to enter the country after Red October and was therefore readable as an emblem of a whole race’s sympathy for Bolshevism” (Maxwell 74).

Eastman, the publisher McKay had once edited for, observes in a “biographical note”:

We were together in Moscow in 1923, both sympathetic to the Bolshevik Revolution, both unofficial visitors, however, and not fanatical. There being no Negroes in Russia, and one very much needed to demonstrate the new race solidarity, Claude was taken up—and played up—to a degree that would have turned the head of anyone not endowed at birth with those skeptical eyebrows. Adopted as a kind of mascot by the Red Army and Navy, entertained everywhere at the state’s expense, given a Grand Duke’s bedroom and study to live and work in, exhibited on tribunes with the great leaders and orators of the revolution, Claude certainly had the time of his life.

But his mind was in command. He saw clearly the authoritarian mechanism behind these ‘spontaneous’ demonstrations, the regimentation, the bigotry [...]. In midstream of that flood of officially sponsored adulation in which a less independent mind would have gone down, he composed a sonnet to St.

Isaac's Church in Petrograd [St. Petersburg], which asserts in sublime opposition to the whole trend and essence of it the divinity of the individual man. (Selected Poems 112)

Though McKay spent nearly a decade abroad, inclusive of what is known to be at least a year in Russia, it appears he never forget the effect Eastman's *The Liberator*, a socialist magazine of art and literature, had had on his political acumen. While McKay lived in London, he invested a great deal of energy at the Worker's Socialist Federation. Several essays of his landed in print there. Meanwhile, it appears, while abroad, he reasoned daily with the Negro's fate in America and questioned if socialism or communism had a purpose in America's political paradigm. One might guess he questioned this *facto* adamantly, questioned it to the extent of laboring on a fourth manuscript that was written in 1941. This manuscript, *Amiable with Big Teeth: A Novel of the Love Affair between Communist and the Poor Black Sheep of Harlem* has to this day never been published. Perhaps, on up till his death in 1948, perhaps consequent of the title with the word "communist" in it underpins why the novel has yet been published by an American publisher. Yet even more obscure it is that this novel never found a publisher abroad or here in the States.

No two African American authors wrote so eloquently of Europe as McKay and James Weldon Johnson did. The "Negro renaissance" writers—as they were calling one another among themselves—were thinking, drinking, and sneaking about the streets of Harlem with *Europe* on their mind. Like McKay, Johnson wrote reasonably of London, Paris, and Berlin. In my well-established exposure to Europe since childhood, I feel both McKay and Johnson make keen psychological and cultural observations about the people living in those cities with an ingenious accuracy, which remains stark till this day. One of the strongest passages in the *The Autobio-*

graphy of an Ex-Colored Man happens when its speaker travels abroad with [his] “millionaire” benefactor. The protagonist becomes this millionaire’s noteworthy companion, travelling all across Europe with so generous a white American as fiction could possibly ever imagine a benefactor to be. The narrative’s speaker is brought along, at first, to be the millionaire’s replacement to his valet, Walter. Subsequently, this speaker, the *ex-colored man*, has been devolved into being the traveller’s personal confidant and entertainer. He begins to not only enjoy a lifestyle that he knows he has not been ordained to live; yet, too, he has begun to experience the gifts of freedom outside the racial trenches of his country. In another country, the speaker begins to understand his life has a greater value than America has revealed to him. He enjoys the pubs, the cafés, the saloons and he even learns that all that is immoral is universal, be it that its existence is in London, Brussels, Paris, Cairo or Berlin. Although McKay’s experience in London was a rather positive one, his tone about Europeans, overall, is so similar to that hospitality James Weldon Johnson encountered:

Americans are immensely popular in Paris; and this is not due to solely to the fact that they spend lots of money there, for they spend just as much or more in London, and in the latter city they are merely tolerated because they do spend. The Londoner seems to think that Americans are people whose only claim to be classed as civilized is that they have money, and the regrettable thing about that is that the money is not English. But the French are more logical and freer from prejudices than the British; so the difference of attitude is easily explained.

(Johnson 81)

Nonetheless, roughly after eighteen months of travelling across the continent, our ex-colored man has “lost interest” in his journey overseas. Even though in Europe he feels he is “a

man,” [and] “no longer a boy”...what he is doing is “wasting [his] time and abusing [his] talent” (Johnson 85). Again, the black man is not to be fooled or spoiled by the pseudo-promises of other lands. He is ambitious but he is rational. He knows what America can offer others. The divinity of his senses brings him to a spiritual awareness that readily becomes sublime. He knows he is among the *Talented Tenth*. No matter how rough his life in America is, he accepts in this time spent abroad that he is American, and that America is at a point in her maturity whereby she needs men as talented as him—who are committed to envisioning the equality and independence of all men. He has not been spoiled; he understands that this journey has been a journey away from his country, a journey away from his blackness, but to be “blackness rediscovered,” while exiled in Europe (Sartre 298). To America he shall return, that is, to compose and play his music and become married to the woman who is the love of his life. He has meditated often during his year in Europe. He has a story that needs to be heard and “by speaking only of himself, he speaks to all [blacks]” (300).

Beyond Being Among the Other(s)

James Weldon Johnson wanted Claude McKay back in the States, living in the midst of the Harlem Renaissance. Upon finishing his “native holiday in Marrakesh,” McKay found himself in Casablanca, finding a pile of letters in his room. One letter was from Johnson, telling McKay the news that he would “facilitate” his trip back to Harlem (A Long Way 306).

According to McKay this news from Johnson “set [him] thinking hard about returning to Harlem” (A Long Way 306). For nearly nine years McKay had been in exile. He only had had the “exciting impressions of a more glamorous Harlem,” and other accounts of Harlem’s expansion “spreading west and south,” from reports from afar. It seemed so rare a dilemma to have been in. He was, indeed, in hindsight, missing Harlem, missing America; but he had felt at home abroad and was even enthusiastic to hear from “one friend in Harlem that Negroes were traveling abroad en masse that spring and summer and that the élite would be camping in Paris. [Thus] I thought that it might be less unpleasant to meet the advance guard of the Negro intelligentsia in Paris” (307).

McKay gets a train in Tangier, “where four big European powers were performing their experiment of international government in Africa upon a living corpse” (A Long Way 307). He heads on toward Spain and writes some of his most lyrical poems along the way to Paris. McKay meets up with a dying Louise Bryant in Paris. He feels a great deal of empathy for her decaying health, to the point that he can’t even muster the strength to look at her. She protests how he avoids her, how he “won’t even look at [her]” (310).

At first it appears McKay is implying that this “guardian” is Louise Bryant, however, once he has told his readers a few passages farther that he has met Alan Locke, it becomes

apparent that he means no one none other than the “professor” and editor of *The Anthology of the New Negro* is his intellectual “guardian” (A Long Way 312).

McKay is happy to finally meet Locke. But Locke has upset McKay. Alain Locke has altered the title to one of McKay’s poem. For the anthology, Locke has changed it to “White Houses” (its original title in *The Liberator* was “The White House”), and has done this in all the editions of his anthology. That Locke finds the title misleading, and has no intention of arousing the “office residence of the President of the United States” (314), McKay argues once more, telling Locke that he finds such accusations “ridiculous.” McKay asks why it would upset them once published in the anthology, when it hadn’t upset them in *The Liberator*—which has had its office based in the Washington, D.C. Nonetheless, though in complete disagreement, they joke about wearing the same pair of shoes and before one knows it, McKay moves on absorbed in the cityscape along the Seine again. McKay notes in the summer of 1929:

The cream of Harlem was in Paris. There was the full cast of Blackbirds (with Adelaide Hall starring in the place of Florence Mills), just as fascinating a group off the stage as they were extraordinary on the stage. The Porgy actors had come over from London. There was an army of school teachers and nurses. There were Negro Communists going to and returning from Russia. There were Negro students from London and Scotland and Berlin and the French universities. There were presidents and professor of the best Negro colleges. And there were painters and writers and poets, of whom the most outstanding was Countee Cullen. (A Long Way 311)

Certainly McKay does admire the nucleus of intellectual fusion among the Negro Renaissance writers and he is also very much so the wonder and amalgamation of those char-

acters he has introduced the world to in *Banjo*. He is the epitome of that solidarity of brotherhood that he bonds himself to in *Banjo*; but he is no longer a man in need of the company of other Black male drifters. Albeit the years have passed since he lived that life on a seaport in France as a vagabond where Banjo, Malty, Bugsy, Goosey, Jake and Ray entered his imagination. But that episode of community and solidarity that showed his potential as a political force, as that very colossal of a thinker as the Black Marxist were looking for, is not the person he has become. Those characters are but his persona of an era where his life as a freeloader enabled room for such alliances. The very manner in which he stares ambiguously into a storefront where “copies of [his] book, *Banjo*,” decorates a façade on Avenue de l’Opera and that he was “disappointed” that he could not “work up to feeling a thrill such as [he’d] imagine an author should feel” (*A Long Way* 309), is telling that those years were too disturbing, too far removed from his alignment and desire to be productive while in the company of other men like Johnson and Locke. McKay actually never comes to accept Locke’s influence and authority on members of the Harlem Renaissance.

In Jean-Paul Sartre’s treatise “Black Orpheus,” which overtly and obviously defends socialism—and perhaps even showing an understanding why the socialist intentions of The Harlem Renaissance had not reigned over communists notions a decade earlier—the French philosopher concluded that “before black peasants can discover that socialism is the necessary answer to their present local claims, they must learn to formulate these claims jointly; therefore, they must think of themselves as black men” (296), and bond together with a common purpose and language and not be divided by the postcolonial apathy that keeps them linguistically disassociated as a political force. Sartre believed the language that would bond blacks was French. It seems prophetic, how two decades before Sartre’s revelation came into being, Claude McKay

took a similar worldview in *Banjo*. His story, set in the port of Marseille, among the French speaking residents of the world, had made English, not French, the language which proffered that potential political potency needed for blacks to come to terms with both solidarity and globalization's arrival. Sartre isn't thinking as a supremacist here, nor is he condescending, when he asks astutely "Can black men count on a distant white proletariat—involved in its own struggles—before they are united and organized on their own soil?"

With a need to inject some sort of signifying to the historical, cultural, and theoretical legacy of talent assembled around Zora Neale Hurston, Richard Wright, Louise Thompson, Alan Locke, Sterling Brown, Langston Hughes, James Weldon Johnson, Jessie Fauset, Nella Larson, Wallace Thurman, Dorothy West and Countee Cullen—there alongside of white intellectuals and sponsors such as Andy Razaf, Mike Gold, Bessy Marbury, Elsie de Wolfe, Dorothy Parker, Louise Patterson, Carl Van Vechten and Charlotte Osgood Mason dwelling in the center of New York City—I hope to procure how inexplicably stark a collectivity of American minds this was. And that the "Negro renaissance" had direct connections with the writers of The Lost Generation is all the more mind-bobbling. As William J. Maxwell puts it, this was a "[productivity] of a race-radical modernism that was not black alone" (202). With the Parisian pipeline recurring apropos of these aforementioned names, one vividly merges the Black authors of the Harlem Renaissance to this great correlation of white writers living in Paris, captioned under "The Lost Generation." Yet, to add to Maxwell's insight: we lessen this era's literary and cultural significance when we place its authors into subcultural divisions: because collectively, I would dare say, this was at least a blueprint for *The American Renaissance* that's perhaps still not yet been formulated and harvested in a literary context.

Unfortunately, by the time McKay reaches the end of the “The New Negro in Paris” chapter in *A Long Way from Home*, we understand this is not a person capable of making the sacrifices that necessitate those qualities of trustworthiness, tolerance, and discipline—thus those qualities which allow one to be a part of such a national revelation. In this one vignette, McKay pours out a confession that is one of the most honest yet disturbing of passages in American letters:

For my part I was deeply stirred by the idea of a real Negro renaissance. The Arabian cultural renaissance and the great European renaissance had provided some of my most fascinating reading. The Russian literary renaissance and also the Irish had absorbed my interests. My idea of a renaissance was one of talented persons of an ethnic or national group working individually or collectively in a common purpose and creating things that would be typical of their group.

I was surprised when I discovered that many of the talented Negroes regarded their renaissance more as an uplift organization and a vehicle to accelerate the pace and progress of smart Negro society. It was interesting to note how sharply at variance their artist outlook was from that of the modern that of the modernistic white groups that took a significant interest in Negro literature and art. The Negroes were under the delusion that when a lady from Park Avenue or from Fifth Avenue, or a titled European, became interested in Negro art and invited Negro artists to her home, that was a token of Negroes breaking into upper-class white society. I don't think that it ever occurred to them that perhaps such white individuals were searching for a social and artist significance in Negro art which they could not find in their own society, and that the radical nature and

subject of their interests operated against the possibility of their introducing Negroes further than their own particular homes in coveted white society. (A Long Way 322)

Indeed, such harsh words are within the scope of a very tacit interpretation of what socio-political dilemmas addressed the climate in America during the 30s. I do not wish to suggest that readers be offended by this passage. You have to keep in mind that McKay is not American; which in many ways is as much an attribute for a writer critiquing the American traveller as it is a curse. Meaning, this is that one aspect of his psyche that cannot enable McKay to engage in the common interests of the Harlem authors. They will always remain the *other(s)*. McKay won't be able to avoid his disconnect to Harlem. He has no desire to be a part of a group set on uplifting a race; he desires in his own right, as is event in *Banjo*, to exist an entity in harmony with the entire globe. He longs to free the world of its ill, not solely free Americans. Though Germany is too "highly organized for [his] temperament" (*Banjo* 147), America seems too dishonest a place for McKay to live in.

"In America it's different," Ray continued. "I didn't sense any soul-destroying honesty there. What I felt was an awful big efficiency sweeping all over me. You felt that business in its mad race didn't have time to worry about honesty, and if you thought about honesty at all it was only as a technical thing, like advertising, to help efficiency forward. If you were to go to New York and shop in the popular districts, then do Delancey Street and the Bowery afterward, you'd get what I mean. Down in those tedious-bargain streets you feel that you are in Europe on the shores of the Mediterranean again, and that their business has nothing to do with the great steam-rolling efficiency of America.

“But in Germany I felt something quite different from anything that impressed me in other white countries. I felt a real terrible honesty that you might call moral or religious or national.” (Banjo 145)

Here it is possibly as early as 1924...even 1925...and McKay is foreshadowing the German’s mind-set during the evolution of the Third Reich as well as few non-German thinkers of *that* era—say with exception to Thomas Wolfe—foresees the Nazis’ rise toward nationalism.

It seemed like something highly organized, patriotic, rooted in the soul—not a simple, natural, instinctive thing. And with it I felt a confident blind bluntness in the people’s character that was as hard and obvious as a stone wall. (Banjo 145)

In hindsight, those Harlem authors cannot understand his vision any more than he will understand theirs. McKay has spent a good seven years in England focusing his artistic and political energy on socialism. And I would surmise that it is this political division that will inspire his decision to abandon the idea of returning to the States to help Johnson’s “uplifting the race” endeavors; and this will lead to the debacle of a great American literary sociopolitical cause. McKay’s genius, even though it is in representation of a most belligerent critic on behalf of the infrastructure of the “Negro Renaissance,” still, has to be considered worthy of one final inclusion:

Also, among the Negro artists there was much of that Uncle Tom attitude which works like Satan against the idea of a coherent and purposeful Negro group. Each one wanted to be the first Negro, the one Negro, and the only Negro *for the whites* instead of for their group. Because an unusual number of them were receiving grants to do work, they actually and naïvely believed that Negro artists as a group

would always be treated differently from white artists and be protected by powerful white patrons.

Some of them even expressed the opinion that Negro art would solve the centuries-old social problem of the Negro. That idea was vaguely hinted by Dr. Locke in his introduction to *The New Negro*. Dr. Locke's essay is a remarkable chocolate *soufflé* of art and politics, with not an ingredient of information inside.

(A Long Way 323)

In earlier passages in this section of his book, McKay has mentioned that he could not see Locke as the right intellectual to lead the Harlem Renaissance. One could at that point sense that McKay has little tolerance for a movement led by Locke, after all.

They were nearly all Harlem-conscious, in a curious synthetic way, it seemed to me—not because they were aware of Harlem's intrinsic value as a unique and popular Negro quarter, but apparently because white folks had discovered black magic there. I understand more clearly why there had been so much genteel-Negro hostility to my *Home to Harlem* and to Langston Hughes's primitive Negro poems. (A Long Way 323)

Speaking in Hughes' defense, it is unfair that McKay isn't able to bring Hurston's rural blacks and Fauset's petty black bourgeoisies into this critique. These two women were getting attacked by Wright and Hughes for the prose and *attitudes* they produced within the circles as much as McKay had been rebuked for his work and attitude. And given that outside forces, especially from the right—the Ku Klux Klan sent flies to the writers and posted posters on the streets of Birmingham, Alabama and on the façades of Harlem that warned, “Negroes

Beware...Do Not Attend Communist Meetings”²—were constant, this dichotomy of intellects was at a disadvantage when they began to mistrust one another. One might question if Van Vechten would have been a possible candidate. I doubt if he was. And recruiting whites in such positions might have proven too obvious. Blacks would be less detectible, would be less visible. Dorothy West “was always suspicious of Ralph Ellison “being an FBI informer” (Vemer 151). I do not doubt, especially in the wake of McCarthyism a decade later, that agents were firmly in place to demolish the communist esteem inside the group. (Though I have never given it any consideration before now, perhaps it is indeed Ellison’s guilt over having been an informer that explains why there is this complex labyrinth of secrecy, as well as psychological mysticism, in his novel *Invisible Man*.)

Noteworthy to consider, too, how I find it plausible that Louise Thompson might have become that niche that could have merged with McKay and enabled Hughes and Johnson to take on the belief that socialism was a far better fit for their social-intellectual cause than communism was. Given that West and Thompson had spent a great deal of time in Russia, they would have understood what *tour de force* Rosa Luxemburg was to socialism’s impact in Europe; they would have understood that socialism addressed the many questions concerning family issues and the well-being of women as child-bearers in our society; and the fact is where socialism seemed more favorable a nexus for such a political engagement than the discourse of communism had been. Socialism concerned itself with the individual as an entity of productivity in society; whereby, communism concerned itself with a more innately masculine tradition of “enforcement of the momentary interests of the working class” [men] (Marx 94). Though Marx and Engel did not exclude women in their ideological interests, still, they saw commodity, not the needs of women, at the forefront of their cause.

² See: Maxwell: Post inserts Figure 10...

Often in Paris, Elisabeth Marbury—along with Mason, who was yet another crucial Harlem Renaissance sponsor—was in proximity of both de Beauvoir and Sartre’s stark circle of socialist there. She commuted to Paris frequently and would converse with Hemingway, Fitzgerald, and Stein on a regularly basis (Vemer 130). Indeed, I would like to have had the chance to locate and study the private letters of Marbury, Mason, and de Wolfe—if only to discover whether there were hints in their correspondences—to reveal any sentiments which were favorable toward socialism. Unfortunately, these questions I have not had the time or resources to resolve. So, I will not go deeper into kindling any debate on behalf of just how close the writers might have come to making socialism their doctrine of intent had McKay, Thompson, and West teamed up in Harlem. However, without McKay there to join forces with Fauset, West and Hurston’s notion of following the European model of socialism set by Luxemburg, Thompson herself had no chance of opposing Hughes’s plea that she “hold the boat to living socialism in the New York harbor” there for the duration of their journey as Black Marxist (Maxwell 142).

I wondered after all whether it would be better for me to return to the new *milieu* of Harlem. Much as all my sympathy was with the Negro group and the idea of a Negro renaissance, I doubted if going back to Harlem would be an advantage. I had done my best Harlem stuff when I was abroad, seeing it from a long perspective. I thought it might be better to leave Harlem to the artists who were on the spot, to give them their chance to produce something better than *Home to Harlem*. I thought that I might as well go back to Africa. (A Long Way 323)

I’m going to give you my take on the aforementioned passage. I cannot say this was the sort of artist and persona who would ever find themselves in harmony with personalities as stark as Hurston, West, Brown and Fauset. And even within the black race itself, unfortunately there

existed that social hierarchy that made it not only possible for blacks to feel inferior to whites, but also gave men the belief that they should “have power over women” (Wall 72). Hurston speaks of this male empowerment and critiques it superbly and adamantly in her masterpiece *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. It was a missed opportunity that the Black male leaders in the renaissance did subversively and openly suppress Hurston’s, Fauset’s, and Thompson’s voices. To borrow a metaphor from Stuart Hall, might they have found a greater bond as activists had they been there in Harlem “wrestling [together] with the angels” (280), and keeping good-faith that their cause would be a favorable cause, impacting forthcoming generations of blacks and whites, might they have discovered how essential it was for them to abandon the post-Lenin influences of the Black Marxists for that lesser aggressive, subversive textuality the French and British socialist treatises endorsed? So close they were to obtaining a political identity that would have worked to their benefit as African Americans had they been able to persuaded McKay to come on board. Yet, without McKay, those refined renaissance women—in need of socio-political autonomy and not community sovereignty—were not welcomed to rank themselves above the heteronormative protocol of social priorities their Black male comrades kept them at a distance from.

The classic example of this tension among the male leader-ship to suppress the female voices of the “Negro Renaissance” became most evident at the Civic Club dinner on March 21, 1924. This was when the debut of the younger school of Negro writers would underscore Fauset’s significance to the movement apropos of honoring her newly issued novel, *There is Confusion*. What happened at that event it is well-documented among scholars. Several letters collected and archived at Howard University from Fauset, Locke, and Charles Johnson grants proof of the fact that the male leaders of the movement would have their way. Locke insisted that

the “event was not to feature Jessie Fauset” (Wall 60). Jessie Fauset got up and thanked a handful of her friends and signaled out Dr. Du Bois for being “her best friend and severest critic” (60). Secretively kept in her place, and overwhelmed with frustration, she sat down, silenced.

Agencies were well in place to jump on board with these aspiring black socialists. *The Partisan Review*—with such key activist icons as Philip Rahv, William Phillips, Mike Gold and Randall Jarrell at its helm (Teres 214)—even if for some years funded controversially by the CIA, were pioneers posed to support the black authors and scholars following the footsteps of the *Black Marxists*.

No matter how discomfiting the thought of returning to Harlem seemed McKay accepted that the struggle in Harlem would never be his struggle:

...Traveling away from America and visiting many countries, observing and appreciating the differences of human groups, making contact with earthy blacks of tropical Africa, where the great body of his race existed, had stirred in him the fine intellectual prerogative of doubt. (Banjo 324)

Again, I have to ask, what agency has vaulted away the last book of such a mind? What gate-keepers have kept such a thinker’s thoughts out of reach of a publisher’s hand? What publisher has refused to bring that fourth book to print? Did such a mind set up a formula or lay grounds to a philosophy which was strong enough to make room for a third party framework in America? How influential might such a novel have been in shaping and expanding the socio-cultural creative capacities of minds such as Stuart Hall, Baldwin, Davis, Walker and Mosley—or even two entire generations of writers around the globe had it been published back in 1941? But to forthcoming generations who might come across my writing now, I challenge you as intellectuals, researchers, and writers to advance my thought and seek to find answers to the

questions I have presented readers with, regarding my two semesters' journey into the Harlem Renaissance.

4/17/15
Greensboro, NC

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