

EARLY INFLUENCES ON THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE
TO ACCOMPANY DISCUSSION MARCH 14 (HEGINBOTHAM)

PHILLIS WHEATLEY "ON BEING BROUGHT FROM AFRICA"

'Twas mercy brought me from my *Pagan* land,
Taught my benighted soul to understand
That there's a God, that there's a *Saviour* too:
Once I redemption neither sought nor knew.
Some view our sable race with scornful eye,
"Their colour is a diabolic die."
Remember, *Christians, Negros*, black as *Cain*,
May be refin'd, and join th' angelic train.

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Harriet Jacobs: With this mailing I send 4 pages of excerpts from *Incidents*
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Frederick Douglass. This snippet from his famed *Narrative* will be part of
the lecture

*Chapter 10: "You have seen how a man was made a slave; you shall see how a
slave was made a man" (p.77). . .*

*"We were at it for nearly two hours. Covey at length let me go, puffing and
blowing at a great rate. . . The whole six months afterwards, that I spent
with Mr. Covey, he would occasionally say, he didn't want to get hold of me
again. . . . This battle with Mr. Covey was the turning point in my career as
a slave" (82)*

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Charles W. Chesnutt. "The Goophered Grapevine," a tall tale of the trickster
tricked may be accessed in full at this link to its appearance in *The
Atlantic*: [https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1887/08/the-
goophered-grapevine/306656/](https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1887/08/the-goophered-grapevine/306656/)

Or you can trust me that the long story, written almost entirely in a
vernacular (that includes the "N" word, spoken by a black character)
throughout. . . like this:

"W'en do wah broke out, Mars Dugal' raise' a comp'ny, en went off ter fight de Yankees. He say he wuz
mighty glad dat wah come, en he des want ter kill a Yankee fer eve'y dollar he los' 'long or dat grape-
raisin' Yankee. En I 'spec' he would a done it, too, ef de Yankees had n' s'picioned sump'n, en killed him

fus'. Atter de s'render ole miss move' ter town, de niggers all scattered 'way fum de plantation, en de vimya'd ain' be'n cultervated sence."

[And it ends this way]:

"Is that story true?" asked Annie, doubtfully, but seriously, as the old man concluded his narrative.

"But I thought you said all the old vines died."

"Dey did 'pear ter die, but a few ov 'em come out ag'in, en is mixed in mongs' de yuthers. I ain' skeered ter eat de grapes, 'caze I knows de old vimes fum de noo ones; but wid strangers dey ain' no tellin' w'at might happen. I would n' 'vise yer ter buy dis vimya'd."

I bought the vineyard, nevertheless and it has been for a long time in a thriving condition, and is referred to by the local press as a striking illustration of the opportunities open to Northern capital in the development of Southern industries. The luscious scuppernong holds first rank among our grapes, though we cultivate a great many other varieties, and our income from grapes packed and shipped to the Northern markets is quite considerable. I have not noticed any developments of the goopher in the vineyard, although I have & mild suspicion that our colored assistants do not suffer from want of grapes during the season,

I found, when I bought the vineyard, that Uncle Julius had occupied a cabin on the place for many years, and derived a respectable revenue from the neglected grapevines. This, doubtless, accounted for his advice to me not to buy the vineyard, though whether it inspired the goopher story I am unable to state. I believe, however, that the wages I pay him for his services are more than an equivalent for anything he lost by the sale of the vineyard.

W.E.B. DuBois: You will hear a lot in today's lecture and from others in our team. Here's a small squib: "This, then, is the end of his striving: to be a co-worker in the kingdom of culture, to escape both death and isolation, to husband and use his best powers and his latent genius. These powers of body and mind have in the past been strangely wasted, dispersed, or forgotten. *Souls of Black Folks* Ch 1, p3

James Weldon Johnson: You already know "The Black National Anthem." With this mailing I am sending you four pages of excerpts from his novel, *The Autobiography*. Let me indulge all of us with the whole of this beautiful sermon:

The Creation

And God stepped out on space,
And he looked around and said:
I'm lonely—
I'll make me a world.

And far as the eye of God could see
Darkness covered everything,
Blacker than a hundred midnights
Down in a cypress swamp.

Then God smiled,
And the light broke,

And the darkness rolled up on one side,
And the light stood shining on the other,
And God said: That's good!

Then God reached out and took the light in his hands,
And God rolled the light around in his hands
Until he made the sun;
And he set that sun a-blazing in the heavens.
And the light that was left from making the sun
God gathered it up in a shining ball
And flung it against the darkness,
Spangling the night with the moon and stars.
Then down between
The darkness and the light
He hurled the world;
And God said: That's good!

Then God himself stepped down—
And the sun was on his right hand,
And the moon was on his left;
The stars were clustered about his head,
And the earth was under his feet.
And God walked, and where he trod
His footsteps hollowed the valleys out
And bulged the mountains up.

Then he stopped and looked and saw
That the earth was hot and barren.
So God stepped over to the edge of the world
And he spat out the seven seas—
He batted his eyes, and the lightnings flashed—
He clapped his hands, and the thunders rolled—
And the waters above the earth came down,
The cooling waters came down.

Then the green grass sprouted,
And the little red flowers blossomed,
The pine tree pointed his finger to the sky,
And the oak spread out his arms,
The lakes cuddled down in the hollows of the ground,
And the rivers ran down to the sea;
And God smiled again,
And the rainbow appeared,
And curled itself around his shoulder.

Then God raised his arm and he waved his hand
Over the sea and over the land,

And he said: Bring forth! Bring forth!
And quicker than God could drop his hand,
Fishes and fowls
And beasts and birds
Swam the rivers and the seas,
Roamed the forests and the woods,
And split the air with their wings.
And God said: That's good!

Then God walked around,
And God looked around
On all that he had made.
He looked at his sun,
And he looked at his moon,
And he looked at his little stars;
He looked on his world
With all its living things,
And God said: I'm lonely still.

Then God sat down—
On the side of a hill where he could think;
By a deep, wide river he sat down;
With his head in his hands,
God thought and thought,
Till he thought: I'll make me a man!

Up from the bed of the river
God scooped the clay;
And by the bank of the river
He kneeled him down;
And there the great God Almighty
Who lit the sun and fixed it in the sky,
Who flung the stars to the most far corner of the night,
Who rounded the earth in the middle of his hand;
This great God,
Like a mammy bending over her baby,
Kneeled down in the dust
Toiling over a lump of clay
Till he shaped it in his own image;

Then into it he blew the breath of life,
And man became a living soul.
Amen. Amen.

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Paul Laurence Dunbar

We Wear the Mask

We wear the mask that grins and lies,
It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes,—
This debt we pay to human guile;
With torn and bleeding hearts we smile,
And mouth with myriad subtleties.
Why should the world be over-wise,
In counting all our tears and sighs?
Nay, let them only see us, while
 We wear the mask.

Sympathy

I know what the caged bird feels alas. . .
I know what the caged bird feels! . . .
I know why the caged bird beats his wing
Till its blood is red on the cruel bars;
For he must fly back o his perch and cling
When he fain would be on the bough a-swing
And a pain still throbs in the old, old scars
And they pulse again with a keener sting.
I know why he beats his wing. .

Nella Larsen – see the six page sample of her novel, *Passing*. It is a separate packet included in this mailing.

Langston Hughes

The Negro Speaks of Rivers

I've known rivers:

I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than the flow of human blood in human veins.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.
I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.
I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.
I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln went down to New Orleans, and
I've seen its muddy bosom turn all golden in the sunset.

I've known rivers:

Ancient, dusky rivers.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

I, Too

I, too, sing America.

I am the darker brother.
They send me to eat in the kitchen
When company comes,
But I laugh,
And eat well,
And grow strong.

Tomorrow,
I'll be at the table
When company comes.
Nobody'll dare
Say to me,
"Eat in the kitchen,"
Then.

Besides,
They'll see how beautiful I am
And be ashamed—

I, too, am America.

"The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain" (a small sample from this important essay of 1926

. . . . The road for the serious black artist, then, who would produce a racial art is most certainly rocky and the mountain is high. Until recently he received almost no encouragement for his work from either white or colored people. The fine novels of Chesnut go out of print with neither race noticing their passing. The quaint charm and humor of Dunbar's dialect verse brought to him, in his day, largely the same kind of encouragement one would give a sideshow freak (A colored man writing poetry! How odd!) or a clown (How amusing!).(3) . . .

The Negro artist works against an undertow of sharp criticism and misunderstanding from his own group and unintentional bribes from the whites. "O, be respectable, write about nice people, show how good we are," say the Negroes. "Be stereotyped, don't go too far, don't shatter our illusions about you, don't amuse us too seriously. . . .

Let the blare of Negro jazz bands and the bellowing voice of Bessie RiSmith singing the Blues penetrate the closed ears of the colored near-intellectuals until they listen and perhaps understand. . . .

We younger Negro artists who create now intend to express our individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame. If white people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, it doesn't matter.

We know we are beautiful. And ugly too. The tom-tom cries and the tom-tom laughs. If colored people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, their displeasure doesn't matter either. We build our temples for tomorrow, strong as we know how, and we stand on top of the mountain, free within ourselves.

Richard Wright . Last year 20 of us explored *Native Son* in its painful totality. We did not look at Wright's 1937 take on "Negro Writing." Here's an excerpt

" . . . They [works by Negro writers] entered the Court of American Public Opinion dressed in the knee-pants of civility, curtsying to show that the Negro was not inferior. . . . For the most part these artistic ambassadors were received as if they were French poodles who do clever tricks.

White America never offered these Negro writers any serious criticism. The mere fact that a Negro could write was astonishing. Nor was there any deep concern on the part of white America with the role Negro writers should play in American culture; and the role it did play grew out of incident rather than intent or design. Either it crept in through the kitchen in the form of jokes, or it was the fruits of that foul soil which was the result of a liaison between inferiority-complexed Negro 'geniuses' and burn-out white Bohemians with money. . . .

One would have thought that Negro writers in the last century of striving at expression would have continued and deepened this folk tradition, would have tried to create a more intimate and yet a more profoundly social system of artistic communication between them and their people. But the illusion that they could escape through individual achievement the harsh lot of their race swung Negro writers away from any such path... Today the question is: Shall Negro writing be for the Negro masses, moulding the lives and consciousness of those masses toward new goals, or shall it continue begging the question of the Negroes' humanity?" , , When Negro writers think they have arrived at something that smacks of truth, humanity, they should want to test it with others, feel it with a degree of passion and strength that will enable them to communicate it to millions who are groping like themselves.