Notes

CHAPTER ONE


3. Robert Brustein, "The W. C. Fields of American Journalism," New York Times Book Review 81 (19 December 1976): 3. Even so excellent and sympathetic a biography of Mencken as William Manchester's Disturber of the Peace: The Life of H. L. Mencken (New York: Harper, 1951) helped to sustain the folk image. Here is Manchester's description of Mencken getting out a paragraph on his Corona typewriter: "Out it came, with a spasm; another long pause, an oath softly muttered, then with a grunt he was off on another paragraph, viciously punching the keys and squirming in the suffering and articulate swivel chair. Periodically he sprang to his feet and paddled into the bathroom, to indulge in a curious but very necessary writing habit: a complete and vigorous washing of the hands" (pp. 48-49). Mencken's character is that of an eccentric from the pages of a Dickens novel.

4. Frank Turaj, "H. L. Mencken and American Literature" (Ph.D. diss., Brown University, 1968), pp. 1, 2. Other recent works that discuss Mencken's formidable literary reputation in the teens and 1920s are William Nolte's H. L. Mencken, Literary Critic (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1966), William Manchester's Disturber of the Peace, Charles A. Fecher's Mencken: A Study of His Thought (New York: Knopf, 1978), Carl R. Dolmetsch's The Smart Set: A History and Anthology (New York: Dial Press, 1966), Fred C. Hobson's Serpent in Eden: H. L. Mencken and the South (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1974), Carl Bode's Mencken (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1969), W.H.A. Williams's H. L. Mencken (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1977). This is by no means an exhaustive list of the work done on Mencken's literary criticism, but these critics do present convincing evidence that Lippmann was not exaggerating. Furthermore, the general consensus today is that Mencken's literary criticism continues to hold up, that he was a first-rate critic. No longer do critics believe in the post-1930s, pre-1960s attitude of Edgar Kemler, who argued that because "Mencken was a cynic," he does not qualify "as a truly professional critic." See Edgar Kemler, The Irreverent Mr. Mencken (Boston: Little, Brown, 1950), p. 123. As William Nolte and Frank Turaj have shown, Mencken was no cynic when he discussed literature. He brought to it a passionate intelligence, which not only punctured cant but also recognized and appreciated real merit.

14. Jervis Anderson, "That Was New York (Harlem—part III)," *New Yorker* 67 (13 July 1981): 64. Anderson's article was one of four articles which appeared in the *New Yorker* and were recently collected in the book *This Was Harlem: A Cultural Portrait, 1900-1950* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1982).
17. There may be some gentle satire directed at Mencken as well. In Nigger Heaven, white novelist Roy McKain (probably Jim Tully) writes a "capital yarn" (says Durwood) about a Negro pimp: "I don't suppose he even saw the fellow . . . but his imagination was based on a background of observation" (p. 226). Van Vechten depicts McKain as a man who can observe detail but who completely misperceives its moral implications. As we shall see, Mencken was associated with literary realism from his early days as a book reviewer for the Smart Set. On the other hand, Van Vechten's narrative propensities lay toward the comedy of manners, the light ironic touch. Hence, the latter may be underscoring the limitations of a literal-minded realism, one that Mencken was sometimes (but not always) guilty of espousing.


20. HLM to Walter White, 7 October 1922, NAACP Executive Correspondence Files, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, hereafter referred to as the NAACP Files.

21. Yet see William L. Andrews, "William Dean Howells and Charles W. Chesnutt: Criticism and Race Fiction in the Age of Booker T. Washington," American Literature 48 (November 1976): 327-39. Andrews acutely observes that Howells could never quite free his literary judgment of Chesnutt from his political one. Although he had praised Chesnutt as a realist in his reviews of Chesnutt's early fiction, he talked of The Marrow of Tradition (1901) as if it were a tract on racial relations. Since Howells believed in Booker T. Washington's accommodationist position, he essentially disapproved of Chesnutt's "bitter" novel. Thus, Howells's extra-aesthetic views triumphed over his realist principles, and, in retrospect, it seems that Mencken was quite right to ignore him as an important influence upon realism in Negro letters.


24. Publishers Weekly 96 (20 September 1919), advertisement for Dodd, Mead; and p. 745.

25. Ibid., 94 (3 August 1918), cover. The same claim was made for Means on the cover of the 31 May 1919 issue of Publishers Weekly.


27. HLM to W.E.B. DuBois, 15 October 1935, H. L. Mencken Papers, Rare Books and Manuscripts Division, New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations, hereafter referred to as NYP.

28. HLM to Walter White, 16 October 1923, NAACP Files.


34. At least this is what Julia Peterkin thought had happened. She told Mencken that 'Knopf did 'Green Thursday' without any enthusiasm for the book. I think, out of courtesy


39. All her novels were published in the 1930s, but Hurston never left the fictional perspective that she had learned in the 1920s. Her fiction ignores the Depression altogether. See Robert Hemenway's excellent biography, Zora Neale Hurston (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977).

40. See James O. Young, Black Writers of the Thirties (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1973), p. 134. Throughout his informative book, Young makes the mistake of assuming that realism in black literature was the particular property of the 1930s.


42. HLM, Prejudices, Fifth Series (New York: Knopf, 1926), p. 233. All six volumes of Prejudices were published by Knopf, and the dates are as follows: First Series (1919); Second Series (1920); Third Series (1922); Fourth Series (1924); Sixth Series (1927). Hereafter, only title and series number will be listed.

43. See Nella Larsen’s letter to Carl Van Vechten, 12 November 1926, James Weldon Johnson Memorial Collection of Negro Arts and Letters, Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, hereafter referred to as JWJ: "Pablo de Segovia is marvelous. A tale of a Negro ruffian told in this naive manner would be interesting. (I think someone, Mencken perhaps, has made this suggestion somewhere.)."

44. HLM, "Novels for Indian Summer," Smart Set 60 (November 1919): 139, reprinted in Smart Set Criticism, pp. 46-47.

45. See Huggins, Harlem Renaissance, chap. 6, "Personae: White/Black Faces—Black Masks."


50. HLM, Prejudices 4, p. 283.


52. HLM, Prejudices 3, p. 27.


54. HLM, Prejudices 4, p. 141.


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59. HLM to Walter White, 2 August 1934, NYP.
60. Roy Wilkins to HLM, 9 August 1934, NYP.

CHAPTER TWO

2. Floyd Calvin, "Interview with Countee Cullen," *Pittsburgh Courier*, 18 June 1927.
4. Ibid., 21 February 1920.
8. Countee Cullen to HLM, undated letter, 1924, NYP.
10. Ibid., 3 August 1925.
11. HLM's article appeared in the *New York World*, 25 September 1927, in his weekly column, "Hiring a Hall."
13. Miller was so taken with his theme that he promised his readers another article on Mencken, but as far as I know, he never wrote it.
16. George Schuyler to HLM, 15 March 1938, NYP.
19. See Johnson's letters to him in which he apologizes for not writing the article: 19 December 1923, 20 February 1925, NYP.
20. HLM to George Schuyler, 15 January 1941, JW; George Schuyler to HLM, 18 January 1941, NYP.
21. HLM to George Schuyler, 27 September 1934, NYP. On an earlier occasion, Mencken told Schuyler that somebody ought to provide a clipping bureau for Negro news-
papers: "If you know anyone who wants to make the venture, tell him I'd like to be his first customer" (19 October 1927). See Letters of H. L. Mencken, ed. Guy J. Forgue (New York: Knopf, 1961), p. 305, hereafter referred to as Letters. Three days later, Mencken again encouraged Schuyler to find "some enterprising young man in Harlem" to start this much-needed service. HLM to George Schuyler, 22 October 1927, JWJ.

22. See the categories of "Negro" and "Slavery" especially: HLM, A New Dictionary of Quotations on Historical Principles from Ancient and Modern Sources (New York: Knopf, 1942).

26. "The Invisible Empire," Baltimore Evening Sun, 4 December 1922. For other articles attacking the Klan, see "The South Rebels Again," Baltimore Evening Sun, 17 November 1924; "Sub-Potomac Agonies," Baltimore Evening Sun, 22 March 1926; and "Sport in the Bible Country," Mercury 17 (July 1929): 382-83. For an interesting and unorthodox study of the psychology of the Klan's members, see "The Nightshirt Passes," Baltimore Evening Sun, 28 June 1926. Mencken perceptively argues that the Klan's rise to power after the Civil War may be due in part to "a reaction against the growing regimentation of American thought." Again, although he roundly satirizes the Klan's benighted stupidities, he makes the seminal attempt to understand it as a product of a specific social environment.

28. HLM to Walter White, 28 January 1935, NYP.
29. See Arthur Schlesinger's rebuttal to Charles Angoff's charge that Mencken was a racist: "Correspondence," New Republic 137 (16 December 1957): 23.
30. See Forgue, Letters, p. 331. It is worth noting that Mencken added in his letter to Schuyler, "Just as many are to be found in the white race."
41. Ibid., pp. 234-35.
42. Ibid., p. 224.
43. HLM to George Schuyler, 4 October 1927, JWJ.
47. HLM, Heathen Days, p. 104.
48. HLM, Happy Days, p. 279.
50. HLM, Happy Days, p. 154.
56. HLM to George Schuyler, 12 October 1933, JWJ.
57. HLM to editor, *Pittsburgh Courier*, January 1947, NYP. Mencken's letter was in response to a questionnaire from the *Courier*. Mencken also privately told Schuyler that Schuyler's "column was worth all the rest" and that he regarded it as "the best produced in this free Republic, regardless of the cutaneous hue of its producers." HLM to George Schuyler, 10 July 1947, NYP.
58. I have found Mencken's note concerning the reprinted article in his unpublished correspondence with George Schuyler in NYP. The date on the note is May 1945. Schuyler's article on Roosevelt was originally published in the *Pittsburgh Courier*, 25 April 1945. Mencken wrote to Schuyler at the time and praised him for telling "the whole and bitter truth" about Roosevelt's relationship to the Negro. See *The New Mencken Letters*, ed. Carl Bode (New York: Dial Press, 1977), p. 554—hereafter referred to as *New Letters*. The theme of Negro "superiority" was a favorite one with Mencken. At one time, he urged DuBois to write an essay on the subject—see DuBois's letter to HLM, 16 January 1923, NYP. Also, see HLM, "Treason in the Tabernacle," *Mercury* 23 (June 1931): 160: "In many obvious ways they [Negroes] are superior to the whites against whom they are commonly pitted. They are not only enormously decenter; they are also considerably shrewder."
60. HLM to Countee Cullen, 13 August 1924, Amistad Research Center, New Orleans, Louisiana.
61. HLM to Countee Cullen, 5 May 1926. ibid. Cullen then wrote Mencken a long letter explaining the details of the event. Countee Cullen to HLM, 7 May 1926, NYP.
63. Cruse quotes Samuel Putnam to the effect that one manifestation of the cultural revolt of the 1920s was "a contempt for the arts of the people that with Mencken and his followers became a contempt for the people themselves." See Cruse, *Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*, p. 62.
64. HLM, *Prejudices 6*, pp. 51, 207.
68. HLM, "What Ails the Republic," *Baltimore Evening Sun*, 17 April 1922.
70. HLM, "Minority Report*, p. 188.
72. Answer to questionnaire sent by Lionel White in 1934, found in Mencken correspondence, NYP.
75. HLM to George Schuyler, 16 December 1943, NYP.
82. HLM, *Prejudices* 6, pp. 142-43.
88. HLM to George Schuyler, 25 July 1931, JWJ. Mencken asked Schuyler to "accumulate some materials on the growth of anti-clericalism among American Negroes. . . . The facts whatever they are would make a good article."
90. Letter of recommendation that Mencken wrote for Schuyler, for Harmon Foundation prize, 30 July 1930, NAACP Files.
93. HLM, "Literary Notes," *Smart Set* 65 (July 1921): 141.
97. HLM to George Schuyler, 11 November 1930, JWJ. Mencken said that he was sorry Schuyler could not stop by when he had last visited Baltimore: "My cellar has a just reputation, and is at the disposal of visiting literati."
98. See W.H.A. Williams, *H. L. Mencken*, p. 45. Mencken's aesthetic advice may have been the source of Bill Gorton's satirical song about "irony and pity" in Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*. Williams does not mention this connection, but it seems fairly obvious, given Hemingway's dislike of Mencken.
100. I am combining two letters here: HLM to George Schuyler, 9 September 1943 and 13 September 1943, NYP.
108. HLM to George Schuyler, 30 June 1934, JWJ.
109. HLM to George Schuyler, 9 September 1943, NYP.

**CHAPTER THREE**

1. The story of Mencken's difficulties during World War I has been told many times.
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3. HLM, "The Coroner's Inquest," *Smart Set* 69 (September 1922): 144.
8. Quoted from the *Crisis* 21 (April 1921): 267.
11. Cartoon, ibid., 26 March 1921.
12. Ibid., 2 July 1921.
14. Grace Johnson to HLM, 25 August 1942, NYP. In this same letter, Grace Johnson made a perceptive observation about Mencken's letters to her husband: "They are an interesting and valuable part of your range of thought when most people were inarticulate who held the power of influence that you represented" (italics mine).
15. HLM to James Weldon Johnson, undated letter, 1917, NYP. Johnson sent Mencken songs by Harry Burleigh, and Mencken wanted to know more about him. "Is he a colored man?" Mencken asked. Undated letter, 1917, NYP.
16. HLM to James Weldon Johnson, undated letter (circa 1922), NYP. Mencken also wanted Johnson to expand the section of the preface dealing with Negro music into an article or book: "Why not go into the history of ragtime at length, establishing names and dates accurately? It ought to be done. . . . Then you might do similar essays on negro poets and negro painters and sculptors, and so have a second book on the negro as artist. . . . I think a preface to poetry should stick to poetry pretty closely. . . . The whole thing interests me immensely."
18. Ibid., 21 February 1920.
19. Ibid., 14 October 1922.
20. In 1913, beginning in June, Mencken dissected this species of *Homo sapiens* with relish. Carl Bode has conveniently collected five of these six essays in his *Young Mencken*, and my references will be to this text.
22. Ibid., p. 289.
23. Ibid., p. 288.
25. Ibid., p. 16.
30. HLM, *Prejudices* 2, pp. 144, 142.
32. Ibid., pp. 146-49.
34. HLM, *Prejudices* 2, p. 150. Also, see Joel Williamson's informative book, *New People: Miscegenation and Mulattoes in the United States* (New York: Free Press, 1980). Williamson argues that by the 1920s people of mixed blood no longer saw themselves as "new people," but rather called themselves Negroes. For example, such people as W.E.B. DuBois, James Weldon Johnson, Alain Locke, and Walter White became the leaders of a literary movement that stressed that "black is beautiful," though they themselves were light-skinned. Notice that Mencken in the passage quoted does not make a distinction between mulattoes and "negroes."
36. Undated letter, 1917, HLM to James Weldon Johnson, NYP. On 27 November 1917, Mencken wrote Johnson and apologized for spilling "the 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' beans. Why not announce the work, and so protect your priority?" NYP.
44. See Waldron, *White and the Harlem Renaissance*, p. 37.
47. HLM to George Schuyler, 30 August 1927, in Bode, *New Letters*, p. 214.
48. HLM to George Schuyler, 5 October 1932, JWJ. Also, see HLM to George Schuyler, 30 January 1933, NYP. Mencken advised Schuyler to present his "facts in a perfectly grave manner and without any moralizing upon them."


79. Ibid. (February 1924): 41.


83. Ibid., 8 (October 1926): 307.

84. Ibid., 9 (November 1927): 230.


92. Eugene Kinckle Jones and Robert Russa Moton, Director of the Urban Leage and President of Tuskegee Institute, respectively.

94. The paradox that some Negroes would be made unhappy by the removal of the color problem is a theme that Mencken had touched on in the Mercury. See Editorial, Mercury 12 (October 1927): 159.

95. See Charles Larson's introduction to Black No More (1931; reprint, New York: Collier Books, 1971), pp. 9-15. Larson completely misperceives the purpose of Schuyler's satire, arguing that Schuyler has no sense of racial pride and that he advocates Crookman's solution, on a figurative level, for all blacks. Such a literal-minded response to the novel is comparable to that of many students of Swift, who thought the "message" of "A Modest Proposal" to be a new lesson in the culinary arts.

96. George Schuyler to HLM, 30 August 1930, NYP. As far as I know, Mencken's answer to Schuyler's request for an introduction has been lost. However, Schuyler refers to it in an unpublished letter that he wrote to Mencken, 18 September 1930, NYP. It is clear from Schuyler's remarks that Mencken refused to write the introduction because he did not want to be put in the position of patron. Although disappointed, Schuyler agreed: "One thing I am very anxious to avoid is patronizing. There has, I believe, been altogether too much of it, especially in work done by the darker brethren."


CHAPTER FOUR

This chapter contains sections that were first published in a form now thoroughly revised. See Charles W. Scruggs, ‘‘All Dressed Up But No Place to Go’': The Black Writer and His Audience During the Harlem Renaissance,’’ American Literature 48 (January 1977): 543-63.

1. For instance, see the chapter in HLM, Happy Days, entitled “Rural Delights.”


4. See Ernest Boyd, H. L. Mencken (1927; reprint, Folcroft, Pa.: Folcroft Press, 1969), pp. 14-15. Boyd quotes at length from a Baltimore Evening Sun article called “On Living in Baltimore,” 16 February 1925. Mencken also expressed similar views to those expressed in Boyd’s book in “New York,” Smart Set 72 (September 1923): 138-43, and in “New York,” Baltimore Evening Sun, 26 July 1926. In this last article, we see a side of Mencken which is absent from the Mencken who writes for the Smart Set or the Mercury, the small-town lad who loathes the canned goods of the big city. “Who, indeed, can escape the race’s ancient nostalgia for trees, green fields, cows, horseflies, the song of the thrush, the soft earth underfoot? When it comes on in New York it engenders only homicidal moods. The town is made solidly of steel and concrete. The only sweet scents that it knows come out of bottles. It is so artificial that even the grass in its so-called parks looks like embalmed sauerkraut.”

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9. Santayana first used the expression "the genteel tradition" in a speech that he gave at the University of California at Berkeley on 25 August 1911. The title of his talk was "The Genteel Tradition in American Philosophy." See Wilson, *Genteel Tradition*, pp. 3, 4.


12. It was Bourne who pointed out this possibility to Brooks. See James Hoopes, *Van Wyck Brooks* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1977), p. 124. After the Great War, Brooks began to lose his optimism concerning America's future—that it was soon to become a real culture, that it would no longer remain a "vast Sargasso Sea" of "unorganized vitality." In 1922, he published an essay called "The Literary Life"—it appeared in Harold Stearns's *Civilization in the United States* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1922)—and here he specifically attacked the American reading public whose unimaginative and unsympathetic response forced real artists into mediocrity. He quoted Dreiser's rebuke of Jack London, who never wrote to excel but only to sell, because "he did not feel that he cared for want and public indifference" (p. 82). In the 1920s, Brooks increasingly focused on the "ordeal" of the American writer who lived in an environment that failed to nourish him. See *The Ordeal of Mark Twain* (1920) and *The Pilgrimage of Henry James* (1925). Only in the 1930s, after a mental breakdown, did he begin in his books to celebrate America's literary past.


14. Sherman Paul, *Randolph Bourne* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1966), p. 31. Also, see John E. Smith, *Royce's Social Infinite: The Community of Interpretation* (New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1950), chap. 5. Paul does not mention that the expression "the Beloved Community" had its origin with Royce, though I am very much indebted to his excellent pamphlet on Bourne. The phrase "the Beloved Community" was to become a favorite of Mumford's as well. See *The Story of Utopias* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1922), pp. 50, 64, 298.


22. Ibid., p. 207.
23. Patrick J. Gilpin, “Charles S. Johnson: Entrepreneur of the Harlem Renaissance,” in *The Harlem Renaissance Remembered*, p. 217. Also see *When Harlem Was in Vogue*, pp. 95, 125-26: David Levering Lewis argues that Johnson was the real power behind Locke’s throne, that the editor of *Opportunity* magazine personally chose Locke to edit the *Survey Graphic* issue that became the genesis of *The New Negro*. Although all this is quite true, once Locke took on the mantle of royalty he put his own aesthetic stamp on the materials he assembled for *The New Negro*.


25. The following discussion is a condensed version of a paper that I gave at an MLA meeting in December 1978.


27. It is entirely possible that Jean Toomer introduced Mumford’s writings to Locke. In late 1920 and early 1921, Toomer wrote two emotionally intense letters to Locke. He told Locke that he had been reading Van Wyck Brooks, Randolph Bourne, and Waldo Frank, and that these authors shed light upon specific problems that concern black people. Brooks’s categories of puritan and pioneer seem to explain a certain kind of behavior among us, he said. We are so busy trying to lead both a utilitarian and a moral life that we don’t see those forces that draw us together as a people. “We need something to cement us,” he said prophetically, “and that something can only spring out of a knowledge, out of certain fundamental facts which we share in common. It is to the lack of such a basis that I largely attribute our failure to get together in the past.” After *Cane*’s publication (1923), Toomer came to reject the need for racial cohesion that he so eloquently outlined to Locke. His own attitude toward himself as a Negro took an ambiguous turn, resolved only, if then, by his adopting the mask of the “American” artist. (See Charles W. Scruggs, “Jean Toomer: Fugitive,” *American Literature* 47 (March 1975): 84-96.) Nonetheless, around the time that he wrote Locke (circa 1920), as he said in his unpublished autobiography, he met Lewis Mumford (“the first flesh-and-blood writer to enter my life”), and since Mumford’s theories about the city sprang from the Brooks-Bourne-Frank platform, Toomer may later have passed Mumford’s writings on to Locke as he had those of the other members of the “little American renaissance.” See Jean Toomer to Alain Locke, 23 August 1920, 26 January 1921, in Alain Locke Papers, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University. For Toomer’s memory of Mumford, see Toomer Collection, Fisk University Library, hereafter referred to as TC.

28. In this light, it is significant that Locke also deleted from the *Survey Graphic* a sketch by Rudolph Fisher which shows a Negro peasant terrified by the chaos of Harlem. The story focuses on a migrant worker, Jake Crinshaw, who leaves the rural South to find work in Harlem, there to meet one frustration after another. The story ends with Jake juxtaposed against the vast backdrop of the city. “He looked up at the buildings. They were menacingly big and tall and close. There were no trees. No ground for trees to grow from. Sidewalks overflowing with children. Streets crammed full of street-cars and automobiles. Noises, hurry, bustle—fire engines” (p. 646). The last scene hardly shows the Negro to be at one with his new environment.

34. HLM, *Prejudices* 2, p. 87.
36. HLM, “Art and the Mob,” Baltimore Evening Sun, 8 May 1922.


38. Locke, “Art or Propaganda?,” p. 12.


42. Paul Oliver, Screening the Blues: Aspects of the Blues Tradition (London: Cassell & Company, 1968), pp. 6, 7. These statistics are no doubt underestimated because they don’t include Paramount’s mail-order line with its large sales to southern rural blacks. It is also significant that when the Depression hit in the 1930s, it hit the poor blacks the hardest, and hence the bottom dropped out of the Race Record business. Now people were so desperate that even music was no longer considered a necessity. See Giles Oakley, The Devil’s Music: A History of the Blues (London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1976), p. 172.


44. See Berthoff, Ferment of Realism, pp. 287-98. Berthoff suggests that the best writers of the 1920s freed themselves from the cultural provincialism of the previous decade. They no longer asked, “How can I be American and real?” but “How would Flaubert have done it, or Balzac, or Jules Laforgue, or Mann or Joyce or . . . Dante or Shakespeare or Catullus?” (p. 298). In this sense, the Great War and the European experience liberated the American artist from being too preoccupied with his audience. On the other side of the ledger, Malcolm Cowley has amusingly described the aesthetic squabbles that followed in the wake of his generation’s return from Europe. Instead of doing battle with the American public, they fought among themselves, often over the most petty principles. The “little American renaissance” had degenerated into a kind of civil war in Lilliput. See Exile’s Return (1934); reprint, New York: Viking Press, 1961), pp. 171-96.


52. Walter White to E. R. Merrick, 8 May 1924, NAACP Files.
53. HLM to Walter White, 16 October 1923, NAACP Files.
54. Walter White to HLM, 17 October 1923, NAACP Files.
55. Walter White to Eugene Saxton, 19 August 1923, NAACP Files.
56. Walter White to ELM, 17 October 1923, NAACP Files.
57. Walter White to L. Golden of Alfred A. Knopf, 26 September 1925, NAACP Files. Walter White sent Knopf a check for $3.20 and told Golden to keep the $114.00 he had coming to him from the sale of the novel. Thus, his total loss was $117.20. In his other dealings with the branches, he worked out an arrangement whereby he would not be liable if the novel failed to sell.
58. Walter White to L. Golden, 31 July 1925, NAACP Files. White told Golden that the only thing to be done with the Des Moines branch was to turn its account over to an attorney. White had written all three branches, asking them to pay for the copies they received, but to no avail. They simply could not sell White's novel even at the discount (50 cents off the $2.50 list price) that Knopf gave them.
60. Claude McKay to James Weldon Johnson, 30 April 1928, JWJ.
61. Jean Toomer to Mae Wright, 4 August 1922, TC. A few months earlier Toomer had dramatized this theme in his unpublished play "Natalie Mann."
62. Jean Toomer to Sherwood Anderson, 29 December 1922, TC.
64. Langston Hughes, "These Bad New Negroes: A Critique on Critics," *Pittsburgh Courier*, 9 April 1927. His second article appeared in the *Courier* a week later, 16 April 1927.
66. Ibid., 4 May 1929.
67. Ibid., 31 July 1926.
68. Ibid., 13 October 1928.
72. Ibid., 8 (December 1926): 380.
74. Ibid., 9 (July 1927): 229. My analysis draws from both this article and the previous one.
75. Lewis, "New Year's Message," p. 27.
77. Ibid., 7 (June 1925): 230.
79. "It was a matter of experience," Thurman wrote in his unpublished autobiography, "that he had and would suffer from the hands of the black mob as much if not more than he had and would suffer from the hands of the lily whites." Wallace Thurman, "Notes on a Stepchild," JWJ.
81. Claude McKay to Walter White, 15 June 1925, NAACP Files.
CHAPTER FIVE

2. In an unpublished article called "The Negro in Contemporary Literature," White singled out Mencken's "Sahara" as one of four factors responsible for a revolutionary change in recent American literature—that of seeing "the Negro in a new light." NAACP Files.
5. Walter White to HLM, 13 April 1922, NYP.
6. Eugene Saxton to Walter White, 16 August 1923, NAACP Files.
7. Walter White to Eugene Saxton, 23 August 1923 and 19 August 1923, NAACP Files.
10. Walter White to HLM, 11 October 1923, NAACP Files.
11. Ibid., 5 October 1923.
14. Knopf was Hugh Wiley's publisher, and Doran had just published Cobb's *J. Pindexter, Colored* (1922), a novel about the ubiquitous clever servant.
15. HLM to Walter White, 19 December 1923, NAACP Files.
17. Walter White to HLM, 2 September 1924, NAACP Files.
18. Walter White to Carl Van Doren, 14 December 1923, NAACP Files.
28. We have discovered only in the last two decades that black musical forms, be they spirituals, folk songs, or the blues, are quite sophisticated in both their meanings and the responses they evoke from their audience. See Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977); Charles Keil, *Urban Blues* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966); and Imamu Amiri Baraka, *Blues People* (New York: Morrow, 1963).
30. Ibid., 28 September 1927.
32. Quoted on editorial page, *Chicago Defender*, 8 October 1927.
37. See especially DuBois's review of Claude McKay's *Home to Harlem* and Taylor Gordon's *Born to Be*, in *Crisis* 35 (June 1928): 202; *Crisis* 37 (April 1930): 129.
40. The success of DuBose Heyward's *Porgy* (1925) inspired many of these sketches, as did *Nigger Heaven*. A partial list of them follows: Jake in *Home to Harlem* (1928); Jimboy in *Not Without Laughter* (1930); Little Augie in *God Sends Sunday* (1931); Gabriel Prosser in *Black Thunder* (1936); Sam in *One Way to Heaven* (1932); the Reverend Pleasant Green (a Mencken portrait if there ever was one) in *Quicksand* (1928); Shine and Linda in *The Walls of Jericho* (1928); Banjo in *Banjo* (1929); Bita in *Banana Bottom* (1933); Emma in *The Blacker the Berry* (1929); the Reverend John Pearson and Lucy in *Jonah's Gourd Vine* (1934); and Janie and Tea Cake in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937).
42. Mencken often insisted that criticism was not "constructive," but see "The Embattled Literati," *Mercury* 20 (June 1930): 154, in which he admits to holding the view mentioned above.
46. Wallace Thurman, "This Negro Renaissance," unpublished MS, JW1, pp. 1-2; probably the first draft of "Negro Artists and the Negro."
50. Langston Hughes to Wallace Thurman, undated letter (circa 1926), JW1.
53. Locke, "Art or Propaganda?", p. 12.
54. Walter White to Claude McKay, 6 November 1924, NAACP Files. Thurman dramatizes White's generalization in his portrait of Locke (Dr. Parkes) in *Infants of Spring*.
56. George Schuyler to HLM, 16 June 1931, NYP.
CHAPTER SIX

5. HLM, "Consolation," *Smart Set* 64 (January 1921): 138.
7. HLM, "The Anatomy of Ochlocracy," *Smart Set* 64 (February 1921): 141.
8. HLM, "Reflections on Prose Fiction," *Smart Set* 68 (May 1922): 141.
12. Ibid., p. 70.
18. Ibid., p. 292.
21. This list does not include playwrights such as Ridgely Torrence, Eugene O'Neill, and Paul Green, who were using the Negro as the central figure in their dramas. A still useful bibliography for white authors who wrote about blacks during the 1920s is Elizabeth Lay Green's *The Negro in Contemporary American Literature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1928). When *Nigger Heaven* was published in 1926, Joseph Hergesheimer wrote Van Vechten and confessed his desire to write "a short novel" about Negroes, and other American writers such as F. Scott Fitzgerald and Ellen Glasgow also wrote to Van Vechten to express their theories on the impact of urban civilization upon the Negro. See Joseph Hergesheimer to Carl Van Vechten, 23 August 1926, NYP; F. Scott Fitzgerald to Carl Van Vechten, undated (circa August 1926), NYP; Ellen Glasgow to Carl Van Vechten, 28 July 1926, NYP.
35. DuBois and Locke had Harvard Ph.D.'s; Brawley, an M.A. from Harvard; Fauset, an M.A. from the University of Pennsylvania; and White, a B.A. from Atlanta University. In addition, Fauset had studied at the Sorbonne, and DuBois and Locke had attended the University of Berlin.
41. HLM, *Prejudices* 3, p. 205. I am indebted to Frank Turaj for this insight and for these two quotations from Mencken. See his excellent "Mencken and American Literature," pp. 61, 132.
42. Walter White to Rudolf Fisher, 12 March 1925, NAACP Files. Also, see HLM to Walter White, 7 October 1923, NAACP Files. This is the letter to which White refers.
43. Walter White to A. S. Frissel, 20 September 1924, NAACP Files.
45. Walter White to W. P. Dabney, 19 January 1925, NAACP Files.
46. Walter White to HLM, 22 November 1920, NAACP Files.
47. Walter White to Eugene Saxton, 19 August 1923, NAACP Files.
48. Ibid., 23 August 1923.
49. Walter White to Professor Webster, 14 April 1925, NAACP Files. White made a similar defense of his novel to Eugene Saxton in his letter of 23 August 1923, NAACP Files.
51. White was clearly indebted to Charles Chesnutt's *The Marrow of Tradition* (1901) for this element of the plot, though he was also thinking of Stribling's *Birthright*. Unlike Peter Siner, Kenneth Harper will not have a spiritual relapse when he returns home.
53. Walter White to HLM, 30 August 1924, NAACP Files.
54. J. A. Rogers to Walter White, 9 January 1925, NAACP Files.
55. Walter White to J. A. Rogers, 12 January 1925, NAACP Files.
56. Wallace Thurman, "Notes on a Stepchild," unnumbered page, JWJ.
58. Turaj, "Mencken and American Literature," pp. 82-84.
60. DuBois ran this symposium through the months of March, April, May, and June 1926.
64. Alain Locke, "The Negro in American Literature," *New World Writing* (New
York: New American Library, 1952), p. 28. Locke uncharitably does not mention Mencken at all, either in the context of realism in American literature or in the context of the southern renaissance. Locke is not unusual in this respect; by 1952, most critics belittled Mencken's influence.

66. Locke implied a preference for "pure art values" in The New Negro (see p. 52) and made his implication explicit in "Art or Propaganda?" See p. 12.
68. In his novel, Home to Harlem (1928; reprint, New York: Pocket Books, 1965), McKay was constantly reminding his reader of Harlem's capacity to turn men into beasts: "Who's the Wolf?" timidly Zeddy's girl asked.
Zeddy pointed out Billy.
"But why Wolf?"
... Zeddy laughed. "'Causen he eats his own kind" (p. 49).
At the end of the novel, Zeddy figuratively tries to devour his best friend Jake, and at that point, Jake knows that it is time to leave town.
72. Locke, "Art or Propaganda?,” p. 12.
73. Jean Toomer, "The South in Literature." TC.
74. Walter White to A. Bernd, 24 March 1925, NAACP Files.
75. On 23 July 1922 Toomer wrote to Frank about the latter's intended revision of Our America, in which Frank planned to include the Negro: "Those unspeakable palefaces who have been championing Birthright, and who have been clamoring for the black folk in our literature, will hate you for it." TC.
77. That the color of the black man's skin was the mark of Cain is part of American folklore. See Winthrop Jordan, White over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812 (1968; reprint, Baltimore: Penguin, 1969), pp. 242, 416. On the other hand, as James Baldwin has noted, "In the same way that we, for white people, were the descendants of Ham, and were cursed forever, white people were, for us, the descendants of Cain." See The Fire Next Time (1963; reprint, New York: Dell, 1964), p. 59. Also, see Levine, p. 85-86.
78. Jean Toomer to Waldo Frank, 12 December 1922, TC.
79. Jean Toomer to Sherwood Anderson, 18 December 1922, TC.
80. Jean Toomer to Waldo Frank (circa 1923), TC.
81. Esther does bear a remarkable resemblance to Alice Hindman ("Adventure") and Kate Swift ("The Teacher") in Winesburg, Ohio.
82. Jean Toomer to Waldo Frank (circa 1923), TC.
83. HLM, "Holy Writ," Smart Set 72 (October 1923): 144.
85. Walter White to Eugene Saxton, 19 August 1923, NAACP Files.
88. Fauset herself was to create characters who shared Carter's racial makeup. Peter Bye in There Is Confusion (1924) discovers a blood link to an aristocratic white family who used to be the owners of his ancestors. Anthony Cross bears the cross of miscegenation in
Plum Bun (1929), and Laurentine Strange (The Chinaberry Tree, 1931) is a product of a liaison between a white Southern colonel and a mulatto mistress. In Comedy, American Style (1933), the tragedies of Teresa and Oliver are due to their mother’s obsession with whiteness. Yet while skeletons appear in the closets of these fictional families, there is no sense, as there is in Faulkner, that the sorrows are irrevocable. In three of her four novels, the dilemma is neatly solved by a happy ending. Peter Bye waves goodbye to his white inheritance; Anthony Cross forgets his troubled ancestry when he finds true love with Angela Murray, and Laurentine is no longer “strange” when she marries Dr. Denleigh. Fauset always gave the impression that even the most irrational of situations look better in the light of day. Only in Comedy, American Style did she leave the warmth of sunlight for the power of darkness, but even here people are what they are, and they can be explained in rational terms.


98. Charles S. Johnson to Carl Van Vechten, 10 August 1926, JWJ.

99. To Carl Van Vechten must go the credit of resurrecting Chesnutt during the 1920s. In his review of Locke’s The New Negro and in his own Nigger Heaven, he held up the older writer as a model for the present generation of black writers. See “Keep A-inclin’ Along,” p. 59; Nigger Heaven, pp. 104, 176-79.


102. One might argue that John Pearson in Hurston’s Jonah’s Gourd Vine, the preacher in Johnson’s God’s Trombones, and Reverend Johnson in One Way to Heaven were all written with Mencken’s criticism in mind. Each portrait is of a man more complicated than he appears to be. Pearson is both a womanizer and a man of God; Johnson’s preacher is a myth maker and a teacher of homely truths; the Reverend Johnson, a tough fighter and a kindly Christian. As Zora Neale Hurston told Johnson, “being a good man is not enough to hold a Negro preacher in an important charge. He must also be an artist. He must be both a poet and an actor of a very high order, and then he must have the voice and the figure. . . . the light that shone from GOD’S TROMBONES was handed to you, as was the sermon to me in Jonah’s Gourd Vine” (quoted from Robert Hemenway’s Zora Neale Hurston [Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977], p. 194).

103. Three portraits of the Negro preacher that fit the Menckenian mold are James Baldwin’s puritanical Gabriel Grimes (Go Tell It on the Mountain), Ralph Ellison’s blind
Homer Barbee (Invisible Man), and Richard Wright’s complacent preacher in Bigger’s cell (Native Son).


EPILOGUE

1. Young, Black Writers of the Thirties, p. 93.
3. Ibid., p. 265.
5. HLM to Walter White, 6 December 1943, in Forgue, Letters, p. 479.
6. Mencken attacked Christianity’s relationship to slavery in two books that he wrote in the 1930s. He argued that slavery was not abolished by Christians; on the contrary, institutional religion was often the chief supporter of the “peculiar institution.” It took men of the Enlightenment, most of them non-Christians and many of them atheists, to lead the charge for freeing the bondsmen. The muddle-headed Christians only followed the lead of these men (who had acted as morally responsible individuals) when the attack on slavery could be made into a “cause.” Mencken’s reasoning on this matter explains why he could be against both slavery and the Abolitionist movement. See HLM, Treatise on Right and Wrong (London: Kegan Paul, 1934), pp. 30-35, 48, 49. Also, see HLM, Treatise on the Gods (New York: Knopf, 1930), p. 29. In Treatise on Right and Wrong, Mencken typically took an unsentimental attitude toward slavery; it was primarily an economic affair, and when it was no longer profitable, slavery ended. However, he never squared this observation with his strong implication that if it had not been for the moral promptings of the Enlightenment men, slavery might have continued.
8. HLM to George Schuyler, 8 November 1939, 18 November 1940, JWJ.
9. Ibid., 10 May 1939, NYP.
10. Ibid., 15 January 1945.
12. Ibid., 15 January 1945, NYP.
15. HLM to Kelly Miller, 5 December 1939, NYP. Mencken wrote this letter to Miller three weeks before the latter’s death (29 December 1939). Mencken had obviously been upset by Bilbo’s scheme, because he mentioned it to Miller as well as Schuyler.
16. Ibid., 22 September 1939.