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Title: Claude McKay's Vision of Community in the African Diaspora: A Fresh Take on *Home to Harlem* and *Banjo*

Abstract approved:

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This research examines the literary and philosophical dimensions of the African American Harlem Renaissance, beginning with the historical milieu of the early twentieth century. A social movement that became known as Uplift and the so-called Cabaret Movement emerged as important, competing literary and social ideologies within the Renaissance. W.E.B. Du Bois served as the most well-known advocate of Uplift, which recommended that blacks acquire a university education and adopt a refined middle or upper-class lifestyle. The thesis explicates the Uplift themes of *The Crisis* magazine, which he edited from 1910 to 1933, his novel *Dark Princess* and other select writings. The Cabaret novelists and poets offer an alternative to Uplift by highlighting the lives of lower class African Americans and their jazz clubs. Claude McKay established himself as a major spokesman for the Cabaret Movement with his groundbreaking novel *Home to Harlem*, positively featuring working class and nightlife characters and venues. McKay's novel *Banjo,* set in Marseilles, features a small band of men hailing from throughout the African Diaspora, living a meager but rewarding existence. Here, McKay's counter Uplift vision becomes clear, because the lives of the Marseilles group serve as a metaphor for future egalitarian and self-directed societies.

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Claude McKay's Vision of Community in the African Diaspora: A Fresh Take on *Home to Harlem* and *Banjo*

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I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University Libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

Michael A. De Jesus, Author

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INTRODUCTION

Although the 1920's Harlem Renaissance of African American literature, music and fine arts is often portrayed as a unified cultural movement with the twin goals of building a raised ethnic consciousness and achieving social liberation, its many voices not only overlapped but also offered what were often very different visions of a liberated future for both the black individual and the black community at large. The concept and movement called racial Uplift, for example, was a major Renaissance focus and positioned itself as a movement of black American intellectuals who wished to rehabilitate the Negro image. The Renaissance promoters of racial Uplift sought to model a bourgeois lifestyle for the masses of impoverished African Americans and, in so doing, raise the status of blacks in the eyes of white Americans. Historian Kevin Gaines writes, "Uplift came to mean an emphasis on self-help, racial solidarity, temperance, thrift, chastity, social purity, patriarchal authority, and the accumulation of wealth" (2). Thus, with the exception of the high value often placed upon racial solidarity, the Uplift project promoted values that were central to American white cultures. Uplift tried to refashion the image of black Americans by portraying only successful and positive examples of individuals who had attained a high level of educational or financial distinction.

Allison Davis and Countee Cullen are examples of figures that furthered the Renaissance Uplift's image enhancing mission. Davis was a prominent African American anthropologist who taught at Dillard in New Orleans and then at the University of Chicago. In 1924, he wrote that black writers had been writing about what he considered the underbelly of black life. He

particularly objected to the use of jazz, cabaret or sexuality as subjects by black novelists and poets, because he felt that these subjects perpetuated racial stereotypes (Vogel 4-5). The refined and popular Renaissance poet Cullen epitomizes this ideal. Always photographed in a three-piece suit with a visible Phi Beta Kappa key dangling on his chest, he was the icon of African American education and sophistication (Powers 661). The penchant for Uplift at times even crossed political lines of left or right. In 1924, the radical black socialist journal *Messenger* published an editorial column stating, "A race that hums operas will stay ahead of a race that simply hums the 'blues'" (Editorial 71), confirming that Uplift was not necessarily about an exact politics per se but rather often about black racial representation.

The Renaissance voices in favor of the Uplift project were many and strident, but there were equally strong figures pulling against the ideology. The work of the celebrated poet Langston Hughes ran counter to Uplift. His poetry often references the themes and settings of Harlem nightlife. The titles of his poems, such as "Harlem Night Song," and "To Midnight Nan and Leroy's," signal that he refers to bar and cabaret settings and nightlife in general. Hughes does not shy away from sexual themes either, as in his poem "The Cat and the Saxophone (2 a.m.)" he writes, "You like liquor, don't you honey"/ . . . Sure. Kiss me/ Then let's . . . do it!" (Vogel 122-123). Claude McKay's bestselling 1928 novel, *Home to Harlem*, which frankly portrays black working and underclass life, famously provoked W. E. B. Du Bois to write in *The Crisis* that after reading it he felt as if he needed a bath (Home 359). Hughes had a much different reaction to McKay's novel; he wrote McKay that it was "the finest thing we've done yet" (Vogel 222-223). I will return to both Du Bois and McKay later in this introduction to lay out my argument surrounding the significant differences and implied cultural futures of their mutually exclusive visions for black identity during the era.

In addition to Hughes, other important Renaissance figures such as Zora Neale Hurston and Wallace Thurman looked upon *Home to Harlem* as a hopeful sign that "the politics of normative racial Uplift" were diminishing (Vogel 4-5). Thurman's 1929 novel *The Blacker the Berry: A Novel of Negro Life* shed a light on the heretofore-taboo subject of intraracial color prejudice and sexism affecting African American women, particularly the high value placed on light skin and the denigration of dark-skinned women. *Home to Harlem* helped pave the way for Hurston's 1937 novel *Their Eyes were Watching God*, about small town life from the viewpoint of a black woman. Her lyrical writing unflinchingly views the sexism, violence and hypocrisy of the African American community. These writers applauded *Home to Harlem* because its publication encouraged their desires to create art without regard to whether the finished product provided a good piece of propaganda that put their race in a good light and to not shy away from exploring controversial or negative aspects of black life in their works.

Alternatively, Alain Locke provided a strong voice for the Uplift project and functioned as one of the midwives of the Renaissance, announcing its existence with his landmark 1925 work *The New Negro: Voices of the Harlem Renaissance.* Locke graduated from Harvard and was the first black Rhodes Scholar at Oxford. At Oxford, the University of Berlin and the College de France in Paris, he studied philosophy, Greek, and modern literature. At the time of *The New Negro's* publication, Locke was assistant professor of philosophy at the historically black college Howard University in Washington, D.C. Locke had published little after his doctoral dissertation. Then, a series of fortunate events culminated in the opportunity to compile a "special number," for the *Survey Graphic* publication that was to highlight the figures of the Renaissance. Locke seized upon the project with gusto (Rampersad, Introduction xi-xiii). Later, *The New Negro* included most of the articles.

Because Locke believed there are no pure genetic strains, he concluded that racial categories are artificial constructs created by scholars in the social and physical sciences. He acknowledged the existence of social groupings by writing, “As long as you have groups of people knitted together by a kinship feeling . . . you have what is the germ of race sense” (Locke, The Political 20). In some senses, Locke’s idea that there are no essential differences between the races makes sense, because humanity shares most common genetic elements. On the other hand, he focused on the rapid integration of U.S. blacks into the mainstream society, and he showed no interest in the development of close ties with the worldwide African diaspora or the study or preservation of African American culture. With these ideas as a motivation, he put together *The New Negro* with an eye to providing evidence that black artists, writers and intellectuals were capable of work equal to those corresponding in white society. In his view, blacks provide evidence of their worthiness by excelling in professional and artistic endeavors, rather than by showing solidarity or engaging in political mobilization.

With this in mind, *The New Negro* is a showcase of writing from most of the major novelists, poets, and intellectuals of the Renaissance movement as of 1925—including Jean Toomer, McKay, Countee Cullen, Du Bois and many others. The highlighting of these major Negro talents is an admirable accomplishment, but scholars have detected an undercurrent of conscious reorientation on Locke’s part. For example, Barbara Foley notes, “Alain Locke’s *New Negro* 1925 . . . is commonly held to have wrested leadership of the New Negro movement away from the radicals and placed it firmly in the hands of the culturalists” (vii). These Renaissance culturalists proposed to illustrate their creative, artistic and aesthetic sensibilities to a disbelieving white audience and to provide role models of achievement the black masses could aspire to emulate. In this way, some culturalists tried to shift focus away from radical politics, or

even efforts to dismantle discriminatory laws. Rather, these writers highlighted cultural products such as poetry and literature. David Lewis theorizes that this shift occurred as a frightened reaction to the Red Summer of 1919, (xxiv), discussed below. At any rate, the main objective of the culturalists was to prove that African Americans were refined, intelligent and civilized and thus ultimately worthy to receive the full benefits of U.S. citizenship.

Locke leaves no doubt that promotion of black cultural elitism is one of his goals as editor of *The New Negro.* On the first page of his Foreword to the volume, he writes, “In these pages, without ignoring either the fact that there are important interactions between the national or the race life . . . we have nevertheless concentrated upon self-expression and the forces and motives of self-determination. *So far as he is culturally articulate, we shall let the Negro speak for himself”* (emphasis added) (xxv). He advocates self-determination and self-expression but only for the culturally articulate Negro. In his introduction to the 1992 edition of *The New Negro*, Arnold Rampersad notes, “To the young [African-American] journalist George Schuyler . . . Locke was the ‘high priest of the intellectual snobocracy’” (xix). As to what Schuyler termed“snobocracy,” Locke’s treatment of blues and jazz music, both integral to black culture of the time, is a case in point. In *The New Negro,* Locke chooses to ignore the explosion in sales of blues records. The compilation includes a chapter on jazz music by the *Amsterdam* and *Messenger* journalist James A. Rogers, which ends with an admonishment to “try to lift and divert it [jazz] into nobler channels” (224). Locke wrote the chapter, entitled “The Negro Spirituals,” in which he writes of the spirituals as, “broken words, childish imagery, peasant simplicity, [and] lies” (200). Later in that section, he compliments spirituals for “a tragic profundity of emotional experience” (200). Yet, a page later Locke pronounces, against the overwhelming evidence of the importance of the black church at the time, which he terms “the

folk religion that produced them is rapidly vanishing" (201). These are a few examples of Locke's elitism concerning some of the most important subjects to black people of his day--blues and jazz music, spirituals and hymns and their Christian faith as lived out in the black church. The volume splendidly highlighted black literary talent, but its tone and content advanced an elitist perspective on traditional aspects of black culture and social life.

A rapidly changing social milieu and critical historical events during the era catalyzed these disputes about representation, and although Uplift was influential by 1918, the impact of WWI and the Russian revolution brought other forces to bear on the Renaissance. The influence of black soldiers returning from WWI posts in Europe to their homes in the United States cannot be overstated. Political and military leaders championed World War I by invoking lofty ideals about democracy and freedom, but when the weapons finally became silent, many viewed the effort as a tragic waste of precious human life. Returning combat-weary soldiers began to question the rhetoric of continual progress (Hutchinson 6), and black veterans often returned home from serving their country with a newly acquired impatience for change.

The members of Harlem's 369th Army Regiment were the first African Americans to see combat in WWI, since the military assigned the majority of black soldiers to work in supply-related tasks. Prior to leaving for France, the city and the Army prevented the 369th from marching alongside white soldiers in New York's sendoff parade down Fifth Avenue. They stood on the sidelines with the other spectators (Nelson 30-31). During basic training in the South, they were subject to constant discrimination and violence at the hands of civilians, police forces and their white brothers in arms (Nelson 32-44). In the segregated U.S. military of the time, African Americans were not allowed to train or fight alongside U.S. soldiers of other races, so once on the battlefield they fought alongside French soldiers and under the command of

French officers. French civilians and military personnel welcomed them and treated them as social equals (Nelson 61). Memories of fair treatment on French soil would be bittersweet upon return to bigoted discrimination in the U.S.

Racist leadership within the U.S. military engaged in massive attempts to undermine and sabotage black troops by providing them with "inadequate housing, clothing, equipment, or training" (Nelson 148). In spite of all these drawbacks, the 369th demonstrated uncommon valor, sustaining the highest casualty rate of any other regiment in World War I (Nelson 203-204). German troops aptly nicknamed them "the Hellfighters" because they refused to allow the Germans to take them prisoner and fought to the death rather than give an inch of ground (Nelson 104). The French military leadership greatly respected the Hellfighters, and at the war's end the French Army award the Croix de Guerre to 170 individuals in the 369th (Nelson 205). Once back home in the U.S., General Pershing gave many Distinguished Service Crosses to other regiments but only one medal to the 369th—to Lt. George Robb who had been injured four times (Nelson 213-214).

The varied experiences of African American veterans upon their return home to the U.S. demonstrate the fallacies of the Renaissance's Uplift project. Once on U.S. soil, black veterans faced the bigotry of Jim Crow in the South where, after Reconstruction, the antebellum Slave Codes had transformed into the Black Codes. In the North, Blacks found both de facto and legalized discrimination in retail establishments, housing and employment (Janken, African American 1). These circumstances barred the veterans from achieving the middle class status hoped for by those who supported Uplift. In spite of the many obstacles placed in their way, some black veterans rose to new levels of success, such as WWI Lieutenant Rayford Logan who became a scholar and Howard University Professor (Janken, African American 3). He was also

an integral part of the Renaissance's International Movement, further explained below. Another member of the 369th, Noble Sissle, went on to achieve greatness in music after the war. He was part of the team that produced the first all-black musical on Broadway in 1921, called *Shuffle Along*. In Paris, in 1925, his band played a show specifically written for them by Cole Porter. In addition, in 1952 he was the first black disc jockey on a major station, WMGM in New York (Nelson 236).

Nevertheless, many of the fearless veterans of the 369th did not fare well and ended their lives in unwarranted disgrace. For example, life did not turn out well for Sergeant Needham Roberts. On the battlefield, surrounded by German soldiers, he fought his way out against all odds and came home a war hero (Nelson 97). He had difficulty finding and sustaining employment due to lack of opportunity for black workers in New Jersey and the pain from an unhealed bayonet wound. In 1924, he was arrested for wearing his uniform after the three month period allowed by law, and arrested and jailed on a trumped up sexual abuse charge in 1928. One evening in 1949, after an arrest for "bothering" a girl in a Newark theater, he and his wife hanged themselves; his wife left a suicide note saying that her husband was innocent of any crime and that they wanted to go together. For some black veterans, the stresses of combat followed by the racial battles at home, proved to be too much to tolerate.

The worst blow occurred in the summer of 1919, after the WWI armistice, known as Red Summer because of the blood that flowed. Whites rioted in many places, including "Longview, Texas; Knoxville, Tennessee; Omaha, Nebraska; Elaine, Arkansas; and Norfolk, Virginia. By the end of Red Summer, "seventy-seven black men had been killed by mobs, ten of them veterans" (Nelson 262). Several black veterans died in the South, in attempts to stand up for their rights. For example, in Sylvester, Georgia, veteran Daniel Mack was jailed and then lynched by a mob

because he told a white man that he served his country in France and was "not going to take any crap from anybody anymore" (Nelson 262). On July 19, white veterans entered black neighborhoods in Washington D.C. beating up people at random (Nelson 263). In Chicago, white swimmers killed a young man swimming on the white side of the pool. When authorities refused to indict anyone for the murder, six days of violence erupted in which 23 blacks and 17 whites died (Vogel 263).

Some of the violence was due to white anger at blacks attempting to enter the workforce. In Chicago, white stockyard workers killed 23 black workers in July 1919 (Maxwell 35). The conflicts did not end with the Red Summer. In 1921 in Tulsa, Oklahoma, black World War I veterans armed themselves and went to the county jail to prevent the lynching of a black man. In retaliation, white rioters went into the black neighborhood of Greenville and burned over a thousand black homes in two days (Nelson 263-264). If African Americans intended on asserting their rights or attempting to enter mainstream American life in the manner envisioned by the promoters of Uplift, they quickly learned that it was a going to be an uphill battle.

In response to the Red Summer, McKay penned his iconic poem, "If We Must Die," which was published in the *Crusader.* The poem quickly became the rallying cry of blacks all across the country. In part it reads, "If we must die let it not be like hogs/ Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot/ While round us bark the mad and hungry dogs, / Making their mock at our accursed lot. / If we must die—let us nobly die" (Nelson 265). McKay grasped the dangers that awaited a black man who attempted to make a way for himself with a semblance of dignity intact.

In addition to the effects of World War I and its aftermath, blacks in the U.S. were influenced by an increasingly Pan African and international influence. The influx of Caribbean

immigrants into the U.S., the process of decolonization overseas and the Russian revolution profoundly influenced African Americans of the period. Black soldiers returned home from France and blacks from the Caribbean entered New York in record numbers during the 1920's. These individuals created a global atmosphere, particularly in Harlem, where heretofore there had been little thought of the outside world. Black soldiers had experienced equality in France, and blacks from the Caribbean arrived with tales of colonial oppression. The world had suddenly become smaller. As Michael A., Chaney explains:

> The "New Negro Movement" bloomed within a global network of . . . cultural nationalisms and folk revivals. In the first two decades of the twentieth century, pulses of decolonization rippled throughout Asia, the Caribbean, and Ireland, catalyzed by China's 1901 Boxer Rebellion . . . . (41)

African American intellectuals felt solidarity with colonized peoples and others in the worldwide struggle for freedom and independence and were encouraged by news of their political progress.

Rayford Logan, a black army lieutenant in WWI mentioned above, was one of the leaders of postwar Pan-Africanism (Janken, African American 2). Once home, he received his Ph.D. from Harvard (Janken, Rayford W. Logan 35, 71). He taught at Howard University for thirty years and was a Pan-African scholar. In his article "The International Status of the Negro," Logan discusses the interconnectedness among African Americans, French-speaking blacks from Africa and the Caribbean, and Africans (Logan 2) and presents an overview of the conditions of blacks in Africa and in the diaspora outside the United States, but his main point is to give a critique of the African policies of the European Powers and the U.S. For instance, he writes there should not be "a repetition of what took place in Haiti, where more than three thousand Haitians

were killed by American marines," (Logan 36) which is one of his many censures of U.S. policies regarding blacks in Africa and elsewhere.

Marcus Garvey, a Jamaican by birth, founded the Universal Negro Improvement Association, in an attempt to connect the welfare of blacks across the diaspora. In 1916, he traveled to Harlem and made his home there. He gave fiery speeches to crowds across the United States advocating pride in African heritage and that African Americans return to Africa. Yet, he was convicted of mail fraud and imprisoned in 1922, possibly for political reasons (British Broadcasting Corporation). In 1920, Garvey presented a document at a Universal Negro Improvement meeting entitled, "Declaration of the Rights of the Negro People of the World," in which he outlines the grievances of the African diaspora, including segregation and discrimination in the U.S. It concludes with a recommendation that a transnational flag with "the colors, Red, Black and Green, be the colors of the Negro race" (Garvey 95). It is easy to understand how Garvey's far-reaching vision and ideals proved to be so inspiring to African Americans by providing them with a new racial identity and pride and the feeling of belonging to something bigger than themselves. Garvey's "back to Africa" and delineation of a distinct African diaspora greatly increased the international perspective of Renaissance blacks, particularly in Harlem. Yet, his unique philosophy represented a distinct movement that ran counter to the politics of Uplift. Garvey, along with figures such as McKay, shared a grasp of the important role to be played by the worldwide African diaspora.

The notion of African Americans connection to the worldwide African diaspora took hold at the grass roots level. This phenomenon resulted in the popular response of New York blacks to Emperor Haile Salassie I's 1936 appeal to the League of Nations. Salassie requested assistance from the League when Benito Mussolini's military forces attacked Ethiopia. In his appeal, he

eloquently pleads for military and financial help for his country and his people (Selassie 104-110). Knowledge of Ethiopia's predicament galvanized black New Yorkers, where tens of thousands rallied for Salassie throughout Harlem and Madison Square Garden. Yet, it was all for naught; the League of Nations did nothing (Northrup 21). The intensity of the protests shows that African Americans were beginning to feel solidarity with others in the African diaspora.

The Russian Revolution of 1917 and the government's promises of a society based on racial equality made the Soviet Union appear to be a beacon of hope to many blacks suffering discrimination in the United States. Vladimir Lenin and Leon Trotsky, as leaders of the new Soviet government, immediately proclaimed a society based on total equality, without regard to race or nationality. Many radical Renaissance African Americans, such as Cyril Briggs, founder and editor of the 1920's communist periodical *The Crusader*, embraced communism, reasoning that the Soviet Union would succeed in ending racism, and that the Communist Party USA would assist the U.S. in following suit (Maxwell 36-37). As Hutchinson writes, "Marxism . . . provided an intellectual matrix of international dimensions in which not a few 'New Negroes' participated" (4). In hindsight, it might appear that these idealistic Renaissance radicals were hopelessly naïve. Yet, they drew hope from the fact that the czarist regime of Russia had been overturned. It showed that major change was possible. After 300 years of oppression, African Americans grasped at hopeful signs wherever they could find them. Many of the most renowned figures of the Renaissance looked to communism or the Soviet Union as a source of help for the troubles of African Americans, including novelists Ralph Ellison, Richard Wright and poet Langston Hughes.

In his 1952 novel *Invisible Man*, Ralph Ellison devoted the bulk of over 200 pages to his unnamed black protagonist's bittersweet experiences with the "the Brotherhood", based on his

own conflicted experiences with the Communist Party USA (Ellison 296-534). Richard Wright wrote several important short story collections and novels, including his 1940 novel *Native Son*. Wright supported communism and the Soviet Union for most of his life, even going so far as to sign a statement in the 1938 *Daily Worker* in support of Stalin's purges (Maxwell 163), until he publicly disavowed communist politics with his 1944 article, "I Tried to Be a Communist" (Wright). Langston Hughes was attracted to communism by the early Soviet stance on equality among the races (Maxwell 134). Yet, in 1953, at the McCarthy hearings, Hughes denied ever having been a communist and after the hearings distanced himself from communism (Maxwell 201). All of these figures hoped in the promises of communism and the Soviet Union. They wanted to believe that justice and equality could exist somewhere.

These historical movements and events ultimately pushed two figures into the center of ideological tensions within the Renaissance. Du Bois became the most respected voice of Uplift, and McKay, became what this paper will argue as the most important and promising opposition to it. Throughout the Renaissance, the term "New Negro" continued to denote an idealized image of a refined and educated, middle class Negro, as embodied in Du Bois. He was born in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, where he attended schools in which the vast majority of students were white and his Congregational church was exclusively white. Outside of his immediate family, Du Bois did not socialize with blacks (Gates Jr. and Oliver, Introduction xiv). His experience with the black community during his formative years stood in marked contrast to that of McKay, as I will explain below. Du Bois was socialized within a white, middle class milieu, whereas McKay was socialized in a black, rural milieu. These differences in early life experiences shaped their divergent outlooks on African American social life. Du Bois advocated a white and bourgeois cultural lifestyle, which was similar to the larger environment of his

youth. Alternatively, McKay grew up among black rural people and believed in the goodness and strength of the poor and working class members of the African diaspora.

Du Bois's first major contact with ordinary African Americans did not occur until he taught school during his undergraduate years at historically black Fiske University in Nashville. At that time, it was customary for students to spend their summers teaching in the remote Tennessee hill country. There, for the first time in his life, he found himself immersed in the lives of impoverished, rural blacks in the Jim Crow South, as he describes in his groundbreaking work, *The Souls of Black Folk*. At times, he writes with poignant insight, as when he returns after ten years absence to see what has become of his former students and their families. There, he writes of feeling sadness when he finds that some have died and most are faring even worse than before (51-54) Yet, at other times, his descriptions seem to indicate that he considers his rural black students to be almost a separate species from himself, and his tone sounds more like that of an objective anthropologist than of a person living among his own people. For example, he writes, "And then the big boys, the hulking Lawrences, the lazy Neills, unfathered sons of mother and daughter" (48). He describes the mother of several of his students as, "the thin, slovenly mother, whose face was pretty when washed" (49). And again, he describes the black section of town, "three—or four room unpainted cottages, some neat and homelike, some dirty" (50). He does not acknowledge the possible reasons for the dirty environment—that the "thin, slovenly" mother was probably undernourished and exhausted or that the cottages were unpainted because the cost of paint put it beyond their reach.

After graduation from Fiske University, Du Bois went on to Harvard where he eventually obtained his doctorate. He undertook doctoral studies in History and Economics in Berlin for a time but lacked the fellowship funding to continue. While in Berlin, he developed a lifelong

fondness for the German language and for writers such as Goethe (Gates Jr. and Oliver, Introduction xvi-xvii). As a young man, Du Bois planned a life in which he would be perceived as a prominent figure. For instance, while studying in Berlin, at the age of twenty-five, he wrote his goals as, “to make a name in science, to make a name in literature, and thus to raise my race” (Du Bois, Against Racism 29). Du Bois’s later self image is indeed that of a famous and successful man of letters, living in comformity with a bourgeois American lifestyle.

Du Bois’s acceptance of bourgeois values partially explains his promotion of middle and upper middle class blacks in the pages of *The Crisis* magazine during the time he was editor (1920-1934). In the magazine, he showcased black middle and upper middle class success stories in business, the professions and education. He included essays on Negro life and issues, editorials on lynching of blacks and articles explicating and promoting Marxism and the Soviet Union. During Du Bois’s editorial control of *The Crisis* magazine, a February 1933 article appeared. Entitled, “The Soviet Film”, by Louise Thompson, it describes twenty-two prominent black individuals, including Langston Hughes, who had been invited to the Soviet Union to collaborate on a film. In it, Thompson writes that the Soviet Union is “the one country in the whole world which gives them [Negros] complete equality” (37). It is quite understandable that the African American literati of the time eagerly seized upon the fact that the Soviet government enthusiastically welcomed them into their country for projects, since opportunities and encouragement were often sparse and hard-won in the U.S.

Because of such material, Du Bois is sometimes thought of as a revolutionary Communist, but he did not join the Party until the age of 92 (Kihss). As noted above, articles that were admiring of the Soviet Union were published in *The Crisis* under his editorship, but he remained publicly on the fence almost his entire life. Even at the age of 72, he wrote, “I could

never regard violence as an effective, much less necessary step to reform the American state" (Du Bois, Dusk of Dawn 142). In 1918, he cancelled his Socialist Party membership in support of President Woodrow Wilson and dramatically announced his support for the war effort in a 1918 editorial in *The Crisis* in which he writes, "Let us, while this war lasts, forget our special grievances and close our ranks shoulder to shoulder with our own white fellow citizens and the allied nations that are fighting for democracy" (Du Bois, Close Ranks 111). This was a loud and clear call for African Americans to put aside their injustices and utilize all their efforts in support of the U.S. government and military.

Du Bois's convictions about the urgent need for blacks to obtain a university education and to pursue upward mobility blinded him to the obstacles facing Booker T. Washington in the South. In 1901 Du Bois writes,"A Critical Assessment of Booker T. Washington," in which he characterizes Washington's goals as "industrial education, conciliation of the South, and submission and silence as to civil and political rights" (Du Bois, A Critical Assessment 80). In light of the oppressive Jim Crow laws and the rampant lynching of black men of the post-Civil War South, Washington's 1881 establishment of the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama is a monumental achievement. Had Washington publicly insisted upon civil and political rights, as Du Bois and the N.A.A.C.P. recommended, no training institution would have been established, and his life would have been in constant danger. Du Bois had been raised in Massachusetts, where whites were generally supportive of his gifts. He lived in a relatively sheltered environment while in the South, as a university student at a black institution. He had not experienced life as a slave, as had Washington; therefore, he could not appreciate the tremendous obstacles Washington faced in the South and how careful he had to be about his public remarks. Washington, who had been born a slave and reared in the South, surmised that the most pressing

concern for Southern blacks was to attain a higher degree of literacy and learn a trade in order to rise above the endless cycle of poverty caused by the Southern sharecropping system. Du Bois agreed that training in the trades should continue but felt that training of leadership to "advance" the race in bourgeois values should be the top priority, as part of his Uplift ideology.

As early as 1903, Du Bois was espousing what is termed by Adolph Reed as an elitist philosophy (431), in which working and poor Negro people should be led by their more educated and talented brothers. Du Bois's written comments about Washington correspond well with his views concerning the formation of an elite corp of black leaders. In 1903, he contributed an essay, along with Booker T. Washington and several other prominent black leaders, for a book entitled, *The Negro Problem: A Series of Articles by Representative American Negroes of Today.* The article was entitled "The Talented Tenth," Du Bois's' term for the educated and professional class of Negro, a phrase for which he became famous. In it, he asserts that, "the Talented Tenth as they have risen among American Negroes have been worthy of leadership" (34). In another part of the essay he writes, "[The college-bred Negro] is, as he ought to be, the group leader, the man who sets the ideals of the community where he lives, directs its thoughts and heads its social movements" (54). The main ideas of the article are that the most intelligent blacks need access to a university's liberal arts curriculum to train them to lead their people, in order to "raise the Negro as quickly as possible in the scale of civilization" (59). In the article, Du Bois puts forth his argument that throughout world history the few educated and exceptionally talented and capable members of society lead and civilize the majority (35-37). Thus, he writes his critique of Washington in *Souls of Black Folk*, "The question then comes: Is it possible, and probable, that nine millions of men can make effective progress in economic lines if they are . . . allowed only the most meagre (sic) chance for *developing their exceptional men?* (Italics added) (54). Du

Bois's philosophy gave him a sort of intellectual myopia that rendered him incapable of seeing that Washington was trying to administer to the need of the greatest number of black men. In addition, his concept of elite leadership left no room for the notion that working class or poor people could manage their own affairs, govern themselves or independently create meaningful lives and societal institutions.

A large percentage of the photographs, images and articles in *The Crisis* magazine, under the editorial guidance of Du Bois, exemplify the process of racial Uplift, with particular focus on the rehabilitation of the Negro's image. Even a cursory viewing of any issue of *The Crisis* magazine during the period of Du Bois's editorial leadership reveals that he considered the highlighting of prominent African American academics, professionals and business people to be one of the primary functions of the periodical. This was his way of providing role models for Negros and proving to the white population that Negros could be successful. In many ways, this was an admirable undertaking, which would have served as a beacon of hope to the majority of American blacks living in grinding poverty. Alternatively, it could also illustrate Du Bois's tendency toward elitism.

At first glance, admiration of the bourgeois ideals and lifestyle would seem to contradict Du Bois's end-of-life decision to join the Communist Party. Reed offers a theory about how Du Bois melded his seemingly contradictory espousals of elitism and Marxism. He writes, "As a core principle of Bolshevism, the Party stands above the proletariat, represents its collective will, and thus constitutes a true universal subject . . . ." Further, he writes, "the ruling circles within the Party . . . are . . . composed overwhelmingly of intellectuals and intelligentsia" (Reed 450). Du Bois's' class elitism can thus be seen as a compatible adjunct to his admiration of Soviet-style Marxism.

Yet, the New Negro was only an image. As Henry Louis Gates explains, "[J]ust as *utopia* signifies "no-place," so does 'New Negro' signify a black person who lives at no place, and at no time . . . . Rather it is a "will to power, to dare to recreate a space by renaming it, despite the dubiousness of the venture" (The Trope 132). Thus, Gates posits the function of the "New Negro" as a theoretical construct meant to renovate and reconstruct the images of the "Old Negro"—the Old Negro, who was subjugated first under slavery and later under Jim Crow laws in the South and under de facto discrimination in the North. As a part of "Uplift", then, members of the educated black elite, the New Negros, were to shepherd the illiterate masses of black folk into the middle and upper classes.

In contrast to the quixotic goals and problematic contradictions of Du Bois's theories and lifestyle, McKay was a seasoned world traveler and open-minded thinker who tended to be more inclusive in his vision of a new twentieth-century black identity. He had an early, decided interest in Russian communism, met Trotsky and was on hand to witness the new Soviet state, which he thought to be full of promise, at least in its beginnings. He himself lived in poverty for most of his life as a writer, with the exception of the period immediately after the publication of his best-selling novel *Home to Harlem*, his only financially successful work. Despite its success, his socioeconomic status rarely rose above working class life. He was born in 1890 in the Jamaican town of Sunny Ville, an impoverished village in a beautiful rural setting. His parents, like most Jamaicans, were descendants of African slaves. Unlike many in the village, McKay's parents owned the family farm. For the time and the place, his family was well off because they had moved beyond subsistence farming and were able to take some cash crops to market (Cooper 6-7). The father, Thomas, was very religious, a senior deacon in the local Baptist church, who strictly disciplined his children; McKay and his siblings were especially close to their mother,

who sided with the children in disagreements with their father and was more loving toward them (Cooper 9).

At around the age of seven, it was determined that McKay should go to live with his married brother UTheo, who was a teacher in a community just outside Montego Bay, in order for UTheo to take charge of his education (Cooper 11). This move proved to be crucial in the formation of the author's character, because UTheo, though teaching at a religious school and serving as the church choirmaster (C. McKay, My Green 18-19), was privately a free thinker tending toward agnosticism, whose home was filled with a variety of books. *In My Green Hills of Jamaica*, McKay writes that he read works by "Spinoza, Shopenhauer, Kant and Berkeley" and comments, "Now I read the freethinking books with greater interest and saw and thought of life solely from the free thought angle" (18). UTheo inculcated in McKay the critical thinking skills and the tendency to challenge conventional ideas, which were to play such an important role in McKay's political views and in his novels. At the age of 17, in 1907, he met Walter Jekyll, who was destined to exert a great influence upon him just as UTheo had done. Jekyll was a Jamaican from "an old upper-class family" (Cooper 23) in England who happened to wander into the humble dwelling where McKay was apprenticed. He immediately expressed an interest in McKay's poetry. News spread of McKay's poems, which the local newspaper, *The Daily Gleaner,* published (Cooper 23-24). This was the beginning of McKay's literary career.

In 1912, McKay left for America, hoping to establish a career and a literary voice (Cooper 51). He planned to study at Booker T. Washington's Tuskegee Institute. Upon arrival, he disembarked in Charleston, South Carolina and immediately confronted the South's rigid system of segregation and disenfranchisement of its black citizens. In addition, he found little intellectual challenge at Tuskegee and the militaristic atmosphere repelled him (Cooper 63-66).

Yet, when Washington died in 1915, McKay wrote a poem, “In Memoriam: Booker T. Washington.” In part it reads, “gone: you are gone, / Death’s hand has torn you from your trusting race, / and O! We feel so utterly alone” (Cooper 66). As late as the 1930s, McKay cited Washington as an example of what Negros could accomplish (Cooper 387). In this, McKay stood in sharp contrast to Du Bois, who served as Washington’s most public and vocal opponent. Du Bois characterized Washington’s concessions with Southern leaders, necessary to allow training of blacks in the trades so they could earn a living, as servile conciliation with racism.

Nevertheless, McKay could not tolerate Tuskegee and next attended Kansas State University from 1912 to 1914. There, a group of socialist students working their way through college befriended him. In them, he found other intellectuals, who were also from modest backgrounds with whom he could socialize and freely discuss his developing ideas about politics (Cooper 68). Like the influences of UTheo and Walter Jekyll, the favorable impressions of socialism McKay formed at Kansas State would play an important role in his future political writings and thoughts.

During this time in his life, McKay published a poem in the *Liberator* and became acquainted with Max Eastman, the chief editor. They would remain friends until McKay’s death. They both shared an admiration for the Soviet revolution, coupled with a controversial (to Communists) endorsement of informal leadership methods exemplified by the International Workers of the World (IWW), with its “syndicalist” lay representation scheme. In addition, Eastman and McKay held the same opinions that art is not a propaganda tool for Uplift. As Cooper explains, “Eastman took the place that Jekyll had occupied in McKay’s life: patron, friend, confidant, and sympathetic critic” (92-95). Throughout his life, patrons and mentors would take the place of his distant father.

McKay's developing ideology had set him on the road to being something of an iconoclast as far as his political philosophy. Though he greatly admired the Russian Revolution and its leaders, he never officially joined the Communist Party U.S.A. His politics included a complex amalgam, with anarchism making up a principle element in the admixture. McKay joined the International Workers of the World in 1921. The IWW members, known as "the Wobblies," supported socialism. While they admired communism and the Soviet Union, the Wobblies promoted syndicalism rather than a centralized, hierarchical form of government. The concept of syndicalism, as promoted by IWW leader Eugene V. Debs and as understood by the general membership, envisioned worker-led organizations. Under syndicalism, there would be no professional political class. Rather, a group, such as a section of factory workers, elected a worker to represent the group at meetings. The worker would have no term of office, and the group elected a different worker when they needed the next representative. This process aimed to disburse representational power throughout the group. This was a completely horizontal structure of government and it was an idea that McKay enthusiastically supported. In fact, when he traveled to the Soviet Union, he tried to encourage syndicalism when he spoke to government leaders such as Lenin. McKay used as his model the syndicalist Jewish Bund system, practiced in early Soviet days by the factory and worker's unions in Russia (Holcomb 169-170).

In the winter of 1921, McKay sailed for New York using funds from British supporters (Cooper 122-126). McKay had kept in touch with Max and Crystal Eastman while in London and they hired him as an associate editor on their New York newspaper, *The Liberator,* in the winter of 1921. At this point in his life, McKay was supportive of Soviet Russia, as was *The Liberator.* The paper regularly reported on Russia and Lenin. Notable communist sympathizers, such as Charlie Chaplin and E. E. Cummings, often dropped by publisher's offices (Cooper 138).

McKay published forty-two poems in *The Liberator* between 1919 and 1923, and he wrote articles explaining his political views, such as “How Black sees Green and Red,” published in June 1921, in which McKay writes,

> In spite of a professional here and a businessman there, the maintenance of an all-white supremacy in the industrial and social life . . . places the entire race alongside the lowest section of the white working class. They are struggling for identical things. They fight along different lines simply because they are not as class conscious and intelligent as the classes they are fighting. (20)

Early on, McKay understood social struggle as not only concerning racial issues but also in terms of oppression of the poor and working classes of all races.

At this time, McKay was socially involved with many important literary and political figures of the Harlem Renaissance. In particular, he wanted to become acquainted with Du Bois, because he had been impressed and influenced by *Souls of Black Folk.* As Cooper explains, “. . . like many who met him, McKay found Du Bois too aloof and formal for any genuine friendship to develop between them. At a large social gathering, McKay studied Du Bois from a distance. He took note of his proper three-piece suit and his rigidly unfriendly manner and decided against introducing himself, feeling that they would have nothing in common. Besides, they were ideologically at odds, as mentioned previously. Du Bois had briefly joined the Socialist party in 1912, but he had soon left it to support Woodrow Wilson’s first candidacy [for president]” (141).

In August of 1922, McKay resigned from *The Liberator* due to tensions with other staff. In particular, he felt that since the population was ten percent black, the paper should devote ten percent of its articles to black issues. The other members of the editorial staff felt that to do so might threaten the paper’s funding from its mostly white supporters. McKay’s beloved Harlem

was feeling oppressive to him. He had lost a good job that he enjoyed, and he was tired of battling racism in the United States. On a positive note, he had just published *Harlem Shadows*, which received critical acclaim but produced poor sales (Cooper 157-158).

In September 1922, he left for Russia to attend and cover the Communist Party's Fourth Comintern. Upon arrival, McKay was in danger of becoming homeless, because of the American communists' antagonism against his anarchist and syndicalist sympathies. Eventually, the intervention of visiting members of the Japanese Communist Party and the adulation of the Russian people saved him. He was a popular favorite. Everywhere he went in Moscow crowds cheered him, at one point even lifting him up onto their shoulders and jubilantly carrying him about. Of his warm reception by the Russian people, he writes, "I met with this spirit of sympathetic appreciation and response prevailing in all circles in Moscow and Petrograd . . . When Max Eastman and I tried to bore our way through the dense crowds, that jammed the Tverskaya Street in Moscow on the 7th of November, I was caught, tossed up into the air, and passed along by dozens of stalwart youths" (C. McKay, Soviet Russia 63). The Soviet leadership took notice of this, and McKay's troubles during his Russian stay were soon over (Cooper 175). He received a seat of honor at the Comintern meetings. When the day came for his speech, as originally recorded in volume 3 of *International Press Correspondence*, on January 5, 1923, he spoke plainly, stating,

> The situation in America today is terrible and fraught with grave dangers. It is much uglier and more terrible than the situation of the Jews and peasants under the Tsars . . . The Socialists and Communists have fought very shy of the race problem because there is a great element of prejudice among the Socialists and Communists of America. They are not willing to face the Negro question. In associating with the comrades of America, I

> have found demonstrations of prejudice on the various occasions when the White and Black comrades had to get together and this is the great difficulty that the Communists of America have to overcome. (2)

Throughout his stay and after the Comintern had concluded, McKay continued to be something of a celebrity. Leon Trotsky sent him on a grand tour of Soviet military organizations, and he wrote for the Soviet press, for which he received high fees (Cooper 183-185). The Soviet government commissioned McKay to write a book, which he entitled *Negroes in America*. In this book, he outlined the history of blacks in America, their current situation in the North and South, U.S. class divisions and racism in its labor unions. He included sections on Negro art and Negroes in sports (C. McKay, Negroes in America). His book, though written in Marxist terms, is not so strictly ideological as to be unreadable. It is not one of McKay's best works, but it is historically significant.

In May 1923, McKay left Russia bound for Germany. He published three articles on his Soviet experiences for *The Crisis*, for which Du Bois paid him. His funds were low, and he wrote to his American friends, such as Arthur A. Schomberg, asking for books and money. He traveled to Paris extremely low on money and, for the first time in his life, seriously ill and had to enter the hospital where a French doctor informed him he had syphilis. McKay became extremely depressed, with good reason. At the time, the treatment for syphilis was equal to the disease. Medicine knew little about syphilis, and the cure was to poison the patient with mercury or arsenic (Cooper 199-200).

In early 1926, he began working on *Home to Harlem*. Some stories he had written were useful as a starting point. About completing *Home to Harlem*, in *a Long Way from Home*, McKay writes, "I knew the unskilled Negro workers . . . by working with him as a porter and

longshoreman and as a waiter on the railroad. I lived in the same quarters and we drank and caroused together in bars and at rent parties. So when I came to write about the low-down Negro, I did not have to compose him from an outside view" (174). Then, he journeyed to Paris and finally caught a break by acquiring William Bradley as his literary agent. Bradley, whose office was in Paris, was the preeminent representative of American expatriate writers. McKay lived in Paris at the same time as Gertrude Stein, Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald but was not on friendly terms with any of them. In *A Long Way from Home,* he talks about his experiences. He describes briefly seeing Ernest Hemingway from a distance while at a party with his friend Max Eastman (190-194). He had an opportunity to meet Gertrude Stein but did not approve of what he considered the "cult" following surrounding Stein and so refused to visit her (191). Unfortunately, I believe that the lack of social interaction between McKay and noted white authors in Paris was also the result of the fact that the white expatriate community of literati was not aware of McKay's talent. In May 1927, he completed the novel, and sold it to Harpers. The publisher advanced $500, which he quickly spent on his necessities. However, it proved to be a bestseller, so eventually he received royalties (Cooper 225-234).

In May of 1927, he traveled to Marseilles to write *Banjo.* For McKay, Marseilles' squalid waterfront area symbolized the state of Western Civilization, particularly that of its lower classes struggling to survive (Cooper 211). In the novel, he does not merely mirror this broken state of affairs, but suggests a redemptive alternative in which his characters band together to meet their basic needs and create meaning outside of the materialistic paradigm of capitalism and bourgeois values. He looked with affection on the people who made up the African diaspora, eking out a living on the seamy waterfront area known as "the ditch." Yet, on his return, some had died or been imprisoned, and by the time he completed his novel in the summer of 1928, he had tired of

Marseilles' poverty and tragedy. He journeyed to Barcelona to reread and finalize *Banjo,* which was a critical success but brought him little financial reward (Cooper 237-238).

By the time McKay wrote his autobiography *A Long Way from Home,* in 1937, he had completely tired of American communists criticizing his life and his work. For instance, in reaction to an article in *The New Masses*, in which a critic asserted that *Home to Harlem* "had no class-conscious action," to which McKay angrily responded that his protagonist, Jake, had refused to become either a scab or a pimp, which was class consciousness (C. McKay, A Long Way 174-175). McKay wrote his autobiography ten years prior to his death and the content indicated substantial changes in his ideology. Besides his frustrations with communist critics, McKay had disavowed communism as a system, particularly in its Soviet version. Cooper illuminates his decision process, writing, "He still considered himself a revolutionary, but he saw his dreams suborned, perverted, and destroyed by Stalin" (219). As early as 1943, with five years left to live, McKay began to contemplate joining the Roman Catholic Church, "for intellectual and social reasons" (Cooper 357). In particular, he liked the social justice program of the church and admired Catholic activist Dorothy Day. By the end of his life, he was thoroughly tired of communism and socialism, and his health was rapidly deteriorating. He found respite and comfort with the workers at Friendship House, a Catholic youth house in Chicago.

McKay's novels *Home to Harlem* and *Banjo* illuminate a political and philosophical stance opposed to the Renaissance Uplift project promoted by Du Bois, Locke and others. In contrast, McKay's "black-anarchist-proletarian" (Holcomb 169) ideology shines through his characters and settings, always envisioned in a transnational African diaspora. McKay's philosophy as exemplified in his novels is complex and defies simplistic categorizations. Holcomb notes that academia has difficulty in classifying McKay's works and in summarizing

the issue writes, "The McKay currently familiar to the world is an anomalous pastiche of frequently incompatible identities" (3). For example, some scholars view his Jamaican origins and long sojourns abroad as tarnishing his status as a Harlem Renaissance author. Yet, Caribbean creative voices were integral to the Renaissance. Chaney clarifies, writing that the Caribbean influx, "reached an apex in the mid-1920s, coinciding with the height of Renaissance activity and affecting the social milieu of Harlem dramatically" (46). It is likely that academics often have incorrectly perceived McKay's multifaceted identities as being incompatible, because it is difficult to fit him into oft-used categorizations for literature.

McKay's political and social thought, as illuminated in *Home to Harlem* and *Banjo,* is rich and layered. First, *Home to Harlem* is part of the Cabaret School, originally a pejorative label, which refers to works that refute traditional, middle class values and highlight a dynamic form of social interaction and a creative lifestyle. Second, his novels promote his syndicalist and anarchist values as well as his hopes for a productive transnational African diaspora that engages peacefully with all races. Finally, McKay used his novels as a counterpoint to the patriarchal, heterosexual family model of the racial Uplift project. In regard to *Home to Harlem* being part of the Cabaret School, Vogel writes that the Cabaret School "made use of criminal interruptions into the normative temporal order to imagine an afterhours time that critiques the clocks of bourgeois life narrative, [and] capitalist productivity," (132) and counters "the spatial logic of Uplift ideology" (132). *Home to Harlem* offers a vibrant alternative to Uplift ideology.

Yet, to categorize McKay as simply a Marxist poet and novelist would be an over-simplification that does not take into consideration his entire philosophy. Holcomb explains, "McKay was a cultural nationalist, the strident voice of black self-determination, while he was simultaneously an internationalist, a radical dedicated to Marxist-Leninist-Trotskyist cross-racial

revolutionary change" (6). In addition to all this, McKay was deeply committed to anarchy and subscribed to a political ideology that has been termed "anarcho-communist" and "syndicalist" (Nickels 3-4). *Banjo* and *Home to Harlem* appeared during a period characterized by the emergence of a more fluid conception of sexual orientation and an increased willingness to represent previously taboo sexual subjects in literary vehicles. This was due to rapidly shifting societal attitudes, especially among creative black individuals of the Renaissance. Gates famously writes that the Harlem Renaissance was "surely as gay as it was black" (The Black Man's Burden 235). Of McKay, Tyrone Tillery notes that one of McKay's romantic interests, bisexual writer and journalist Josephine Herbst, states that McKay was bisexual (12). Scholars have unearthed evidence for the "gay character of Harlem Renaissance authors" such as "Countee Cullen . . . Alain Locke, Richard Bruce Nugent [and] Wallace Thurman" among others (Vogel 5). Some of their personal correspondence documents the homosexuality of Countee Cullen and Alain Locke (Rampersad 333-338). Of McKay, Holcomb writes, "[H]is sexual difference unites with a Marxist-Trotskyist revolutionary internationalism and radical ethnic nationalism to be articulated as a transgressive force against reactionary, imperialist hegemony. McKay's black Marxism cannot be disentangled from his queer resistance" (12). These factors obviously place him in a tension with Du Bois's Uplift project.

Nevertheless, gay Renaissance figures Cullen and Locke were supporters of the Uplift program and eschewed radical politics, which seems to argue against the view that there is a direct connection between political or societal attitudes and stances and sexual preferences or orientation. Javier Reyes points out the difficulties with this position. He writes, "The more formidable challenge Holcomb confronts in his analysis is to elicit how queer representations interface with and enrich the black and the Marxist . . . . One struggles to find the subversive

erotomania Holcomb claims for these texts . . . . Too often, Holcomb ekes out queer representation ex nihilo" (Reyes). Within the censorship constraints of the time, McKay attempted to represent sexuality in an open manner. Holcomb suggests an inextricable link between McKay's sexual and political identities; this is a theory about which one could debate. In either case, McKay's open, freewheeling sense of black life, however, indeed allows a wider expression of sexual desire and practice; his novels demonstrate that he viewed as positive sexual couplings and relationships that could exist outside of the patriarchal, middle class constraints of Uplift.

In *A Long Way from Home,* McKay explores his life experiences and the fact that, though he never lost his idealism, he lost his faith in socialism and communism as answers to the problems facing humanity. Significantly, he makes no mention of his bisexuality or homosexuality. In *Code Name Sasha*, Holcomb dismisses both of these facts as being part of some sort of cover-up on McKay's part, as an attempt to whitewash his life to avoid government surveillance. I conclude that the work represents McKay's honest late-in-life assessment of himself and contains an accurate account of his beliefs.

J. Gosciak takes issue with Holcomb's assertion that a pronounced connection exists between McKay's sexuality and political beliefs. He writes, "[H]e [Holcomb] never fully explains, to my satisfaction, the trajectory from black subjectivity to queer Marxism" (763). This observation is similar to that made by Reyes. Interestingly, he also notes that Holcomb found the FBI surveillance files, which noted his sexual activities, to be a more reliable source about McKay than his autobiography, which is a debatable conclusion. McKay's sexuality and social concepts may have sabotaged his early attempt at married life and may have played a part in his critical attitude of the bourgeois life—particularly its "mandatory heterosexuality." Nevertheless,

in the final analysis, perhaps McKay wished for his work and social ideals to be his legacy, rather than his sexuality, at least as far as it becoming a more sensationalist aspect of his reputation as a writer.

In what follows I will explore the ways in which *Home to Harlem* and *Banjo* exemplify the author's unwillingness to accept the bourgeois values promoted by the architects of the Renaissance Uplift project, particularly as promulgated by Du Bois. For example, in Du Bois's 1928 novel *Dark Princess,* his black male protagonist leaves medical school due to racism and joins an international team plotting revolution. The team members are wealthy oligarchs and royals of color living in sumptuous luxury. Though the Romance novel is in the Fantasy genre, in many ways it represents Du Bois's dreams for an elitist society (Du Bois, Dark Princess). I will analyze the evidence provided by *The Crisis* periodical under Du Bois's' editorship and show how Du Bois pioneered the principles of class hierarchy that became such a prominent Renaissance stream of thought in his landmark sociological treatise of 1899 entitled *The Philadelphia Negro.* He studied Philadelphia's Seventh Ward, which was the city's black neighborhood and came up with four distinct social classes. The bottom two grades were three and four. He characterized grade three as being comprised of those working but not able to continuously keep themselves out of a state of poverty or want. Grade four he described as the "lowest class of criminals, prostitutes, and loafers," or the "submerged tenth" [the polar opposite of the talented tenth] (311). In contrast to Du Bois's clinical and derogatory terms for certain groups of individuals, McKay purposefully features characters in his novels who comprise Du Bois's' Grade Three, the working poor, who drifted in and out of poverty, and his Grade Four, the so-called "submerged tenth." Instead, McKay views the constant social and economic intersections of these two groups to be so ubiquitous as to make any distinction meaningless.

Rather than casting his characters as either “low class” or “criminal class,” McKay bestows upon them natures of a rich, classless complexity. For example, near the beginning of *Home to Harlem,* upon his arrival in Harlem Jake meets a comely black woman named Felice in a cabaret. After agreeing on the price for the pleasure of her company, he spends the night at her apartment (11-15). Immediately after departing in the morning, he discovers she has replaced the money he paid her into his pocket attached to a note that reads “Just a little gift from a baby girl to a honey boy” (16). They part company for most of the novel and reunite at the end when the novel reveals that Felice has a regular job and only engages in prostitution part-time and with men of her own choosing. The character Felice contains within herself attributes of both of Du Bois’s’ class Grades Three and Four, as described above.

I contend that Claude McKay’s novels *Home to Harlem* and *Banjo* explicate his unique vision of the Renaissance by illuminating what Gary Edward Holcomb refers to as his “black anarchist-proletarian *becoming identity*,” (169) which McKay proposed should be lived in the transnational African diaspora continually creating and renewing itself at the grassroots level. Moreover, the building blocks of McKay’s anarchical style of communism are discernible in *Banjo.* For example, the protagonist, Banjo, along with other itinerant and often homeless black men, combine talent and instruments to form a band in which to play in cabarets and make money. Yet, Banjo often views the profits of their performances as secondary to the interchange of energy that occurs when playing music, in which the lines between performer and audience are blurred or nonexistent. Throughout the novel, the main characters combine their funds and lodgings to help each other when in need, in a highly individualized manner that speaks to McKay’s unique brand of Marxism (C. McKay, Banjo).

Home to Harlem reveals McKay's views about the ways in which Harlem's black urban proletariat subverted capitalist bourgeois values by inventing their own jazz and cabaret way of life. Though these venues were profit-making enterprises, the activities of the patrons and performers countered the Uplift movement's championing of capitalism, individualism and traditional sexual roles and mores. In addition, criminals and others in the "submerged tenth" played vital roles as their lives blended with those of the proletariat in the novels. In addition, I discuss how, in *Banjo*, McKay further explicates the complex ideological themes of *Home to Harlem,* and in addition portrays his hope for a transnational African diaspora developing and renewing an anarcho-communist, syndicalist ideology at the grass roots level.

CHAPTER ONE – W.E.B. DU BOIS'S NOVEL *DARK PRINCESS*

In this chapter, I explore the significance of Du Bois's novel *Dark Princess* and examine select issues of the 1928 *The Crisis*, published the same year as the novel. Both provide evidence of Du Bois's social philosophy. *Dark Princess* ostensibly promotes radical revolution with a love story in the background. I investigate the deeper meaning and intent underlying these overt elements For example, the novel illuminates the origins and implications of Du Bois's Eurocentric orientation and demonstrates his vague and uninformed perceptions of both the rural South and India. By not utilizing the philosophies of either Africa or Asia as bases for the novel, he indirectly shows his negative attitudes towards their cultures, particularly that of Africa. Even though *The Crisis* sometimes featured successful black women, I will posit that the characterization and plot of *Dark Princess* imply the author's disapproval of them. The novel indicates that he views women mainly as objects of beauty and as mothers and wives capable of augmenting the patriarchal family structure, a crucial element of a bourgeois lifestyle. The novel's love story implies that the world's "darker races" will be led by a messiah who results from the union of an African American and an Asian, and *The Crisis* often features photographs of light-skinned African Americans, which further suggests a belief that darker complexions and other African features should be eradicated through intermarriage with lighter-skinned people of color and with whites. Perhaps he envisions the ultimate miscegenation of the American black population.

In what follows, I discuss how the manner in which Du Bois researched the novel shows evidence of a possible naiveté about the level of support and understanding for the African American community forthcoming from members of India's progressive elite. His lack of research on and inexperience with the South, as exemplified by the novel, ties in with his break with Booker T. Washington, as mentioned in the Introduction. Du Bois experienced Jim Crow Tennessee as a student at a black college. He did not suffer the hardships of everyday black workers and tenant farmers. If he had, he would not have written about the South in such flowery language, as I detail below. Rather, the sources for much of the novel lie within the European and British Romantic tradition, and the novel's themes open a window into the author's adherence to the ideals and concepts of German philosophers such as Kant and Hegel.

Prior to a discussion of the ways the novel reflects Du Bois's system of thought, some general background on the novel will provide a good foundation for understanding. The sheer complexity of *Dark Princess* renders its analysis a daunting task. Yet, it contains important information. As Arnold Rampersad writes, "it [Dark Princess] deserves further scrutiny by anyone interested in taking a more exact measure of the range of Du Bois's interests and concerns," (161). Though Du Bois produced a considerable body of work, as Claudia Tate points out, towards the end of his life he revealed the novel as his favorite, (ix) indicating that he held the work in high esteem, perhaps even as a valued reflection of his public image and legacy. Tate summarizes the relationship between Du Bois and his favorite novel as she writes, "*Dark Princess* offered Du Bois an opportunity to fulfill in fiction . . . his greatest ambitions, dreams, and longings" (x). Because Du Bois viewed the novel in such a favorable light, we can assume its basic structural elements and imagery obviously held great significance for him.

Alain Locke accurately expressed the difficulty of evaluating the work in an undated and frank letter to Langston Hughes, which in part reads, "Tonight I have to do *Dark Princess* for [*New York Herald Tribune] Books.* God help me" (Tate xxiv). On the one hand, Locke felt obligated to give the work an honest review in order to sustain his literary reputation. Alternatively, he feared that if Du Bois judged his comments as too severe, he might so alienate him that Locke's writing would no longer be considered for publication in *The Crisis,* one of the major outlets for African American publications at the time (Tate xxv). Locke found good company in his reluctance and trepidation concerning his review of the novel. Its publication met with mixed reviews and sold poorly. Predictably, Allison Davis, in his 1928 review in *The Crisis,* wrote of the novel that it "has raised the dead weight of our stolid depression by propaganda at once eloquent and sane" (339). The historically black college Hampton Institute proved less positive and wrote in its review of Du Bois's novel that it attempted a search for black emancipation but did not effectively solve the issue of how to accomplish the task (339). Tate points to the attitudes of white reviewers as represented by the 1928 reviews in *The New York Times* and *New Republic,* the former of which characterized the novel as "flamboyant and unconvincing" (xxiv-xxv), while the latter called the characters "silly and improbable" (xxv).

In summary, the plot of *Dark Princess* follows. The novel features an African American protagonist named Matthew Towns. In the opening chapter, a racist dean proclaims that Matthew may not deliver the babies of white mothers, though an obstetrics rotation is a requirement in order for him to finish his medical degree. Disappointed and angry, Matthew departs for Berlin, Germany by ship and in a café there sets his eyes upon an Indian princess, whereupon her beauty astounds and enthralls him. She invites him to a dinner party at her sumptuous dwelling where he meets a revolutionary cabal composed of Asian, Arab, Chinese, Egyptian, Japanese and Indian

aristocracy. The members plan to overthrow governments and thereby rid the world of international white hegemony. The princess soon departs for India, and her assistants discourage Matthew from further contact. Matthew becomes a Pullman porter, working on the train as a kitchen helper and giving menial assistance to passengers and the workers plan a porter's strike. The Klan lynches his coworker, another porter whom Matthew has befriended. In retaliation, Matthew decides to blow up himself and Klansman when they enter a car but the princess boards that train car foiling his plan. Officials discover his plot and imprison him in Joliet, Illinois for an undisclosed length of time. Matthew then embarks upon a career in politics, planning to become a legislator in Indiana and marries a successful African American woman named Sarah Andrews who helps him with his career, but he soon becomes completely disenchanted with Sarah, Chicago and politics. The princess suddenly reappears as Matthew gives a speech to a labor union audience. They leave together, and become lovers. Then Princess Kautilya mysteriously suggests that they need to spend time apart and she heads to his mother's farm in Virginia. He and the princess correspond until she writes asking him to join her at the farm. Matthew divorces Sarah and heads for Virginia where he finds that the princess has given birth to his son. Surrounded by representatives of all religions, all present herald the boy as the heir to the princess's royal line and future leader of what Du Bois terms the "Darker Races" of the world.

Understandably, the novel caused confusion. The complete title is *Dark Princess: A Romance*, which indicates that the work should be categorized in the Romance genre and this, coupled with the novel's elements of fantasy, satire and operatic drama, must have left reviewers in general, and the African American intelligentsia in particular, at a loss as to what to make of the work. Only a small part of the novel contains writing in a realistic form, and I discuss the

significance of this section below, as it directly relates to Du Bois's attitude towards African American women.

Du Bois chose to write the majority of the novel using the traditional Romantic framework and an imaginative symbolism. As an erudite scholar, Du Bois undoubtedly knew of the long history of Romance. Sydney Bufkin describes the tradition of classical Romance as having begun with the medieval tradition of courtly poems about aristocratic heroes on a quest, often including a romantic interlude. The Arthurian legends come under this heading, and in the nineteenth century, the Romance genre again resurfaced in novels such as Walter Scott's historic adventures (64). The medieval courtly tradition of Romance emphasized chivalry towards women, and in the first portion of the novel, Matthew preserves Princess Kautilya's honor from the besmirching advances of a white American, a definite nod to medieval Romance (Bufkin 64-65).

Du Bois appears to have utilized a Romantic basis for his novel because it provided an excellent structure for showcasing the themes of the German Idealist School. Vermonja Alston, who refers to Du Bois as a "Germanist," writes that Du Bois's doctoral studies, from 1892-1894 at the Friedrich Wilhelm University in Berlin, profoundly influenced his views (3). His status as a Germanist greatly influenced his philosophy of art, as shown in his well-known work, "Criteria of Negro Art," which he partially presented in a speech at the NAACP annual conference in June of 1926 and later published in *The Crisis* in October of the same year. In the article, Du Bois often utilizes the capitalized form of words such as Truth and Beauty. He writes, "Thus it is the bounden duty of black America to begin this great work of the creation of Beauty, of the preservation of Beauty, of the realization of Beauty . . . . The apostle of Beauty thus becomes the

apostle of Truth and Right" (Du Bois, Criteria). In such sentences, Du Bois sounds like a true disciple.

Reginald Snell writes that Johann Wolfgang von Goethe influenced the Idealist School of German philosophy. Early on in his career, Goethe began the movement of Romantic writing that lasted from approximately 1760 to 1850 but later eschewed Romanticism in favor of Classicism. Classicism emphasized order and reason, as an interpretation of the classical Greek philosophers and writers. The most influential spokespersons for the German Idealist School were George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Immanuel Kant and Friedrich Schiller. Schiller was especially influential in the areas of aesthetics and beauty. During the ten-year period in which Schiller composed his Letters, which I elaborate upon below, he and Goethe conversed almost daily while Schiller read Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* in installments. Schiller's works evidenced his original ideas, but Goethe influenced and inspired him (10). The following quote, from his "Simple Imitation of Nature, Manner, and Style," from *Der Teursche Merkur,* reflects many of Goethe's ideas about beauty, which complement those of the Idealists. Here, Goethe advocates a creative interpretation of natural beauty, rather than realistic images, preferring the imaginative rendering of romantic and spiritual beauty:

> But, more often than not, the artist finds this way of working [copying nature] too timid and inadequate. He sees a harmony between objects which he can only introduce into a single picture by sacrificing the particular: he finds it tedious to spell out what is in front of him according to the letter; he invents his own method, makes his own language to express what his spirit has grasped in his own way. (21)

Goethe's concepts, and the Idealists whom he influenced, about the value of subjective and impressionistic representation of beauty in works of art can be seen in Du Bois's novel, in the descriptions of his princess as well as in his poetic interpretations of the U.S. South and of India.

Here, it is necessary to provide a brief introduction to these German Idealist philosophers and how their concepts of aesthetics relate to *Dark Princess,* Du Bois's attitude toward art, and his social and political philosophy. Although Hegel, Kant and Schiller share some qualities, they diverge on many theoretical points. Yet, it is their commonalities that come to play in Du Bois's novel. Hegel's philosophy was, of course, highly influential to social thought and captivated many a scholar, most notably Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, and Du Bois was no exception to this. Hegel, in his *Introduction to Aesthetics,* writes that the "aim of art . . . ." consists in stirring "the human breast in its depths and manifold possibilities and aspects, and to deliver to feeling and contemplation for its enjoyment whatever the spirit possesses of the essential and lofty in its thinking and in the Idea—the splendor of the noble, eternal, and true" (46). In the same work, Hegel continues with a discussion of the importance of art's portrayals of "misfortune and misery, evil and guilt" (46). This latter theory partly caused Du Bois's negative reaction to McKay's novel *Home to Harlem,* mentioned in the Introduction above. Du Bois might have concluded that McKay's novel failed to portray the "noble, eternal, and true" and additionally inappropriately portrayed acts Du Bois deemed evil—such as gambling, sexual promiscuity and the idle pursuit of pleasure—as reasonable alternatives to Racial Uplift.

Further examination of Hegel's conception of art proves illuminating as to Du Bois's writing in *Dark Princess*. In *Introduction to Aesthetics,* Hegel writes about the passions and feeling, "the mitigation of the power of passions therefore has the universal ground in the fact that man is released from his immediate imprisonment in a feeling and becomes conscious of it

as something external to him" (49). Thus, an individual needs to view feelings objectively rather than acting upon them from a subjective viewpoint. Adherence to this philosophy caused Du Bois to strive for a calm, collected hero in his novel. *Dark Princess* portrays this genteel serenity in the person of protagonist Matthew Towns, who briefly expresses his outrage and fury but then soon represses it. When, after two years of study, Matthew finds himself thrown out of medical school due to racism, he threw papers into the face of the offending dean and "stumbled out" (4), after which he dramatically boarded a ship headed to Berlin and stood on the deck in a "cold, white fury" (3). He loses control of his emotions but quickly recovers and settles into a gloomy and angry silence.

Another German Idealist work that seems to have influenced Du Bois is Kant's 1790 treatise *Critique of Judgment,* which provided the initial foundation upon which Hegel constructed his own treatment of aesthetics (Karelis xviii-xx). Kant writes, "In order to distinguish whether anything is beautiful or not, we refer to the representation, not by the understanding to the object for cognition, but by the imagination . . . . The judgment of taste is therefore not a judgment of cognition, and is consequently not logical but aesthetical, by which we understand that whose determining ground can be no other than subjective" (37).

Du Bois's description in the novel of Matthew's impressions upon first seeing his princess illustrates the German Idealist's promotion of the subjective and imaginative appreciation of beauty. Friedrich Schiller writes about this concept in his 1795 work, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man.* In his introduction to the work, Reginald Snell sums up its major theme. He writes, "The whole burden of the argument in the Letters [which compose Schiller's work] is, in a single sentence, that Man must pass through the aesthetic condition from the merely physical, in order to reach the rational or moral" (12). In the work, Schiller writes:

> Though need may drive man into society, and reason implant social principles in him, Beauty alone can confer on him a *social character.* Taste alone brings harmony into society, because it establishes harmony in the individual. All other forms of perception divide a man, because they are exclusively based either on the sensuous or the intellectual part of his being; only the perception of the Beautiful makes something whole of him, because both his natures must accord with it. All other forms of communication divide society . . . (138)

The above quotation helps explain Du Bois's preoccupation in the novel with the fineness of his characters clothing, the beauty and grace of the princess and the rich and tasteful luxury of her abode. Schiller argues that even reason does not bring harmony into society, nor does it make a man whole; only the perception of the Beautiful can produce a whole man or a fully functioning society. The German idealists generally theorized the aesthetics of beauty and art and their sensual appreciation as being essential to the comprehension of rationality and morality. Perhaps Du Bois believed one must have a cursory understanding of these philosophical precepts of beauty in order to live a moral life. As a Germanist, Du Bois believed the correct appreciation of beauty to be a necessary precursor to an individual living a better life. For Du Bois, group efforts, such as the uplift of the "darker races" would need to embody these principles in order to achieve meaningful success. Subjective beauty would thus outweigh political solidarity or social freedom for Du Bois, in opposition to McKay, for whom an uninhibited way of life and spontaneous sexual pleasure were centerpieces of his concept of black freedom. This subjective appreciation of beauty plays a prominent role in the novel and this concept comes out most forcefully in Du Bois's description of Matthew's thoughts and impressions upon first meeting the Dark Princess:

> First and above all came that sense of color . . . . It was darker than sunlight and gold; it was lighter and livelier than brown. It was a living, glowing crimson, veiled beneath brown flesh . . . . Then came the sense of the woman herself: she was young and tall even when seated, and she bore herself above all with a singularly regal air. She was slim and lithe, gracefully curved. Unseeing, past him and into the struggling, noisy, liquid, translucent, haunting depths—whose brilliance made her face a glory and a dream. (8)

Du Bois presents Matthew's first sight of the woman he will eventually marry, and who will eventually bear him a son destined to rule the "Darker Races," as an event. Significantly, the description evokes a kaleidoscope of subjective impressions. In the contemplation of her beauty, Du Bois describes the princess as if she were the avatar of Beauty and has Matthew intuit her essence more through his soul, or spirit, rather than through his mind, in honor of Hegel and Goethe, who posited that the spirit could directly apprehend beauty. Kant wrote that the imagination plays an important part in this process, and Du Bois reflects this concept in his rendering of the princess's appearance as a "brilliance [which] made her face a glory and a dream" (8).

Du Bois apparently saw no contradiction in his employment of Eurocentric philosophy and literary traditions as a means to dramatize a future in which people of color throughout the world might unite. One might argue that African or African American concepts or traditions, even Asian traditions, could have been used as sources for the novel and would have been more germane and consistent with his subject matter, but two obstacles stood in the way of this approach. One could be that Du Bois's attitude towards Africa seems to have been the result of prettified general images and impressions rather than any concrete knowledge. At the time of the novel's publication, he had not yet traveled to Africa (Rampersad, Du Bois's Passage 169). His

work *Dark Water,* published eight years before *Dark Princess,* provides a source for his perceptions of the continent. In the chapter of the book, entitled “The Hands of Ethiopia,” he gives an impassioned and informed account of European involvement in the enslavement of Africans and argues against the colonization of Africa by the European powers and in favor of independence. Few would argue against these sentiments or find fault with the accuracy of the history he presents. Yet, the chapter contains very little specific information about Africa or Africans, other than a historical outline. In the most specific language of the chapter, he writes:

> Who are the folk who live there [on the continent of Africa]? They are brown and black, curly and crisp-haired, short and tall, and longheaded. Out of them in days without date flowed the beginnings of Egypt; among them rose, later, centers of culture at Ghana, Melle, and Timbuktu. Kingdoms and empires flourished in Songhay and Zymbabwe, and art and industry in Yoruba and Benin. (36)

Although the passage praises the cultural significance of accomplishments of a host of African peoples, it takes the form of a general outline of history, rather than evidencing any knowledge of, or appreciation for, particular African cultures or ways of life in the present day. In addition, in the same work, Du Bois points out the importance of increased education in Africa, and writes disparagingly of European “benevolent domination of Africa and of *other backward parts of the world”* (italics added) (39). Here, Du Bois reveals his true attitude towards Africa and African culture in referring to it as backward. Granted, this attitude prevailed at the time he wrote the work, and the backlash against the notion of the superiority of Western European cultures over and against all others remained decades into the future. Yet, his acceptance of the current view helps explain why he felt that African Americans must be led by their college educated brethren and why, for Du Bois, Uplift was synonymous with being Eurocentric. If he judged Africa as

backward, then the continent could not function as a cultural source, and one must look to examples from Europe for progress. At the time he wrote *Dark Princess,* his main impressions of Africa and its peoples were vague and somewhat negative. By extension, any unique contributions that might be garnered from the African American community seem to be deemed useless.

Rampersad writes that though India plays a primary role in the novel, Du Bois had not traveled there at the time of writing, and his Indian contacts were few. (Du Bois's Passage 169). Vermonja R. Alston finds a connection for the inspiration of the novel's general plot in a novel by Rabindranath Tagore, entitled *The Home and the World,* first published in 1919 and well circulated and read in the U.S. during the 1920's. Both novels share themes of romance "within a story of political intrigue in the larger context of a people's struggle for liberation," (4) but the similarities exist only in superficial similarities of plot and theme, since both novels are about politics and incorporate a romance (4). For example, Tagore's novel did not utilize a fantastical writing style or the imaginative, some might say overdrawn, descriptions used in *Dark Princess*, nor did Tagore base his novel upon Germanic philosophy. *The Home and the World* uses three viewpoints, whereas *Dark Princess* uses the omniscient perspective. Du Bois likely drew inspiration from Tagore's novel in a very general sort of way, but there the similarity ends. It might have been one of the Indian influences that so affected Du Bois's outlook.

Dohra Ahmad clarifies that the Indian Punjabi leader Lajpat Rai functioned as Du Bois's only personal source on India, not only for *Dark Princess* but also for articles about India in *The Crisis* and that Rai was a member of the Indian National Congress, the primary organization dedicated to Indian independence from Great Britain. From 1914 to 1919, Rai lived in Harlem, where he promoted and publicized the cause of Indian independence to Americans. He and Du

Bois became friends and colleagues in various progressive struggles. For example, in 1917 Du Bois and Rai gave a joint address for the Intercollegiate Socialist Society, at which Rai stated that the issues of Indians and blacks were not local concerns but rather international problems (788). During this period, Du Bois seems to have developed a solid relationship with Rai, because it was to Rai alone that he sent pages from the novel pertaining to Princess Kautilya asking for Rai's editorial comments (Schlabach).

Yet, as Rampersad points out, no evidence exists to indicate that Du Bois engaged in any studies about India, and since he grew up in Massachusetts, he derived most of his knowledge of the continent from the American Transcendental tradition of New England, from reading the works of Emerson, Thoreau and Whitman (Du Bois's Passage 163). Moreover, in Du Bois's mind, the situation and destinies of Asia and Africa were linked, as he writes in *Dark Water* in 1920, "A belief in humanity . . . is a belief in coloured (sic) men . . . Europe has never produced, and will in our day bring forth, a single human soul who cannot be matched and overmatched by Asia and Africa" (Marable vi). The latter statement again shows Du Bois's antithetical attitude toward African culture. In the latter statement, from *Dark Water,* he seems to be saying that Asian and African individuals are superior to those of European origin. Yet, also in *Dark Water,* he writes that Africa is "backward." If Asia and Africa are superior to Europe, why does Du Bois orient his philosophical basis in Germany? Why not base his vision on Indian or Egyptian philosophy?

I believe that Du Bois takes an intellectual leap in *Dark Princess*, from a view that Asia and Africa are linked by common concerns, to the notion that Indians as a whole felt the same comradery with African Americans as he felt with Indians. Whether due to hope or to a fundamental misunderstanding will never be known, but Ahmad discusses Du Bois's and Rai's

sharply divergent viewpoints on the relationship between Indian and African Americans. One of the major subtexts of *Dark Princess* is that African Americans are a colonized people in relation to the white dominant majority in the same way that Indians were colonized by Britain (Ahmad 789). The following excerpt from the novel's dinner scene, in which Matthew so adamantly advocates for the inclusion of African Americans and Africans into the ranks of the revolutionary cabal's people of color, (24-26) clearly reflects Du Bois's concept of solidarity among the world's peoples of color:

Nonetheless, in Rai's comments to Booker T. Washington in 1915 and in a speech he made in Bombay in 1925, he clearly states his view that the position of blacks in the U.S. is analogous, not with Indians as a whole, but only with the situation of India's Untouchables (790). An overview of the origins of India's caste hierarchy aids in understanding the basis of Rai's attitude. India's mythic history serves as the basis for its caste system. Gordon Johnson writes that according to this purported history, widely accepted in India, somewhere in the distant past, highly civilized, light-skinned Aryans swept into India from somewhere north and conquered the indigenous population of primitive, dark-skinned people (62-63). Additionally, the Sanskrit word for India's caste system, *Varna,* has color connotations. Radhika Parameswaran and Kavitha Cardoza write that the ancient Hindu text *Mahabharata*, the basis for India's caste system, outlines the *Varna* with the lighter-skinned Brahmins at the top of the caste hierarchy. Next down in rank are the Kshatriy, designated as red. Next down are the Vaishyas, yellow, and at the bottom, the Untouchables, now known as the Dalits, described as black (225). Given this basis for the structure of Indian social stratification, it becomes clear that with the low social position of African American's at the time Du Bois wrote the novel, coupled with their dark skin, Rai could easily equate the status of African Americans with that of the Untouchables. Du Bois

had not been to India at that time and obviously had not closely studied their social mores. If he had, he would not have written a novel about intermarriage between an Indian woman and an African American man. In a society in which one cannot marry outside one's caste, let alone outside one's race, the fact that an African American protagonist's love interest in the novel is an Indian *Princess*, makes the novel's plot even more of a romantic fantasy.

This disconnection between Indian perceptions and that of Du Bois is not a minor point, because from the beginnings of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored Peoples (NAACP), Du Bois chose that name for the organization to signal that it somehow connected to people of color throughout the world. He also named the NAACP's flagship magazine, *The Crisis: A Record of the Darker Races,* presumably for the same reason. His grand vision for the NAACP's mission and its flagship magazine ties into his novel's plot, in which an African American and an Indian Princess conceive and she gives birth to the future "Messenger and Messiah to all the Darker Worlds" (311). Nevertheless, in order for any sort of putative relationship between the two continents to exist, Indians would have to share Du Bois's vision of the future, but even his friend Rai did not share those beliefs. Several other prominent Indian leaders, who may have shared Du Bois's collaborative vision, offered to assist him with the novel, but his correspondence shows that he left their letters unanswered (Ahmad 787-789).

In *Dark Princess,* Indian Princess Kautilya invites Du Bois's African American hero, Matthew Towns, to her sumptuous dwelling filled with servants, where he finds assembled a collection of elite and aristocratic leaders of the "darker worlds." In a semiautobiographical touch, at the dinner table Matthew divulges the fact that he, like Du Bois, has a very mixed ancestry, the majority of which is of European origin. The Princess replies that she is also mixed, to which one of the Indians admonishes her that at least she is not part African (19). As Matthew

listens to the conversation of these members of the revolutionary cabal, the novel records his inner thoughts in the narrator's voice, in which Matthew discovers there "a color line within a color line," (22) as when the Japanese representative of the cabal states, "on the whole question of the Negro race both in Africa and in America . . . . for us here and for the larger company we represent, there is a deeper question—that of the ability, qualifications, and real possibilities of the black race in Africa or elsewhere" (21). The latter suggests that on some level Du Bois realized other nations of the "darker worlds" had misgivings about acknowledging solidarity with African Americans, but Du Bois, without really solving or addressing the issue, chooses to dispose of it by concluding the novel with the birth of an Asian/African "Messenger and Messiah to the Darker Worlds" (311) to rule the world's people of color.

The novel's linkage of African American destinies with those of Asians seems based on rather dubiously romantic thinking and little research, and the same can be said for the novel's characterization of the American South. Incredibly, Ahmad points out that in the novel, Du Bois describes the Jim Crow American South, particularly Matthew's fictional home town of Prince James County in Virginia, as an "instance of self-determination and reproduction onto a global scale" (794). The references to the South contain some of the most dramatic and portentous descriptions in the novel. Du Bois sees the South as the locus of the world of the Darker Races. Princess Kautilya, while staying with Matthew's mother gives birth to his child, the future Messiah (284-285). In a letter written to Matthew from the Virginia home of his childhood, Princess Kautilya writes that Europe, Asia and Africa are no longer the centers of power, and so their reign and revolutionary work must take place in America (284-285). Further, not only must it take place in the United States, it must happen in the South, which she refers to as the Black Belt. She writes:

> [H]ere in Virginia you are at the edge of a black world. The black belt of the Congo, the Nile, and the Ganges reaches by way of Guiana, Haiti, and Jamaica, like a red arrow, up into the heart of white America. Thus, I see a mighty synthesis: you can work in Africa and Asia right here in America if you work in the Black Belt. (286)

This transformation of the American South into a center for black achievement and world improvement, written in 1928, would have been a great idealistic accomplishment. Maybe Du Bois wrote these words as part of a fantastical notion of possibilities in the best imaginable world. Nonetheless, even as fantasy, I think that this utopian vision of black accomplishment in the South represents an incongruous conflict with reality, particularly the reality of the time and does not reconcile with the drudgery and constant fear of persecution or death that would have shadowed the life of any black person living in Virginia. Along with the novel's naïve attitudes about India's rigid social and racial stratification, Du Bois seems equally naïve about the conditions that plagued the Black Belt.

I have argued that Du Bois based his favorite novel on the Germanic philosophical tradition, that he considered Africa as backward, and that his conclusions concerning India and Africa and Asian/African collaboration were based on little personal knowledge or research. In addition, his poetic presentation of the U.S. South as a poetic place filled with possibilities cannot be reconciled with the facts of everyday life. My analysis points to unsettling inaccuracies, but most importantly show that his completely Eurocentric outlook, formed during his years of graduate education in Berlin, emerges in the pages of *Dark Princess.* Next, I contemplate how the novel reflects Du Bois's patriarchal values, which play such an important role in the Uplift project.

In my Introduction, I cited Kevin Gaines statement that the racial Uplift program of the Harlem Renaissance included adherence to the bourgeois value of patriarchal authority. *Dark Princess* contains a strong undercurrent supporting patriarchy, especially in the novel's characterizations of Princess Kautilya, Sara and Matthew Town's mother. The treatment of Matthew's mother exemplifies the complete objectification of the female person, though Du Bois objectifies his princess as well. Du Bois never names Matthew's mother. In fact, little personal information about her is forthcoming. The princess describes her to Matthew in poetic and dramatic language, as "that mother of yours who lives far down in Virginia in the cabin by the wood. Oh, Matthew, you have a wonderful mother. Have you seen her hands? Have you seen the gnarled and knotted glory of her hands? . . . . Your mother is Kali, the Black One; wife of Siva, Mother of the World!" (220). The novel presents Matthew's mother as the archetype of all mothers. Alston writes that Matthew's mother is the "paradigmatic ancestress" (6) and that her "gnarled and knotted" hands identify his mother both with the black workers of the South and with the dying culture of the South (7). Matthew's "Black mother" faces a startling fate. As Alston writes, the ancestress, Matthew Town's mother, "is to be absorbed, dissolved in the amniotic fluid of the Indian womb to create a new *volk,"* (3). If this genetic absorption were to become a universal practice, it would mean the obliteration of African Americans as a people.

In some ways, this development could be viewed as a positive and generous gesture toward improved international relations between Asians and Africans. Alternatively, Du Bois's unconsciously negative attitude toward black women and toward people of African descent in general, might shape his utopian vision of the future world of "darker races," a world in which the skins of the offspring of these interracial unions will be a golden color rather than a black, or dark brown color. In the final chapter of *Dark Princess*, Matthew Town describes seeing his son

for the first time, “a naked baby that lay upon her hands like a palpitating bubble of gold, asleep . . . . And the child awoke; naked, it cooed and crowed with joy . . . and threw its golden limbs up to the golden sun” (307-308).

Elizabeth Schlabach views Du Bois’s portrayal of an Indian princess “as the future mother of the Darker Races” in a negative light. She writes, “It is troubling that Kautilya, although a woman of color, is not black. The most beautiful woman for Du Bois, the representative thinker of his race is not black” (505). The novel provides insight into Du Bois’s attitudes concerning African American women. As an example, at the end of the novel, in a dramatic and operatic conclusion, Matthew Towns and Princess Kautilya are married, and their son anointed as the future ruler of the darker races under the approving eyes of a group of interfaith representatives. At the time of the marriage, Matthew has been divorced for less than a week. He is seemingly quite anxious to disassociate himself from his African American wife.

The portion of the novel that details Matthew’s Chicago political career and his marriage to Sara, entitled “Part III, The Chicago Politician,” is the only section written in a harsh realistic style reminiscent of Theodore Dreiser and Upton Sinclair” (Ahmad 776). In fact, Ahmad takes note that the geography of the novel determines Du Bois’s writing style. For example, when writing about India or the South, his “language [is] much like the decadent, otherworldly Orientalism of Baudelaire and other figures of the romanticist Oriental Renaissance” (776). From this, Ahmad draws the conclusion that by utilizing such shifts in writing style, Du Bois signals his dislike of Northern materialism and his approval of India and his imagined future of the South (796-797). In addition, Rampersad calls attention to the great amount of research Du Bois conducted on Chicago, while he conducted little or no research on India (Du Bois's Passage 69). This supports my argument that the writing style shifts are a result of the fact that Du Bois knew

very little about either India or the U.S. South; therefore, he found it easier to write about those areas and their people in romanticized language

His portrayal of Sara Andrews provides a stark contrast to the rapturous description of Matthew's first encounter with Princess Kautilya, written as a sensual and uplifting event. He writes of Sara, "She was not beautiful, but she gave an impression of cleanliness, order, cold, clean hardness, and unusual efficiency. She wore a black crepe dress, with crisp white organdie collar and cuffs, chiffon hose, and short-trimmed hair" (109). Alston concludes that by writing Part III in the realistic literary style and describing Sara in such cold terms, Du Bois intends a sharp rebuke of African American women, particularly successful African American women, who the novel depicts as "castrating . . . unfeeling, manipulative and angry" (7). Sara thus stands in stark opposition to the novel's characterization of Princess Kautilya and reveals his negative attitudes about black women stepping out into business and professional roles outside of the sphere of motherhood or homemaking.

Hazel Carby offers a viable hypothesis for Du Bois's repudiation of African American women using evidence from his groundbreaking work, *The Souls of Black Folk.* Carby points to the second chapter wherein Du Bois writes of the ultimate threat to black manhood posed by the sexual degradation of female slaves at the hands of their white masters. Of black mothers raped or otherwise impregnated by a white man he writes, "had aforetime quailed at that white master's command, had bent in love over the cradles of his sons and daughters, and closed in death the sunken eyes of his wife,--aye too at his behest had laid herself low to his lust and borne a tawny man-child to this world" (Du Bois, The Souls 27) in words that read as centered on the black man's feelings about this widespread practice, rather than upon the heartbreak and tragedy this entailed for black women. He writes that "she laid herself low to his lust" in the active voice, as

if slave women were not usually forced or coerced into the act. He appears to view it as "an act which compromises the black man's masculinity, because it does not recognize his control over her sexual being" (Carby 38). The writing takes the patriarchal stance of blaming female survivors of sexual violence and characterizing these acts as offenses against masculine honor. Additionally, this passage points to an inconsistency in Du Bois's system of thought. He decries the "tawny man-child" resulting from unions with slaves and masters but promotes photographs and magazine covers of lighter-skinned blacks in *The Crisis* and promotes interracial marriage between an African American and a lighter person of color in his novel.

An examination of a few of the 1928 issues of *The Crisis,* of which Du Bois was managing editor, reveals further evidence of his ambivalent attitude toward African American women, his distinctly bourgeois orientation and his, at best, contradictory ideas about individuals who are the product of interracial unions. The January issue features photographs of six young African American women from various locales across the country who have won the "NAACP Popularity Contest" (12). Four of the women are quite light-skinned. The issue also features a photograph of male African American students at Hampton College (15). In both instances, the young black individuals wear extremely formal, bourgeois attire. Another photograph in the issue shows the President of Liberia visiting France. In 1928, freed slaves from the U.S. still formed the ruling class of the nation and had enslaved the indigenous Africans of the area, as they had since 1887. It is possible that *Crisis* editor Du Bois, who appears to have had only very general information about Africa, was unaware of the Liberian political situation and history.

The August 1928 issue features an article entitled, "Our Negro Intellectuals" by Allison Davis, but Du Bois could have written it because it so accurately reflects his views on the subject. The opposite page features five black university or college graduates, three of whom are

women. All wear formal dress; the men wear suits and ties. Two of the three women are very light-skinned, and all three have straightened hair (269). The article on the opposite page gives a scathing criticism of the "sordidness and triviality of Negro life" (268), scolding author Dr. Rudolph Fisher for writing "High Yaller" and condemning the celebrated poet Langston Hughes for composing his poetry collection entitled, *Fine Clothes for the Jews*. The title was taken from his poem "Hard Luck," and referred to the then common practice of blacks facing financial setbacks pawning their clothes, since at the time Harlem's pawnshops often owned by Jewish individuals. In part, it reads, "When hard luck overtakes you/ Nothin' for you to do/ Gather up yo' fine clothes/ An' sell 'em to de Jew" (34). Kathleen Pfeiffer writes that the provocative title elicited strong reactions from the public and some reviewers characterized it as deliberately anti-Jewish. Pfeiffer notes that Hughes wrote the poem, and most in the collection, using the common speech of ordinary black people, rather than displaying the upwardly mobile, and Hughes specifically intended to write exactly as he wished, without regard for the opinions of either blacks or whites (135). Davis's article stated that writers such as Hughes and Fisher "represent that the Negro has no self-respect" (268).

Disturbingly enough for my purpose in this study, particular venom was reserved for Claude McKay's poem "Harlem Dancer." Of all such writers, Davis continues, "the cabaret has been an unhealthy obsession with these youths, who in their relative naiveté imagine that there is something profoundly stirring about the degradation of its habitués" (268). McKay's offending poem reads as follows:

> Applauding youths laughed with young prostitutes
> And watched her perfect, half-clothed body sway;
> Her voice was like the sound of blended flutes
> Blown by black players upon a picnic day.
> She sang and danced on gracefully and calm,
> The light gauze hanging loose about her form;

> To me she seemed a proudly-swaying palm
> Grown lovelier for passing through a storm.
> Upon her swarthy neck black, shiny curls
> Profusely fell; and, tossing coins in praise,
> The wine-flushed, bold-eyed boys, and even the girls,
> Devoured her with their eager, passionate gaze;
> But, looking at her falsely-smiling face
> I knew her self was not in that strange place.

The poem is a sensitive appreciation for the emotions hiding behind the calm veneer of the dancer. In a reference to locations far removed from Harlem, he characterizes the dancer as a "proudly-swaying palm." Contrary to what Davis implies in *The Crisis* article, the poem indirectly acknowledges his conflicted feelings about exotic dancers when he writes of her dancing there as "passing through a storm." Thus, while McKay appreciates her beauty and grace, he feels empathy for her predicament in that her "falsely-smiling face" indicates she is unhappy in her work. McKay recognizes that a strained smile may be hiding feelings of shyness or disgust and that the dancer might be imagining herself elsewhere, disassociating from the voyeuristic crowd. The final words referring to the nightclub as "that strange place" shows awareness that, for all his nonjudgmental celebration of Harlem's lowdown characters and seamy activities, he acknowledges that its underbelly has a dark side.

At issue here, for the author and *Crisis* editor Du Bois, is McKay's rendering of a seminude dancer in a Harlem cabaret. Indirectly, the article states that he should not frequent such establishments and most assuredly should not feature their sordid environments in his writings. The fact that McKay wrote a subtle and compassionate poem on the subject matters little. Indeed, in my introduction I discussed Du Bois's elitist attitude, as evidenced in his article "The Talented Tenth." His portrayals of middle and upper-middle class blacks in *The Crisis* and his novel's portrayal of aristocrats and royalty as the people of color to lead the "darker races" also shows his elitism. He believed that only by increasing black education and entrepreneurship

and publicizing images of refinement and success could blacks ever hope to be respected by whites in general. Armed with respectability and wearing it as a shield, blacks would finally be allowed their constitutional rights. This was the theory, and creative entities such as Claude McKay and Langston Hughes were a disgrace to their people. In Du Bois's mind, and others like him, not following the Uplift program became synonymous with tearing down African Americans. They viewed McKay as a traitor to his race, and while he was far from a traitor, his outlook and vision formed an opposing force to that of Du Bois and other architects of Uplift.

In Chapter Two, I study the nuances of McKay's alternative to Racial Uplift and its elitism, Eurocentrism and bourgeois patriarchy using the evidence of two of his novels, *Home to Harlem* and *Banjo. Home to Harlem* is McKay's hymn of praise to the city, a vivid painting of the bold impressions that made up the life he found there and loved. He approached it not as a prude with a program but rather as a student of human nature who found beauty and political solidarity everywhere. In *Banjo,* he conjures his dreams for an African Diaspora that begins to create a new life on its own terms, not modeled on European or even on American norms. *Banjo* might be viewed as the radical alternative to *Dark Princess,* a grass roots, egalitarian movement of free spirits, rising like the Phoenix from the whirlwind of European and American colonialism, racism and genocide.

CHAPTER TWO

This chapter presents the social and political vision of Claude McKay as reflected in his novels, *Home to Harlem* and *Banjo.* The picaresque structure of the novels, coupled with the itinerant lives of their protagonists, aligns with the author's lifelong search for a community that reflected his ideals and values. McKay believed that white Western Civilization's acquisitive, individualistic and mechanistic way of life deadened the soul and robbed life of its joy. In the novels, he promotes the substitution of African tribal cultures and the cultures of the African Diaspora as viable alternatives, not only for black individuals but ultimately for the entire world.

In McKay's judgment, the most humane and effective type of governance could be found in close-knit, small groups. He advocated for syndicalism, modeled on the nonhierarchical worker's unions known as the Jewish Labor Bunds that existed in Soviet Russia and Poland, which were small, nonhierarchical groups who elected temporary representatives and in the similar structure of the International Workers of the World. In his novels, he expands upon the egalitarian governance scheme of the Bunds, transforming their ideals and practices into a creative realm of possibilities for a better world.

James Giles writes that, for many scholars, McKay's poetry constitutes his greatest literary achievement. Yet, in Giles' opinion, "his greatest importance to Afro-American literature is represented by his three published novels" (n.p.). My thesis concerns only McKay's first two novels, but I agree that his novels are his most important works, because they explicate his unique contribution to the fields of social and political philosophy. The ideology that emerges

from the pages of the novels represents a profound shift from that of Du Bois and other proponents of Uplift. Mark Helbling characterizes McKay's attitude towards the general thrust of the Renaissance as that of "an extremely perceptive and articulate critic" who saw its focus on the black elite as inappropriate" (49). Paradoxically, Helbling calls McKay's attitude emotional rather than reasoned (49). Though McKay reacted passionately to what he viewed as the petit bourgeois Uplift's wrong-headed approaches, he utilized his analytical skills rather than his emotions to perceive problems in the general direction of the Renaissance that only a handful of others in the creative black community noticed. He judged that upwardly mobile African Americans were simply repeating the mistakes of Western European and North American cultures.

In the novels, McKay presents an alternative to Western ideology and Uplift, while at the same time providing entertaining and positive portrayals of working and lumpenproletariat black experience. In *Home to Harlem,* McKay offers a glimpse of possible solutions. Then, in *Banjo,* he not only gives the reader more of his ideas about the issues confronting the African diaspora, he outlines the foundations of an alternative black lifestyle and mode of being. Into his plots and settings, McKay deftly interweaves conversations that enlighten the reader about his ideology. His protagonists Banjo, Ray and Jake most often speak for McKay, with lesser characters chiming in. It would seem at first consideration that the earthy but intellectual character Ray, who plays a central role in both novels, represents McKay. Giles writes, "Ray, the character who links *Home to Harlem* and *Banjo*, is obviously patterned after his creator" (21). The similarities between McKay and his character Ray include both hailing from Caribbean islands, both being writers and both autodidactic intellectuals. McKay may have chosen Haiti as Ray's homeland to increase the fictional, rather than autobiographical nature of his character. Alternatively, he

might have deemed Haiti a more inspiring choice. At the novel's publication, Haiti had achieved independence in 1804, as one of the first Afro-colonial nations to do so, whereas the dream of Jamaican independence from England was not to be realized until 1962. McKay and his character Ray share the same negative opinions of United States' foreign policy and Western civilization.

Yet, the protagonists Jake of *Home to Harlem* and Banjo in the eponymous novel also reflect parts of McKay's makeup about both his sentiments and his personality. As Tillery aptly observes, the characters Jake, Banjo, and Ray reflect McKay's dual personality: "Though McKay lived a Jake-like life and a Ray-like life he was never comfortable with either" (85). Both McKay and his character Ray were self-taught and politically conscious intellectuals. In addition, McKay worked as a journalist in London and New York and was a cosmopolitan and seasoned traveler having journeyed from Jamaica to New York, to England, Europe, North Africa and the Soviet Union. Conversely, as a consummate bohemian, he savored the pastimes and lifestyle of the black bohemian and working classes as exemplified by his characters Jake and Banjo.

Vogel clarifies the purpose of McKay's methods, including use of characterization, by writing that rather than an attempt at realism, the author presented lyrical representations of his perceptions of Harlem and Marseille (137). The truth lies somewhere beyond Vogel's appraisal. Like any work of fiction, the novels are indeed not chronicles or photographs of real life events but rather artistic interpretations of life. Paradoxically, his lyrical representations convey important truths about McKay's beliefs and the populations about which he wrote.

Regarding McKay's political and social philosophy, his period of interest and appreciation for the promise of the Soviet Union had an important influence, especially regarding his strong affinity for the working class and the poor. As William Maxwell states, the "Old Left's

alliance with a good portion of Harlem Renaissance artists and writers has sometimes been portrayed as white communists duping black notables" (1). While the Soviet operatives in the U.S. undoubtedly manipulated them and other Americans in countless ways, there was more to the Renaissance alliance with Soviet communism than this. As a positive example of this influence, Maxwell notes that the Soviet connection introduced proletarian writing to leading Renaissance artists and leaders (1). When McKay wrote *Home to Harlem* and *Banjo,* he had not yet completely repudiated Soviet Communism. Though the revolution had come with the price of much bloodletting, the purges of Stalin had not occurred, and hopes were still high for a positive result, in Russia and in various locations around the world. In "Critique of the Gotha Program," Marx's imperative that, "The emancipation of labor must be the work of the working class" (n.p.) also represented McKay's belief, but he took it a step further. Whereas Marx devalued the lumpenproletariat as "social scum" and "a passively rotting mass" (n.p.), McKay agreed that labor must emancipate itself but also believed that both the proletariat and the lumpenproletariat had values and insights that would prove useful for a more just society.

Along Marxist lines, both novels portray lifestyles based upon the well-known words, "From each according to his ability, to each according to his need," and this is most prominent in the ragtag but close-knit group in *Banjo*. None of the novels' characters has any interest in obtaining a storehouse of wealth. Rather, they earn or take only what they need. As pointed out in my Introduction, much later in his life, while retaining his original ideals, McKay would become disheartened and cynical about the Soviet Union, communism and socialism. Through his characters, he reveals the African Diasporas' most salient characteristics, but most importantly, their hidden potential for effecting a transformative society, by employing a form of collectivism based on the Bund model. *Home to Harlem* focuses on the black criminal class and

the poor and working classes, while *Banjo* portrays the marginalized members of the international African Diaspora. McKay saw creative potential in economically challenged black populations, whereas he thought of upwardly mobile black people as delusional sycophants who thought that by trying harder they could prove their worth to white societies.

In order to bolster his philosophy of intrinsic black and African influenced worth, McKay transformed racist stereotypes into positive qualities. For example, whereas white society stereotypes blacks as hypersexual and lazy hedonists, he turns these stereotypes on their heads by emphasizing the strengths of a positive attitude about sex and spontaneity as opposed to the bourgeois notion that upward mobility and material wealth give life purpose and meaning. Where Renaissance leaders such as Du Bois and society in general characterize Africa as backward, McKay hearkens back to the wisdom of his African heritage. In so doing, he does not advocate returning to the continent, nor is he proposing the retrograde copying of African tribal culture, but he rather asserts that society deems such characteristics as negatives simply because they oppose white bourgeois culture, not because they are intrinsically without value. Indeed, Kotti Sree Ramesh and Kandula Nirupa Rani characterize the novels as a method of promoting “black pride” (92).

In judging McKay’s efforts to instill values akin to what much later would be termed the Black Pride Movement, his novels forcefully promote a kind of black Essentialism, which enforces negative stereotypes regarding what it means to be black and fail to take into account the instances of heterogeneity of African Americans. Scholars have weighed in against black essentialism in increasing numbers. Dwight A. McBride effectively summarizes the general argument against having a set of assumptions. He writes, “phrases or calls to unity like ‘Blacks’ and ‘the Black community’ . . . serve to make us think . . . that the Black community is

knowable, totalizable, locatable and certainly separate" (763). McBride concludes that, though in the prevailing view, many reject the concept of black Essentialism, he believes that the "experience of race is different for whites and for people of color" (767). Patrick Flynn zeroes in on McKay's novels with the charge that "[i]n his praise of black sensuality and even black primitivism, McKay erects the old shibboleth of black essentialism . . . [but that] McKay's glorification of 'instinct' as embodied by the character Banjo is at least partly balanced by the intellectual Ray" (140). In its common use, these are valid arguments against black essentialism and point out the downside of such a stance.

Yet, modern and postmodern criticism of black essentialism must take into account the social and political conditions prevalent at the time of the novels publications. White essentialism pervaded the U.S. and Europe of McKay's experience. Pontuale writes that McKay espouses black essentialism in the novels, "which recuperates the uniqueness of a black, urban working class and which values its difference from white, European and American, civilization" (79) and, most importantly, "is a political expression of black identity" (66) . Adam Lively describes McKay's essentialism as "a kind of cultural [black] nationalism that expresses itself in the glorification of 'blackness,' [such as] skin colors and black music" (229). Cultural considerations played a crucial part in McKay's essentialism, and he felt that *strategic essentialism*, as a form of pride in black identity, could empower blacks to overcome their economic and cultural subjugation. U.S. blacks constituted a homogeneous group as far as their deplorable economic and social situation, but in a few instances, there were exceptions. For example, the longstanding free black community in New Orleans maintained a better standard of living than most U.S. blacks. Some black intellectuals and businessmen had overcome many racial barriers in urban communities. Nevertheless, while Du Bois moved in a circle of like-

minded intellectuals and led a relatively comfortable material life, even in his New York City and in other areas such as Philadelphia and Boston, most restaurants and hotels during this era denied access to African Americans, and housing covenants restricted where they could live. De facto employment policies closed the door on jobs in industry and the professions, and the labor unions overtly denied them admittance. On the other hand, Du Bois's boyhood home in Massachusetts seemed largely racially enlightened, most likely because only a small population of blacks resided there and so were nonthreatening.

A few Southern blacks worked on the land or in homes under the direction of kindly bosses. Nevertheless, the vast majority of blacks lived in the South in poverty for racist employers in racist communities. As Angela Davis succinctly describes it, "the various Black Codes of the Southern states . . . were rearticulations of the Slave Codes" (32). She further explains that when Reconstruction ended in 1877, Southerners in positions of power scrambled to undo the gains of blacks within their borders. Davis shows how the criminalization of vagrancy, applied almost exclusively to blacks, became the most important tool in the Black Code legislation, later termed Jim Crow laws. The laws enacting strict segregation also had a profound effect upon the economic conditions of Southern blacks. Southern laws segregating and restricting places of employment made finding full-time work difficult for most black men (33). Michelle Alexander explains that the vagrancy legislation included stipulations against "mischief" and "insulting gestures," vague terms arbitrarily applied almost exclusively to blacks, enabling the regular arrests of tens of thousands. Upon arrest, they were sold to industry and agriculture to pay off fines and court costs or as their punishment. Their working conditions were worse than under slavery, because slaves were considered valuable property, whereas a cheaply acquired laborer could be starved or worked to death. Black laborers were punished by flogging,

as under slavery, for infractions such as “working too slowly” and could not leave the workplace without their employer’s written permission (31). Angela Davis notes that some free black men found themselves working on the same plantations where they had toiled as slaves (33). McKay entered the United States at the port of Charleston, North Carolina, where blatant racism would have struck him with its full force. In addition, blacks steadily trickled into Harlem from the South whenever they could, and the stories of their situation there would have been common knowledge.

McKay’s experiences of racism and bigotry in the U.S. haunted him for decades. In “Boyhood in Jamaica” published in 1952, he writes with bitterness about America as the place where he was introduced to racism. Of American anti-Jewish bigotry, he writes, “I never heard the word ‘Christ-killer’ until I came to America” (143). He continues with a condemnation of the U.S.’s culture’s colonialist arrogance:

> Most Americans, it seems to me, from the extreme left to the far right, believe what the rest of the world needs is more sanitation and material luxury: enamel bathtubs, gleaming wash basins, and two bottles of milk for every person. They don’t realize that millions in other countries don’t like and won’t drink milk as American adults do. Or that there are millions of Moslems and Hindus who insist that water for washing must be poured onto the body, as has been done from most ancient times.

The latter quote condemns America’s white essentialist attitudes towards other races and cultures as condescending and patriarchal.

Bell hooks formulates an interesting take on this issue of white essentialism, using the university classroom as an example. She writes that “critiques of essentialism have usefully deconstructed the idea of a monolithic homogenous black identity and experience,” validating

McBride's sentiments; yet, she continues, "the totalizing critique of 'subjectivity, essence, and identity' can seem very threatening to marginalized groups, for whom it has been an active gesture of political resistance to name one's identity as part of a struggle to challenge domination" (172-173). Here, she advocates a strategic essentialism, much like the one McKay refined in his fiction. Certainly, McKay's focus on strategic essentialism constituted a major effort toward claiming a black identity as a form of resistance. Along these lines, hooks also points out that, although academics sometimes call attention to what they consider divisiveness and exclusion practiced by marginalized groups in the classroom, they often remain oblivious to white essentialism (176). By this hooks means that white students unconsciously assume the validity and importance of their experiences and viewpoints as does the typically white instructor, while treating the input of the minority students as a negative. It is such ubiquitous forms of assumed white essentialism that McKay tries to counterbalance with his own form of strategic black essentialism.

According to Nathan Irvin Huggins, this essentialist orientation transformed into positive qualities the "very stereotypes that had formerly marked them [Africans and African-Americans] as limited" (7). Thus, a fair critique of McKay's strategic essentialism must take into account the dominating white essentialism with which he and other blacks had to contend. Though finding employment in the United States proved a difficult task for them, society branded black men as lazy. In the novels, especially *Banjo,* he turns that perception on its head by raging against the acquisitiveness of Western Civilization's plutocracy and imperialism, advocating instead for a simpler life in which humans use only what they need. White society often infantilized members of the African Diaspora and characterized them as simple creatures needing restraint and guidance. McKay converted simplicity into a positive attribute, maintaining the superiority of

many aspects of the communal cultures of sub-Saharan Africa and the African Diaspora and raging against the militarism and greed of the West.

Beginning with *Home to Harlem*, the author offers a direct challenge to the Renaissance push toward black refinement and upward mobility, by positively portraying, indeed celebrating, Harlem's working class and underclass. Helbling writes, "McKay was most importantly concerned with the relationship of art and politics and the creation of a Black cultural expression rooted in the Black experience" (50). For example, in a 1921 review of the all-black Broadway play *Shuffle Along* for the *Liberator*, McKay lambasted conservative black critics:

> Negro art, these [Negro] critics declare, must be dignified and respectable like the Anglo-Saxon's before it can be good. The Negro must get the warmth, color and laughter out of his blood, else the white man will sneer at him and treat him with contumely. Happily the Negro retains his joy of living in the teeth of such criticism. He expresses himself with a zest that is yet to be depicted by a true artist. (21)

With the publication of *Home to Harlem* and *Banjo,* McKay indeed vividly represented the African Diaspora's passionate appreciation for life.

In *Banjo,* McKay places his arguments against the idea of writing his novels with concern for what others will think in the words and thoughts of his character Ray, who tells a member of the tight knit group of comrades, Goosey, that he is writing about the adventures and life of blacks in the Ditch. Goosey responds "the crackers" will use what Ray writes as ammunition for bigotry (115). Ray responds with bitterness:

> Let the crackers go fiddle themselves, and you, too. I think about my race as much as you. I hate to see it kicked around and spat on by the whites, because it is a good earth-loving race. I'll fight with it if there's a fight on, but if I am writing a story . . . I tell it for

the love of it. If I am a real story-teller, I won't worry about the difference in complexion of those who listen and those who don't. (115)

This might have been McKay's direct response to Du Bois's blistering review of his novel *Home to Harlem* or a general counter to Uplift-oriented black intellectuals. It might also represent, as discussed previously, in a *Long Way from Home,* McKay's wish to address far-left criticism that *Home to Harlem* was not class-conscious enough in a Marxist sense (227). Ray's statement above reflects two ideas about art. McKay felt that an artist should be free to portray black lower and working class people as legitimate and without the need to be upwardly mobile in an imitation of white culture. Also implied in Ray's words is the position that the artist is not beholden to any political persuasion, but rather writes "for the love of it." This attitude represents a sharp contrast to Du Bois's complex and detailed views on the goals and meanings of writing fiction.

McKay writes for the love of it, and in the same vein, he affectionately portrays the Harlem he loves, warts and all, as it were. In the opening chapter of *Home to Harlem,* McKay provides vivid images of Harlem's low-life dens, beginning with its buffet flats, to which he takes his "lovely brown," as he affectionately calls her in the novel—a part time prostitute with a regular job. As described in the novel, the buffet flats were apartments, usually rented by black females, open for late night visitors. The women offered food, music, dancing and alcohol for their guests and encouraged the presence of women to create a lively atmosphere. While prostitution and illicit sexual activities were not always the order of the day, they were not discouraged, and illegal gambling was often part of their allure. Stephen Robertson and Shane White write that buffet flats were quite common during the Harlem Renaissance owing to Prohibition and to legal and societal surveillance of sexual activities. Thus, Harlem's buffet flats,

along with its cabarets and brothels, were one of the primary places that respectable and Uplift blacks would not want portrayed in a novel. By writing that Jake pays for the company of a part-time prostitute he meets in a cabaret and heads off with her for one of the popular buffet flats, McKay sets the tone of the novel.

In addition to his disregard for writing material that would be deemed respectable, McKay devotes particular attention to the value of the culture and lifestyle of the African diaspora. He hearkens back to the ethos and traditions of Africa, from whence these people or their ancestors came. This forms his starting point for his version of black essentialism, as he resurrects cultural memory. Comments written in McKay's posthumously published *Boyhood in Jamaica* provide insight into formative experiences that shaped the author's ideas about Africa. In the work, he remembers his father as ". . . a wonderful teller of African stories . . . and African customs," (141) such as making "moonshine babies" out of broken pottery (136). Also, in a scene in *Banjo* shows representatives from many nations of the African Diaspora gathered in a bar listening as Ray and a Senegalese man share African folk tales they learned from their parents as children (118-125). By inclusion of the scene, he resurrects and reframes African heritage as a positive presence, countering the dominant culture's disparaging attitudes.

Ray's tale, which he prefaces as "an African tale we tell at home," concerns an orphan girl whose parents die leaving her grandaunt to raise her. The little girl's mother had tattooed a magical image of a crocodile on her daughter's throat that would always keep her young and healthy. Her grandaunt hoodooed it off and placed it on herself so though old she appeared young. The girl's growth was stunted (118-119). Thus far in the tale, McKay presents a typical African worldview, as it existed prior to European colonization and missionary efforts. In this worldview, animals such as the crocodile have spiritual qualities, and even their images have

supernatural properties Hoodoo is a syncretic African Diasporic spirituality of healing and spells, primarily of African origin, and incorporating Native American and European folk beliefs as well. The term, though not strictly African, would be well-known to African American readers and perhaps is used here as a code for African-based spiritual beliefs.

The ending of the tale shows belief in the spirit world that consists of the departed ancestors, which is endemic in the entire African continent. Through the intercession of the spirit of her mother, the orphan is saved and her fortunes reversed:

> And standing at the gate was her grandniece, now a beautiful black princess, with the young chief, her husband, beside her.
>
> Hardly could the grandaunt recognize the stunted girl in the woman before her. But the princess said: 'Aunt, you thought I was dead . . . .'
>
> The old thing fell on her knees and cried: 'Give me to the leopards, my child, for I was a bad relative to you.'
>
> The princess replied, 'No aunt, we're flesh and blood of the same family and you will come and live in this home and garden all the rest of your days.' (119-121)

The latter drives home the paramount role of blood ties in the African world view. McKay thought that a spiritual orientation of connectedness to all others, even beyond the grave, a good way to approach life and that to believe in a reality stripped of all its magic was to enter a meaningless flatland that rendered humans devoid of joy. To him, African spirituality stood in stark contrast to the mechanistic and impersonal societies in which most members of the Diaspora found themselves.

As part of the celebratory view of the African diaspora, he also shows an appreciation in the novels for the entire array of black complexions, from darkest coal to creamy light. Yet,

amongst his appreciation for the myriad shades of colors, he evidences a negative attitude toward mulattos, whom he often refers to as "yellow" or "yalla,'" and writes disparagingly about their character traits. This could be a side effect of his Jamaica upbringing in which mulattos were social superiors of those with darker skin (Cooper 27). McKay signals his conflicted attitude concerning the ranges of black skin tone early on in *Home to Harlem.* On page three, he makes a point of describing his protagonist, Jake, as "tall, brawny, *and black*" (italics added). Jake is not mulatto. McKay writes of lighter-skinned Harlem blacks with a combination of distaste and appreciation for the resultant exotic beauty, as when he writes about the appearance of Ginhead Suzy, who had previously married a "yellow youngster":

> Civilization had brought strikingly exotic types into Susy's race. And like, many, many Negroes, she was a victim to that . . . Ancient black life rooted upon its base with its fascinating New layers of brown, low-brown, high-brown, nut-brown, lemon, maroon, olive, mauve, gold . . . Almost-white on the brink of a change. Sucked back down into the current of black by the terribly sweet rhythm of black blood. (57-58)

Here, McKay reveals his ambivalence on the subject of skin tone in one relatively short passage. First that the dilution of African blood, though sometimes causing lovely results, comes as a result of the negative infringement of "civilization" on "ancient black life by characterizing Suzy as a "victim" of this process. He affirms the uniquely positive attributes of African lineage with the phrase "the terribly sweet rhythm of black blood." In another passage in *Home to Harlem,* Jake's friend Zeddy describes Congo Rose as a "high-yaller entertainer" (35). Before even setting eyes on her, Jake states, "I ain't much for the high-yallers after having been so much fed-up with the ofays [slang for white] . . . They're so doggone much alike" (36). Later on, the text makes a second reference to Congo Rose as Jake thinks to himself that she, the "mulattress,"

is all sexuality with no fine emotions such as tenderness (42). In yet another passage of the novel, he admiringly describes a woman he sees on the street as "a little chestnut brown" with beautiful arms "like smooth burnished bars of copper" (141).

In *Banjo,* McKay continues his emphasis on skin colors in the African diaspora. Many of his characters in the Marseilles setting hail directly from sub-Saharan Africa and seem to be presumed by the author to be pure African, but he takes pains to describe the skin tones of those of mixed blood. When Banjo first becomes acquainted with the gang that will be his comrades in Ditch life, McKay describes Malty, the unofficial leader of the group, as a "shining black big-boned lad" (5). Another member of the gang, Ginger, is "chestnut-skinned with drab-brown curly hair" (5). However, as with the example of Ginhead Suzy from *Home to Harlem*, the reference to chestnut-skinned can have various interpretations, though Ginger's drab-brown hair indicates possible mixed ancestry.

McKay's constant references to skin color borders on preoccupation. Yet, he writes about this not only because of his early life experiences but to show that he believes the admixture resulting from interracial union reflects the unhealthy effects of Western Civilization and causes the gradual loss of cultural traits that could resolve political and social problems of his modern world. As discussed above, where Du Bois displayed lighter-skinned blacks in *The Crisis* and possibly advocated intermarriage with lighter-skinned individuals in *Dark Princess,* McKay takes the opposite view in his novels.

On the one hand, in the novels McKay notes the aesthetically pleasing results in skin color variation among blacks. His objection to mulattos, rather than evidence of racism, centers on McKay's belief that intermarriage causes something to be lost and might ultimately erase African heritage and cultural memory altogether. As a case in point, in *Banjo,* Ray argues with

Goosey about miscegenation between whites and blacks, saying that he has nothing against it in general, but it has larger ramifications. Here again, McKay takes an essentialist stand against sexual liaisons between whites and blacks out of a belief that black women are needed by black society, as when Ray argues that white men take black concubines in order to weaken the black culture, because women are the backbone of a healthy society. Black women are essential to the African diaspora, as mothers and, more importantly, as equal partners contributing to society at all levels. He also states that black women are not as emancipated as women are in white society, and that they must be in order to build a functional and healthy culture (205-207). Here, through Ray, McKay makes an eloquent case for the freedom and self-determination of women in the African Diaspora as well as for their essential contributions to the black community.

In yet another form of strategic black essentialism, in *Home to Harlem,* McKay's depicts what he deems the more wholesome attitudes toward sexuality in the African diaspora, over and against white attitudes. In *Banjo,* a trio of wealthy, white American tourists befriend Ray and Banjo. At their request, Ray takes them to the "blue cinema." At the film's end, Ray feels revulsion:

> The Blue Cinema struck them with the full force of a cudgel, beating them down into the depths of disgust. Ray wondered if the men who made it had a moral purpose in mind: to terrify and frighten away all who saw it from that phase of life. Or was it possible that there were human beings whose instincts were so brutalized and blunted in the unsparing struggle of modern living that they needed that special stimulating scourge of ugliness. (214).

The passage indicates that, while the joyful interest in sex constitutes an important part of a healthy personality, to Ray the production and viewing of pornography does nothing to add to

sexual experience and that McKay views pornography as a Western aberration. Moreover, where the above quote reads, "human beings whose instincts were so brutalized and blunted in the unsparing struggle of modern living" McKay refers to a recurring theme in *Banjo*, that the brutal capitalism and unnatural lifestyle of the West create a poisonous environment for humans. Filmed pornography seems to cross some line for McKay. While prostitution has ancient origins, he views pornographic movies as a capitalist innovation that ruins the joyful or spontaneous expression of sexuality.

McKay's accepting attitudes toward alternative forms of sexuality represent the main departure from his strategic black essentialism in the two novels. Blackmer writes that to Harlem's African Americans, at the time of the Renaissance, homosexuality was viewed as "a taboo subject," (57-58). African attitudes remain unchanged on this issue, with homosexuality criminalized in forty-nine African nations.[1] In contrast, McKay matter-of-factly defies black Harlem's societal mores by writing about homosexuality and transgenderism. In *Home to Harlem,* at the Congo nightclub Jake spies a longshoreman sitting at a table with a "boy who was made up with high-brown powder. His eyebrows were elongated and blackened up, his lips streaked with the dark rouge so popular in Harlem, and his carefully-straightened hair lay plastered and glossy under Madame Walker's absinthe-colored salve 'for milady of fashion and color'" (91). The Congo's singer Rose chooses the graceful young man as her dancing partner (91). In the same novel, Jake begins his acquaintance with the intellectual Ray, a waiter on the railroad line where Jake works as a cook; he finds Ray reading a book called *Sapho* (Daudet). Jake asks about it, and Ray explains that the bisexual protagonist eventually drowned herself in the sea because of her love for a young boy (127-128). Ray says that the story of the original Greek Sapho "gave two lovely words to modern language . . . . Sapphic and Lesbian" (129). Jake

[1] Library of Congress, n.p.

responds that in Harlem, "Tha's what we calls bulldyker . . . Them's ugly women" (129). Ray responds saying, "not always," (129) and that the name bulldyker is ugly and, "Harlem is too savage about some things" (129). McKay then speaks through Ray about his opinion of the unenlightened attitude toward homosexuality in Harlem.

Aside from McKay's censure of Harlem's general views on homosexuality, the novels promote positive affirmation of black culture. For example, in *Banjo*, Ray, in the midst of giving a lecture to Jake about the importance of taking steps to avoid venereal disease, characterizes Jake as part of "a strong race of working men" (207). For McKay, this "strong race" laughed and had good times throughout all sorts of adversity. Nevertheless, rather than simply existing as fun-loving simpletons, Jake, Banjo and Ray possess an inherent integrity. For example, in *Home to Harlem,* Jake quits a job when he finds out it is scabbing for striking workers. Later, his friend Zeddy expresses disbelief that Jake would consider the striking white workers more important than survival, especially since blacks are not welcome in the union. Jake responds to Zeddy by saying, "I won't scab on nobody, not even the orneriest crackers" (48).

Here, McKay takes pains to note that part of Jake's integrity shines out in his anti-racist stance. In a related passage in *Banjo,* "they came upon a pinched-faced white boy with a hunk of bread so hard that he was softening it under a hydrant to be able to eat it" (162). The boy's plight moves Banjo to help, and he calls him over, much to the consternation of his black pals. One of the gang, Bugsy, reacts: "Wachu gwina do? Don't give the white bastard a damn thing!" (162). Banjo gives the boy 10 Sous to eat and tries to explain his attitude to Bugsy but cannot find the words for wanting to help a white person after all the racism he has suffered at the hands of whites (162). On the following page, the boy's situation and Bugsy's reaction reminds Ray of a similar situation in London that pained him to recall. As Ray walked with two men from India, a

one-armed white British man had approached them to beg, most likely a WWI veteran. One of the Indians gave the man a harsh refusal, stating that people like him caused the problems for his people in India. Ray felt "Ashamed of himself. Ashamed of humanity. He hated living in a world that pitted humans against each other" (163).

When McKay writes about the evils of Western Civilization, including the United States, he does not refer to all whites and especially not to white individuals and groups striving for justice or those living on the margins of society struggling to survive. By including the above section about Banjo and Ray, McKay reveals that he was not a separatist, nor was he a hatemonger. McKay had too many positive experiences with progressive and enlightened white people who encouraged and helped him. As noted in the introduction, Trotsky sent McKay on a tour of the military and commissioned him to write the book *Negroes in America* during his stay in the Soviet Union. In Jamaica, Walter Jekyll encouraged him to write and publish his poetry. Max Eastman hired him as a writer for *The Liberator*. Many people of European and Jewish descent patronized McKay and his work, and most were his friends. These experiences precluded any possibility of racist feelings toward white people as individuals. In addition, like his novels' protagonists, McKay's spirit proved too generous for such a stance.

In his turn away from hierarchical government structure, McKay acted as a forerunner of progressive social and intellectual movements to come. He recognized a fundamental truth clearly elaborated in 1968 by Paulo Freire, who wrote, "The oppressed, having internalized the image of the oppressor and adopted his guidelines are fearful of freedom. Freedom would require them to eject this image and replace it with autonomy and responsibility" (n.p.). This statement recognizes the futility of allowing leaders, representative or not, to determine one's destiny. Freire wrote from the standpoint of his native Brazil, which Portugal colonized for 300 years, yet

his observations are universally applicable. McKay points to a new model for the world, in which individuals "participate in developing the pedagogy of their liberation" (Freire n.p.) rather than looking to their oppressors as models. McKay gives a clear summation of his stance on the subject of empowerment of the African diaspora in *A Long Way from Home,* where he writes:

> Negroes will have to organize themselves and learn from their mistakes. The white man cannot organize Negroes as a group, for Negroes mistrust the motives of white people. And the Negro whom they consider an Uncle Tom among the whites, whose voice is the voice of their white master, cannot do it either, even though he may proclaim himself a radical. (350)

Out of necessity, blacks need to independently create vibrant communities of their own choosing and learn from their mistakes. McKay believed that by utilizing a strategic black essentialism the diaspora would be empowered by renewed confidence to create a grass roots, bottom up movement for a better life—a better life that would leave behind what he considered to be the ruins of white European civilizations. *Banjo* contains by far the greatest number of sustained passages in which Ray holds forth, in thought or in word, giving voice to McKay's views on the need for a new paradigm for diasporic and postcolonial peoples. Ray's thoughts on blacks and civilization given toward the end of *Banjo* summarize the author's position. He writes that civilization, meaning white Western civilization, deals unfairly with all people of color, but most especially with blacks (311). As an example, in *Banjo,* Ray thinks of the vast chasm between the whites on a pleasure ship, stuffing themselves with delicacies, and the starving Senegalese of Marseilles who eagerly consumed their table scraps: "It was a long way from them to these stranded and lost black creatures of colonization who ate garbage to appease the insistent demands of the belly" (310). This metaphor summarizes McKay's thoughts about the situation of

people on the continent of Africa and in the African diaspora. Because of imperialism and colonialism, blacks suffered want and humiliation while whites ate their fill and lived relatively carefree lives. The injustice of the situation caused him to judge Western Civilization as diseased at its root.

In *Home to Harlem,* McKay provides the explanation for Ray's appreciation of Harlem's diasporic culture by way of its contrast with white European culture when Ray muses:

> No wonder the whites, after five centuries of contact, could not understand his race. How could they when the instinct of comprehension had been cultivated out of them? No wonder they hated them, when out of their melancholy environment the blacks could create contagious music and high laughter . . . (267) (ellipsis in text).

In this passage, McKay argues that African Americans, in spite of centuries of economic and social deprivation, have created a more vibrant culture than have the generally more affluent white Americans.

In *Home to Harlem*, Ray considers his sweetheart Agatha, acknowledging that she would like to marry him and settle down. While he feels concern for her position, he cringes from the thought of resigning himself to a life of drudgery (263-264). Of the mechanistic world of the lower-middle-class male, Ray summarizes his thoughts on the subject: "Once upon a time he used to wonder at that great body of people who worked in nice cages: bank clerks in steel-wire cages, others in wooden cages, salespeople behind counters, neat, dutiful, respectful, all of them. God! How could they carry it on from day to day and remain quietly obliging and sane?" (265). Here, the author points to the hollowness of the work ethic, which holds the worker in subjection as to space and time and deprives her of the ability to speak her mind by demanding obedience.

As he wrote *Home to Harlem*, McKay had not yet lost faith in democratic socialism. In *Banjo's* fledgling group, we see a primitive socialism carried out autonomously as in the Bunds. When Banjo becomes ill and enters the hospital, the group comes to his aid, with Ray visiting him every day and the rest of the gang doing what they could. "The boys kept him supplied with cigarettes and sweets, although the beach was not a place of plenty now" (249). When Banjo leaves the hospital, he obtains a small amount of funds in a letter from a distant aunt and the American consulate. These he distributes among the group. "Banjo changed the ten dollars and gave the boys of his group ten francs a piece. To Ray he gave fifty and kept a hundred for himself. They celebrated the evening big" (256). The way the group handles money presents an exact counter to American and European common wisdom that stipulates that my money is mine alone. When an individual has money, he distributes it to those in need. If possible, they all celebrate with a dinner. With such a mindset, one does not need to shackle oneself to the often-mindless drudgery of a job.

McKay offers a roadmap for his attitude about work in his description of Banjo's approach. Banjo creatively forms a music group and plays in bars, sometimes for money, most often for the sheer joy of the experience in the moment. He does not plan for his retirement or open a savings account. He lives in the present. The idea of a band at first appeals to him as a way to make a few sous "without worrying ovah mah wants" (25) and to "show them some real nigger music" (25). Banjo dreams of the little enterprise and suddenly the chance appears, without planning and without capital for investment:

> And one afternoon he walked straight into a dream—a cargo boat with a crew of four music-making colored boys, with banjo, ukulele, mandolin, guitar, and horn. That evening Banjo and Malty, mad with enthusiasm, literally carried the little band to the

> Vieux Port. It was the biggest evening ever at the Senegalese bar. They played several lively popular tunes, but the Senegalese boys yelled for 'Shake That Thing.'" (47)

In all the passages about livelihood, McKay shows that one must find work one enjoys and that uses the best of one's abilities. Banjo states, "I play that theah instrument becaz I likes it" (90). Banjo integrates every aspect of his entire lifestyle. He and his friends share good times and bad; they live for the joy of life, not for setting financial goals for a future that may never come. McKay deduces that the necessity for all the drudgery and submissiveness required in Western society results from its all-encompassing reach, in which each person exists as a minor cog in the machinery.

On a related note, Ray also voices arguments against higher education in *Home to Harlem,* probably writing of McKay's own concerns on the subject. When Jake tells Ray that he should be utilizing his education in his choice of profession, rather than working as a waiter on the railroad, Ray replies, "Anyway, you're happier than I as you are. The more I learn the less I understand and love life" (274). The statement serves as an argument against Du Bois and others pushing for blacks to obtain higher education. McKay's prophetic theories about university emphasis on male, white and European history and creative works would later be forcefully reiterated by students and teachers of Hispanic, black and Native American descent at all levels of education.

In another passage from *Home to Harlem,* Ray expresses more clearly why higher education can be detrimental to black individuals:

> No, modern education is planned to make you a sharp, snouty, rooting hog. A Negro getting it is an anachronism. We ought to get something new, we Negroes. But we get our education like—like our houses. When the whites move out, we move in and take possession of the old dead stuff. Dead stuff that this age has no use for. (243)

In this passage, McKay focuses upon why education comprises a looking backward toward corrupt white models from the past that do not apply to blacks attempting to forge a new identity. Bell hooks suggests that even the academics of today often disregard or have no knowledge of black scholarship (173). One must remember that in McKay's time, no black or Chicano studies departments existed.

In summary, in *Home to Harlem,* McKay laid down the foundation for his belief in the worth of ordinary African Americans by emphasizing black life in the Harlem District of New York. With his love for the quiet rural village of his birth, he could have just as easily based his novel on rural U.S. blacks. He chose Harlem because he knew it well; he had lived there and often frequented its cabarets, buffet flats, restaurants and bars. He had worked beside other black working men on the railroad and at various odd jobs he took to make ends meet.

In *Banjo,* McKay broadens the scope of his vision. Blacks, mainly from the Caribbean and the U.S. South converged in Harlem. Yet, as written, in Marseille the sweepings of the entire world eked out a living on the harbor or the beach. McKay writes, "They were all on the beach . . . white men, brown men, black men, Finns, Poles, Italians, Slavs, Maltese, Indians, Negroids, African Negroes, West Indian Negroes . . . . afraid and ashamed to go back to their own lands, all dumped down . . . bumming a day's work, a meal, a drink, existing from hand to mouth, anyhow any way, between box car, tramp ship, bistro, and bordel" (6). Here, he gives his readers a glimpse into a vista of hope for those on the fringes throughout the world. They could work

together to build a future—a future not based on power, greed, colonialism or imperialism. Rather, McKay's world would learn from the best of African and African American family and tribal community. A new community built for all, no matter their color, race or creed.

McKay espoused newness, social and political newness as well as fresh literary methods. Rather than following classic "hero's journey" motifs, both novels feature rather loose plots, termed episodic or picaresque, interspersed with characters' statements reflecting McKay's sentiments. At the end of the novels, the characters leave the primary locale in search of better lives. McKay's usage of loose plots probably results from his aversion to mimicking classical and oft-used plotting devices, since he lived and thought along the lines of a creative leader. In addition, his loose plots parallel his disengagement or "loose" relationship with the accepted mores and manners of the societies in which he lived. The novels' open-ended finales symbolize their author's vagabond lifestyle and the African Diaspora's seemingly endless search for meaning and justice.

Like many wanderers from unsophisticated settings who enter the U.S.'s urban hustle and din, he never forgot the sense of closeness he experienced in the village of his youth. Truly, a lack of community haunted him his entire life. America's strident individualism, along with its bigotry struck him like a savage blow. Always wandering, he often tried to find the community of his dreams—in the Soviet Union, in France, in England and in the United States, but his iconoclastic individualism and his fierce sense of justice kept him from forming the bonds he so desperately sought.

The novels mirror McKay's quest for community and his experiences of finding a seemingly pleasant locale or community group, only to be disappointed in the end. In the beginnings of both novels, the protagonist begins a chapter of his life in a new location filled

with happy anticipation, particularly evident in *Home to Harlem.* Jake thinks, "Oh, boy! Harlem for mine!" (9). Two pages later, he meets Felice, who becomes his long-term love (11). Everything seems positive and bright. Also in *Banjo,* the eponymous hero immediately happens upon a close-knit gang of homeless and impoverished men from far-flung locations of the African Diaspora, who become his pals. Throughout most of *Home to Harlem*, Jake cannot find his love, and he engages on a path of sometimes pleasurable but often-unsatisfactory adventures. He lives with nightclub singer Congo Rose, but eventually leaves her in disgust because of her, to him, twisted desire for him to act the role of a brutal pimp (26-119). Out of necessity, Jake takes a job as a third cook on the railroad (123), but this proves problematic from the start because of the cantankerous boss and the bad working conditions. In *Banjo,* disenchantment with Marseilles occurs gradually, solidifying when the Marseilles police take the gang to jail and beat them, even though they accuse the men of no crime (262). Soon thereafter, police stop Ray on the street, search him roughly, hit him and take him to spend the night in jail, torturing him by tightening his handcuffs along the way (264). Near the end of *Home to Harlem*, after reconnecting with Felice, Jake remarks to her, "I been thinking of getting away from the stinking mess and going off to sea again," but Felice persuades him to head with her to Chicago. Like their creator, Jake, Banjo and Ray look for a place to call home, restlessly pursuing various jobs and locales, never finding one that fits.

Cooper's book title, *Claude McKay: Rebel Sojourner in Harlem,* captures the quality of the author's life, except that McKay spiritually sojourned everywhere he wandered, not only in Harlem. The characters' struggles in *Home to Harlem* and *Banjo* parallel McKay's. In the former, Jake wanders through a kaleidoscope of experiences in Harlem only to leave with Felice for Chicago at the end. Jake feels happy and excited to return to Harlem, yet the novel gives no

hint of any regret or nostalgia upon leaving. In the latter novel, Banjo arrives in Marseille and immediately forms a close bond with a group of men in the African diaspora. Nevertheless, by the novel's end, the situation in Marseille has changed for the worse and Banjo prepares to depart.

McKay's experiences reflected the restless searching and travel portrayed in the novels. Soon after traveling from his native Jamaica to New York, he embarked on a promising career as a writer for Max Eastman's newspaper *The Liberator.* After 2 years, in 1922, at the age of 32, he resigned over editorial conflict and left New York to sail to the Soviet Union. By then, he had already lived in Jamaica, Kansas, Alabama and England. He would eventually travel to Germany, France, Spain and Morocco before returning to New York.

Given his high ideals and hopes, most of his life he searched in vain for a community where he felt comfortable. As Heather Hathaway notes, everywhere McKay traveled to live, his singular convictions and goals prevented him from the full participation and membership in groups (51). In Paris, McKay felt uncomfortable with the community of writers in exile, because, as he wrote in *A Long Way from Home,* he felt that, concerning his plight as a black man, "my white fellow ex-patriots could sympathize but which they could not altogether understand" (167). He left Paris for the proletarian community of the Marseille docks, and when life there began to disintegrate due to government policy changes regarding immigrants of color, he left. From Marseille, McKay traveled to Barcelona and then to Morocco. In 1934, McKay returned to the United States and lived there until his death in 1948 (Hathaway 168). Upon his return to the U.S., no warm welcome awaited him.

The first major critical blow occurred upon publication of McKay's 1939 autobiography, *A Long Way from Home.* Alain Locke wrote a caustic review, tellingly entitled, "Spiritual

Truancy," in which, among other things, he roundly condemned McKay for his travels and scolded him for writing his novels *Home to Harlem* and *Banjo* while overseas, rather than returning home "to take a warranted and helpful place in the group of 'New Negro writers'" (404). The review continues with a catalogue of McKay's professional history including his having had patrons such as Max Eastman. At one point Locke criticizes McKay's long associations with socialism and communism, immediately followed by a denouncement of McKay's ultimate decision not to officially join the Communist Party U.S.A. (405). In Locke's litany of McKay's failings, he repudiates almost every personal action the novelist had ever undertaken.

Locke launches a personal attack against McKay's character by comparing McKay to Peter in the Gospel account in which the disciple denies having ever known Jesus (405) and accuses McKay of "apostasy" (405). According to Locke, black writers have a duty to "the people" that precludes lives of individuality, as he writes, "Negro writers must become truer sons of the people, more loyal providers of spiritual bread and less *aesthetic wastrels and truants of the streets* (405) (italics added). Locke's reaction epitomizes the central issue of McKay's life. His iconoclastic personality and viewpoints threatened and dismayed Alain Locke, and by writing his review, he let McKay and the Renaissance community know that nonconformity would not be tolerated.

CONCLUSION

W.E.B. Du Bois and Claude McKay stand opposed on many levels about the appropriate social and political changes needed to improve the conditions of the African Diaspora, and in the end reflect competing ideologies within the Harlem Renaissance movement. Du Bois believed that his peoples' future consisted in acquiring a university education and a lifestyle of Western culture and refinement. In contrast, McKay's outlook showed a preference for self-determination and preservation of what he considered the positive aspects of African consciousness within the diaspora, such as a strong sense of community and a spiritual connection to the earth and the ancestors. An emphasis on enjoyment of the present combined with a cyclical, or seasonal, worldview undergirds the African mindset, transcending tribal differences. His almost visceral aversion to Western culture's acquisitive capitalism and colonialism and its mechanistic and deadening workplace environs drove his ideology. McKay's views resonated with some important figures in the Harlem Renaissance, most notably Langston Hughes. Yet, in the decades following his death, his literary works seemed largely forgotten, until a revival of interest about 40 years ago[2]. Conversely, Du Bois's work has remained in the literary and social science canons. McKay's singular social vision and his picaresque literary style might have caused the neglect of his contributions.

In his novels, McKay proposes something entirely new and unique, a society not based upon capitalism, communism, socialism, totalitarianism or representative democracy. He offers a

[2] For prominent scholarship contributing to renewed interest, see Harold Cruse book, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*, 1967.

third way, neither Left leaning nor Right leaning, but rather a grass roots, egalitarian societal structure. McKay's concept of egalitarianism does not equate to the Left's top-down measures imposed by socialist and communist governments—such as progressive tax schemes or government ownership of businesses—but rather by the consensus of local groups. This reflects his appreciation for the anarcho-syndicalist approaches of Jewish Bunds in the Soviet Union and the International Workers of the World. His ideology liberates individuals from the hierarchical, material-obsessed oppression of both capitalism and communism. He foreshadowed the work of Paulo Freire, which articulated that the peasantry of his native Brazil, as well as other oppressed people, should take over the leadership functions of their own education and processes of social reform, rather than relying upon elites such as professionally trained politicians, activists, teachers and professors. The latter would function as equal partners but not as authoritarian figures. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* Freire explains: "They [the peasants or lower class people] call themselves ignorant and say the 'professor' is the one who has knowledge and to whom they should listen . . . . [A]lmost never do they realize that they, too, 'know things' they have learned in their relations with the world and with other women and men." He continues: "[H]olding them [the oppressed] fast in a position of dependence, will not do . . . . [T]rue solidarity with the oppressed means fighting at their side to transform the objective reality which has made them these 'beings for another'" (n.p.). Any social undertaking could utilize Freire's platform. Like McKay, Freire trusted the ability of the lower classes to take on the mantle of self-determination.

In the U.S., the self-determined neighborhood-action programs of the Black Panthers, discussed below, also reflected McKay's ideas, as well as the oft-used protest call and response, used by Mandela and crowds in his native Xhosa language. Mandela: '*Amandlam!'* power!'

Response: '*Ngawetha!*' 'The power is ours!' Whether McKay directly influenced like-minded groups of the future is the subject of another thesis. Clearly, McKay's novels and public statements and writings show that he prophetically glimpsed crucial social movements just beyond the horizon.

With uncanny precision, McKay recognized the pitfalls of his age. For example, just a few years before Hitler's rise to power, he raged against the modern age's frenzy for nation building and patriotism. With the Third Reich and the Empire of the Sun, extreme xenophobic patriotism would plunge the world into chaos. He sensed the dangers of unrestrained capitalism that would lead to the current neocolonial, neoliberal multinational corporations. To McKay, adopting a middle or upper class lifestyle spelled disaster; it meant joining the legions heading for the abyss. He prescribed an alternative path, and he keenly understood the underlying significance of upwardly mobile lifestyle changes, beginning with the attempt to eradicate African American dialect from the spoken idiom.

McKay represents his black characters as speaking in a certain way that places them outside of the dominant culture. Other literary icons in the recent past, such as Alice Walker, in *The Color Purple,* have drawn attention to black dialect, but some critics disparaged the work because of this. McKay spent time working and socializing with blacks in New York and had developed an ear for their idioms. Yet, in some ways, his characters' speech does not exactly reflect "typical" black Harlem speech. It seems that McKay wrote not from an interest in realistic representation but rather wanted to illustrate that African Americans constituted a culture within a culture, and linguistics constituted one of his primary cultural markers.

The significance of African American speech cannot be overstated. In the dominant white society, particularly in the middle and upper classes, when a black individual uses mainstream

speech, she seems more relatable, even more human. African American dialect functions as a signifier to most in white society, identifying the speaker as subaltern, as Other and as a deviant in need of reform. To relinquish one's speech represents the foundational shift for an African American's recreation into the image of white America. Most upwardly mobile blacks acknowledge the necessity of adopting the speech patterns of the dominant culture as a necessary step toward acceptance into middle or upper class society.

The adoption of white speech patterns coincides with acquiring a university education, and entering the socioeconomic levels of society of the white-collar, professional and business classes. In concert with this comes the adoption of white attire, interests, furnishings, and mannerisms. Moving to a white neighborhood then seems a natural step, particularly since one has often become alienated from family and friends in the neighborhood of origin, formerly intimates, who may now relate to the transformed graduate with suspicion and mistrust. Uplift accepted these standards and in doing so tacitly acknowledged the inferiority of African American culture as opposed to the hegemonic white culture. By writing his characters as speaking a form of dialect outside the mainstream, McKay signaled his distaste for the process of reshaping blacks into whites.

In addition to his approval of African diasporic speech, McKay brings the magical, interconnected world of African folk tales into *Banjo* as a counterweight to what he perceived as the flat and alienating landscape of Western culture. To him, the adoption of the speech and attitudes of the dominant culture meant turning the diaspora onto a path leading to the lonely world of the West. However, he understood that blacks who stubbornly clung to their ways would be seen as recalcitrant and unacceptable in middle class society. Rather than seeing this as

retrogressive, he viewed it as a valuable defense against loss of important black cultural traits and values.

During the period of publication of *Home to Harlem* and *Banjo*, and perhaps up to the present, McKay's concepts appear counterintuitive but have particular relevance in the twenty-first century. Vicky Martin, President of Milwaukee Area Technical College, notes that the majority of jobs in the future will require associate degrees and certificates rather than university degrees, a situation that, to a certain extent, recalls the debates between Booker T. Washington and Du Bois. Washington believed in solid vocational preparation, whereas Du Bois advocated attainment of university education. Additionally Martin explains that sixty-five percent of young people in the U.S. believe that college is financially unattainable, while in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, the location of MATC, fifty percent of graduating high school seniors in Milwaukee are living below the poverty level. While Martin proposes making technical education free to disadvantaged youth, McKay proposed a third way. For those whom a technical or university degree would assist with self-realization, he would support that. Yet, a degree would be one option in a vast array of choices, to include artistic vocations, work in a small business cooperative and many others.

First, as McKay made clear in *Banjo,* in the society he conceptualized, the goals and way of life would diverge from those of the dominant culture. Individuals would focus on what they loved to do and make decisions accordingly. Whether one felt most comfortable in a career as a musician, a painter, a waiter, or a neighborhood small business owner, individuals would follow their aptitudes and inclinations, without regard for whether the work could provide middle or lower-middle class lifestyle or the means to establish a family. The paramount concern would be the ability to achieve self-realization by utilizing one's talents, desires and aptitudes in order to

sustain one. He advocated these methods of living, not to promote hedonism, but rather because he believed in the dignity of the human person and that any society's structures and conventions exist to serve the individual, not the individual to serve society. Thus, each person's work must be meaningful and must be true to one's aptitudes and interests, honoring the inherent value of each person. Out of this honoring, the collective good would flow. Second, in a nod to McKay's social justice leanings, people of means in diasporic communities would share with the needy from their superabundance of wealth. He alluded to this practice in *Banjo*, when the gang ate a freighter's leftover food or illicitly drank from the many wine barrels in Marseilles. Again, he illustrated this idea when individuals in the gang in Marseilles shared short-term monetary gains with the rest of the group. The informality and voluntary nature of these acts in *Banjo* shows McKay's attitude. As with the IWW and the Jewish Bunds, generosity would result from individual choices or group consensus, rather than from government control, as in the case of communism or socialism.

The character Banjo never reached any appreciable level of success with his musical enterprise, partly because he sometimes acted in ways that precluded making a profit, such as refusing to pass the hat during or after a performance. Yet, in comparing the many obstacles facing Jake in finding suitable employment to Banjo's great joy while performing music in Marseilles, McKay gives his readers a glimpse into his solution. The common wisdom, even in much of the African-American community, continues to veer towards Uplift social philosophy. Most voices within and without the community continue to advocate for African Americans to attend universities and enter professional careers. One drawback of this approach centers on outcomes for African American graduates. While statistics are scant regarding Historically Black Colleges and Universities graduates, it may be that those who acquire good jobs often leave their

communities of origin to live in predominately-white neighborhoods. *Diverse Issues in Higher Education* writes that, in the U.S. as of 2015, 40 percent of black members of Congress, 12 percent of black CEO's, 40 percent of black engineers, 50 percent of black professors at non HBCU's, and 80 percent of black judges graduated from HBCU's. It can be inferred, though not proven, that many of these highly successful graduates from humble black areas might not have returned to their neighborhoods (Taylor Jr.). .During the time prior to and in the decade following the Civil Rights Movement, integration was considered a primary goal. Later, a realization developed that the flight of educated African Americans from their neighborhoods of origin deprives black communities of some of their most promising sons and daughters, who could have been positive agents of change.

This process of black education leading to the lessoning of black cultural values and affiliation helps with an understanding of McKay's dislike of higher education. The establishment of departments of black studies, Chicano studies, and ethnic studies has mitigated some of the drawbacks in U.S. university education. Unfortunately, the issues involved in university studies, which McKay referred to as inheriting "white houses," remain a significant challenge for minority students. In most history departments, western civilization holds pride of place. English departments generally focus on Western novelists and poets, with the exception of classes specifically designated otherwise. The university socialization and education process often produces African American graduates who have become intellectually and culturally indistinguishable from their classmates of European descent. As a byproduct of the aforementioned process, black graduates often become alienated from their communities of origin and thus anxious to live elsewhere. Ama Ata Aidoo's novel *Our Sister Killjoy: Or Reflections of a Blackeyed Squint,* addresses a similar problem, using the example of Africans

obtaining education in Europe or Britain and then deciding to plant roots there, rarely if ever returning to their homeland. Aidoo's reaction to European culture dovetails with McKay's repugnance for the West. She describes this in visual and sensory terms in the following passage: "There is a kind of loneliness overseas . . . . the artificial heat in the room . . . . the unwholesome medications on the food, which I had to eat out of tins, boxes and plastic bags, just a taste of which got my blood protesting loudly" (Aidoo 119). The novel serves as Aidoo's plea for Africans to use the knowledge and skills gained at English and European universities in their African nation of origin. In reply to the notion that European-educated Africans need to stay in Europe to teach the worth of Africans, she writes, "we won't get a flicker of recognition from those cold blue eyes," (130) which means that the effort proves futile. Instead, she entreats her reader, "So please come home My Brother, Come to our people. They are the only ones who need to know our worth" (130). Her concerns can easily be applied to the situation of African American university graduates fleeing black neighborhoods.

How might these gifted blacks be included in the egalitarian future envisioned by Claude McKay? He never addressed this issue in his novels, but Aidoo's ideas could be viewed as a way to integrate educated blacks into his social and political philosophy as it pertains to the U.S. diaspora. There will always be African Americans who feel called to be teachers, nurses, attorneys or physicians. University education does not necessarily or per force require subsequent integration into a white community. By incorporating and remaining cognizant of a celebratory attitude toward African American culture, as expressed in McKay's novels, blacks can acquire an education without taking on the full weight of the dominant culture, if they have the will to do so. In looking at the situation of his time, McKay believed this an impossibility. Continual efforts must be made to ensure that university studies reflect the cultures of most of

the world's populations. If the latter were true, then education would cease to be the inheriting of "white houses." Until such time, university education remains problematic for the African diaspora and other minority students who must carefully navigate the experience.

McKay gives us a shorthand summary for his ideal black society in *Banjo,* in a discussion between Ray and a student. Ray characterizes the process as using "the common people . . . who furnish the bone and sinew and salt of any race or nation" and further that we need to create a better African diaspora by "building up from our own people" (200). Given McKay's distaste for many aspects of Western Civilization and his syndicalist and anarchist tendencies, these words from his novel make sense. McKay believed in what his novels termed the "common people" of the diaspora as well as other races, and here, through Ray, states they form the heart of any society.

Communities "built up from our own people" would utilize the talents of everyone, without the need to attract corporate or government entities into the neighborhood. All businesses and services would look something like nonprofit cooperatives whose sole mission would be to benefit employees and the community. Using McKay's syndicalist, anarchist and socialist values would necessitate the creation of community organizations whose method of operations would stretch far beyond today's nonprofits. McKay dreamed of organizations that would be grass roots and nonhierarchical cooperatives, which is not the case of nonprofits today. For example, a medical clinic's board and "management" would consist of an even mix of patients, clerical staff, nurses and physicians with no one group having more authority than another. The students, parents and teachers would run local schools. Always the consumers of any organization would play a large part in day-to-day operations. For local stores and other

businesses in the African American community, as well as for organizations providing professional services, the consumer and worker approach works well.

The Black Panthers offer a concrete example of attempts to effect grass roots changes of which McKay would have approved. Huey P. Newton, one of the six founding members of the Black Panther party, immersed himself in political study, reading the works of Franz Fanon "particularly *The Wretched of the Earth"* (Hilliard 27). In 1971, the Panthers established their own community school in Oakland, which merited the California legislature's acknowledgement as "setting the highest standard for elementary education in the state" (Chiles). When the Oakland police department proved unable or unwilling to protect the elderly from muggings, the Panthers offered free transportation and escort services. African Americans in Oakland could not access community ambulance services, which were reluctant to serve individuals with limited financial means, so the Panthers provided their own emergency vehicles with trained attendants. The Panthers delivered high quality food to residents, pioneered the formation of black student alliance groups on university campuses, published a newspaper focused on black affairs in the U.S. and the diaspora, and in 1968 instituted free school breakfast programs in 19 cities (Chiles). Federal COINTELPRO agents infiltrated groups and incited violence among black organizations, which led to the demise of the Panther Party. In the end, the positive and progressive services they established matched McKay's grass roots ideology. In addition to the Panthers' social justice programs, the organization of small black businesses run on a communal and profit sharing basis would have fleshed out McKay's vision for the future. Profits from business ventures might go toward the establishment of community center where artists, crafts people, musicians, playwrights, poets, novelists and dancers could receive stipends to enable them to engage in creative work and share their talents with their community.

Some might argue that the grass roots and egalitarian social structures McKay envisioned sound fine in theory but turn out to be untenable in reality. Postcolonial societies face many difficult challenges after gaining their freedom. Freire writes on the subject: “But almost always, during the initial stages of the struggle, the oppressed, instead of striving for liberation, tend themselves to become oppressors.” (n.p.). Everywhere in postcolonial societies, from Haiti to Uganda, natives often rise up as corrupt dictators, at least as oppressive as their European colonial predecessors. Freire’s “initial stages” have continued for an overly long period. Postcolonial societies muddle along at their own pace making their own mistakes and floundering, just as with European societies. Yet, the egalitarian societies such as envisioned by McKay could yet be realized.

Of course, McKay takes self-determination to an extreme. He invites his readers to reconsider giving up power to someone else, whether a policeman, a politician, a business executive, or a teacher. We see the power for good of grassroots organizations like the Civil Rights Movement (though grassroots, the Civil Rights advocated integration) and the Black Panther Party. Communal, egalitarian organization based upon high ideals can work to better society. Though the Civil Rights Movement differed from McKay’s vision, in that he thought improvements in the African American Diaspora should precede integration, the movement effected change by working together, with a place found for all, regardless of race, educational attainment, wealth or lack thereof.

McKay especially believed that African Americans who adopted a white lifestyle sold their souls to no avail. He perceived the alienation and loneliness inherent in the West’s linear obsession with acquisitive materialism, militarism and individualism, and he wished to spare his people that fate. He saw that African Americans and others in the diaspora could improve their

circumstances by using their communal and spiritual values brought from Africa that remained alive in the Diaspora in hidden ways that need to be unearthed and made the active center of a new black consciousness. Not necessarily the large extended families or close knit tribes of the old world but as friends and comrades united in a common purpose, all working and sharing together as equal partners.

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