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Négritude or Black Cultural Nationalism

by ABIOLA IRELE*

It is well known that nationalist movements are generally accompanied by parallel movements of ideas that make it possible for its leaders to mould a new image of the dominated people. And as Thomas Hodgkin has shown, the need for African political movements to 'justify themselves' and 'to construct ideologies' has been particularly strong.¹ Nationalist movements were to a large extent founded upon emotional impulses, which imparted a distinctive tone to the intellectual clamour that went with them and which continue to have a clear resonance after independence.

In order to understand certain aspects of African nationalism and of its carry-overs, it is important to consider the fact that colonial rule was not only a political and economic affair, but that it also imposed a specific social framework for the African's experience both of the world and of *himself*. The fact of political domination created areas of contact between Africans and Europeans all over the continent under conditions that constantly underscored racial and cultural differences. The colonial relationship thus involved the total cultural situation, and nationalist movements were in fact efforts at cultural as well as purely political autonomy. 'Although they have an economic political basis, they involve the question of a common racial and cultural heritage', observes Franklin Frazier.² It is in this sense that one can speak of 'cultural nationalism' as a distinctive part of the liberation movements.

The only really significant expression of cultural nationalism associated with Africa—apart from small-scale local movements—is the concept of *négritude*, which was developed by French-speaking Negro intellectuals. Because of its extra-African connexions and implications, and because of its vigorous organisation as a movement (especially in literature) it has developed far beyond the concept of the 'African personality', which has remained more or less a catch-word, or a simple ideological slogan; whereas *négritude* has tended more towards a philosophy.

* A Nigerian writer at present preparing a doctoral dissertation at the *Ecole pratique des hautes études*, Sorbonne, Paris. This study of *négritude* will appear in two parts; the first deals with the historical origins and the social and cultural aspects of the movement, and the second part will be concerned with its literary expression and ideology.

¹ Thomas Hodgkin, *Nationalism in Colonial Africa* (London, 1956), p. 169.

² Franklin Frazier, *Race and Culture Contacts in the Modern World* (New York, 1957), p. 35.

However, I take *négritude* to mean not the philosophical idea of a Negro essence, which appears to me not only abstract but quite untenable—Senghor himself has moved far away from this point of view—but rather an historical phenomenon, a social and cultural movement closely related to African nationalism. It has aroused considerable controversy and inspired reactions ranging from enthusiastic partisanship to outright hostility. None the less, it seems to have been acknowledged as an important historical phenomenon, and as such it may most conveniently be examined, and its significance fully appreciated.

I. ANTECEDENTS

Négritude in fact appears as the culmination of the complete range of reactions provoked by the impact of western civilisation on the African, and of the whole complex of social and psychological factors that have gone to form black people's collective experience of western domination. Its roots thus lie far down in the total historical experience of the black man in contact with the white.

1. *The Colonial Situation*

It is hardly an exaggeration to say that the advent of the European in Africa turned out to be for the African a shattering experience in more than a metaphorical sense. Although the early phase of contact was marked by an ambiguously calm relationship, the European presence in Africa developed gradually into a situation of conflict, first through the slave trade, and later on with the establishment of colonial rule. African history since the coming of the white man presents examples of violent reactions to this situation—and resistance movements like those of Chaka in Zululand, and Samory in what is now Guinea, form an essential part of the stock of symbols that have nourished the nationalistic strain of *négritude*.

But the main interest of the historical origins of the movement lies in those *indirect* forms of resistance provoked by the colonial situation. As Georges Balandier has pointed out, the establishment of colonial rule in Africa brought with it a drastic re-ordering of African societies and human relations. The fact of domination, and all that this meant in the arbitrary political and social reorganisation of the African communities and the misunderstandings that naturally followed, created 'a state of latent crisis'. Colonial rule also substituted new poles of reference for social organisation and individual life, which were often in conflict with the established traditional pattern, and thus created a society which, in Balandier's words, 'appeared to possess an essentially

non-authentic character'.¹ In other words, colonial rule created in varying measure all over Africa a state of cultural fluctuation, in which tensions were likely to develop.

It is against this background that certain popular movements in Africa represent a search for new values, an attempt at readjustment. Perhaps the most striking of these indirect reactions to the colonial situation have been religious. It is an objective fact that the Christian missionary was an important agent in cultural change, and his role in the introduction of new values, both voluntary and involuntary, was by no means negligible.² Neither is it necessary to belabour the point that Christianity was, and remains, largely identified with colonial rule, as part of the cultural baggage of the coloniser.

In this light, the separatist churches in colonial Africa have been recognised as symptoms of cultural *malaise* and as indications of cultural readjustment.³ But their real significance appears in their links with nationalist feeling. Again, Balandier's analysis affords an insight into the problem.⁴ The main fact that takes precedence over the rest is that of *domination*. Taking a cue from Gabriel d'Arboussier, who attributes to European influence 'the oppression of the cultural stock' of the indigenous African—thus a double politico-economic, and socio-cultural domination—Balandier has pointed out how the separatist movements, particularly that of Simeon Kibangi in the Congo, represented 'a total response to a situation felt to be creative of internal "crisis" and propitious for the maintenance of (a state of) alienation'.

The two main characteristics of these movements, as analysed by Balandier, appear to be their political radicalism—a direct consequence of their schismatic attitude in religious matters, sometimes assuming the proportion of an aggressive racialism—and their syncretic messianism. On the one hand, we have a negative gesture of refusal, a denial of an imposed world-order attributed to the white coloniser, and the wish for a cultural 'differentiation' which gives rise to a nascent political awareness, or a 'nationalist consciousness in the raw state'.⁵ On the

¹ Cf. Georges Balandier, *Sociologie actuelle de l'Afrique noire* (Paris, 2nd edn. 1963), pp. 3-38.

² Cf. Frazier, *op. cit.* pp. 305-11.

³ Cf. in particular V. Lanternari, *Les Mouvements religieux des peuples opprimés* (Paris, 1962).

⁴ Balandier, *op. cit.* The article he quotes by d'Arboussier was entitled 'Les Problèmes de la culture', and was published in the special number of *Europe* (Paris), May-June 1949, devoted to black Africa.

⁵ Balandier, *op. cit.* pp. 486 and 441-2. Sentiments of racial solidarity were helped by the influence of American Negro 'missions', but were inevitable in view of the racial discrimination to which the Africans were exposed. The racial factor assumed a preponderance in popular and intellectual movements of black people in the New World, and will consequently be discussed in that context. See also Balandier, 'Messianismes et nationalismes en Afrique noire', in *Cahiers Internationaux de Sociologie* (Paris), xiv, 1953.

other hand, we have a recasting of foreign and indigenous elements into a new cultural structure, which offers new possibilities of self-expression.

These popular religious movements were not, of course, always transformed into political movements. In many cases, they helped their adherents to escape from the pressures of a difficult situation;¹ and some also represented forms of cultural regression. But they emphasise some of the problems involved in the colonial situation. For the African was in most cases drawn into the cultural world of the European, but none the less maintained in a secondary position. While he was refused acceptance as an equal by the colonisers, his life and values had come to be ruled by the norms imposed or sanctioned by the latter. He thus lived with the European in a state of symbiosis, but one of ambiguity. The result has been described by B. Malinowski:

Since Africans cannot share the ideals, interests and full benefits of co-operative activities with the Whites, they naturally fall back on their own system of belief, value and sentiment. To be a mere carbon copy is not satisfactory as a substitute for all the African had initially to give up . . . The African thus is forced at least spiritually to recross the first line and to re-affirm many of the tribal values abandoned at the first crossing.²

A particularly dramatic example of this spiritual recrossing of the line was the Mau-Mau revolt. This largely Kikuyu nationalist rebellion was buttressed by a resort to tradition, particularly the oath, designed to counter the influence of European cultural incursion. That this was effective in its psychological purpose can be judged from this testimony of a former Mau-Mau detainee: 'Afterwards in the maize, I felt exalted with a new spirit of power and strength. All my previous life seemed empty and meaningless. Even my education, of which I was so proud, appeared trivial beside this splendid and terrible force that had been given me. *I had been born again.*' (My italics).³

The same instinctive falling back on tradition in the face of political domination formed a regular feature in African societies, especially among educated Africans. In the Congo, the Abako started out as a movement of cultural regroupment for the BaKongo, and the Egbe Omo Oduduwa served the same purpose for the Yoruba in Western Nigeria and was later to give birth to the Action Group.

¹ This is Frantz Fanon's interpretation in *Les Damnés de la terre* (Paris, 1961), which J.-P. Sartre summarised in his preface in characteristic fashion: 'The colonised protect themselves from colonial alienation by reinforcing religious alienation'.

² B. Malinowski, *The Dynamics of Culture Change* (New Haven, 1951 edn.), p. 158.

³ Joseph Kariuki, *Mau Mau Detainee* (London, 1963), p. 27.

In short, colonial rule was felt as a shock that reverberated right down to the foundations of African society: a truly traumatic experience that could not but provoke a reaction. This has taken many forms, from makeshift individual adjustments to organised collective movements. The 'messianic' movements presented in bold relief certain traits which were to figure in the more sophisticated reaction to colonial rule of *négritude*. In other words, *négritude* had a popular precedent in Africa; it can be seen as an articulation by an educated élite of sentiments that were felt and confusedly expressed by humbler folk. Balandier has, not without cause, called *négritude* 'the literary replica of African messianisms'.¹ But although, in this light, popular movements in Africa furnish an indication of the historical and cultural origins of *négritude*, it was among black people in America that it was to receive its immediate inspiration, as well as most of its distinctive characteristics.

2. *The Black Diaspora*

The starting point of Negro history in America is slavery, a fact which has determined to a large extent the nature of the global experience of black people in the New World. The drastic character of this experience from the first needs no underlining. What is important for our present concern is the general pattern of the Negro's reaction to his condition in America.

In the first place, there were organised forms of violent resistance. The history of the Negro in America has known some heroic moments, the most celebrated of which was the successful revolution under Toussaint Louverture which gave birth to the first Negro republic, Haiti.² The example itself is of direct relevance here, since Toussaint has also become a symbol in the literature of *négritude*, and Aimé Césaire has hailed Haiti as the cradle of its revolutionary spirit.³ The heroic dimensions and the universal import of these resistance movements were not lost upon the slaves themselves, as shown by the proclamation of another group of slaves who revolted in Guadeloupe under Louis Delgrès, which begins: 'To the entire world, the last cry of innocence and of despair', and ends: 'And you, posterity, grant a tear to our misfortunes, and we shall die content'.⁴ This lyrical note adopted by the desperate slaves in commenting upon their situation was to reappear in a more extended form in Negro spirituals.

¹ Georges Balandier, *Afrique ambiguë* (Paris, 1957), p. 285.

² Cf. C. R. L. James, *The Black Jacobins* (London, 1938).

³ Aimé Césaire, *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (Paris, 1956 edn.), p. 44.

⁴ Quoted by Aimé Césaire in *Toussaint Louverture* (Paris, 1956 edn.), p. 44. Delgrès and his followers in revolt were holding out against the French army, and preferred to blow themselves up with their fort rather than surrender.

The spirituals represent the earliest examples of the black people's indirect defence, through an art form, against the conditions of contact with the white man. The spiritual appears in this light as a direct ancestor of the *négritude* poem. For the Negro slave not only made observations on his lot, but also created a whole mechanism of defence through lyrical symbols. As Langston Hughes has pointed out, some of the spirituals like 'Steal Away' were disguised weapons of direct resistance.¹ Furthermore, they contain the first form of Negro religious expression; elements taken from the dominating culture of the white master were adapted to the Negro's temperament as well as re-interpreted to apply to his situation. An analogy between the history of the Jews of the Old Testament and that of the Negro slaves was struck in spirituals like 'Go Down, Moses', and thus the Negro slave's sentiment of exile found an appropriate and socially acceptable expression. This analogy survived slavery and has been developed into the idea of a Black Diaspora, both in the popular imagination and in the intellectual movements among black people in the Americas.

The New World Negro's sense of Africa varies considerably, according to the area and the social class in which he lives, but it is undeniable that it exists.² Furthermore, the marked racial distinction of the Negro, living as a minority group in dominantly white societies, as well as other specific historical and social factors, have created a differentiation of the black man in America, and have produced Negro sub-cultures throughout the continent. At one extreme lies the largely spontaneous religious syncretism of the Negro in Latin America, notably in Brazil with the *candomblé* cult and in Haiti with the *voodoo* cult. At the other extreme lies the urban sub-culture of the Negro in the north of the U.S.A., created by the failure to complete the process of integration of the black population. In between can be cited examples like Afro-Cuban music (the rhumba) and the 'Nancy' Tales of the British West Indies.³ Whatever the particular significance that these varied forms of Negro sub-culture were to have in the social context of the countries in which they are found, they kept alive in varying measures a myth of Africa largely as a survival of slavery, to which the Haitian writer Jacques Roumain has given expression in his poem, 'Guinea':

It's the long road to Guinea
 No bright welcome will be made for you
 In the dark land of dark men:
 Under a smoky sky pierced by the cry of birds,
 Around the eye of the river
 The eyelashes of the trees open on a decaying light
 There, there awaits you beside the water
 a quiet village,
 And the hut of your fathers, and the hard ancestral
 stone where your head will rest at last.¹

In general, it is probably safe to suppose that the presence in America of Negro sub-cultures composed in part of African elements, and the complementary existence of a myth of Africa among black peoples would never have assumed any kind of active significance without certain social factors. The most important of these was without doubt the caste system which followed on emancipation in the United States.² This had the effect of stratifying American society by forcing the Negro into a distinct social organisation, to the extent that Booker T. Washington was able to remark that the Negro had become 'a nation within a nation'. Racial discrimination, which gravely limited the Negroes' opportunity for social advancement, and the various humiliations to which he was exposed created a discontent which gave rise to various political movements. A 'nationalist tradition' thus developed among black people in the United States, which was to have a cultural parallel.³

The race problem and its immediate effects on the life of the U.S.A. has made the entire Negro population conscious of its ethnic identity, and has rendered its leaders and intellectuals sensitive to the historical implications. For the caste system was maintained through an elaborate cultural myth governed mainly by the idea of the biological inferiority of the black man.⁴ It has often been argued that racial prejudice developed out of attempts to rationalise the slave trade. There is no doubt, however, that the arguments for black inferiority were based upon an evaluation of the Negroes' African origins. Herskovits describes how 'the myth of the Negro past' conditioned the life of the Negro in the U.S.A.:

For though it has often been pointed out that the skin colour of the Negro makes him an all too visible mark for prejudice, it is not so well realised that

¹ Jacques Roumain, 'Guinée', translated by Langston Hughes in *The Poetry of the Negro* (New York, 1949), p. 365.

² Cf. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro in the United States* (New York, 1949).

³ Cf. E. U. Essien-Udom, *Black Nationalism* (Chicago, 1962), ch. 2, 'The Nationalist Tradition', which offers a useful summary of American Negro forms of nationalism.

⁴ Sir Alan Burns gives a history of the development of this idea in his book *Colour Prejudice* (London, 1949).

¹ 'The Glory of Negro History—A Pageant', in *The Langston Hughes Reader* (New York, 1958), pp. 465 ff.

² Cf. Roger Bastide, 'Le mythe de l'Afrique noire et la société multiraciale', in *Esprit* (Paris), October 1958.

³ The problem of 'Africanisms' in the New World has been given considerable attention; the best known studies are: Melville Herskovits, *The Myth of the Negro Past* (Boston, 1941), and Roger Bastide, *Les Religions africaines au Brésil* (Paris, 1960).

the accepted opinion of the nature of the Negro's cultural heritage is what makes him the only element in the peopling of the United States that has no operative past except in bondage.¹

The extension of colonial conquest in Africa all through the nineteenth and the early years of the twentieth century lent weight to the idea of African, and by extension, Negro inferiority, and gave rise to the imperialist ideologies embodied in Kipling's well-known slogan, 'the white man's burden'. Greater still was the effect of these events upon the Negro population in the U.S.A., deprived of any worth-while historical tradition.

This is the background that gives a profound meaning to popular movements such as those inspired by Noble Drew Ali and Marcus Garvey. The cultural position of the black man in the U.S.A., though possessing its own specific characteristics, none the less offered certain resemblances to that of his African counterpart. He too lived in a symbiotic relationship with the white man, and was likewise held in a subordinate position by the caste system. At the same time he was, even more than the African, governed by the secondary institutions imposed or sanctioned by the whites, especially in the fields of religion and social morality. The result resembles that observed in the case of the African, for, as Essien-Udom has remarked, 'Negroes have sought to strike out for themselves in those areas of activity in which the resistance of the white society is marginal.'² The Negro wish for independent expression found a ready springboard in those elements of Negro sub-culture which segregation had helped to mould into something of a definite structure, particularly the separatist religious movements.

The role of Noble Drew Ali and Garvey was to capitalise upon this latter aspect of the Negro's situation and to endow it with an historic sense derived from what had up till then remained largely a rudimentary atavistic instinct, namely, the Negro's sense of his African origin. Garvey's 'Back to Africa' movement in particular differed from those before him in that it was presented not as an escape from America, but as a national return to an original home, as a positive rather than a negative gesture. For, whatever his excesses, Garvey appreciated the psychological needs of his adherents, realising that what they hankered after was not so much political freedom as 'freedom from contempt'.³

Garvey's mythical revaluation of Africa had the precise function

¹ Herskovits, *op. cit.* pp. 30-1.

² Essien-Udom, *op. cit.* p. 17.

³ Frazier, *Race and Culture Contacts in the Modern World*, p. 311.

of abolishing the world order created by the white man in the mind of the Negro.¹ The prophetic character of Garvey's movement offered a striking similarity to African messianism. Its visionary nature, springing in part from the historic dimensions of his conception and in part from his remoteness from Africa itself, necessarily informed his movement with a strong millenary strain, and his last directions to his followers from his Atlanta jail were characteristic: 'Look for me in the whirlwind or storm, look for me all around you, for with God's grace, I shall come and bring with me countless millions of black slaves who have died in America and the West Indies and the millions in Africa to aid you in the fight for Liberty, Freedom and Life.'²

Garvey's contribution was twofold. He helped to crystallise the ambiguous and troubled race feeling of his followers into a definite racial consciousness, although he could not avoid the dangers of racialism. He was also among the first to create a *mystique*, based on a revaluation of the African cultural heritage, as a source of inspiration to the blacks in America and in the world.³

For in the early years of this century, the black man's worth was low indeed, not only in the eyes of his white overlord, but also (and as a consequence) in his own eyes. He was on the lowest rung of the racial hierarchy which western civilisation had established. As Césaire has observed, referring to the San Domingo revolution, this was not merely a hierarchy, but even 'an ontology: at the top, the white man—the *being*, in the full sense of the term—at the bottom, the black man... the thing, as much as to say, a *nothing*'.⁴ This was a situation which black intellectuals were to combat with all their strength, particularly those who were in direct contact with the whites. The contest was to infuse a passionate vigour into their movements, which acquired the character of a counter-offensive.

II. PRECEDENTS

The black man in the western hemisphere occupied a definite cultural position, to say the least, and in the United States this position was

¹ Abram Kardiner and Lionel Ovesey concede as much when they write: 'Marcus Garvey saw one important truth: that the Negro was doomed as long as he took his ideals from the white man. He saw that this sealed his internal feeling of inferiority and his self contempt.' *The Mark of Oppression* (New York, 1962), p. 363.

² Marcus Garvey, *Philosophy and Opinions*, edited by Amy Jacques-Garvey (New York, 1923).

³ It is well known that Ghana's 'Black Star' emblem is a legacy of Garvey's movements. But the activities of New World Negroes who *did* come to Africa, such as Dr E. W. Blyden, helped to diffuse ideas similar to his.

⁴ Césaire, *Toussaint Louverture*, p. 31.

manifestly uncomfortable. For, although living in the white man's society, the black man retained an awareness of his racial differences and in some cases was forced to organise his life on a racial basis. Thus distinctive black currents appeared in the 'mainstream' of the majority culture in some American societies.

Where this process was not accentuated by the caste system, it was often helped on by the class system which grew out of slavery. Usually the black man, the former slave, became the peasant or the unskilled worker, and the Negro sub-cultures also became identified in some American societies with a definite social classification, especially in the south of the U.S.A.¹ But this combination was implicit in other areas, such as Brazil and Cuba.

Thus, even where there were no full-blown nationalist movements based on clear social grievances, there were minor manifestations of ethnic feeling. These were kept to the minimum in Brazil, for example, where racial issues were almost unknown, due to the favourable traditions that had been built up during the slave period and the consequently unproblematic racial assimilation of the population.² Ethnic feelings were manifested in popular and cultural movements, which were partly dictated by economic and social factors, and partly by the reaction of black people to Brazilian 'aesthetic prejudice', as it has been called, against the black colour, as distinct from racial prejudice against black people.³

These movements combined a revaluation of the black and his sub-culture together with social protest. They culminated in the literature of the so-called 'cannibalistic' school, which was animated mainly by radical white writers and whose misguided literary primitivism was a reaction against Christian and middle-class values. The Negro and the native Indian were glorified on the basis of white stereotype conceptions of their cultural heritages.

1. Afro-Cubanism

But it was in Cuba that the Negro and his sub-culture were to have a preponderant influence on intellectual movements. From the beginning, an anti-slavery tradition had put the Negro in the centre of Cuban

¹ Cf. John Dollard, *Caste and Class in a Southern Town* (New York, 1949 edn.).

² Cf. G. Freyre, *Maitres et esclaves* (Paris, 1952).

³ Roger Bastide, 'Variations sur la négritude', in *Présence Africaine* (Paris), p. 36. Professor Bastide considers coloured people in Brazil with particular reference to the ideology of *négritude*, and shows that no real movement based on an African myth was able to extend beyond the national context, despite a Back to Africa slogan, 'Volta na Africa'.

literary interests, a position that was to be reinforced by the writings which accompanied the Cuban independence struggle.¹ The ideological stand of the Cuban revolutionaries against slavery, particularly in the writings of José Martí, although part of a general political attitude against Spain, had the effect of affirming the Negro sub-culture as an integral part of the distinctive national heritage of Cuba, and eventually gave rise in the years 1920-40 to what has been called the Afro-Cuban school, or *negrismo*.

As in Brazil, *negrismo* was essentially an affair of white writers and it too had its share of primitivism. The Negro was seen mainly as a stereotype, and in many cases the poetry that he inspired was no compliment to him or to his African origins.² But there was a positive side to *negrismo*. In the first place, something of a technical revolution was achieved by some poets turning seriously to Africanisms in Cuba and working them into their poetry to arrive at a striking originality. This was true in particular of their use of the rhythms of Afro-Cuban music.³ But, more than this, some Cuban poets and intellectuals were to achieve a real sympathy with the Negro's situation and his culture. In this, they were helped by the presence in their midst of the coloured writer, Nicolás Guillén, for whom, as G. R. Courthauld observes, 'the Negro theme is not just a fashion, a subject for literature, but the living heart of his creative activity'.⁴

Guillén introduced an element of racial and social protest into Afro-Cubanism, along with its formal technical modes. In his long poem, 'West Indies Ltd.', written in 1934, we have a combination of the stylistic devices of *negrismo* and of a radical, demanding tone, that prefigures in many ways another classic of Negro literature, Césaire's *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*, written a few years later. In other poems, like 'The Name' and 'Ballad of the Two Grandfathers', he evokes the memory of his African ancestry and of the slave trade, although he invariably ends by reconciling this with his Spanish ancestry in a common cause:

¹ Cf. G. R. Courthauld, *Race and Colour in Caribbean Literature* (London, 1962). I am indebted mainly to this book for information on the Afro-Cuban movement; it also offers an insight into the Caribbean aspects of *négritude*.

² For example, Palés Matos' poem, 'Ñam-Ñam', in which this passage occurs:

Asia dreams its nirvana
America dances its jazz
Europe plays and theorises
Africa grunts: ñam-ñam.

Translated and quoted by Courthauld, *op cit.* p. 33.

³ See Janheinz Jahn, 'Poetry in Rhumba Rhythms' in *Black Orpheus* (Ibadan), p. 3, 1958.

⁴ Courthauld, *op cit.* p. 34.

Black anguish and white anguish
 Both of the same measure.
 Shouting, dreaming, weeping, singing,
 Dreaming, weeping, singing,
 Weeping, singing,
 Singing.¹

Guillén's work offers no indication of any internal conflict arising out of his Negro connexions, and its militant character is clearly due more to social than racial reasons. And although the intellectuals of the Afro-Cuban movement concerned themselves seriously with the situation of the Negro, their movement had no political aim but was conceived rather in a liberal spirit. A nationalist strain and a distinct racial consciousness were thus absent in Afro-Cubanism.

2. *The Negro Renaissance in the U.S.A.*

A completely different picture emerges from a consideration of the United States. Two factors were to play a determining role in this respect: the problematic situation of the Negro in U.S. society, and the fact that what can rightly be called a Negro literature in the U.S.A. was the work of Negroes themselves.²

The social situation of the Negro in the U.S.A. made of him an essentially divided individual, a man with a double awareness of himself. This split in the Negro's consciousness, a direct result of racial prejudice, went hand in hand with the other psychological effects of discrimination upon his social life to create a permanent state of mental conflict. He felt a double alienation: by and in society, and from himself.

Thus, even when a Negro was assimilated to the culture of the white majority, he was rejected by society, and remained what R. E. Park has called the 'marginal man', burdened with conflicting ethnic and national loyalties.³ Here is the problem which is at the bottom of the extreme racial consciousness of the Negro intellectual in the U.S.A., and which appears notably in the 'New Negro Movement' variously called the 'Negro Renaissance' and the 'Harlem Renaissance', which sprang up in the wake of the racial agitation after the First World War.

¹ Nicolás Guillén, 'Ballad of the Two Grandfathers', in *Élégies et chansons cubaines* (Paris, 1959), pp. 15-19. The version here quoted offers slight variants on the original in *El Son Entero* (Buenos Aires, 1947).

² The term 'Negro' is used here in its accepted sense in the U.S.—that is, to denote any individual having in any way an African origin. The American Negro writer was often a mulatto, sometimes very light-coloured, but in the circumstances was obliged to write under a racial 'Negro' label.

³ Cf. R. E. Park, 'Cultural Conflict and the Marginal Man', in *Race and Culture* (New York 1950), and also E. V. Stonequist, *The Marginal Man* (New York, 1937).

The outstanding figure in Negro intellectual life in the U.S.A. during this period was W. E. B. Du Bois. He was the first to analyse with clarity the ambiguous social position of the Negro in the U.S.A. In his book, *The Souls of Black Folk*, which first appeared in 1903, the conflict in the Negro's mind was set out in these pathetic yet vigorous terms:

It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness—an American, a Negro: two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings, two warring ideals, in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.¹

This sentiment of alienation furnished the incentive that led Du Bois to a passionate analysis of the distinctive aspects of Negro life and history in the U.S.A. from their very beginnings, and induced him, in his consideration of the religious life of the Negro communities and of spirituals, to see them as continuations of the Negro's African heritage. This was a position that he was to develop in another book *Black Folk Then and Now* (New York, 1939), which was, in the words of Herskovits, an effort 'to comprehend the entire picture of the Negro, African and New World, in its historical and functional setting'.²

Thus, at the same time as Garvey, but on a different plane, Du Bois began to develop the racial ethos which informed his political activities as the founder and moving spirit of Pan-Africanism.³ His Pan-Negro cultural ideal is well summed up in the following extract from his writings:

We are Americans, not only by birth and by citizenship, but by our political ideals, our language, our religion. Further than that, our Americanism does not go. At that point, we are Negroes, members of a vast historic race that from the very dawn of creation has slept, but half awakening in the dark forest of its African hinterland. We are the first fruits of this new nation, the harbinger of that black tomorrow which is yet to soften the whiteness of the Teutonic today. We are the people whose subtle sense of song has given America its only American music, its only American fairy tales, its only touch of pathos and humour amid its mad money-making plutocracy. As such, it is our duty to conserve our physical powers, our intellectual endowments, our spiritual ideals; as a race, we must strive by race-organisation, by race solidarity, by race unity to the realisation of that broader humanity which freely recognises differences in men, but sternly deprecates inequality in their opportunities of development.⁴

¹ W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Chicago, 7th edn. 1907), pp. 3-4.

² Herskovits, op. cit. p. 2.

³ Cf. Colin Legum, *Pan-Africanism* (London, 1962), for more details of this aspect of Du Bois' activities.

⁴ Du Bois, quoted by Essien-Udom, op. cit. 28-9, from *The American Negro Academy Occasional Papers*, 2, pp. 10-12.

Du Bois gives voice here to certain sentiments which his Negro compatriots were the first to echo, although we have come to associate them with Léopold Sédar Senghor. The cultivation of a Negro identity, culturally as well as socially and politically, and the expression of a total racial solidarity based not only on a common social experience, but also on a common spiritual feeling, came to dominate the literature of the American Negro. The apologetic tones and veiled revolt that had characterised Negro writing before then gave way to a new revolutionary accent. Claude McKay, Countee Cullen, Langston Hughes, Sterling Brown, and others established a radical and militant tone, and Negro poetry became 'characteristically the poetry of rebellion and self assertion'.¹

I oppose all laws of state and country,
All creeds of church and social orders,
All conventionalities of society and system
Which cross the path of the light of Freedom
Or obscure the reign of the Right.²

This new Negro poetry was only part of a cultural revival which included a new type of Negro novel of protest, culminating in Richard Wright's *Native Son* (New York, 1940), and in which jazz and the blues had an important function: to differentiate the Negro and to give him the sense of a cultural heritage. The theme of Africa as the distant home of the black man came to acquire a new importance. In the circumstances, these poets could not avoid the pitfalls of exoticism, but the theme came to carry a strong emotional weight of personal involvement, as this extract from Cullen's poem, 'Heritage', illustrates:

What is Africa to me:
Copper sun or scarlet sea
Jungle star or jungle track,
Strong bronzed men, or regal black
Women from whose loins I sprang
When the birds of Eden sang?
One three centuries removed
From the scenes his fathers loved,
Spicy grove, cinnamon tree,
What is Africa to me?³

Garvey's movement and Du Bois' ideas had begun to give the Negro a pride in his race and origins, and the poets were beginning to affirm

¹ R. E. Park, 'Negro Race Consciousness as Reflected in Race Literature', in *Race and Culture*, p. 294. See Jean Wagner, *Les Poètes nègres des Etats-Unis* (Paris, 1962), for a complete discussion of the period 1890 to 1940 (Dunbar to Hughes) in American Negro poetry.

² Walter Everette Hawkins, 'Credo', quoted by Park, *op. cit.* p. 296.

³ Countee Cullen, *Color* (New York, 1925), p. 36.

this in tones that soon acquired a mystical character, as can be observed from the poem by 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 my pyramids above it
I heard the ringing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln
went down to New Orleans
And I've seen its muddy bosom turn all golden at sunset
I've known rivers
Ancient, dusky rivers
My soul has grown deep like the rivers.¹

The Negro renaissance in the U.S.A. is of capital importance in the development of *négritude*. The writings of American Negroes were known outside the U.S.A. and commented upon by Negro intellectuals in France and the Caribbean.² Besides, the renaissance not only exported its writings, but also some of its personalities. McKay, Cullen, and Hughes travelled in France, and a flow of Negro expatriates to that country started a Negro renaissance in Paris, with Josephine Baker and Sidney Bechet as the leading musical personalities. Richard Wright was later to become a prominent Negro expatriate in France. Negro intellectuals in France thus had opportunities of meeting their American counterparts.³ It must be remembered too that Du Bois' Pan-African Congress held in Paris in 1919 depended very much on the collaboration of Blaise Diagne, an influential Senegalese deputy.

But apart from these personal contacts, the Negro renaissance can be said to have led to *négritude* as a movement by setting precedents in all the areas of feeling in which the latter was to be given articulate expression. The literary movement that it played a part in creating in Haiti provides a link between the two movements that is both historical and thematic. The American poets were thus not so much influences

¹ *The Langston Hughes Reader*, p. 88.

² Césaire obtained his *Diplôme d'études supérieures* (M.A. degree), with a monograph on American Negro poetry. Léopold Sédar Senghor produced translations of Hughes and others.

³ Lilyan Kesteloot, in *Les Ecrivains noirs de langue française* (Brussels, 1963), p. 63, cites a letter of Senghor's, in which he mentions how contacts between American- and French-speaking Negro intellectuals were developed by a certain Mlle Nardal who had founded a *Revue du monde noir*, and kept a *salon littéraire*, at which Negro intellectuals from the U.S.A., the Caribbean, and Africa were wont to meet. Mme Kesteloot's book contains the best documentation so far of the literary development of French-speaking intellectuals, and is indispensable for the study of *négritude*. (It was reviewed by Hassan El Nouty in *The Journal of Modern African Studies* (Cambridge), 2, 4, 1964.)

as precursors, whose work the French were to carry on to its logical limits.

3. *The Haitian Literary Renaissance*

The Haitian renaissance was a direct result of the occupation of the Republic by the United States in 1915. Whatever the tactical reasons for this gesture, the American occupation created a colonial situation in Haiti and aroused a profound resentment in its intelligentsia. Apart from the complete take-over of the public institutions of Haiti, an element of colour conflict was introduced by the racial attitude of some members of the American administration. The import of the occupation appeared clear—as the republic was the only state run by black people in the Americas, the reversal of its sovereign position was generally interpreted in a racial light. Haiti thus came under white domination, and its intellectuals reacted along familiar lines.

Although Haiti had for about a century been an independent country, the very absence of direct white domination up to 1915 had made it a Negro republic, as far as the more sophisticated forms of cultural expression were concerned, only in a nominal sense. The Haitian élite, though proud of its political heritage and jealous of its independence, took its cultural values exclusively from France, and was far removed from the original culture of the ordinary folk. A deep cleavage thus existed between the intelligentsia and the masses. The American occupation however brought a radical change in the mental outlook of the Haitian intellectuals. The process has been described by Naomi Garret:

They had been made conscious, in a humiliating manner, of the racial characteristics which distinguished them from the powerful Americans in their country. To fight the feeling of inferiority that the Occupation had managed to engender within them, they turned within themselves and to their distant past to seek what there was, if anything, in their traditions and their heritage of which they could be proud. Here at last was something theirs, and inaccessible to the Americans.¹

The reaction of the Haitians was to seek for themselves a sphere of thought and action outside American control, and thus to seek a 'national soul'. Their quest was to be facilitated by the writings of a most eminent scholar, the ethnologist J. Price-Mars, who became their ideological leader. His book, *Ainsi parla l'oncle*, though a scientific report of popular Haitian culture, was interspersed with comments in

¹ Naomi Garret, *The Renaissance of Haitian Poetry* (Paris, 1963), p. 61. This book is the only account in English of this important phase of Haitian literature.

which he made clear the message he wished it to convey to his compatriots. Like Du Bois, he saw in Haitian popular culture the common denominator, 'the intimate essence', as he termed it, of the Haitian people. And, again like Du Bois, Price-Mars went on to recognise the African basis of this, and to advocate its acceptance as a functional part of the Haitian national heritage, in the hope that such a gesture would make the Haitians no longer coloured Frenchmen, but 'Haitians pure and simple, that is, men born under specific historical conditions.' His main point was: 'We have no chance of being ourselves unless we do not repudiate any part of our ancestral heritage. Well, 80 per cent of this heritage is a gift from Africa!'²

Thus the sentiment of diminution by white rule led Price-Mars to place a specific situation within a larger context—cultural, historical, and racial. Naomi Garret has shown how strong the hold of Price-Mars' ideas was upon the younger generation of Haitian writers,³ who reacted against their predecessors, considering them servile imitators of the French, and organised themselves around literary reviews with significant names like *La Relève*, *La Revue indigène*,³ *Les Griots*. She has also indicated how the American Negro poets of the renaissance were to exercise a determining influence upon the Haitians, through the articles of writers like Frank Schoell on the American Negro phenomenon in Parisian journals, through articles and translations by Haitians such as Dominique Hippolyte and Price-Mars (who had a fervent admiration for Du Bois), and through René Piquion's biographical study of Langston Hughes, with a selection in French of 34 of his poems:

Like the American Negro writers of the 1920's, Haitians had become race conscious and were beginning to feel for their American brothers a kinship born of similarity of interests. It boosted their morale to discover that in their search for information about their African past, they were not alone; common cause had been found with American Negroes who, too, were ceasing to be ashamed of their heritage and were able to look upon themselves and their brothers with objectivity.⁴

On the other hand, their French connexion drew them into a common stream with French-speaking writers from other parts of the world, in particular from the Caribbean. Thus it was that they became the first

² J. Price-Mars, *Ainsi parla l'oncle* (Port-au-Prince, 1928), pp. 1-11, 20, and 210.

³ Garret reports that in 'separate interviews with many of them', the majority of the younger poets indicated 'lectures by Dr Mars' as the great influence on them and their work; *op. cit.* p. 611.

⁴ The choice of the word 'indigène' (the French colonial equivalent of 'native'), is highly significant as a calculated gesture of defiance, the same attitude that was to produce *négritude* out of the word 'nègre', a term of contempt.

⁴ Garret, *op. cit.* p. 84.

poets of *négritude* as such, even before the term had been coined, and occupied a prominent position in the anthology compiled by Senghor which was to launch the movement.¹ The part of Haiti in the development of the movement was well reflected by the election of Dr Price-Mars as chairman for the First Congress of Negro Writers and as president of the Society of African Culture (S.A.C.) created in 1959. Aimé Césaire's designation of Haiti as the birthplace of *négritude* is thus true in more than one sense.

III. INFLUENCES

An ironic aspect of Negro popular movements in Africa, as well as in the United States, is the way in which western elements acted as catalysts in the emotional reaction which produced nationalist feelings. Christian egalitarian teaching, for example, helped to show up in the eyes of black converts the fundamental contradiction that separated white domination from the avowed humanitarian principles of western culture, and to underline the rift between the objective practice and the declared values of the white man. Toussaint Louverture's revolution in San Domingo was founded, by a similar process, on the ideals of the French Revolution. A powerful emotional inspiration of nationalism was thus a disaffection for the white man, judged against his own principles.

Since the separatist churches in Africa as well as in America were syncretic, they were therefore never a pure return to original forms of religious expression in Africa, much less in America, where this was out of the question. Thus, once the black man had been dissociated in any way from his culture, a return to any kind of complete authenticity became impossible. The acculturative process was irremediable.

On the above two points, the popular were again to anticipate the intellectual movements, and what was true of the former became even more so for the assimilated black intellectual. This truth is borne out by the tremendous influence which western ideas and cultural forms have had on Negro intellectual movements, especially on *négritude*. For, without any doubt, the progressive formulation of the movement was made possible by the dominant currents of ideas in the west, was in fact singularly favoured by the intellectual and moral climate created in Europe by the aftermath of World War I.

¹ The poetry of the Haitian renaissance will be discussed, together with the literature of *négritude*, in the second part of this study.

1. *The Intellectual Climate in Europe*

One of the best chroniclers of this period in the intellectual history of Europe, the French critic R. M. Albérès, has declared: 'European sensibility in the twentieth century is characterised by the belief that there exists a divorce between intelligence and reality, truth, or instinct.'¹

Consequently the dominating current in European intellectual life has been anti-intellectualism, and the man who helped to put it on a philosophical basis was Henri Bergson. His influence was important in creating a climate in which ideals that previous centuries had rendered 'non-western' could be accommodated within the European sensibility; but his position as the 'official philosopher' in France also had a direct consequence for French-educated Negro intellectuals.² Bergson's influence is apparent in the way Senghor employs concepts derived from Bergsonian categories like *intuition* and *élan vital* in his own writings on African culture.³

Anti-intellectualism also provoked a crisis of European consciousness, marked by a general calling into question of established institutions and of moral and religious values, and by a completely new vision of man. The surrealist movement developed out of this crisis and has left a permanent mark on the literature of *négritude*, counting in Césaire one of its foremost practitioners; but it was not so much the technical revolution as the social import that came to have a meaning for black intellectuals. By its aggressive iconoclasm, surrealism drew attention to the imperfections of western society and helped to foster a radically critical outlook towards it, a lesson that was absorbed by the blacks in their own movements of revolt.⁴

But a far more important western influence was Marxism. For if surrealism could be considered, in the words of Gaëtan Picon, 'a passionate enterprise of liberation'⁵ it was largely literary and individualist, and consequently offered no ideology, despite its revolutionary

¹ R. M. Albérès, *L'Aventure intellectuelle du XXe siècle* (Paris, 3rd edn. 1963), p. 11.

² Henri Bergson was Professor of Philosophy in the Collège de France from 1900 until his death in 1941. His *Creative Evolution* probably exercised the greatest influence on Senghor and others.

³ A later influence on Senghor was the work of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, to be discussed in the second part of this study.

⁴ The surrealists had adopted an anti-colonial attitude in their reaction against western society. In an open letter to Paul Claudel in 1925, they wrote, *inter alia*, 'We heartily wish that revolutions, wars and colonial insurrections would come to wipe out this western civilisation whose impurities you defend even as far as the eastern world'; reproduced in Maurice Nadeau, *Histoire du surréalisme* (Paris, 1945), p. 296.

⁵ G. Picon, *Panorama de la nouvelle littérature française* (Paris, 1960 edn.), p. 43.

stand. Marxism, on the other hand, presented a comprehensive framework of social and political ideas. In Marxist concepts such as 'the principle of contradiction', 'alienation', and 'the class struggle', black intellectuals found ready instruments of social analysis applicable to the colonial and 'para-colonial' situation.¹

Indeed, western Marxists left nothing to chance in making them aware of the relevance of their ideology to their situation. In 1916, Lenin had advanced the thesis that imperialism was 'a direct continuation of the fundamental properties of capitalism in general', and Stalin followed this with an analysis of *The National and Colonial Question*, in which the principles of national and cultural autonomy were reconciled with the ideal of proletarian solidarity. Anti-imperialism thus became an important part of the Marxist ideology. The Communist Party was at the height of its popularity in France in the 1930's and deployed tremendous efforts in the United States to win the adherence of the obviously discontented Negro population. Senghor has recounted how, as students in Europe, black intellectuals came in contact with Marxist teaching:

Indeed, right from the time of our arrival in Europe, we were submitted to Marxist propaganda. Some black students—especially the West Indians—had succumbed to its seduction. And they tried in turn to seduce us. They presented 'scientific socialism' as the final solution to our problems, to all our problems. Under the guise of parliamentary democracy (they preached), a minority of bourgeois [elements] held in their hand the levers of power and wealth. They exploited, by oppressing them, not only their own people but also the immense flock of *natives* overseas. The solution to the problem was clear. It was up to us to join the army of the proletariat, and to struggle within its ranks. Once the 'capitalist system' had been overthrown and the ownership of the means of production handed over to the workers, the colonised people would be at one stroke *de-colonised, dis-alienated*. They would recover, at the same time as their independence, the ownership of their material wealth and the freedom to promote the values of their civilisation.²

The influence of Marxism on Negro intellectuals on both sides of the Atlantic was profound and enduring. A good number of Negro writers have been, at one time or another, members of the Communist Party.

¹ Césaire described the American Negro situation as 'para-colonial' in his *Discours sur le colonialisme* (Paris, 3rd edn. 1958). The fundamental identity between the colonial system and the caste system in the U.S. has been pointed out by the French sociologist, Mickel Dufrenne, who remarks that they are both a perpetuation of the 'master-slave' relationship, and concludes: 'The hazards of history have only arranged that the United States have their colonies within!' *La Personnalité de base* (Paris, 1953), p. 232. Similarly Césaire's phrase carries the idea of domination.

² Senghor, 'Négritude et marxisme', in *Pierre Teilhard de Chardin et la politique africaine* (Dakar, 1962), pp. 21-2.

The attraction of Marxism lay in its revolutionary character; and this emotional pull left a permanent imprint on the ideas of most of them. Even after the inevitable period of disillusionment with the Communist Party, due to its tactics and methods, the Marxist dialectic continued to inform their writings.¹

Finally, the nature of literary activity in Europe has not been without consequence for the literature of *négritude*. The years preceding World War II saw the development of a literature of 'causes', culminating in the outpouring provoked by the Spanish Civil War. This literature committed to political causes was to receive a tremendous impetus during the French Resistance; and after the war Jean-Paul Sartre developed the idea of *littérature engagée* in a series of essays on the nature of literature and on the relationship of the writer to society.² The two decades 1930-50 were dominated by the literary figures of Louis Aragon, Albert Camus, Paul Eluard, and Jacques Prévert.³ It was inevitable that the black writers should have been strongly influenced by them, especially Sartre, who was the first European apostle of *négritude*, and others who were to have a direct hand in its formulation.

French writing thus had a marked social content in this period, and the literature of *négritude* reflects the prevailing atmosphere in France. There was, however, an important distinction between the white writer and the black, which Richard Wright pointed out at the time: 'The individual discovers that he is a sacrifice to society. This consciousness of sacrifice is developing around two opposite poles: among the whites, the pole of psychological consciousness, among the blacks, that of the realistic-social'⁴—in other words, the poles of *individual* consciousness for the whites, and of *collective* consciousness for the blacks.

2. *The Contribution of Anthropology*

Although the intellectual climate in the west favoured the development of movements that questioned the fundamental values of its society, and Marxism in particular opened the way for a revolt against

¹ Césaire resigned from the Communist Party after the exposure of Stalin by N. Krushchev at the 20th Congress in 1956. His *Lettre à Maurice Thorez* on this occasion has been analysed at length by Colin Legum, in his *Pan-Africanism*, pp. 104-10. Senghor has affirmed on several occasions that Marxism is a western ideology which has to be adapted in Africa. Both he and Césaire, however, continue to employ the dialectical method in their writings, especially the latter in *Toussaint Louverture*.

² These essays were first published in his review *Les Temps modernes* (Paris), and later separately under the title *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?* (Paris, 1948).

³ Paul Eluard wrote the best-known poem of the French Resistance, 'Liberté'. He was a personal friend of Césaire, and his death inspired one of the latter's greatest poems, 'Tombeau de Paul Eluard'; see *Ferrements* (Paris, 1960), pp. 62 ff.

⁴ Richard Wright, interview in *Pan-Africa* (London), 1, 9, September 1947.

imperialism, the determining factor which provoked the black counter-offensive and gave it validity was the revision of the image of the black man in modern anthropology. The development of a scientific method and an objective approach, and the consequent evolution of the concept of 'cultural relativity', led western ethnographers to a broader outlook and a more sympathetic view of non-western cultures.¹

The work of Leo Frobenius was to play an important part in the re-valuation of Africa's culture and peoples. His *History of African Civilisation* was the first serious attempt to credit the black race with a part in ancient Egyptian civilisation and with a capacity for evolving more than rudimentary cultural institutions, and his attitude to the black man is summed up in his enthusiastic exclamation, 'Civilised to the marrow of their bones!'² The writings of French ethnographers like Maurice Delafosse, Robert Delavignette, Théodore Monod, Marcel Griaule, and later Placide Tempels, and of the American Melville Herskovits, to cite only a few, were to give scientific authority to the growing sentiment that the African cultures had been seriously underestimated, with prejudice to the black man's human worth.³

The importance of the new ideas on Africa developed by the anthropologists is threefold. In the first place they gave an important booster to the black man's self esteem, and provided scientific arguments for the intellectuals to undermine the ideology of the white man's 'civilising mission', one of the principal justifications for colonial rule.⁴ Césaire quoted Frobenius in his pamphlet, *Discours sur le colonialisme*, and summed up the indictment of colonial rule with this epigram: 'From colonisation to civilisation, the distance is infinite.'⁵

In the second place, they promoted in the west a new appreciation of African culture. Given the moral and intellectual climate of the inter-war years, when western man began to look outside his own culture for new directions in art and thought, the introduction of non-western forms, and of African sculpture in particular, created an understandably profound impression. Leading artists and writers in Europe took up African forms of cultural expression, including literary

¹ A good example of the old approach to the question of culture is to be seen in the late T. S. Eliot's *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* (London, 1948).

² Leo Frobenius, *Histoire de la civilisation africaine* (Paris, 3rd edn. 1936), p. 14.

³ Maurice Delafosse, *Les Noirs de l'Afrique* (Paris, 1922), Marcel Griaule, *Dieux d'eau* (Paris, 1948), Placide Tempels, *La Philosophie bantoue* (Paris, 1949), Melville Herskovits, *Dahomey* (New York, 1938), 2 vols.

⁴ As a Belgian administrator put it, 'The coloniser conceived his relationship to the colonised as that of a civilised man to a savage. Colonialism is thus based on a hierarchy, assuredly elementary, but stable and sure.' G. Picon, quoted by Kesteloot, op. cit. p. 109.

⁵ Césaire, *Discours sur le colonialisme*, p. 10.

styles; and jazz brought over by the Americans began to be considered a serious musical form.¹ In short, 'The Negro was in vogue in Paris', as Naomi Garret has observed;² the African and his culture were becoming 'respectable'.

Finally, the anthropologists were to exercise a direct influence on the writings of some of the black intellectuals. In this connexion, Lucien Lévy-Bruhl's studies of non-western forms of experience and knowledge furnished Senghor with a conceptual framework for his description of the Negro African mind. His controversial differentiation between western man's 'sight-reason' (*la raison-œil*) and the Negro African's 'touch-reason' (*la raison-toucher*)³ are based on Lévy-Bruhl's distinction between western logic and 'primitive' logic in *La Mentalité primitive* (1921).

Négritude thus owes an immense debt to the west, and this much Senghor has conceded: 'Paradoxically, it was the French who first forced us to seek its essence, and who then showed us where it lay.'⁴

IV. TOWARDS A FORMULATION

Négritude as a definite movement thus grew out of an emotional and intellectual ferment among African and Caribbean students and intellectuals living in Paris before World War II; it was gradually elaborated in a succession of journals,⁵ and finally brought into focus in the post-war years. This ferment became significant because of the uneasy position that the black intellectual occupied in French society.

For there was a fundamental weakness at the heart of the French colonial policy, a selective and rigid assimilation of a black élite, combined with discrimination against the rest of the colonised population.⁶ It created in the élite a feeling that they were on sufferance, and a

¹ The influence of African sculpture on western art forms, especially on Picasso and Modigliani, is a well-known chapter of art history. The influence of African literary forms is perhaps less appreciated, especially on Blaise Cendrars, whose *Anthologie nègre* appeared in 1947. Jazz has also influenced western classical music through Stravinsky and Ravel.

² Garret, op. cit. p. 69.

³ Senghor, 'Éléments constructifs d'une civilisation d'inspiration négro-africaine', in *Deuxième Congrès des écrivains et artistes noirs* (Paris, 1959), 1, pp. 249-79.

⁴ Senghor, 'What is Négritude?', in *Atlas* (New York), January 1962.

⁵ Mme Kesteloot's history of Negro poetry in French, already cited, is in fact based on the development of these journals and reviews.

⁶ Cf. Hodgkin, op. cit. pp. 33-40, for a fuller analysis of French colonial policy. There were also numerous cases of exactions, of which the most resented was the system of forced labour whose abuses were seen at their worst during the construction of the railway line from Brazzaville to Pointe-Noire (the 'Congo-Océan') in 1928-33, at the cost of a great number of African lives. Mongo Béti makes a reference to this in his novel, *Le Pauvre Christ de Bomba* (Paris, 1956).

conflict of loyalties. Added to this was the fact that they could not always escape racial prejudice against them in white society; for even if French people have little prejudice, the black man was an object of contempt. These contradictions are well expressed in this bitter line from Césaire's *Cahier*: 'I salute the 3 centuries that uphold my civic rights with my blood minimised.'¹

The black élite was thus assimilated intellectually but never socially, and could not become involved and identified with the culture of their masters. As cultural hybrids, the only way out of their form of alienation was to fall back on their ethnic loyalties. Their situation thus drew them together, and it is not difficult to understand their reaction. As Senghor put it in 1962:

Early on, we had become aware within ourselves that assimilation was a failure; we could assimilate mathematics or the French language, but we could never strip off our black skins or root out our black souls. And so we set out on a fervent quest for the Holy Grail: our Collective Soul.²

The first sign of this reaction came in 1921, when a West Indian administrator, René Maran, published a novel, *Batouala*, based on his experience in the Congo. This won the coveted Prix Goncourt for that year and caused a scandal, leading to his dismissal from the civil service. Although Maran, who was brought up and educated in France, rightly claimed to be French, he has since been acclaimed by other black writers as a 'precursor' of *négritude*.³ But such a title belongs more properly to another West Indian, Etienne Léro, whose manifesto, *Légitime Défense*, which appeared in 1932, indicated the way in which separate influences from America and Europe had converged upon the blacks in France to inspire their reaction. In one passage, for instance, he wrote:

The storm wind blowing down from Black America will soon wipe out from our Antilles the aborted fruits of a decaying civilisation. Langston Hughes and Claude McKay, the two revolutionary poets, have brought for us, tempered in red alcohol, the African love of life, the African joy of love, the African dream of death.

In another passage, Léro condemned West Indian writing: 'A foreigner would look in vain in this literature for an original or profound accent, for the sensual and colourful imagination of the black man, for an echo

¹ *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*, p. 65.

² Senghor, *op. cit.* p. 54.

³ See preface to the second edition of *Batouala* (Paris, 1921); cf. also Kesteloot *op. cit.* pp. 83 ff. for a discussion of Maran's place in the development of the *négritude* movement.

of the resentment as well as aspirations of an oppressed people.'¹ And Léro went on to annex surrealism and Marxism to the cause he had set out to espouse.

Léro's poetry was neither original nor of a high quality.² But with this single manifesto he had set in motion a process which was to outlive him, and to be prolonged by the efforts of three other poets—Aimé Césaire, Léon Damas, and Léopold Sédar Senghor—who founded their own paper, *L'Étudiant noir*, which appears to have brought together Africans and West Indians.³ This was also the period in which Césaire produced his masterpiece, *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*, published in a little known journal, *Volontés*, in 1939, in which the word *négritude* first appeared in print. The original inventor of the term has been kept a close secret between the three of them, although Césaire is generally given credit for it.⁴ The war soon scattered the group, but Césaire kept up their efforts with *Tropiques*, a paper he founded in Fort-de-France, capital of Martinique, where he had returned as professor at the local *lycée*. He maintained a sharp commentary on the colonial situation in his native island, complemented by a new determination, as can be seen in the article he wrote to launch the review:

The circle of darkness gathers, amid the cries of men and the howls of beasts. Yet we count ourselves among those who say 'No' to darkness. We know that the salvation of the world depends also on us. That the earth has need of all her children. Even the humblest.⁵

It was in Martinique that André Breton, the leader of the surrealist movement, who was a wartime refugee there, came to be acquainted

¹ *Légitime Défense* appeared as the first number of a projected review, but due to its 'subversive' character it was immediately suppressed by the French authorities. Copies are hard to come by, but Léon Damas has reproduced lengthy extracts in the introduction to his anthology *Poètes d'expression française* (Paris, 1947), from which I quote, pp. 13–15.

² For example, see Damas *op. cit.* and Senghor, *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache de langue française* (Paris, 1948). In 'Black Orpheus', his preface to this volume, Sartre compares Léro's surrealism to that of Césaire, and concludes that the former showed no originality. However, there is no doubt that Césaire owes a lot to Léro, who can be regarded as his immediate ancestor.

³ Mme Kesteloot, whose documentation is otherwise complete, could not find a single copy of this paper, and had to rely on excerpts from another publication of Damas, and on testimonies.

⁴ Two other similar terms were also used by Césaire in *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*, 'négraille' and 'nigritie', the first being a pejorative term in common parlance, and the other an invention. But in the crucial passages in the poem, the word *négritude* is invariably employed.

⁵ Césaire, 'Présentation', in *Tropiques* (Fort-de-France), 1, April 1941. The reference to 'darkness' is, of course, to the war. For more about this review and the ideas developed in it by Césaire, with the collaboration of his wife Suzanne and other Caribbean intellectuals, see Kesteloot, *op. cit.* p. 211. ff.

with Césaire. As a result, a new bilingual edition of *Cahier* was published in New York, with a prefatory eulogy in which Breton acclaimed the poem as 'the greatest lyrical monument of the time'.¹

After the war, the three men found themselves together again in Paris, as representatives in the French National Assembly of their territories of origin. The next step was however taken independently of the 'triumvirate' by Alioune Diop, a Senegalese, who in 1947 founded the review *Présence Africaine* with the collaboration of the most eminent personalities in French literary and academic circles. This marked a decisive stage. *Présence Africaine* opened its own publishing section, and helped to give a concrete formulation to the movement, by bringing out a series of works by black writers, and by other scholars on African and Negro literature and problems. Special numbers, such as *Le Monde noir*, edited by the ethnologist Théodore Monod, *l'Art nègre*, *Haiti*, *Poètes noirs*, or *Trois Écrivains nègres* (which included the first novel of Mongo Béti under the name Eza Boto). Two important landmarks published by *Présence Africaine* were the French version of *Bantu Philosophy* (1949), and Cheikh-Anta Diop's controversial essay on *Nations nègres et culture* (1954). The latter was a doctoral dissertation in which Diop, pursuing a trail already opened up by Frobenius, put forward the thesis that ancient Egyptian civilisation was predominantly Negro. Although the dissertation was rejected by the Sorbonne, the book made a profound impression, among black people because of the boldness of its ideas and expression, and in European circles because of its erudition.²

Meanwhile, in 1948 Senghor had brought together, in his well-known *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache de langue française*, the first lyrical expression of the movement, with an introduction in which he expatiated on the concept of *négritude*. But it was the essay entitled 'Black Orpheus' which Jean-Paul Sartre contributed to the volume that consecrated the term and gave the movement a start.³

By the 1950's a considerable body of literature and ideas had been produced; Césaire, Damas, and Senghor had been recognised as important figures in the French literary world, while others like Jacques

¹ André Breton, in 'Un grand poète noir', preface to *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*, reproduced in *Martinique, Charmeuse de Serpents* (Paris, 1948), p. 95.

² Cheikh-Anta Diop eventually obtained his doctorate with a dissertation on *The Cultural Unity of Negro Africa* (Paris, 1959), which was complemented by *L'Afrique noire pré-coloniale* (Paris, 1960).

³ Sartre's essay, 'Orphée nègre', is reproduced in *Situation III* (Paris, 1949). An English translation by the American poet Samuel Allen was published under the title *Black Orpheus* (Paris, 1964).

Roumain, Paul Nizer, Joseph Zobel, Birago Diop, Jacques Rabemananjara, and later Edouard Glissant, Camara Laye, and René Depestre, to mention only a few, had become established writers.

The success of the Bandung Conference in 1955 inspired *Présence Africaine* to organise a cultural counterpart, and in 1956 the First Congress of Negro Writers and Artists was held in Paris, with the express aim of defining a new, non-western, cultural consciousness. As Alioune Diop put it in his opening speech, 'We of the non-European world have got, with the help of everybody, to stimulate new values, to explore together new worlds born out of the meeting of peoples.' This Congress was mainly of a cultural character, with papers on different aspects of African and Afro-American cultures, although not without occasional attacks on the west and impeachments of colonial rule, 'an enterprise of moral extermination', as Diop called it.¹ In short, this was a stock-taking and a tentative effort at Negro solidarity at the cultural level.

The Second Congress, which followed three years later in Rome, was of a far more political character. The theme chosen, 'The Responsibility of the Intelligentsia', was a direct reference to the colonial situation and indicated a new attitude. The crises which marked French colonial policy, and their consequences in France, were probably connected with this development. Colonialism had at any rate become a burning question, made even more urgent by the rise of Ghana as the first African nation to become independent after the war. The spirit that dominated at this conference was thus expressed by Césaire: 'We must hasten the process of de-colonisation, that is to say, employ all means to hasten the ripening of a popular consciousness.' And further on in his speech he declared: 'As for us, in the particular situation in which we find ourselves, we are the propagators of souls, the multipliers of souls, and in the last resort, the inventors of souls.'²

The 1959 Congress in Rome was the last major public manifestation of *négritude* to date, and probably indicates the high-water mark of the movement. For since 1960, the year of African independence, which sent the majority of its adherents back to their new countries, and which marked a turning-point in the relationship between the west and African peoples, it has begun to ebb as an organised movement. On the other hand, *négritude* has acquired a new orientation in ideas, due to the efforts of one man—Senghor.

¹ Alioune Diop, 'Discours d'ouverture', in *Proceedings of the First Congress of Negro Writers and Artists* (Paris, 1956), pp. 11 and 15.

² Césaire, 'L'Homme de culture et ses responsabilités', in *Deuxième Congrès des écrivains et artistes noirs*, pp. 117-18.



Two facts stand out clearly from a consideration of the progressive development of *négritude*, seen in its broad historical perspective. The first is that it was a movement of *reaction* against the western cultural domination which was concomitant with political domination. As such, it appears as a remarkable example of *counter-acculturation*.

It seems perfectly clear, however, that without the pressure of colonial rule and the conflicts which it created in Africa, and without the historical and social factors which dominated the situation of the black man in America—that is, without the racial factor—the forms of reaction to culture contact among black peoples summarised here would have had a completely different character. In this respect, the Haitian phenomenon illustrates how both political domination and racial difference, with the psychological problems this involves, have determined the nature of black reaction to contact with the white man and his culture. In short, black cultural nationalism was inspired by a wish for *freedom* from both domination and contempt.

But this would be a very incomplete view of the situation. The complementary side of the black man's response has been to turn to means which, at first sight and from a psychological point of view, afford him a *compensation* for the domination and humiliation. The role of the Negro sub-cultures, leading progressively on both sides of the Atlantic to the myth of Africa among Negro masses and intellectuals, is thus tied to a defence mechanism. Yet it would be wrong to label this altogether an escape into fantasy. For there is a fundamental difference between Garveyism and similar popular movements on the one hand, and the intellectuals' patterns of reaction, which were so much more lucid, on the other.

Thus, although the intellectual movements developed out of very strong emotional conflicts and they too produced their myths, they generally progressed further to a more *constructive* stage. *Négritude*, in particular, has evolved a framework of ideas, and its literature and ideology afford an insight into the intimate processes of the black reaction to the west.

Léopold Sédar Senghor and African Socialism

by WALTER A. E. SKURNIK*

PRESIDENT Senghor of Senegal stands out among the statesmen of Africa not only for his literary achievements and his political acumen, but also for having made a major contribution toward the emergent doctrine of African Socialism. Senghor's reflections on that subject are based on his emotional and intellectual commitment to African values and realities, and on a thorough investigation of western and Communist thinkers. The result is an amalgam aimed at serving the future of Africa.

Senghor's doctrine is both a method and a myth. As a method, it provides instruments with which to assert and develop the material and ideal values of Africa; these instruments include *négritude*, eclecticism in nation-building, the primacy of the ruling party as the national decision-maker, and the socialisation of some means of production and consumption.

As a myth, it posits a series of interconnected assumptions which tend to explain the nature and direction of history and to serve as a framework for the blossoming of Africa. The elements which may be regarded as part of the myth include his theory of history, the ultimate goal of culture, and his dedication to humanistic universalism.

I. THE METHOD

1. *Négritude*

Senghor's concept of *négritude* antedates his formal concern with African Socialism, but is connected with it intimately through its early militant emphasis on the primacy of Africa and later expression of African cultural values. From the time of its inception during the nineteen-thirties, *négritude* has become transformed, from a vehicle of revolt against the intellectual tentacles of French assimilation, into the positive assertion of newly found identity, and finally into an abstraction of cultural values native to Africa.

The formative phase of *négritude*, that of the search for dignity, was rooted in the destruction of an ideal: absorption by French civilisation.

* Assistant Professor of Political Science, University of Colorado, Boulder.