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A Diasporic Encounter:
The Politics of Race and Culture at
The First International Congress of Black Writers
and Artists

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B.A., Brooklyn College, CUNY, 2005

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An Abstract of
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Abstract

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By Guirdex Massé

This dissertation examines an intellectual gathering that took place in Paris in 1956, the First International Congress of Black Writers and Artists. The event was organized by a group of Francophone writers and intellectuals from the Caribbean and West Africa, and included the participation of several African American writers and intellectuals. Working from the idea that an African diasporic discourse, variedly articulated at the Congress on the basis of race, politics, and historical commonalities, undergirded the staging of the event, this study considers how selected delegates at the conference interpreted what brought them together, key moments of tension and misapprehension, and given the time in which it took place, how a black internationalist discourse articulated at the Congress was significantly informed by the politics of the Cold War.

The dissertation is structured thematically as sets of exchanges between literary figures and intellectuals rarely discussed in relation to one another. The first chapter focuses on W.E.B. Du Bois' absence from the Congress and the Cold War dynamics affecting his relationship to the African American intelligentsia. The second chapter considers the African American scholar Mercer Cook's reception of the Martinican writer Aimé Césaire's lecture, particularly the latter's aligning the African American condition with colonialism. Also examined is the tenor of their respective investigations of black subjectivity, and the political and epistemic dimensions of their visions of black identity. The third chapter focuses on Richard Wright's objection to Léopold Sédar Senghor's framing of black solidarity along a racial logic. Through Senghor's poetry and Wright's fiction and non-fiction during this period, I examine the ideas informing their respective positions. The final chapter analyzes James Baldwin's reception of the Barbadian writer George Lamming's lecture, their understanding of their racialized identities from the position of exile, and their respective visions on the paradoxical nature of racial confinement and creative freedom. Overall, I argue that the immediacy of the Cold War context and the impending era of a postcolonial reality ushered in a new historical moment that significantly shaped and altered discourses of black internationalism and further complicated the logic and practice of black transnational collaborations.

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A Diasporic Encounter: The Politics of Race and Culture at
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Introduction

A Cultural Bandung

Il nous semble que l'on a voulu, justement, que "la culture" reste une donnée vague, une donnée floue, une donnée imprecise, dont on se sert sans bien en préciser le contenu et les caractères.

—Jacques Stéphen Alexis, "Débats" (1956)¹

[It appears as though it was intended that the concept of "culture" remains vague, blurry and imprecise, used without useful clarification of its character and content.]

It is not culture which binds the peoples who are of partially of African origin now scattered throughout the world, but an identity of passions.

—Ralph Ellison, *Shadow and Act* (1964)²

On a bright sunny Wednesday morning in the Fall of 1956, France's most prestigious institution of higher learning—the Sorbonne University in Paris—was the setting for an unusual and unprecedented gathering of writers, artists and intellectuals from various parts of Africa and the African diaspora. The First International Congress of Black Writers and Artists (Le Premier Congrès International des Écrivains et Artistes Noirs) took place from September 19 to September 22, 1956. It was organized through

the auspices of *Présence Africaine*, the influential francophone Pan-African journal that was founded in 1947 by the Senegalese philosopher Alioune Diop (two years later *Présence Africaine* would expand into a publishing house). Diop was the indefatigable motivating force behind the organization of the Congress. He undertook the herculean task of setting into motion this gathering by heading an organizing committee that at various times included, among others, the Senegalese poet and future president of his country, Léopold Sédar Senghor; the novelist from Benin, Paul Hazoumé; the French-Guinean novelist René Maran; the Martinican man of letters and politician, Aimé Césaire; the Haitian poet, René Depestre; Mario Andre, an Angolan nationalist who at the time worked as an editor at *Présence Africaine*; the South African novelist and journalist Peter Abrahams; and Richard Wright, the famed African American writer who a decade earlier had been introduced to Diop through Jean-Paul Sartre and who was an early supporter of Diop's endeavor.³

In all, twenty-four different countries were represented at the Congress, with the largest delegations coming from Haiti, Senegal, Martinique, and the United States. Present, of course, were most of the figures who had contributed to the organizing of the event: i.e., Senghor, Césaire, Depestre and Wright, et al.⁴ The older Haitian intellectual and diplomat, Dr. Jean Price-Mars, was honored with the title of President of the gathering. The remaining crop of the sixty or so writers and intellectuals who served as delegates included the Haitian novelist Jacques Stéphen Alexis; the Martinican writers and intellectuals Édouard Glissant and Frantz Fanon; the Senegalese Physicist and Egyptologist Cheikh Anta Diop; the Barbadian novelist George Lamming; and Jacques Rabemananjara, the Malagasy playwright, poet and politician who had recently been

released from a sentence of life imprisonment with hard labor for suspected participation in events that had led to an insurrection against colonial authorities in Madagascar.⁵

Among the Congress' audience members included the noteworthy literary figures Nicolas Guillen, from Cuba, and African American novelists Chester Himes, Langston Hughes, Richard Gibson, and James Baldwin, among others. Baldwin was attending the Congress in the role of reporter.⁶

The Congress organizers had devised three separate topics around which to structure the discussions and lectures over the course of the event. The first day was dedicated to contemplating the cultural inventory of the black world, with an investigation of its richness and diversity; on the second day, the discussions and lectures considered the current crises in those cultures as it related to political action; and on the third day, lectures were to provide an idea of prospects for the future.⁷ The last day of the Congress consisted of a closing meeting and a final period of group dialogue. The sociologist Bennetta Jules-Rosette has accurately noted that the second topic garnered the most attention in contemporary press coverage of the event and that the topic for that day is often depicted as the topic of the entire Congress.⁸ This was likely the case because of the fact that the most animated exchanges between the delegates took place on that second day. Aimé Césaire's lecture, for instance, was a very well attended; the Martinican author who had just published his *Discours sur le colonialisme (Discourse on Colonialism)* the year before, had taken on the controversial topic of culture and colonization, and as he would in *Discours* he did not refrain from polemical remarks about colonialism. Added to the day's intrigue was the presentation of the Cameroonian delegate, the Reverend Thomas Ekollo, whose lecture "De L'importance de la culture

pour l'assimilation chrétien en Afrique noire" ("The Importance of Culture for the Assimilation of the Christian Gospel in Black Africa") drew ire from many in the crowd, likely because they interpreted his presentation as justification for the missionary endeavor on the African continent.

With a few exceptions, the lectures and presentations at the Congress tended to reflect four broad themes. Some, like Senghor' "L'esprit de la civilisation ou les lois de la culture Négro-Africaine" ("The Spirit of Civilization or the Laws of Negro-African Culture"), adhered to cultural statements about traditional Africa and African values and an Africa emerging out of the colonial domination. Other presentations adhered to a scholarly social scientific approach on topics such as religion and language. An example of this is illustrated by Paul Hazoumé's lecture, "La révolte des Prêtres" ("The Priests' Revolt"). A third set of presentations, like Césaire's "Culture et colonisation" ("Culture and Colonization) and Frantz Fanon's "Racisme et culture" ("Racism and Culture") comprised examinations of the problems of colonialism and racism. Lastly, a fourth set of presentations broached the question of the vestiges of African cultural forms and the presence of syncretic cultural practices and artifacts in societies that came into existence through the slave trade. Dr. Jean Price-Mars' brief lecture "Survivances africaines et dynamisme de la culture noire outré-Atlantique" ("Transatlantic African survivals and the Dynamism of Negro Culture") and Jacques Stéphen Alexis' "Du réalisme merveilleux des Haïtiens" ("Of Haitian Marvelous Realism") are illustrative of the latter tendency.

The year following the Congress, *Présence Africaine* published two special journal volumes that provided an account of the proceedings. This included transcripts of the various lectures as well as the formal dialogues that took place among the delegates.

Apparent in these accounts of the proceedings of the Congress is the fact that while the delegates recognized the value of anti-colonial representations of African and African diasporic cultures and traditions, the very terms of the gathering, “African and African diasporic culture” as a unifying concept, was a point of contention. Notable comments from delegates such as Jacques Stéphen Alexis, Richard Wright, and Mercer Cook, which were motivated by different concerns, revealed the nature and extent of some of these tensions.

Thus this study of the Congress focuses on the idea that an African diasporic discourse, variedly articulated at the Congress on the basis of race, politics, and historical commonalities, undergirded the staging of the event. It examines how selected delegates who took part in the event interpreted what brought them together, key moments of tension and misapprehension that arose, and given the time in which it took place, how a black internationalist discourse articulated at the Congress was significantly informed by the politics of the Cold War. Given its transnational and interdisciplinary focus the study makes a strong claim for the significance of a cross-cultural outlook on black literary and intellectual production. While on the whole the work assumes a broad perspective on the Congress, it is ultimately structured as dialogues between literary figures, intellectuals, and critics from different national backgrounds who are rarely discussed in relation to one another. Thus African American writers and critics such as James Baldwin, Richard Wright, and Mercer Cook are placed in conversation with the George Lamming, Aimé Césaire, and Léopold Sédar Senghor. This allows for a comparative perspective on the different political, historical, cultural and ideological frameworks writers and intellectuals

of the African Diaspora rely on to address issues of cultural identity, political autonomy and civic rights.

Ideological Background of the Congress

Among the key topics at the heart of the debates at the Congress was the question of cultural integrity as well as the significance of understanding the role that a delineation of African and African derived cultural forms might serve in the project of liberation. That is likely the reason why many of the scholars who have commented on the Congress have tended to look at it as an outgrowth of the Négritude Movement.⁹ The same cast of writers and intellectuals that were instrumental in organizing the Congress in 1956, had in the 1930s and 1940s been key figures in founding and elaborating the principles of the Négritude Movement.

The term Négritude itself is a neologism coined by the Martinican poet Aimé Césaire, one of the founders of the movement. On the whole, it refers to the literary and intellectual production of a group of African and Antillean writers who attempted to address the cultural problematics of colonialism and racism through a re-affirmation of the value of African and African diasporic cultures. The three acknowledged founders of the movement, Aimé Césaire, Léopold Sédar Senghor, and the Guianan poet Léon-Gontrand Damas¹⁰ were all students living in Paris in the 1930s.¹¹ All three were involved in founding *L'Étudiant Noir*, the magazine which first articulated the principles of the movement. To put it succinctly, the movement sought to denounce French colonial racism and policy of assimilation. The students had come to comprehend that where black subjects were concerned, there were limits to the utility of European ideologies; they thus sought “‘original solutions’ to the unique problem of the black man.”¹² This

position led them to conceive of the idea of a commonality of cultural heritage in the African Diaspora. With this idea of a commonality of cultural heritage naturally followed a sense of identification with people of African descent, and a sense of solidarity.

The 1956 Congress' concern with the question of Black culture and the political implications of such an examination were thus core concerns of the Négritude project which began two decades earlier. Sharing the experience of being black and originating from lands that were colonies of France, Senghor, Césaire and Damas, as students in Paris in the 1930s had been preoccupied with making sense of their subjective positions and in articulating identities that challenged racist and imperialist discourses that positioned them on the margins of humanity.

A wide range of contemporary events, cultural and artistic movements, socio-political philosophies, and scholarly inquiries informed the group's reflections. For one, the Surrealism that was in vogue in the 1920s and 1930s had provided a means for them to question the rational basis of Western society on grounds elaborated by European artists and intellectuals who had grown alarmed by the destruction of the First World War. And to this assault on the rational basis of Western values was added an increasing emphasis placed upon the value of African art objects by modernist painters and sculptors who found in the art of the continent a new source of inspiration.¹³ This new emphasis had in part been encouraged by the work of French anthropologists such as Maurice Delafosse (*The Negroes*, 1927) and Leo Frobenius (*History of African Civilization*, 1936), among others, whose works were beginning to challenge the more racist representations of Africa.¹⁴

In regards to the social political philosophies that influenced them, it should be noted that the black students in Paris circulated amidst Marxist circles. The rise of fascism stimulated the students to identify with socialism and to sympathize with the French Communist Party.¹⁵ In a documentary about his life's work, Césaire specifically mentions how for a generation of thinkers, the Spanish Civil War and the Italian invasion of Ethiopia which resulted in the triumphs of fascist Spanish and Italian forces were clarion calls for adopting radical political perspectives. Césaire interpreted these conflicts as prefaces to imperialist struggles and regarded these fascist infringements upon a republican government in Spain and an autonomous state in Ethiopia as signs of the arrogance of European imperialism. Also, they were well aware of Lenin's desire to extend the notion of "proletariat" to colonized peoples, and were similarly aware of the Communist Party's interest in the plight of Black Americans.¹⁶

The interest that Césaire, Damas, and Senghor had in historical materialism was nuanced by what they perceived as their particular circumstances as colonial subjects (by the 1940s one could also add to the group Alioune Diop and Jacques Rabemananjara). While they were sympathetic to Marxism, they did not necessarily approach it as a historic-philosophic doctrine universally applicable. Senghor, for instance, specifically saw socialism as a method, an efficient instrument of research. However, he believed that the colonial situation caused a triple alienation. To Senghor, the concept of alienation when it came to the colonial situation did not simply reflect man's relation to the means of production (economic), but extended to the areas of politics and culture as well. While he believed that imperialism was an extension of European capitalism, he

did not believe that the solution is a ready acceptance of Marxist dogma. Rather, he believed in a dialectical analysis of concrete situations of the different colonies.¹⁷

Of the group that came to organize the Congress and aligned with the Négritude movement, the writer most committed to a historical materialist dialectical approach was Aimé Césaire. He was a member of the French Communist Party (FCP) for ten years by the time of the Congress. In 1945 he had won election as mayor of Fort-de-France and a deputy from Martinique to the French National Assembly with support of the FCP. However, he grew disillusioned with the party. The month following the Congress he announced his resignation from the party in an open letter addressed to Maurice Thorez, the head of the FCP. In that letter he explained the reasons for his resignation by first making an explicit reference to the revelations concerning Joseph Stalin's abuses of power in Nikita Khrushchev's famous "Secret Speech" and to the FCP's reluctance to take a stronger stance and de-Stalinize. He then reflected on his "position as a man of color" and asserted that the struggle against racism and colonialism could not be reduced to the class struggle. At the end of the letter Césaire leveled a critique against what he saw as the imperialist inclinations of the European Left.¹⁸

Césaire's message in the letter was an affirmation of his unwillingness to allow the Communist Party to dictate along rigid ideological lines the nature of progressive action in places like his native Martinique. Thus his break with the Communists in 1956 is generally regarded as a declaration of independence, a reclaiming of initiative on the part of colonized populations. Given that it came the month following the Congress, this act also said something about the ideological tenets to which organizers of the Congress adhered. While sympathetic to a Marxist outlook, they were by no means true believers

of the party uncritically carrying the Communist Party flag. As “Chapter One” of this dissertation will further illustrate, concerns over the presence of communists at the Congress was a key factor that influenced the interactions of the delegates, especially those who were part of the American delegation.

Along with involvement in the progressive politics of the period, the literature coming out of the Harlem Renaissance/New Negro Movement, especially works by such authors as Langston Hughes, Claude McKay, Jean Toomer, James Weldon Johnson, and Sterling Brown was another significant stream of influence on the francophone group. These African American writers further radicalized the consciousness of the group by planting in their collective imagination the example of the artistic possibilities of literary depictions of modern black life. Also, while this is not an aspect of Négritude’s indebtedness to the Harlem Renaissance/New Negro Movement that has been discussed at any length, there was an element of a political kind of work being done by Harlem Renaissance writers that would likely have had an impact on the francophone group’s political vision. This is suggested in “Chapter Two” of the dissertation, in the discussion of Césaire’s lecture and the African American delegate Mercer Cook. Of specific consideration is the idea that the literary self-assertiveness of Harlem Renaissance writers, their explorations of the particularity of their own voices, their articulation of the value of their folk cultural heritage and a black folk aesthetic, and their investigation of the racism that impacted their lives and social circumstances, all took place within a political and cultural context, American democracy and American(ness), that they sought to expand. There is thus a way in which Harlem Renaissance writers’ works could be

read as an argument for the promise of a cultural pluralist democracy. The Négritude writers' rejection of the policy of assimilation adheres to a cultural pluralist perspective.

The students' encounters with writers of the Harlem Renaissance did not simply occur through their reading of their works. Paulette and Jane Nardal, two Martinican sisters who at the time lived in Paris and had worked together with the Haitian scholar Léo Sajous to found the literary review *Le Revue du Monde Noir* were in correspondence with figures of the Harlem Renaissance as far back as in 1927. That year, Jane Nardal had proposed to the Howard University academic and disseminator of the New Negro ethos, Alain Locke, to undertake a French translation of Locke's edited volume *The New Negro*.¹⁹ While the project did not come to fruition, the Nardal sisters were successful in establishing personal connections with African Americans. The sisters entertained lively discussions on art, literature and politics in their apartment in the Clamart area of Paris. As Senghor recounts in a letter to a literary historian of the movement, "We were in contact with [...] black Americans during the years 1929-1934 [...] Mademoiselle Nardal kept a literary salon, where African Negroes, West Indians, and American Negroes used to get together."²⁰ The "we" Senghor alludes to would include not only the Négritude trio of Senghor himself, Damas and Césaire, but also a person like Jean Price-Mars, the influential scholar of Haitian culture who served as President of the 1956 Congress.²¹ That would also include the American delegate at the Congress, Mercer Cook, who was then a doctoral student at Brown University.²²

However, if ideas espoused by Négritude writers played a role in the thematic concerns of the 1956 Congress, it should not be assumed that there were not those who posed strong critiques against the principles of the movement. For one, in her literary

history on the movement and its writers, Lilyan Kesteloot admits how the meaning of the term Négritude even to its three accredited fathers meant different things. Quoting Césaire discussing his version of Négritude, Kesteloot notes that Césaire's experience of Négritude was "the acknowledgement of a fact, revolt, and the acceptance of responsibility for the destiny of his race"; for Senghor, we are told, Négritude retrieved "black Africa's cultural patrimony"; and, for Damas it consisted of a rejection of assimilation in his desire to maintain his identity as a "Negro" and a Guianese.²³ So it is in this sense that to speak of "Négritude" may in essence be to speak of one strand of "Négritudes."

Additionally, it should also be noted that the very grounds upon which the movement began to disseminate to a wider range of intellectual circles also articulated ideas about its limitations. Jean-Paul Sartre's discussion of Négritude in his essay "Black Orpheus" ("Orphée Noir"), which was published as a preface to Senghor's *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache*, had provided the movement with epistemological weight on the basis of his status as one of the leading intellectuals in Europe. Sartre conceived of the movement as an important intervention against white supremacy. In the essay he specifically refers to Négritude as an articulation of "negation", an antithesis to the thesis of white supremacy that would lead to a new synthesis. While Sartre recognized its value in the contemporary moment, he argued that blacks would eventually have to renounce race identity for the sake of a race-less and class-less society. He provocatively called the movement an "anti-racist racism."²⁴ Sartre's essay will be further discussed in "Chapter Three" of the dissertation in relation to the Martinican

writer, revolutionary theorist and psychoanalyst Frantz Fanon's perspective on Négritude as well as his appraisal of Sartre's views regarding the movement.

Other black writers and intellectuals who would posit critiques of the Négritude movement did not necessarily make use of Sartre's argument to express such critiques. The Senegalese writer and film maker, Ousmane Sembène, who was living in Marseilles at the time of the Congress, reports that for him Négritude was a "stage in the history of Africa, but all the fuss was a fuss between intellectuals."²⁵ One may also bring up the views of the Nigerian Nobel Laureate, Wole Soyinka, who at the time Congress was in his early twenties and living and working in London, England. In a collection of essays published in the 1970s he would criticize Négritude for encouraging and affirming one of the central Eurocentric prejudices against Africans, namely the dichotomy between European rationalism and African emotionalism.²⁶

It should be taken into consideration that Ousmane Sembène and Wole Soyinka were not part of the intimate Parisian group that organized the Congress. However, while they were part of a younger generation of writers, both Ousmane Sembène and Wole Soyinka were contemporaries of the group that had organized the event and in succeeding years would grow in literary significance. By the time of the Congress, Ousmane Sembène had already published a novel about the life of African workers in the French port city of Marseilles entitled *Les dockers noirs (Black Dockers)*, and Wole Soyinka was well into his university studies (University of Leeds) in England; Soyinka was but two years away from publishing his first major drama, *The Swamp Dwellers*. Their perspective on Négritude is significant here insofar as it is illustrative of the contested nature of the movement, even around the period of its height. As the responses of such

delegates as Jacques Stéphen Alexis and Richard Wright will show, a dissenting perspective on Négritude affected how some of the delegates experienced the Congress.

A Clarion Call for Solidarity: Alioune Diop's Opening Lecture

The opening minutes of the first day of the Congress began with Alioune Diop introducing the President of the Congress, Dr. Jean Price-Mars. Dr. Price-Mars in turn delivered a short address extolling the humanist values that brought the Congress delegates and Congress attendants together. Following Dr. Price-Mars' address, a series of messages from different groups, organizations, and individuals who could not attend the Congress were read to everyone present. Then the stage was set for Alioune Diop to pronounce the Congress' opening lecture.

Alioune Diop began his opening remarks by making an explicit reference to past Pan-African conferences that were organized in the aftermath of World War I. He explained however that these previous conferences did not benefit from either the cultural perspective the 1956 Congress offered or the current Congress' vastly more impressive attendance. Rather Diop chose to explain the significance of the gathering by referring to it as the "Second Bandung." The Bandung Conference of 1955 was the first large-scale meeting of mostly newly independent Asian and North African states. It had aimed to promote cooperation among the various states, and sought to convey the message of resistance to colonialism and neo-colonialism at a time when it was already clear Cold War tensions would play a significant role in the destinies of the nations represented. Alioune Diop's allusion to the gathering at Bandung, Indonesia, announced the political potential of the gathering in Paris. But where the delegates at Bandung were statesmen

representing independent nations, the delegates at the Congress in Paris were “men of culture” from mostly colonized regions of Africa and the Americas.

Diop made a point to specify that the Congress was distinctive for this particular focus on the question of culture. And in his attempt to explain the relevance of “culture” to those currently gathered, he declaimed conventional separations between culture and politics, to advance two perspectives that from our present theoretical understanding of the dynamic of colonialism connotes Edward Said’s concept of orientalism and Frantz Fanon’s understanding of the relationship between the state and culture as expressed in the essay “On National Culture.”²⁷ According to Alioune Diop,

“derrière l’homme politique, l’homme de culture assume des fonctions non moins importantes et d’une portée au moins aussi profonde. La colonisation se réduirait à quelques simples épisodes, sans lendemain, si la culture n’était venue portée son concours durable à l’œuvre et aux desseins du militaire, du colon, et de l’homme politique; elle est responsable véritablement de ce que l’on appelle la “situation coloniale.”²⁸

[“after the politician, the man of culture assumes functions no less important and of a reach at least as profound. Colonization would have been reduced to a few simple episodes without lasting significance if culture had not lent its support to the work and project of the soldier, the colonizer and the politician.

He is truly responsible for what is called the ‘colonial situation’.”]

Diop attributes the construction of the colonial situation to a set of values, perspectives, moral and aesthetic principles promulgated by the European “man of culture” who has appropriated for himself all notions of the universal. In language

similar to that which Said would later use, Diop emphasizes the discursive aspect of the colonial dynamic as a system of representation. While Diop's characterization of the colonial situation lacks Said's nuanced apprehension of the very question of power at the root of the colonial paradigm, he does depict how the African "other" is constructed in the service of an imperial project.

However, in his critique of the role of Western representation of the native in cementing the colonial situation in the Western episteme, Diop implicitly set the framework for the work that needed to be done by those delegates present at the Congress. Diop saw it as the historical responsibility of the delegates to provide a counter narrative to racist and colonialist representation of black cultures. By depicting the pernicious roles played by European "men of culture" in defining black cultures, Diop presents the delegates whom he also regards as "men of culture", with a corrective role. Thus to Diop, as well as other *Présence Africaine* organizers of the Congress, the event was a historical point of departure that promised a re-assessment of the cultural heritage of the African continent and the African Diaspora. According to them this re-assessment went arm in arm with the project of liberation.

Diop's introductory note also addressed the futility of an outlook on culture that does not take into account the material reality of colonial domination. In a statement that prefigures a major tenet of Fanon's "On National Culture", Alioune Diop proclaims

C'est l'Etat qui garantira une culture la mémoire de son passé. Une communauté privée de liberté politique a beaucoup de peine a recréer l'image de son passé.²⁹

[It is the state that guarantees a culture the memory of its past. It is difficult for a community deprived of political autonomy to recreate the image of its past]

Here, Diop clearly articulates what he sees as the relationship between the state and culture. The state guarantees the survival of culture by keeping its memory alive, by providing it a link to its past. While one cannot make too much of the similarity between Fanon and Diop, it is important to note that three years later at the Second International Congress of Black Writers and Artists, Fanon will argue that national culture is neither folklore nor abstract populism; rather, in the colonial context, the fight for national existence sets culture moving.³⁰

We can imagine that with these statements Alioune Diop addressed two very important concerns of many who attended the Congress. For one, it established the significance of the role of the delegates in providing a counter-argument to colonial representations of African diasporic cultures. And secondly his statement linking the viability of a culture to national independence brings the question of culture into the sphere of politics. Diop's latter statement is all the more significant because given the historical context in which the Congress took place, any discussion of the native culture of former and current colonies that did not take into account political movements against colonial and neo-colonial forces could have been interpreted as escapist, if not reactionary.

Notes of Disharmony and a Moment of Harmony

Alioune Diop's opening discourse and Jean Price-Mars' presidential address had provided an introductory message of unison and accord that would immediately be

betrayed by tensions that surfaced after the first set of presentations, when Congress delegates gathered for the first day of formal debates. Among those who would critique not only particular perspectives advanced by individual delegates but also the program of the Congress as a whole was the distinguished Haitian writer Jacques Stéphen Alexis. A scion of the Haitian black bourgeoisie with a prominent historical lineage,³¹ Alexis had by 1955 established himself as a promising young writer working out of the social realist Marxist peasant novel tradition with his acclaimed debut effort *Compère Général Soleil* (*General Sun, My Brother*).³² After hearing the first set of presentations, Alexis would ask the organizers of the Congress for a clearer definition of the culture concept as it applied to the gathering. His comment essentially called into question the notion of a unified black culture that he felt Négritude posited and to which he felt the Congress was adhering to. Wright, whose perspective on the African diaspora was more in alliance with how the African American novelist Ralph Ellison explained transnational black connections as “an identity of passions” and not culture, would himself express a similar critique. However moments of tensions at the Congress also surfaced out of differences in political ideology. The four chapters of the dissertation thus analyzes selected key interactions and exchanges as a way of examining the dissonances and complexities that often accompany any effort at transnational collaboration.

In the first chapter (“W.E.B. Du Bois and the American Delegation at the Congress”), emphasis is placed on a controversial message that the African American historian and sociologist W.E.B. Du Bois sent to the Congress. Du Bois had been denied a passport for travel and could not attend the gathering. In his message he warned the Congress to be wary of those Americans allowed to travel abroad because they could not

be trusted to utter anything not supported by the US State Department. Du Bois' message becomes a point of departure for a consideration of his complicated relationship to the liberal segment of the African American intelligentsia from the latter part of the 1940s up until the time of the Congress. In order to provide a contextualized understanding of the significance of what he was articulating, the discussion on Du Bois relies on information that examines the possible connection between the American delegation at the Congress and the US State Department.

The second chapter ("Aimé Césaire, Mercer Cook and the Political and Epistemic Dimensions of Black Diasporic Identity") considers an exchange between the African American scholar of Francophone Caribbean and African literature, Mercer Cook, and the Martinican poet, playwright and politician Aimé Césaire. At the Congress, Mercer Cook expressed displeasure with Césaire's association of the plight of African Americans in the United States with a form of colonialism. In the examination of this exchange, specific focus is placed on the work that Mercer Cook had been doing on black literary expression in the Francophone world (West Africa and the Antilles), his description of the experiences of colonized black subjects for an African American newspaper readership, and his personal and professional relationships with a number of Francophone black writers and intellectuals. This discussion illustrates how Cook's concern over Césaire's association of the life conditions of African Americans in the United States with black colonial subjectivity represents a departure from his earlier project of trying to make these two experiences (African American and black colonial subjectivity) conversant with each other. In addition, the chapter examines Césaire's lecture at the Congress and the forms of interventions he was trying to make on the ongoing debates

that surfaced. Lastly, the chapter also considers the possible influence of the Harlem Renaissance/New Negro movement on Césaire's radical literary rhetoric and pragmatic political stances.

Richard Wright delivered a controversial closing lecture at the Congress, and along with Jacques Stéphen Alexis also initiated a critique of the Négritude values informing the event. This critique was articulated in his response to Léopold Sédar Senghor's lecture. In this lecture Senghor articulated an elaborate and nuanced vision of his brand of Négritude. While he carefully depicted African social, religious, and aesthetic sensibility in relation to a European sensibility, he ended his presentation with the problematic claim that whether they knew it or not, a spirit of negro-African civilization animated the works of all black writers. Wright responded to this by challenging Senghor and other Congress delegates and participants to explain how he, a Western black subject would fit in the traditional African world Senghor described. The third chapter (Richard Wright, Léopold Sédar Senghor and the Material and Ontological Dimensions of Blackness") thus examines Wright and Senghor's respective visions of the material and ontological dimensions of black subjectivity through an analysis of their lectures at the Congress and a selective discussion of their fictional and nonfictional works up until the time of the event.

The final chapter ("The Black Writer and his Worlds: examines James Baldwin's report on the Congress ("Princes and Powers") and George Lamming's lecture ("The Negro Writer and His World"). Lamming's lecture consisted of a meditation on the subjective position of the black writer, the significance of the racial signifier "negro," and the black writer's relationship to the racial group he/she belongs to. The chapter

analyzes what Lamming describes as the “worlds of the writer” and examines how the Barbadian author envisions the relationship between creative freedom and social responsibility. In this analysis, emphasis is placed on James Baldwin’s positive reception of Lamming’s lecture in his essay about the Congress. This essay remains the best known account of the Congress, as well as one of Baldwin’s few intellectual forays into the global contours of racial discourse and racialized identities. The chapter places in conversation Lamming and Baldwin’s respective visions on the craft of writing, their views on the black intellectual and the condition of exile, as well as their responses to the paradoxical condition of racial confinement and creative freedom

Chapter One

W.E.B. Du Bois and the American Delegation at the Congress

Aidez moi donc à consolider notre solidarité entre vous et nous. Elle se bâtera en profondeur à partir de nos souffrances communes et nos communes fragilités—non à partir de la redoutable puissance de l'Amérique.

—Alioune Diop to John A. Davis, March 31, 1958¹

[Therefore, help me to consolidate the solidarity between us. Its depth will be built on the basis of our common suffering and our uncommon fragilities—not on the basis of the formidable power of the United States.]

I would advice patience, for this is necessary in all international dealings. Not only are we dealing with two languages in this relationship, but we speak out of experience in many different cultures, and misunderstanding is to be expected. Let's hold on for a little while longer, for the future of these French West Africans is pregnant with both hope and tragedy.

—John A. Davis to Horace M. Bond, February 11, 1957²

Prior to Alioune Diop's opening speech that opened the First International Congress of Black Writers and Artists (1956), a series of messages from notable persons, groups and organizations that could not attend the gathering was read to the audience. These messages for the most part expressed sentiments of fellowship and solidarity from writers, artists, and intellectuals from a variety of backgrounds. However, the message that particularly stood out and by far caused the most stir in the audience because of its controversial political resonance came from the noted African-American sociologist, historian, civil rights advocate and Pan -Africanist, W.E.B. Du Bois. In his brief two-paragraph message to the Congress Du Bois expressed concerns that would shade the entire three-day proceeding. It highlighted the Cold War context in which everyone gathered was embedded in, provided a taste of the political and ideological fault-lines that was dividing politically- engaged African American intellectuals in the McCarthy era, and implicitly hinted at the limits of diasporic and black internationalist discourse when confronted with concrete material realities affecting struggles national in nature. References to the Du Bois message in the scholarship that briefly address the Congress, generally consider it as a backdrop to Cold War tensions, at times misreading it as a veiled allusion to the dangerous position that the American delegation found itself in.³ In the case of an account the writer James Baldwin wrote about the Congress for the journal *Encounter* ("Princes and Powers"), the Du Bois' message somewhat appears as reflective of the idiosyncrasies of a disappointed man in his elder years. What here follows is an attempt to consider the Du Bois message with greater depths and on terms that seek to assess its relevance. This will involve a consideration of personal dynamics at play between Du Bois and some members of the American delegation, of Du Bois evolving

perspective on the nature of black freedom and the fight for a racial democracy, as well as the Cold War context and the way it shaped the discourse of international/transnational engagements and exchanges.

A Word of Caution: Du Bois' Message to the Congress

Du Bois had entrusted the message to Emile Saint-Lot, a Haitian senator and UN ambassador who was part of the Haitian delegation at the Congress. He expressed in the message that he could not be present at the meeting. However, unlike other figures who would then go on to extend their salutary regards and well-wishes for the historic gathering, Du Bois proceeded to explain the unsavory reason preventing his presence and participation at the Congress.

I am not present at your meeting today because the United States government will not grant me a passport for travel abroad. Any Negro-American who travels abroad today must either not discuss race conditions in the United States or say the sort of thing which our state Department wishes the world to believe.

With this one statement about the American delegation, Du Bois had, as James Baldwin would remark in his account of the Congress, effectively compromised the position of the members of that delegation.⁴ In making this remark Baldwin was not assessing the verity of the Du Bois statement, which he considered “extremely ill considered.”⁵ He was cogently pointing out the form of significant contradiction Du Bois was addressing. Baldwin’s critique of the State Department’s decision to withhold Du Bois’ passport specifically considered how difficult it would be to explain to those present at the Congress the difference between Du Bois’ effective censorship and the fact that the South African government did not allow for any South Africans to participate at the Congress.

As a way to further emphasize the political nature of this censorship, Du Bois continues to explain his situation by further noting that:

The government especially objects to me because I am a Socialist and because I belie[ve] in peace with Communist states like the Soviet Union and their right to exist in security. Especially do I believe in socialism for Africa. The basic social history of the peoples of Africa is socialistic. They should build toward modern socialism as exemplified by the Soviet Union, Poland, Czechoslovakia, [and] China.⁶

The Du Bois' message was received with a loud round of applause.⁷ The audience that filled out the Descartes Amphitheater at the Sorbonne had apparently been told something they were more than predisposed to accept: that there were international political dynamics at play that went beyond the stated reason for which they had gathered. The organizer of the Congress, Alioune Diop, would later in his opening lecture allude to that in a much less controversial fashion by comparing the Congress with the Bandung Conference of the year before. But Du Bois here had gone well beyond generalities and a symbolic show of Third World solidarity. In his message he had specifically and uncompromisingly raised the specter of state surveillance and repression and its possible influence over what could and could not be articulated at the Congress.⁸ He did so by presenting the U.S. State Department's refusal to grant him a passport for travel as a form of political censorship, associating the restriction on his ability to travel abroad with a limited ability to engage in democratic way a wider public beyond the United States. He had also opened the way for a discussion of the United States as a

nation in political and ideological alliance with the colonial powers. This particular point becomes most vividly clear when in that same message he would also claim:

It will be a fatal mistake if new Africa becomes the tool and cat's-paw of the colonial powers and allows the vast power of the United States to mislead it into investment and exploitation of labor.⁹

That Du Bois would express concern for the continent of Africa does not depart from his long-held Pan-Africanist interest in the colonial predicament of the African continent.¹⁰ The message reveals his belief that the African continent has reached a turning point in its history, and that what is about to unfold would in effect result in a “new” continent. This note of promise and possibility, however, is immediately succeeded by one of warning. For, according to Du Bois, at the corner of this historical juncture awaits the “fatal” and vast power of the United States. Here, the careful listener would surely have heard in this assertion Aimé Césaire’s own warning of the changing dynamics of world power in the 1955 polemical essay *Discours sur le colonialisme* (*Discourse on Colonialism*). After having presented a long diatribe against European colonialism, Césaire concludes by painting the United States as the new dominant force to contend with.¹¹ Du Bois specifically offers his own political affiliation, his being a “socialist”, as a possible counter-measure against this vast American power. Yet while it might initially appear that in his reference to socialism he is proposing a western political and economic instrumentality to help harvest African ability to meet the new historical challenge, he makes it clear that he does not conceive of socialism as alien to the African social reality. He does so by alluding to the idea that a communal principle of social life was central to pre-colonial Africa. Du Bois thereby argues that the basic nature of the

social history of African populations is socialistic in nature. Du Bois' notion here of a native African socialism is expressive of a political vision he had expressed in the 1940 autobiographical text *Dusk of Dawn: An Essay Toward an Autobiography of a Race Concept*. This native African socialism is essentially Du Bois' vision of African communalism. African communalism to Du Bois is an arrangement that prioritizes "ties of family and blood, of mother and child, of group relationship;" although as societal system Du Bois does see it as always producing the highest level of culture, he believed it made group leadership strong.¹² Thus his expression that a Soviet-style socialism would best guarantee the socio-political development of "new" Africa, infers that a modernization of a social and economic paradigm already native to an African social reality might prove to be the continent's salvation.¹³

There is then a triangular nature to Du Bois' expressed political self-identification. While this self-identification is transnational (insofar as he considers the conditions of black populations beyond particular national boundaries) and diasporic (given that Africa in his vision connotes a homeland), it is also reflective of a national political discourse. From the perspective of the transnational and diasporic, Du Bois' self-identification as a "socialist" is conversant with what he presents as an organic African socialism characteristic of African social history. Here it can be said that Du Bois romantically identifies with that social history as an aspect of his heritage as an African diasporic subject.¹⁴ Within the context and logic of a national political discourse, Du Bois' "socialist" political self-identification means, of course, something quite different. It is expressive of his opposition to the prevailing American political and economic ideology, one characterized by an investment in capitalism, and in the

immediate period after World War II, a staunch anti-communism. However, in both instances—as a transnational and diasporic conception of African socialism, and as a rejection of the national discourse of capitalism—it is clear that to Du Bois political redemption resides outside the boundaries of the United States. His vision of “New Africa” embodies as much the promise and possibility of a new postcolonial beginning as it does a fear of an extension of a narrative of exploitation and oppression in a neo/postcolonial context.

These allusions to transnationalism and a black diasporic condition in the message are the means through which Du Bois expresses a sense of solidarity with colonized Africans. However, if these allusions articulate a sense of transnational black solidarity, they also frame the platform from which he levels his critique of the American delegation. This is quite apparent, for instance, in how Du Bois begins his message. He starts with an expression of concern over a national condition—the position of the “American Negro” in the United States—to transition to a show of concern over an international situation—an emergent “new Africa” and its foreseeable relationship to the “colonial powers” and the United States. Du Bois rhetorically succeeds in making a rapprochement between the “American Negro” and a “new Africa” by positioning the United States as an oppressive agent in both instances. Implied is the underlying racial economy that serves as a common thread linking those discrete instances of oppression.

However as he devises this rhetorical rapprochement between a national condition of race relation to an international situation of colonial domination, where a racial discourse is also an important configuring element, Du Bois associates the American delegation with the narrow political and ideological interests of the United States (which

in the message he associates with the politics of the colonial powers). In identifying the American delegation at the Congress with American Cold War interests, Du Bois was suggesting that this relationship bespeaks a betrayal. He specifically notes that those allowed to travel abroad—in this instance the American delegates—are willing to either remain silent on the race problem in the United States or to only speak half-truths. This betrayal to Du Bois rendered questionable the authority of the American delegates to speak as authentic representatives of the American black population because to him these delegates are not at the Congress to discuss the reality of black life in the United States.

It is clear that Du Bois offers his own experience of victimization at the hands of the State Department as a more accurate representation of the experiences of African Americans in the United States. He is able to link the condition of the “American negro” to colonized Africans largely by imagining their respective conditions as reflective of both racial and class oppression. His own personal narrative of state censorship in this way becomes expressive of what he believes is the resulting outcome of any black intellectual willing to speak the plain truth of the condition of the African American masses. Du Bois’ parting image in the message powerfully highlights this point. He ends his message with a stern warning against a new Africa being led “toward a new colonialism where hand in hand with Britain, France, and the United States, black capital enslaves black capital again.”¹⁵ What Du Bois was effectively presenting here is a vision of a black bourgeoisie in collusion with the United States and the traditional colonial powers exploiting black labor.

This idea of a new colonialism succeeding an old colonialism that Du Bois articulates interestingly prefigures the warning that Frantz Fanon would elaborate upon

only a few years later in the essay “The Trials and Tribulations of National Consciousness.” In that essay Fanon would discuss at length a post-colonial moment where a class of native elites, who would comprise the independent nation’s new “national bourgeoisie,” would essentially serve as intermediaries, or compradors, that facilitate a new form of neo-colonial domination. In discussing that comprador class of business elites, Fanon would write:

The national bourgeoisie possesses neither industrialists nor financiers. The national bourgeoisie in the underdeveloped countries is not geared to production, invention, creation, or work. All its energy is channeled into intermediary activities.¹⁶

To Fanon, unlike the Western bourgeoisie, the national bourgeoisie’s “vocation is not to transform the nation but prosaically serve as a conveyor belt for capitalism.”¹⁷ Fanon’s vision of the national bourgeoisie is informed by the idea that unable to live up to the historical mission as a conventional (Western) bourgeoisie, it essentially betrays the interests of its people. Du Bois’ vision of the elite’s betrayal of the masses in this instant, however, does not restrict itself to a national context of political independence and the postcolonial state. Implicitly appropriating the Congress’ theme of the ties that bind the African diaspora (the history of the slave trade, slavery, and the present colonial predicament) his formulation of a neocolonial dystopia implicates all black subjects in the struggle against race and class exploitation. He thus imagines the political conditions of black populations from a transnational perspective. Hence his allusions to “Britain, France and the United States,” and the terms “black capital” and “enslave[ment]” are loaded with deep historical resonance insofar as while he is pointing to a possible

dystopic future, his vision also arcs back to what he implicitly presents as a history of black complicity on black oppression. He considers the slave trade and the era of colonialism as imbricated in a long narrative of not simply European exploitation of African resources and African labor, but also of the native black/African elite contributing and benefitting from the oppression of the African masses. He identifies the American delegation with that elite comprador bourgeois class.

Thus while brief, Du Bois' message was remarkably charged with a political fervor that at the outset of the Congress brought political concerns to the forefront of this gathering of writers, artists, and intellectuals. By presenting himself as a victim of a form of censorship, Du Bois' statement demanded the audience consider very immediate political concerns. These concerns would have meant something to nearly everyone involved and invested in the success of the Congress. To an organizer like Alioune Diop, who cherished a life-long devotion to scholarly inquiry on African civilizations and cultures, this would certainly have represented the personal danger inherent in his work: mainly, the political implications of the anti-colonial overtones of his cultural and intellectual project and how those implications could be interpreted by a French government wary of the expression of anticolonial aspirations from its colonized subjects.¹⁸ To others such as Jacques Rabemananjara, the recently freed Malagasy delegate who had spent time in jail for his political activities and was living in Paris as a political exile, and Frantz Fanon, who would later be involved with the Algerian Front for National Liberation (FLN),¹⁹ the reference to surveillance would certainly have brought to mind the collusion of the colonial and metropolitan authorities in suppressing native movements for liberation. And to Césaire, Du Bois' statement would have further

reaffirmed convictions he had already articulated the prior year in the long essay *Discours sur le colonialisme*.

The Du Bois statement, however, had a most direct impact on members of the American delegation because it directly addressed their presence at the Congress. This delegation was led by John A. Davis, a political scientist from City College (of the City University of New York), and included Horace Mann Bond, the president of Lincoln University, Mercer Cook, a Romance Language professor at Howard University, James W. Ivy, Du Bois' more moderate successor helming the NAACP's *Crisis* magazine, William T. Fontaine, a professor of Philosophy at the University of Pennsylvania, and the best-selling novelist Richard Wright. Wright was at the time already living as an expatriate in France, and thus unlike the other delegates did not have to travel from the United States to attend the Congress. While James Baldwin was another American expatriate attending the Congress, he did so to report on it for the periodical *Encounter*.²⁰ Thus other than Richard Wright, the American delegation was composed mostly of academics, with strong ties to black institutions of higher learning, and with very similar class backgrounds.²¹ They were essentially members of what earlier in the century Du Bois had theorized as the "Talented Tenth," an elite group of vanguard professionals and intellectuals he believed would be instrumental in the project of racial uplift.

It is not clear whether or not Du Bois knew the identities of the American delegates attending the Congress, although he was well acquainted with several of them (John A. Davis, Horace Mann Bond, James W. Ivy, Mercer Cook, and Richard Wright).²² What he would have been privy to, however, were attempts by the US government to deal with its 'Achilles' heel' of race relations by having well-known African-American

entertainers, and other well-accomplished African-Americans such as the literary figure J. Saunders Redding and the lawyer and future judge Edith Sampson, to travel abroad as representative examples of the merit of American democracy.²³ His perspective would also have been shaped by the fact that he himself was a victim of the McCarthy Cold War hysteria, having been brought up on federal charges for failing to register an anti-war organization he had helped found and had been elected chairman of, the Peace Information Center (PIC), as “an agent of a foreign principle within the United States” under the Foreign registration Act.²⁴ Du Bois’ message in that sense was informed by his understanding that writers, artists and intellectuals were key players in a battle of ideological representation and political positioning that fueled the global competition between the United States and the Soviet Union. The fact however that in his message Du Bois would associate the African American delegation that attended the Congress with naked American Cold War interests indicates a clear shift in his political thinking. This shift exemplified Du Bois’ reappraisal of the American racial conundrum, as well as the more personal dynamics of his relationship with the more liberal wing of the black intelligentsia.

W.E.B. Du Bois: The Politics of the Talented Tenth and Socialism

Du Bois’ message to the Congress reflects an important point of departure from his earlier affirmation of the significant role the African American educated elite—his “Talented Tenth”—would play in the project of racial uplift. Developed in the first decade of the twentieth century, Du Bois’ concept of the Talented Tenth was a very specific reaction against the politics of accommodation advocated by Booker T. Washington, the African American educator, race man, and founder of Tuskegee

Institute, whose influence in the national discourse on race in that time period was unmatched and historically unparalleled. As Du Bois' biographer David Levering Lewis points out, a manifesto of the concept is essentially articulated in the essay "Of Mr. Washington and Others" from Du Bois' famed volume *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) and is further elaborated upon on succeeding essays in that volume ("Of the Training of Black Men" and "Of the Wings of Atalanta").²⁵ The concept itself, of course, was the title of an essay Du Bois published in the edited volume *The Negro Problem* (1903) that included contributions by Booker T. Washington himself along with the writers Charles W. Chesnutt and Paul Laurence Dunbar. Then, Du Bois' elitist apprehension of the moving force of history—a society's elite few or "Talented Tenth"—was articulated to challenge Washington's program of vocational training over liberal arts education for African Americans as well as Washington's insistence that economic necessities superseded civil rights concerns as an immediate concern for African American integration in the American mainstream. This post Reconstruction model of race leadership therefore prioritized the rigorous training of black elites in the liberal arts as a means to develop a confident and assertive intellectual cadre to represent the interests of the race.²⁶

Du Bois' message to the Congress offers an acerbic critique of representatives of the class he himself had half a century before labored to call into existence. In this way we can think of the message as reflective of an aspect of Du Bois' legacy that has generated noteworthy scholarly discussion: the relationship of his radicalism over the last decade of his life to the political vision he articulated earlier in his career. This discussion is no less a reflection of the longevity of Du Bois' career²⁷ as scholar and

activist than the impressive scope of his social and political thought, which ranges from contributions to Pan-Africanist thought, liberal humanism, democratic socialism and Marxist intellectual history, to name a few. It is also a reflection of how the breadth of intellectual and political discourses that can be attached to his name can at times compete with each other in attempts to reify a coherent narrative monument of his legacy.

Baldwin's account of Du Bois' message to the Congress, for that matter, implies one tradition of interpretation of Du Bois' legacy. Baldwin clearly presents the message as the utterance of an imprudent and bitter older man dissatisfied with the state of race relations in the United States. This representation conforms to one perception of Du Bois' earlier work and activism in the first three decades of the twentieth century as his lasting contribution to the struggle against racism.²⁸ Here certain aspects of Du Bois' later activities during the Cold War period are emphasized over others. The fact of his involvement in a peace movement that sought to recast the discourse of the political, ideological and military competition between the US and the Soviet Union in diplomatic as opposed to Manichean terms, and the fact of his opposition to nuclear arms and his criticism of the American use of the atomic bomb, are downplayed to highlight his expressions of a sympathetic perspective on socialism and occasional defense of Stalinism. During this period he is often presented as adhering to hasty positions that reflected a blindness toward the violence and cruelty of the Stalinist regime.

Countering this tradition of interpretation, historian Gerald Horne has offered in the volume *Red and Black* an impressive study that debunks the idea of Du Bois' marginal relevance as a public intellectual during this period by emphasizing his popular appeal among working class African Americans, his work in the peace movement, and

his active engagement in labor politics. Horne's detailed analysis of Du Bois' later years, however, if it succeeds in re-framing Du Bois as an influential intellectual during the Cold War period, still does not attempt to convey a convincing genealogy of his shifting political vision because it is primarily concerned with addressing Du Bois' work and activism during the post WWII period. Critics who have commented on Du Bois' shifting political vision include scholar Kate Baldwin, who in *Beyond the Iron Curtain*, represent Du Bois' idealist vision of Soviet socialism as something that can be divorced from the oppressive nature of Stalinism.²⁹ In the work *Transcending the Talented Tenth: Black Leaders and American Intellectuals*, Joy James, on the other hand, insists that one must weigh in the sense of betrayal Du Bois felt by not finding broader support among the African American professional and intellectual classes (the "Talented Tenth") as he was being legally persecuted for carrying on deemed "un-American" activities at the outset of the Cold War in any attempt to understand his statements regarding the USSR.³⁰ Among those critics, Nikhil Pal Singh acknowledges Du Bois' "wilfull blindness" to the oppressive nature of the Soviet regime while advancing the idea that in the Cold War context a principled path that was at once radical and anti-Stalinist was likely the most difficult course to follow.³¹

Thus if the tenor of Du Bois' later socialism in the 1950s is a challenge to critics attempting to assess and depict his overall legacy, the more recent scholarship on Du Bois has tended to appraise the tenor of his radical rhetoric through key moments in his life as well as through his relationship to the NAACP, the civil rights organization he helped found in 1909 and whose influential literary organ, *The Crisis*, he helmed at two different periods. In the essay "How the Socialism of W.E.B. Du Bois Still Matters:

Black Socialism in *The Quest of the Silver Fleece*—and Beyond,” for instance, Mark Van Wienen and Julie Kraft accurately note that critics have tended to date “the significant phase of Du Bois’ radicalism [...] from his contact with Third Internationalism, whether initiated by his visit to the Soviet Union in 1926 [...] or his immersion in Marxism in the early 1930s.”³² In regards to the Russian experiment with socialism Van Wienen and Kraft point to first hand reports of American visitors that grace the pages of *The Crisis* in the immediate period after the 1917 Bolshevik revolution,³³ and concerning Du Bois’ own trip to Russia in 1926, they would point to biographer David Levering Lewis’ statement that “Never before in his life had he been as stirred as he would be by the two months in Russia.”³⁴

On the whole, however, Van Wienen and Kraft’s essay attempt to provide an alternative genealogy to Du Bois’ articulations of socialist ideas by showing how as early as his publication of the novel *The Quest of the Silver Fleece* (1911) his political vision was informed by black economic collectivism and concerns with unionization (albeit his position on this latter issue was greatly informed by his belief that the reactionary racism espoused by the white working class made the idea of a racially unified labor movement a fanciful prospective³⁵). Following the example of an earlier assertion by literary scholar Arnold Rampersad about the socialist ideas articulated in Du Bois’ novel,³⁶ the Wienen and Kraft essay largely succeeds in depicting Du Bois’ consistent consideration of race, class and capitalism in his political vision and analysis during this earlier period where he is more often associated as adhering to the concept of the Talented Tenth. In that way Wienen and Kraft succeed in providing a very useful subtext to how in prior years other scholars had discussed Du Bois’ appropriation of a more radical political

outlook in the 1930s by simply pointing out that there was a connecting thread in his political vision—a consistent engagement with socialist ideas.

Thus in focusing on the period of the late 1920s into the 1930s, the political scientist Adolph L. Reed can be said to represent the consensus perspective on the nature of Du Bois' radicalization. He has illustrated, for instance, how during the Great Depression Du Bois was in the process of articulating and creating a political and economic framework that reconsidered the integrationist premise of his earlier activism.³⁷ Using Du Bois' own explanation of the shifts in his political thoughts in the essay "My Evolving Program for Negro Freedom" (from Rayford Logan's *What the Negro Wants*, 1944), Reed briefly explains that after having realized that more often non-rational rather than rational motivations were at work in white prejudicial feelings and practices, Du Bois began to increasingly concentrate on organized action among blacks as a means for survival. Reed argues that Du Bois' strategy of working within a segregationist system to strengthen black institutions bespoke his particular brand of "nationalism," one that at this point was more tactical than ideological.³⁸ Reed notes that this "nationalistic program was the specific issue" that led to Du Bois' first departure from the NAACP in 1934.

Contributing to this stream of thought regarding the period of Du Bois' radicalization, the political scientist Cedric Robinson would himself consider Du Bois' most influential contribution to black historiography, the volume *Black Reconstruction* (1934), as the text that announced his entry into the black radical tradition.³⁹ It should be noted here, however, that unlike scholars such as Reed and Lewis, who take a broader perspective on Du Bois as a public intellectual and political activist, Robinson is more concerned with the tenor of Du Bois' overarching intellectual vision than his political

activism per se, as his approach to Du Bois is mediated by his interest in delineating his unique contributions to a tradition of black radicalism that creatively engages Marxist thought. *Black Reconstruction* signifies to Robinson Du Bois' mature arrival to an understanding and analysis of American history not only through the lens of dialectical materialism but also through his nuanced apprehension on the function of race in black oppression. The literary historian and biographer David Levering Lewis, by contrast, dually considers Du Bois' broad intellectual outlook and his activism. He connects Du Bois' greater sense of intellectual identification with Marxism with his political stances. Hence similar to Reed, who depicts Du Bois' first departure from the NAACP as the result of a new shift in his political thinking that contrasted with the organization's aims (Du Bois' reconsideration of what African Americans should be aiming for in a segregated social system), Lewis characterizes Du Bois' second departure from the organization in 1948 as a direct result of Cold War McCarthyism and its attendant hysteria. Lewis depicts how the organization's uneasiness with being associated with a prominent member who did not refrain from defending Soviet-style Communism and denouncing American capitalism would play a huge role in that second departure.⁴⁰

To Lewis, an address that Du Bois delivered on August 12, 1948, at the national convocation of Sigma Pi Phi in Wilberforce, Ohio, was the key moment when it became clear he had "lost his political purchase" on the African American elite.⁴¹ Du Bois' address, "The Talented Tenth Memorial Address," reframed the "Talented Tenth" concept to advance a vision of the movement for racial progress that was internationalist in scope and that also was reliant on planned collective action as well as necessary class sacrifice.⁴² What is novel about this address is not that Du Bois refuted his earlier

concept, because he essentially presented his discussion on it as a re-examination of its value and a restatement of its principles. Also, he had earlier offered a critique of the concept in his 1940 autobiography *Dusk of Dawn: the Autobiography of a Race*.⁴³ What are significant about this address are its public nature, the manner in which Du Bois critiques his earlier proposition of race leadership, and his reimagining of that concept. For Du Bois takes notes of its elitist tendencies and overreliance on the idea of an elite that would be naturally predisposed to think in terms of group advocacy rather than self-interest. He presents the premise of a “new” Talented Tenth whose “passport to leadership was not alone learning” but the willingness to engage the economic conditions of African Americans as a group and the courage to make the appropriate sacrifice in advocating for the betterment of the African American mass.⁴⁴

If Lewis presents this address as reflective of Du Bois’ growing estrangement from the African American elite, Joy James seems to consider it as residing along the mid-way point on the way to a more trenchant critique of the politics of the Talented Tenth. At the time of his indictment and trial for failure to register as a foreign agent because of his work with the Peace Information Center (PIC), Du Bois would find that those who most vocally and publically defended him tended to be from the black working class, particularly unionized workers. Du Bois reflects in his memoir *In Battle for Peace, the Story of my 83rd Birthday* (1953) that this led him to reconsider his vision of black leadership and to see that the masses will produce its own cadre of leaders.⁴⁵ Thus having begun by extolling the virtues of a vanguard class of the college trained elite, Du Bois ends up in his later years by affirming the leadership potential of the Gramscian organic intellectual.

While this emphasis on class represents a significant shift in Du Bois' thinking, it is important to keep in mind something Du Bois' himself states in his memorial address to the national convocation of Sigma Pi Phi in Wilberforce, Ohio, in 1948. Specifically addressing the Talented Tenth concept, he notes that

I assumed that with knowledge, sacrifice would automatically follow. In my youth and idealism, I did not realize that selfishness is even more natural than sacrifice. I made the assumption of its wide availability because of the spirit of sacrifice learned in my mission school training.⁴⁶

Here, even as Du Bois is providing a critique of the concept, it is noticeable that he also provides a defense of it by emphasizing how his idealism colored his perspective on human nature. He therefore presents the failure of his usage of the concept not in terms of what it articulates, but in terms of what he failed to further unpack. Yet if Du Bois considers that his earlier essay "The Talented Tenth" ultimately failed to articulate some of his implicit assumptions, one of the lesser-discussed essays in his classic work *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), "Of the Wings of Atalanta," seems to do just that. In that essay Du Bois uses the Greek Mythological figure of Atalanta as a symbol of the pursuit of industrial wealth, particularly in how that pursuit was encroaching in the South.

While "Of the Wings of Atalanta" is ostensibly concerned with what the city of Atlanta could potentially lose by succumbing to the logic of industrialization and commercialization, Du Bois' argument that the region's salvation depended in its ability to proliferate educational institutions, speaks more broadly to his belief that a liberal arts education greatly contributes to the formation of individuals who can stand above the petty fray of crass desires for material wealth. Thus even as Du Bois was foregrounding

that education and knowledge ought to be the project of the New South, he was also positing a critique of American capitalism and American ideological investment in individualistic market-oriented logic. The university, as Du Bois saw it, above all functioned as an “organ of that fine adjustment between real life and the growing knowledge of life, an adjustment which forms the secret of civilization.”⁴⁷ Here, Du Bois’ perspective on university education is clearly associated with the Socratic notion of the ‘good life’ in its association of knowledge with not only intellectual but with also moral growth. While he never uses the concept of the “Talented Tenth” in that essay, it is clear that the value of the university education he describes represents the attributes of that group. What Du Bois admits to in his “Memorial Address,” is his error in believing there was a natural correlation between the values of work and sacrifice he himself upholds and university training. He ends his address by proposing a new theory of vanguard leadership, that of a self-conscious and self-selected group, the “Guiding Hundredth,” who, committed to the work of racial uplift, would work with and on behalf of the masses.⁴⁸

As these various scholars illustrate, a significant change in Du Bois’ political vision occurs from his proposition of the leadership of the Talented Tenth, to his renunciation of that class during the Cold War period. If Wiene, Kraft and Rampersad locate socialist inflections in Du Bois’ fiction in the first decade of the twentieth century, Horne, Robinson, Lewis, James and others consider the 1930s as the period of Du Bois’ true radicalization. Lewis’ magisterial biography of Du Bois, on the whole abstains from making any real positive claim concerning what motivated him to go against the grain and articulate perspectives that placed him at personal risk. Lewis’ parting comments on

the Du Bois of the Cold War period is that his ideological take on socialism from the 1930s until the 1950s did not greatly waver. What changed was the context of the times in which he lived. Lewis thus presents Du Bois as a restless thinker always in search of solutions and in the pursuit of that solution was unafraid to assume unpopular opinions.

Thus if the message Du Bois sent to the Congress was surprising, it was so in a manner that was perhaps similar to the address he delivered in Wilberforce, Ohio: in the public nature of its articulation, and not necessarily in its content. For three years before the Congress, Du Bois had published a short article in the socialist periodical *Monthly Review* (“Negroes and the Crisis of Capitalism in the United States”) that nearly word for word mirrored the message he sent to the Congress. In the *Monthly Review* article Du Bois cautioned his readers that the interest of the African American elite was not always aligned with the interest of the black working class. He ultimately suggests that “cultural affiliation,” which he considered a more accurate way to refer to the idea of racial solidarity, and the operations of racial discrimination and the color line would eventually compel blacks with upward social mobility to side with the proletariat in an impending socialist struggle. However, even though he held out the promise of redemption in the political orientation of segments of the African American elite, Du Bois nonetheless suggests that in the current moment that class submitted itself to the capitalist ethos, mirroring capitalist exploitation of labor in the American mainstream with labor exploitation in the segregated black community. This investment in the status quo, to Du Bois, was reflected in the fact that contemporary black leaders who were “willing to testify to the ‘free and equal’ position of Negroes in America” were able to travel freely “to Asia, Europe, or Africa, with no passport difficulties” and even if they were simply

willing to keep still and quiet about the domestic racial reality, they were recompensed with “a variety of perquisites, including scholarships.”⁴⁹ In thus devising the message to the Congress that he would entrust to Emile St. Lot, Du Bois would only have to retrieve from his personal archives a document from his file of recent writings.

The American Response: Richard Wright and James Baldwin

Of the six American delegates, Richard Wright was the only person who openly addressed the Du Bois message. At the formal discussion that ensued at the end of the first day of the Congress, he told the audience “We had a message today that hurt me.”⁵⁰ Wright was of course referring to Du Bois’ letter to the Congress. Wright continued by saying

my role in this Conference will negate the implication of that message: that the Americans participating here were people who could not speak their minds freely.”⁵¹

Wright was clearly very careful not to speak for every member of the American delegation. Yet considering the seriousness of Du Bois’ charge, it is interesting that Wright would respond in such a tamed way. Wright made no effort to openly discredit Du Bois or to defend his reputation and the reputation of the American delegation from the import of what Du Bois had written. Rather, he appeared to take the high road by simply inferring that Du Bois’ statement could not possibly taint his name given his close association with the *Présence Africaine* group and his participation in organizing the Congress.

Richard Wright had participated in organizing the Congress and by that time had a decade long relationship with Alioune Diop and *Présence Africaine*. He had counted

among a cast of well-known writers, artists and scholars— which included among others, the existentialist philosophers and writers Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus, the painter Picasso, and the surrealist writer and ethnographer Michel Leiris—who supported Diop’s efforts to found the journal. Wright’s first interaction with Diop had come at the recommendation of Jean-Paul Sartre, and subsequently Diop invited Richard Wright to attend meetings of a select committee (“Comité d’honneur”) working on establishing the journal.⁵² To solidify their relationship, Diop, who was a very private man, wrote Wright a fifteen page handwritten letter depicting aspects of his childhood and education in Senegal, his arrival in Paris to study at a time when few African students were living in the city, and the knowledge he gleaned about his native continent through his own experiences living in Senegal, his cosmopolitan encounters with other Africans in Europe, and through his readings of various books on Africa.⁵³ In these early days, Wright would drop around the publication’s Parisian office several times a week to provide the group working on the journal with the names and addresses of potential African American contributors. He also provided his own unpublished texts for publication.⁵⁴

With this decade-long history of collaboration with Alioune Diop and *Présence Africaine*, it is therefore not surprising that Wright would not see the need to publically rebuke W.E.B. Du Bois’ statement about the American delegation in a much stronger tone. On his own end, fellow expatriate writer James Baldwin in his report on the Congress does not attempt to assess the truth-value of the Du Bois message. Rather he emphasizes the fact that the message was apprehended with a roar of applause and admiration. And while he does not dispute Du Bois’ statement, he intimates in his essay

that it was imprudent because the audience the message was addressed to was all too predisposed to a form of blind hastiness because of their justifiable distrust of the West. To Baldwin, the power behind the Du Bois message essentially did not reside in its truth-value. What the message revealed was “the incontestable fact that [Du Bois] had not been allowed to leave his country.”⁵⁵ So to Baldwin, the restrictions placed on Du Bois’ ability to travel did more to indict American democracy than anything Du Bois himself might have been able to say if he had been allowed to engage in the debates at the Congress. Overall, Baldwin’s silence on the truth-value of Du Bois’ statement intones a light dismissal of Du Bois’ construction of the politics he envisioned connected the black diaspora.

Looking at it on the surface there are ostensible reasons why Wright and Baldwin could in this instance be a little dismissive of the Du Bois message that go beyond its Cold War implications. They are in some ways positioned on the outer edges of the latter’s intellectual legacy by virtue of their life backgrounds, early social surroundings, and intellectual penchant.⁵⁶ Respectively the products of the rural south and the economically depressed inner city, neither Wright nor Baldwin have ever mentioned, for instance, whether the vast body of Du Bois’ work was ever of great use to them in their respective understanding of the condition of African Americans in the United States and in their apprehensions of their own racial identities. Baldwin’s narrative construction of his coming to intellectual maturity emphasizes several key experiences and encounters, none of which include allusions to Du Bois’ works or to Du Bois’ example as a living intellectual. Thus, Baldwin foregrounds in his essays his apprenticeship as a preacher in his teens, his trips to the New York City Public Library (where he was able to quench his

love of literature—especially his early appreciation for the American novelist Henry James), his interactions with the African American painter Beauford Delaney (whom he referred to as his “spiritual father”), and sometimes later, of course, Richard Wright, as the key pivotal formative moments of his early life. Baldwin’s relationship with Delaney was particularly significant. An iconic figure of the avant-garde bohemian artistic scene of New York City’s Greenwich Village, Delaney’s warm and generous personality, unassuming sage-like dignity, shared homosexual identity, and quiet racial pride, were all qualities that drew Baldwin to him. Yet even though Beauford Delaney’s life experiences could also have opened up to Baldwin a vista on the Harlem of the Harlem Renaissance and the New Negro ethos of the first three decades of the twentieth century,⁵⁷ one senses that for Baldwin what that relationship most contributed to was not necessarily a privileged purview on the African American cultural experience, but rather a safe-space for the young writer’s self-creation as an artist and intellectual.

If the avant-garde cultural and artistic confines of the Village played a significant role in Baldwin’s development as a writer, for Richard Wright, as is well known, it would be the cauldron of radical political activism he was embedded in as a member of the Communist Party and his belonging to Chicago’s John Reed Club—a cultural and educational arm of the party that sought to develop young writers and artists. While it may seem reductive to assess both writers’ relationship to Du Bois’ intellectual legacy in such terms, it is worth noting that when compared to the other American delegates at the Congress, both Baldwin and Wright cut a singular profile. With the exception of James W. Ivy, who was then editor of the NAACP’s *The Crisis*, the remaining delegates were academics with strong affiliations to black historical institutions of higher learning—the

natural repository of Du Bois' Talented Tenth. Thus Baldwin and Wright's life backgrounds, the white liberal circles (Baldwin) and white radical circles (Wright) in which they were embedded and that early on supported their careers as writers and critics lent to a different relationship to the form of race leadership Du Bois embodied.

Furthermore, concerning Wright specifically, there may also have been some personal dynamics involved that would have influenced how he received the message. Du Bois first met Wright the week after the publication of *Native Son* (1940). This was at a luncheon that included fellow writers Arna Bontemps and Langston Hughes, as well as the African-American sociologist Allison Davis.⁵⁸ In a brief description of this meeting for his weekly column in the *New York Amsterdam News*, Du Bois painted a very sympathetic portrait of the then young emerging writer.⁵⁹ However, by 1945 Du Bois' view of Wright had dramatically changed. Du Bois that year wrote a scathing review of Wright's *Black Boy*. Du Bois opined that the book was not so much a memoir as it was a sordid fictionalized biography by a self-centered man who could not grasp the intricacies of black folk life and was disconnected from the suffering of those closest to him.⁶⁰ Du Bois' opinions about Richard Wright and his work would not change by the 1950s. In a letter he wrote to George Padmore during that period he confided that he "did not like" Wright, and pointed to the latter's deplorable depiction of African traditional culture in his travelogue on the Gold Coast (future Ghana), *Black Power*, as among the reasons.⁶¹

Du Bois' remarks on Wright's representation of African American culture in *Black Boy* (1945) and his representation of traditional African culture in *Black Power* (1954) were not atypical among African American critics and intellectuals, some of whom reacted negatively to Wright's often-harsh and unsentimental description of black

life. Yet, they are reflective of a significant difference in the intellectual project of the two figures. An aspect of this difference can be understood by briefly referring to how Du Bois in his classic text *The Souls of Black Folk* attempted to recuperate the spiritual value of African American folk life and tradition and of his great theoretical contribution to our understanding of African American subjectivity in that same volume through the concept of “double consciousness.” Du Bois in this work largely presented a narrative of the raced-subject’s power of cultural creativity by presenting the African American subject’s ability to translate folk life and folk idiom into such life affirming art form as the Negro Spirituals. With his meditation on double-consciousness, Du Bois took the idea of the African American subject’s sense of alienation within a repressive racial economy to offer the idea that this subject, who experiences something of a split between a normative American-ness and a blackness posited as antithetical to normative American status, has a privileged form of knowledge accorded the outsider. This form of knowledge which he terms “second sight” allows the black subject to have both an insider’s and an outsider’s perspective on American culture.

Wright’s body of work, however, has a tendency to reconfigure Du Bois’s tropes in ways that emphasize less savory aspects of the African American experience. The spiritual reservoir Du Bois alludes to, for instance, is in a text like Wright’s *Black Boy*, re-imagined in the negative. It becomes at times a frenzied religious irrationality and rigidity perhaps best embodied in his representation of his maternal grandmother, a well-meaning but tyrannically religious zealot.⁶² And Du Bois’ idea of the unique epistemological perspective the African American subject is privy to by virtue of his or her position in American society is presented in Wright’s last novel, *The Long Dream*, as

a negative form of knowledge. In that novel, through various depictions of black experiences of racial violence in the South, Wright informs the reader through the protagonist Fishbelly, that the black population lives in a world of shadows, deprived of any means of self-assertion. The real world, as Wright deems it, is the world of those with power—the world of whites. Wright therefore does not imagine the black subject as possessing the form of empowering “second sight” Du Bois envisions. Rather, black subjects are privy to a particular existentialist position that demand of them to continually compromise their ideal values (i.e. courage, resistance, self-assertion) in order to survive. Here the black subject’s “second sight” is indistinguishable from fear; it is what shapes his or her behavior and allows him or her in large part to survive. Wright essentially adopts a very similar outlook in his travelogue on Ghana, *Black Power: A Record of Reactions in a Land of Pathos* (1954). He assesses the liberatory potential of Ghanaian independence not in terms of a recuperative return to cultural formations native to an African reality, but in the future independent nation’s ability to master Western tools of political, technological and economic modernization.

If Wright’s understanding of black subjectivity is at variance with Du Bois’ vision in that he is more concerned with the debilitating trauma of racism and racial violence and its negative affects on black consciousness and self assertion, for Baldwin, such variance would be most expressed in his perspective on the political situations of African Americans in the United States, and of African colonized subjects vis-à-vis European colonial powers. While Du Bois was invested in viewing the African American situation in the United States through the larger prism of the global impact of the slave trade, slavery and colonization, Baldwin’s vision in the 1950s was decidedly more delimited to

a national context. The Baldwin of this period articulated the idea that the African American experience in the US and the colonial situation on the African continent were decidedly different in nature. In explaining the nature of this difference in a little known essay originally published in French in the periodical *Rapport France-États-Unis* (“Le Problème Noir Américain”) Baldwin espoused something akin to an acceptance of the American exceptionalist creed, albeit from a decidedly critical perspective.⁶³ In that essay Baldwin considered the African American experience as a uniquely American experience of migration and settlement that was comparable to the experiences of European immigrant populations who settled in the United States and came to form new American identities. In his estimation, the question of citizenship and national and cultural affiliation rendered the two conditions vastly different. To Baldwin, the colonized Africans who reprobated colonization found themselves in the position of citizens of a country unjustly invaded and shamefully exploited. This situation as Baldwin sees it is very different from that of African American subjects who can make no claim to another country, and who if they wanted to reject their American experience could not replace it with any other experience, or any other past.⁶⁴

There was thus something of an ideological divide between Du Bois, Wright and Baldwin that would have affected Wright and Baldwin’s reception of Du Bois’ message. In the case of Wright, however, this divide was complicated by the embarrassing fact that while he attempted to distance himself from Du Bois’ absence at the Congress, he essentially did play a part in that absence. During the initial planning of the event, Wright was assigned the role of organizing the American delegation that would attend the event. The delegation he initially had in mind would have been composed of the poets and

writers Melvin B. Tolson, Langston Hughes, Chester Himes, William Gardner Smith, and Ralph Ellison, the music conductor Charles Dean Dixon, journalist and historian J.A. Rogers, and the sociologist E. Franklin Frazier. As literary historian and biographer Michel Fabre has noted, Wright had clearly intended to bring in left-leaning artists and intellectuals.⁶⁵ However, after discussions had gone on in his absence over who would make up that delegation, Wright, according to another one of his biographers, Hazel Rowley, contacted officials at the American embassy in Paris to express concerns over the people the Congress organizers were hoping to attend.⁶⁶ Wright had particularly objected to the choices of W.E.B. Du Bois and Paul Robeson because of their affiliations with the Communist Party.

Wright would at some point correspond with Roy Wilkins of the NAACP. It is in effect through this correspondence with Roy Wilkins that the delegation finally took shape. Wilkins appointed James W. Ivy, the editor of *The Crisis*, and professor John A. Davis, with the responsibility to assemble the delegation.⁶⁷ James W. Ivy, was already aware of *Présence Africaine* because it had established earlier contact with *The Crisis*, and Davis on his end, had been reading the magazine “in connection with a study of foreign relations to American race relations he was doing.”⁶⁸ The “study” Davis was reportedly doing came from a grant from the American Information Committee on Race and Caste, a CIA front organization that would later be known as the Committee on Race and Caste in World Affairs (CORAC).⁶⁹ This organization listed John A. Davis, as among its directors, the two other directors being Bethuel M. Webster and Orin Lehman. Orin Lehman, who in 1950 had been appointed by President Harry S. Truman on the board of an agency that administered American aid to Europe under the Marshall Plan

(the Economic Cooperation Administration),⁷⁰ appeared to have been the head of the organization as all grants had to be signed off by him. On his end, Bethuel Webster was a distinguished attorney who, according to Cold War historian Hugh Wilford “earlier in [the 1950s] had helped set up the American Fund for Free Jurists, later revealed to be a conduit of CIA funds to the International Commission of Jurists.”⁷¹ The American Committee on Race and Caste agreed to fund the delegation, and in the week just prior to the beginning of the Congress, Wright received a letter from John A. Davis informing him that the American delegation will compose of himself, Horace Mann Bond, William T. Fontaine, Mercer Cook, James W. Ivy, and perhaps Ralph Ellison (who ended up not attending the Congress).⁷²

After contacting Roy Wilkins, Wright was essentially in the dark over the unfolding dynamics that led to the organization of the American delegation. Thus while he had raised the alarm over the intention of Diop and other organizers at *Présence Africaine* to bring Robeson and Du Bois to the Congress, what ensued thereafter had little to do with him. His fear about the potential presence of Du Bois and Robeson did not reflect a patriotic stance against the spread of communism insofar as he was by no means a Cold War warrior. Rather, Wright’s extensive experience with the American Communist Party had led him to believe African American interests were not reflected in the Party’s program.⁷³ He considered the party’s position on the question of race in the US and colonialism abroad politically opportunistic. Hazel Rowley, however, provides another convincing way of considering why Wright would undermine his co-organizers efforts to bring in Du Bois and Robeson. According to Rowley, Wright’s passport was up for renewal, and given his role in the organization of the Congress, he likely did not

want to be associated with a potential Robeson and Du Bois presence at the Congress. Rowley points to a specific statement by Wright that further highlights his particular situation. Addressing organizers of a cultural festival in London in 1959, Wright remarked that:

I'm an American Negro. We American Negroes who live abroad live under tremendous political pressure...I'm alone. I belong to no gang or clique or party or organization. If attacked there is nobody to come to my aid or defense. Hence I must keep clear of entanglements that would stifle me in expressing myself in terms that I feel are my own.⁷⁴

Rowley introduces here an element of the desire for self-preservation in a treacherous Cold War environment as a motivating factor in Wright's decision. Wright's words approximate in tone how he describes his decision to leave the Communist Party over a decade earlier in the volume *The God that Failed* (1949), a collection of essays by former Communists who had defected from the Party. His emphasis on freedom of action can also be traced to concerns he explores in the latter part of his career, as he worked on the novel *The Outsider* (1953) and an unpublished sequel to the novel *The Long Dream* (1958), "Island of Hallucination." Through the protagonist Cross Damon's search for meaning and purpose, Wright in *The Outsider* took a philosophical approach to the question of freedom by dramatizing the experiences of a character who is confronted with the ideology of an organization—an unnamed Communist Party—that espouse human liberation while requiring complete individual subservience to the organization's doctrines. In "Island of Hallucination," even as Wright's concerns remain to some aspect wedded to a philosophical meditation on freedom, the narrative is decidedly more

embedded in the more material culture of political surveillance and suspicion that Wright believed characterized black expatriate life in France during the Cold War. The protagonist Fishbelly, bent on escaping the racial confines of black southern life, arrives in Paris to essentially find himself having to mediate his desire to “make it” in the more racially liberal environment of post-WWII France as different ideological and political interests weigh in on that desire.

Thus the message Du Bois sent to the Congress put in relief some of the differences Wright and Baldwin would have had with the older intellectual. With Baldwin, this difference can be understood in how he considered the African American experience as a complex issue of national belonging that did not neatly fit into the more global and diasporic vision Du Bois’ message intoned. As regards to Wright, while it can be said that both he and Du Bois shared a similar interest in the condition of the African Diaspora and harbored a global vision of the black struggle, neither saw in each other ideological allies by virtue of their respective interpretation of the African American experience in the United States and the tenor of their political affiliations.

The American Response: John A. Davis, Horace Mann Bond, James W. Ivy, William T. Fontaine and Mercer Cook

If in his response to the Du Bois message Richard Wright might have mainly sought to extricate himself from the message’s implications, there were other members of the American delegation who would voice their concerns on behalf of the whole group. This would occur both at the Congress and in the months and years following the event, as the members of that delegation, again led by the City College political scientist John A. Davis, would attempt to form a stronger bond with Alioune Diop, *Présence Africaine*,

and an organization Diop had just founded—the Société Africaine de Culture (SAC). Horace Mann Bond reports, for instance that Mercer Cook, “in due time, gave a tactful, yet firm, answer to this insulting message.”⁷⁵ The nature of that “tactful, yet firm” reply is not known. Yet we can reasonably assume that Mercer Cook would have been a very effective mediator. He had a long personal history with the Parisian black intellectual milieu that dated by to the 1930s, when he began interacting with figures such as the Négritude poets Léon Gontran-Damas and Léopold Sédar Senghor as well as the French Guinean writer René Maran, among many other Francophone black writers and intellectuals. He was also developing an evolving professional orientation that was progressively leading him toward the path of international diplomacy.⁷⁶

Cook, however, was not the only member of the American delegation traveling from the US to Paris, with extensive black transnational experiences. The very make-up of that delegation (sans Richard Wright) suggests John A. Davis had carefully chosen colleagues who shared his liberal democratic integrationist outlook, and who in one form or other were also connected to or concerned with the African Diaspora. Prior to his position of Associate Professor at City College (CUNY), Davis had been the head of the Political Science Department at Lincoln University, the black liberal arts institution of which the American delegate Horace Mann Bond, an alumnus of the school, was the current president. Bond had also worked with Davis just a couple of years before. Davis was then heading the NAACP’s research team to prepare the legal brief for the landmark civil rights Supreme Court case, *Brown vs. the Board of Education*. He enlisted Bond on the research team because of the latter’s seminal work on the history of black education in the South (*Negro Education in Alabama: A Study in Cotton and Steel*, 1939).⁷⁷ As

president of Lincoln, Bond would evince great interest in strengthening ties between his institution and African educational institutions. He traveled to the continent several times, corresponded with Lincoln's most well-known African Alumni (the Nigerian first minister Nnamdi Azikiwe as well the future president of Ghana Kwame Nkrumah), and in the 1950s established the African Studies Institute at Lincoln.⁷⁸

If the remaining American delegates were not as well-travelled as either Cook or Bond, there were other aspects of their professional and educational backgrounds and orientations that seemed to fit a certain mold that made them attractive representatives of American possibility. James W. Ivy, the editor of *The Crisis* magazine, had one point in his professional career also been an academic, having taught for a number of years at Hampton Institute. The successor of Du Bois at the magazine, he additionally was in correspondence with Alioune Diop's journal *Présence Africaine*. William T. Fontaine, who at the time was a professor of Philosophy at the University Of Pennsylvania, had also done his undergraduate studies at Lincoln University. As an undergraduate at Lincoln, Fontaine was a year behind Langston Hughes and a classmate of future legal stalwart Thurgood Marshall as well as the Nigerian statesman Nnamdi Azikiwe.⁷⁹ Both Fontaine and John A. Davis had also taught Kwame Nkrumah while the latter attended Lincoln University. While Fontaine's work as a philosopher remains largely overlooked, his faculty position at an Ivy League institution made him a prized symbol of the promise of American integration.

John A. Davis was not as accomplished a scholar as the other academics. But what he might have lacked in publications he more than made for in activism and administrative work for progressive racial causes.⁸⁰ Baldwin says of him that he struck

an odd figure, being so light in complexion amidst the sea of blackness that he was often asked by others at the Congress exactly why he considered himself a negro.⁸¹ The answer of course was the “one-drop rule,” the colloquial term in an American context for a hypodescent perspective on racial affiliation, whereby any black ancestry results in a person being classified as black. Davis would further explain, however, that he was also a “negro” by choice and “depth of involvement.”⁸² Davis’ “depth of involvement,” if not to mention his pragmatic and optimistic dispositions as well as protestant work ethic, were understandably what best qualified him to serve as the chief of the American delegation. He shared with the other delegation an investment in American integrationist politics and understandably aspired for a racial democracy. Overall the group’s political vision was liberal democratic in nature. The tenor of their progressive politics was limited to an apprehension of the black struggle through the prism of racism. With the exception of Richard Wright, it could not be said they were invested in a broader class critique that dialectical materialism offered.

Davis’s importance as a member of the American delegation would become ever more clear in the months and years after the 1956 Congress. Shortly after the Congress, Davis requested some delegation members write a report about the event. Richard Wright jotted down some of his ideas about the Congress that possibly were meant to be included in a longer report-type letter to John Davis. While there were several things that concerned him, among them the fact that he believed the West’s bid for the continent’s allegiance was not assured because of the colonial legacy, he in the end believed the event was a great success, even surpassing the Bandung Conference.⁸³ In reading the correspondence with William T. Fontaine shortly after the Congress, we have

an even better idea of what John A. Davis was looking for. Expressing impatience with the amount of time it has taken Fontaine and others to get back to him on the report, Davis informs Fontaine of what exactly he is looking for: Fontaine's reaction to the leading personalities present, his evaluation of the Congress' significance, his evaluation of the nature of African nationalism, and Fontaine's estimate of the influence of the Communist Party on the organization of the Congress.⁸⁴ The report was meant for Orin Lehman of the American Committee of Race and Caste (future Committee of Race and Caste in World Affairs—CORAC). It is clear in no uncertain terms that CORAC's financial backing of the American delegation's trip to the Congress did not reflect an interest in the cultural themes that were going to be discussed. The organization's support of the delegation was premised on the fact that the delegates could monitor and take stock of what was happening in this transnational encounter.

In the final day of the Congress a resolution was passed to create the *Société Africaine de Culture*, an international organization that aimed to promote cultural ties between different populations of the diaspora as well as to disseminate knowledge of black cultures. With the exception of Richard Wright, all the members of the American delegation that attended the Congress would become part of the executive committee of an American chapter of this international organization, the American Society of African Culture (AMSAC), founded in 1957, the year after the Congress and SAC's founding. In the ten-year span of AMSAC's existence, the subsidiary organization greatly surpassed the operational capacity of the international parent organization. AMSAC drew its funds from CORAC, a fact that all the American delegates at the Congress, with the exception of Richard Wright, knew, but that largely remained secret to every other prominent

member of the organization.⁸⁵ Hence, although AMSAC was supposed to be a non-governmental organization, the executive members were aware of its ties to a government agency for its day-to-day operations. At the recommendation of Davis, Horace Mann Bond would in 1957 become a director at CORAC, increasing the chances both he and Davis were aware AMSAC was essentially funded by the government as a Cold War anti-Communist measure.⁸⁶ Mercer Cook who would serve as AMSAC's foreign representative from 1958 to 1960 (while en route to ambassadorship positions in West Africa) would also serve as director of the African Program of the secretly CIA funded Congress for Cultural Freedom. He likely would also have been aware of the steep anti-Communist ideological position of AMSAC. AMSAC's relationship to SAC throughout its existence was fraught with tension. This was largely a result of the seed of distrust the Du Bois message had sown at the Congress as well as both organizations attempt to determine the nature of their partnership.

In what comes off as a continuation of what occurred the first day of the Congress, the executive members of AMSAC all opposed the suggestion made by Alioune Diop and SAC that Paul Robeson and W.E.B. Du Bois become members of that organization. This opposition was firm and assertive, with Davis quite reasonably arguing that the political atmosphere in the US would make the inclusion of people deemed Communist sympathizers injurious to the functioning of any non-political organization. The executive members essentially presented to Diop the ultimatum that the very existence of AMSAC would depend on the members' ability to choose their own representatives. The back and forth between Davis and Diop would continue over the next two years over various issues. John A. Davis, for instance, at one point suggested

that to better all communication between AMSAC and SAC, AMSAC would need to have a permanent representative on SAC's executive board. Alioune Diop, suspecting foul play, wisely declined. Unbeknownst to him, of course, was the fact that shortly after the Congress, fearing the possible influence of the Communist Party on SAC and the *Présence Africaine* organizers, Richard Wright and John A. Davis had effectively corresponded over this possibility as one way to monitor the activities of SAC and *Présence Africaine*.⁸⁷

The real tension between the two organizations and their respective heads would eventually be articulated in letters Diop and Davis addressed to each other. Frustrated about what he considered AMSAC's overreaching its role as a tributary organization, Diop would express to Davis his concern that AMSAC, relying upon its greater resources was arrogantly behaving the way Western powers comported themselves in their relations to the African continent. Diop warns Davis, however, that AMSAC's resources would not prevent him and others at SAC and *Présence Africaine* from distinguishing between the marginalized position of African Americans in the United States and American hegemony. Diop ended the letter with the statement:

Aidez moi donc à consolider notre solidarité entre vous et nous. Elle se bâtera en profondeur à partir de nos souffrances communes et nos communes fragilités—non à partir de la redoutable puissance de l'Amérique.⁸⁸

[Therefore, help me to consolidate the solidarity between us. Its depth will be built on the basis of our common suffering and our uncommon fragilities—not on the basis of the formidable power of the United States.]

Diop's statement was a tacit affirmation and endorsement of the Du Bois message of two years before. While he called for solidarity, his words illustrate that he considered the greatest obstacle between AMSAC and SAC was the tributary American organization's investment in American hegemony. His statement seeks to remind Davis of the African American subject's marginalized position within this discourse of American power, positioning race and racial belonging outside of the parameters of a normative narrative of the American nation. For this reason, he presents the idea that the form of solidarity that can exist between SAC and AMSAC, and more broadly speaking African Americans and African colonial subjects, would be based on a transnational understanding of their common sufferings as well as their differences.

A Christian convert from Islam, Diop himself was adamantly opposed to Communism. Diop's disinclination toward Communism was in part due to his belief that the economic emphasis of dialectical materialism did not speak to the cultural work he felt needed to be done to achieve true and lasting African liberation.⁸⁹ He seems, like Du Bois, to have understood the "socialist" tendencies of African traditional cultures in communal organic terms, but unlike Du Bois, would not have been willing to associate it with Soviet and Chinese political reifications. In this sense, his political imagination would have much more in accord with a figure like Leopold Sedar Senghor, his Senegalese friend and compatriot, who would later become the first president of Senegal. Steering clear from the polarized Cold War atmosphere, Senghor would proclaim a *sui generis* African socialism that while it would borrow from the European socialist heritage would ultimately look onto itself for its political articulation.⁹⁰ Diop's political viewpoint, however, did not preclude him from collaborating and maintaining friendships with,

among others, such Communist Party members as Aimé Césaire, the Haitian writers Jacques Stéphen Alexis and René Dépestre, and Mario de Andrade, the Angolan nationalist who while working as an editor of Diop's journal *Présence Africaine* also labored to found the Angolan Communist Party.⁹¹ Diop was embedded in a context that did not construct the ideological differences between liberal democrats and communists in Manichean terms. Given this, the reactions of John A. Davis and the other executive committee members over the inclusion of Du Bois and Robeson in AMSAC must have rung strange to his ears. On the other hand, Diop's political moderation would not necessarily have been legible by an American delegation steeped in Cold War thinking.

W.E.B. Du Bois, the American Delegation and the Promises and Pitfalls of Transnational Black Solidarity

In his impressive study of the international inflections of black intellectual and social political discourse in the 1920's and the 1930's, *The Practice of Diaspora*, Brent Hayes Edwards proposes the idea that "the cultures of black internationalism are formed only within the paradoxes."⁹² The idea of paradox, here, connotes difference, the impossibility for disparate black populations to assume race in and of itself as a galvanizing basis without considering the constituent elements of history, place and culture that inform the notion of blackness in its various locales. Edwards best expresses these concerns as he notes that through these encounters it becomes apparent that there is an inability to even "translate a basic grammar of blackness."⁹³

Edwards' statement points to both the promises and pitfalls of black transnational collaborations. These collaborations maintain an element of the utopic in that they seem to present a sense of a unified black international community established through

discursive engagements with racist discourses that texture black experiences of modernity. There is from this standpoint an attempt to transcend the specificity of particular locales to more broadly speak to the lived experiences of raced subjects who inhabit similar discursive positions vis-à-vis the West. If the solidarity of these subjects offers possibilities of resistance to a global paradigm founded on the history of the slave trade, slavery, and colonialism, such solidarity is often articulated along the slippery slope of a racial grammar whose internal logic has its various sites of contestation. We see aspects of these sites of contestation in what the Du Bois' message to the Congress reveals about the ideological perspectives of those most affected by it. Thus broadly sketched out are Du Bois' international socialism and Pan-Africanism, Wright's radical humanism and, as will be discussed in a later chapter, his variant form of a political black nationalism that eschews an emphasis on culture, James Baldwin's strategic deployment of American Exceptionalism, and the American delegation's investment in the promise of a liberal racial democracy. Each of these positions inform a particular "grammar of blackness," a particular vision of the nature of the black struggle. Of course, these discrepant inscriptions within the context of the Congress must further be expanded to account for the experiences of the mostly Francophone black colonial subjects present at the event, further complicating and destabilizing the grammar of racial solidarity.

Edwards' vision of black international/transnational interactions largely relies on the seminal work of cultural studies scholar Stuart Hall, particularly on the latter's take on the diaspora concept as it applies to black populations. Following Hall's example, Edwards points to the workings of internationalism/transnationalism through and against difference, or as he frames it, a "difference within unity." Part of the great challenge this

project faces is in presenting an anti-essentialist perspective on race while also implicitly making a case for the liberatory potential of transnational race consciousness as a rationalized form of resistance to a global racial paradigm. If Edwards largely succeeds in presenting a vision of African diasporic engagements along those terms, it is largely because his vision of “diaspora” relies on a novel concept he develops that allows him to slightly and creatively redefine and expand the diaspora concept in ways that attend to the tensions of difference: the notion of “*décalage*.” The term, borrowed from Léopold Sédar Senghor’s attempt to explain the differences between African Americans and Africans as a slight disjointedness in space and time, is used to explain the functioning of a racial diasporic formation as reliant upon the added application of a prosthetic that props up the unevenness inherent in the structure of a racial diaspora. Thus *décalage* speaks to the disjointedness of diasporic discourse and its reliance on a mechanism of sorts to, in Stuart Hall fashion, allow for the process of articulation—or movement through disconnection (as in the anatomical limbs’ reliance on joints to allow for their proper function).

Yet *décalage* also speaks to the “haunting of difference,” or as Edwards further characterizes it, to “the points of misunderstanding, bad faith, [and] unhappy translation” embedded in diasporic discourse.⁹⁴ Here, however, even as Edwards provides more than a hint of the possible failure of diasporic discourse to support an uncomplicated narrative of racial solidarity, the historical and cultural context that informs his work—the Harlem Renaissance/New Negro Movement period—and the methodological approach he employs—an examination of the significant exchanges of transnational black intellectuals through various periodicals—somewhat limits what he can actually say about the failure

of that discourse insofar as his characterization of the points of misunderstanding and “unhappy translations” tend to circulate around issues relating to language and cultural understanding. He therefore locates the nodal point of difference in black transnational interactions within linguistic and cultural registers that often prevent transnational black subjects from different locales from articulating corresponding visions of a racial diaspora.

However, at the time of the 1956 Congress the transnational engagement of raced subjects were amplified by historical conditions that were altogether different. Historically juxtaposed at the heart of the Cold War, as well as within two years following the landmark civil rights Supreme Court case *Brown vs. the Board of Education*, within one year preceding Ghana’s independence from Great Britain, and in the midst of an Algerian conflict that was illustrating the glaring weaknesses of an untenable colonial paradigm, the Congress itself symbolized a moment of significant historical transition: the passage from a colonial reality to a postcolonial condition. There was thus an immediate struggle over concrete political conditions that were to have a great impact on the lived realities of black populations throughout the African diaspora. The various delegates at the Congress would understand this moment of transition in their own way. The American delegation’s reaction to the Du Bois message is reflective of its members’ understanding of the import of this historical moment. Invested in the idea that nation-state boundaries were important constitutive element of identities, they considered the appropriate avenues for emancipatory politics as residing within the framework of the nation-state. Even though the American delegation at the Congress were not necessarily staunch Cold War warriors, its members were well attuned to the idea that the fight

against domestic racial discrimination was a Cold War imperative for the federal government because of Soviet propaganda.⁹⁵ There was thus an element of the real-politick in their way of thinking which, depending on one's ideological take, could either be interpreted as a well-thought-through political pragmatism or as a failure of the political imagination. In either case, it is clear that the American delegation's position at the Congress bespoke a deliberate and self-conscious prioritizing of a national over a transnational framework of political identification. Here the failure in diasporic discourse is not so much the result of linguistic and cultural differences as it is a reflection of the fact that in the context of the Cold War and of a changing world political system, the radicalism of black internationalist politics did not serve the interest of nation-oriented black integrationist politics.

A Future of Possibilities

A few months following the Congress, Horace Mann Bond would write to John A. Davis expressing disappointment over the fact an invitation he had sent to Léopold Sédar Senghor for a proposed reception in Senghor's honor at Lincoln University had been left unanswered. Bond traced what he perceived was a brush-off by the Senegalese poet/politician to his presence at the Congress and to the African delegates' general mistrust of the American delegation. In his reply to Bond, however, Davis gently reassured the latter that Senghor himself had informed the American delegation of his heavy schedule in the upcoming months, and given this, the Senegalese poet's unwillingness to travel to the United States at this time should come as no surprise. Davis ended the letter with a note of advice that essentially captured what the delegation had experienced at the Congress.

I would advice patience, for this is necessary in all international dealings. Not only are we dealing with two languages in this relationship, but we speak out of experience in many different cultures, and misunderstanding is to be expected.

Let's hold on for a little while longer, for the future of these French West Africans is pregnant with both hope and tragedy.⁹⁶

Davis, the active force behind the composition of the American delegation and the delegate most implicated in attempts to keep tabs on the political overtones of the Congress, expressed the challenges inherent in such forms of transnational encounters. Foregrounded are the significance of language and culture as nodal points of difference that mediate communication and the possibility of fruitful exchange. While race is not mentioned anywhere in the letter, implied is the idea that in and of itself this construct does not provide the adequate means to translate the experiences of black diasporic subjects. If in Du Bois' message there was expressed an unqualified and romantic identification with the plight and fate of colonized Africans, here Davis maintains a careful distance. The West Africans, he insists are "French." If they are "French," however, it is not in the same way African Americans are American. The qualification "French" here simply denotes the particularity of their African colonial experience. It denotes their difference from African Americans (and also British black colonial subjects) by calling attention to the different set of political and cultural logic that informs their experiences. Also implied in Davis' statement is the idea of a nationalist impetus inherent in the Africans' political trajectory; for as he sees it the colonized Africans' future is essentially their own. Davis' interest in the Africans' "future" similarly maintains that element of difference, as both "hope" and "tragedy" are held at a

distance. Here we can garner from Davis' perspective that if the slave trade, colonialism, and slavery denote a shared history of racial oppression binding the African diaspora, this shared historical narrative of oppression does not necessarily translate into a shared future of possibilities.

Chapter Two

Aimé Césaire, Mercer Cook, and the Political and Epistemic**Dimensions of Black Diasporic Identity**

[T]he story of the continued struggle of this Negro, who arrived in France as an exile, seemed worth the telling. Because of that struggle, we have borrowed him, for a fleeting moment, from the literary oblivion in which he rests.

—Mercer Cook, “The Life and Writing of Louis T. Houat” (1939)¹

D’hommes reconnus depuis des siècles citoyens formels d’un état, mais d’une citoyenneté marginale, comment ne pas comprendre que leur première démarche collective serait, non de rejeter la forme vide de leur citoyenneté, mais de faire en sorte de la transformer en citoyenneté pleine et de passer d’une citoyenneté mutilée à la citoyenneté tout court?

—Aimé Césaire, *Les Antilles décolonisées*, “Préface” (1956)²

[Of men who were recognized for centuries as formal citizens of a state, but of a marginal citizenship, how can

we not understand that their first collective act would be not to reject the empty form of their citizenship, but to transform it into full citizenship[,] to transition from a mutilated citizenship to citizenship as such?]

If the message W.E.B. Du Bois had sent to the Congress and that was read in the opening minutes of the gathering had caused some tension, it remains that the afternoon session of the second day of the event generated the most heated discussions. The general theme for that second day was an examination of “the crisis of black cultures.” In reading the presentations that took place on that afternoon, one notices if not a concern with “the crisis” of black cultures, certainly a thematic preoccupation with the politics affecting them. Horace Mann Bond’s presentation “Reflections, Comparative, on West African Nationalist Movement,” for instance, details how black transnational encounters and experiences were a determining factor in the nationalist outlooks of both Nnamdi Azikiwe and Kwame Nkrumah, the respective future leaders of Nigeria and Ghana who had both attended Lincoln University. Political considerations were also evident in the presentations of Reverend Thomas Ekollo (Cameroun), Ben Enwonwu (Nigeria) and Emmanuel Paul (Haiti) as they considered the impact of colonialism and racist discourses on African Christianity (Ekollo), the arts and the position of the African artist (Enwonwu), and ethnology as a scholarly field of inquiry (Paul). William Fontaine’s dispassionate and overly-academic presentation on American attitudes about desegregation (“Segregation and Desegregation in the United States: a philosophical analysis”) was greatly tinged with political concerns as well, as he assumed in the

American context a pluralist democratic society where processes of group negotiations characterized deliberations over the practice of desegregation. Aimé Césaire was the last delegate to lecture. James Baldwin would report that his “Culture and Civilisation” (“Culture and Civilization”) was the event of the day.³

There were several reasons leading to the heated discussions on that second day. For one, the experience of the American delegation after the Du Bois message was read on the opening day had indelibly marked the whole event. Alioune Diop’s biographer, Philippe Verdin, for instance, claims that at that point the very success of the gathering was at stake in good part because of the tensions and air of suspicion the message had created.⁴ In addition to this there were other episodes on the first day that had a lasting imprint on the Congress. There is the case of Hubert Deschamps, a socialist former French colonial governor, who even though he had not been invited to address the Congress had insisted upon framing the discussion. In his impromptu statement to the audience, Deschamps associated the African colonial experience with the Roman conquest of Gaul. In providing this analogy, Deschamps was attempting to associate France’s historical past to the African modern colonial predicament, insinuating that European colonization should be viewed as a sort of civilizational tutelage.

Among these episodes is also an intriguing interaction involving the African American writer Richard Wright, the Haitian novelist, Jacques Stephens Alexis, and Senegalese poet Léopold Sédar Senghor that took place on the first day. We will discuss this episode in greater depth in the subsequent chapter, “Richard Wright, Léopold Sédar Senghor and the Material and Ontological Dimensions of Blackness.” For now, however, it suffices to say that it involved both Richard Wright’s and Jacques Stephen

Alexis' respective responses to Senghor's lecture of that day, "L'esprit de la civilisation, ou les lois de la culture négro-Africaine" ("The Spirit of Civilization, or the Laws of Negro-African Culture"). In their apprehension of the lecture both Wright and Alexis were influenced by their belief Senghor was articulating an ideological perspective on race and culture they associated with Négritude—a movement that as historical materialist-leaning thinkers they had their doubts about.⁵ In the case of Alexis, his response to the Senghor lecture indicated his belief that the Négritude movement had a tendency to fold the multiplicity of black cultures into a problematic homogeneous totality—a oneness he likely felt did not speak to the specificity of his own Haitian cultural background.⁶ He would thus respond to Senghor by asking the organizers of the Congress to better explain the meaning and goal of the Congress, and whether the organizers' vision of the culture concept as it pertains to the African diaspora would not better be served by making something of a cultural inventory of the various geographies that constituted that diaspora.⁷ Wright, on his end, questioned what he felt was the facile way in which the Senegalese poet had explained what connected black populations of the African diaspora, essentially calling into question what scholars would later associate with the racial essentialist tendencies inherent in Senghor's Négritude poetics.⁸

These two responses would tangentially serve as a springboard for an important exchange that would involve the Martinican poet and dramatist Aimé Césaire, the American delegate and scholar of Francophone literature and culture, and to a lesser extent the leader of the American delegation, John A. Davis. This exchange took place on the second day of the Congress proceedings, during the time allotted for general questioning and debate among the various delegates. Davis and Cook would respond to

how Césaire had aligned the position of colonized subject to the situation of Haiti and the experiences of African Americans in the United States. They rejected this comparison, especially as it related to the African American situation. This chapter will consider the brief exchange that ensued out of Cook's disagreement with Césaire. It will also take into account the general tenet of Césaire's lecture, as well as present a selective analysis of Mercer Cook's scholarly work prior to the time of the Congress that focuses on the form of connections Cook was making between African American and francophone African and Caribbean subjectivity. The discussion will draw somewhat from some of the concerns already articulated in the previous chapter because Cold War intonations and political positioning were deeply reflected in the misunderstanding between Davis, Cook and Césaire. Lastly, what is also of concern is the nature of the misunderstanding between Cook and Césaire, and how that misunderstanding can be ascribed to ways in which black international/transnational⁹ discourse can be said to be composed of a dual set of investments that while often interlocked can also be thought of as discrete values.

The first such value of black internationalism/transnationalism is what is generally associated with it, a Leftist political project that draws on and emphasizes racial solidarity. This political project owes a great debt to what philosopher Lewis R. Gordon calls "the prophetic black nationalism" of Marcus Garvey,¹⁰ even as the latter was hostile to the Left.¹¹ Garvey's "race first" political philosophy, which emphasized that black liberation was reliant upon the liberation of the African continent from colonialism, is an important thread of black internationalist discourse. For as a transnational political phenomenon, black internationalism conjoins a Marxist critique of class struggle with an analysis of the structural and ideological dimensions of racism. The emphasis on both a

global class and racial analysis is premised on the idea that the involuntary insertion of black subjects within global capitalism made black and other raced subjects a unique and intricate part of the international proletariat.¹² Black internationalism thus addresses the issue of race as a social construct within the global capitalist paradigm as a site of struggle that is both contained within and exceeds the class struggle.

The second value of black internationalist discourse is understated. It relates to what can be called its epistemic function. This specifically refers to how black internationalist discourse is informed by certain assumptions and affirmations, certain modes of knowing that shed light on the nature of black being(ness) in the world. While these assumptions and affirmations may take different forms, they share in common a vision of black subjects as discursively part of an “international black community.”¹³ Intellectuals and activists that seek to provide greater insight into the peculiar complexity of modern “blackness” from a transnational perspective exemplify this through the circulation of their ideas. For instance, we can consider in that vein the transnational nature of Du Bois’ framing of the color-line as a world phenomenon in his address “To the Nations of the World,”¹⁴ or Aimé Césaire’s and Frantz Fanon’s staging of black colonized subjectivity in their respective works (e.g. *Cahier d’un retour au pays natal/ Notebook of a Return to the Native Land* and *Peau noire, masques blancs/Black Skin, White Masks*) in ways that transcends the specificity of their native Martinique to address a more general condition of black subjectivity. A sense of a transnational community is established through a discursive engagement with racist discourses that texture the contours of black modernity.

Another example of the epistemic value of black internationalism also becomes clear when one considers that the discourse inherently presupposes the ideas of historical continuity and historical presence—it essentially assumes a diasporic condition. From the perspective of historical continuity, one understands that given that the black experience of modernity is characterized by rupture and dispersal (the slave trade in the context of the Americas and colonization in an African context), a particular intellectual outlook is necessary that can envision threads connecting the past and the present (a vertical temporal connection) as well as threads that connect the various geographically dispersed populations that comprise the African Diaspora (a horizontal spatial connection). From the perspective of a historical presence, black internationalist discourse is conversant with attempts to debunk the Hegelian notion of the African continent as existing outside of normative history,¹⁵ a proposition that has ontological implications as it relegates black subjectivity to the marginal ontological status of absolute otherness.¹⁶ Therefore the notion that black internationalism is also constituted as an epistemic project rests on the idea that it is informed by an alternative body of knowledge that challenges Western universalism,¹⁷ and nurtures the possibility of black intellectual resistance to racism.

The distinction here made between the political and epistemic value of black internationalist/transnationalist discourse does not seek to affirm the idea of irreducible qualities that do not bleed into each other. The politics of black internationalism/transnationalism and its epistemic function are intricately, and often at times indistinguishably, imbricated. However, with Cook's response to Césaire's presentation we will see how the epistemic and political functions of black

internationalist/transnationalist discourse can become disentangled and produce a form of incoherence that poses a challenge to the politics of transnational solidarity.

Mercer Cook: African American and Francophone Black Colonial Subjectivity and the Transnational Racial Archive

In his essay introducing the anthology *The New Negro*, Howard University philosopher and Harlem Renaissance spokesman Alain Locke characterized the “New Negro” as this unprecedented new figure arriving on the modern historical stage filled with racial pride and a dedication to advocacy for civic equality. Locke carefully painted a portrait of this character along a clear bourgeois, and politically moderate line, proposing that any tendency this figure may have toward what he terms a “quixotic” radicalism resided on matters relating to race. Ultimately to Locke “The negro mind reache[d] out as yet to nothing but American wants, American ideas.”¹⁸ Given the popular appeal of Garveyism and the attraction that Marxism and popular front politics held for many African American writers and intellectuals during this period, it would be erroneous to uncritically accept Alain Locke’s characterization of that generation that came up in the first three decades of the twentieth century. Also, as literary critic George Hutchinson would remind us, there is a way in which Locke’s statement can be read as an attempt not so much to describe an African American zeitgeist, as it was a way to demarcate political boundaries the author himself felt most comfortable with; in that sense, Locke would have been projecting his own political imagination and yearnings onto this “New Negro” figure.¹⁹ With this in mind, however, it should be said that the characteristics Alain Locke associated with the “New Negro” corresponds quite well with

Mercer Cook. The latter typified the “race man” deeply committed to racial advocacy and strongly devoted to American liberal democratic principles. Cook’s connection to Alain Locke, however, would run deeper than Locke’s characterization of the “New Negro” generation, or the fact that at one time both were faculty at Howard University. As a scholar, Mercer Cook succeeded and surpassed Alain Locke’s role as a mediator between the African American and Francophone Caribbean and African intellectual scenes.²⁰

Born to the noted African-American composer Will Marion Cook and his soprano singer wife Abbie Mitchell Cook on March 30th, 1903, Will Mercer Cook typified what Du Bois had referred to as the “Talented Tenth.” From an early age he circulated in a world of distinguished black entertainers, intellectuals and professionals, and appeared to have attained a sense of cosmopolitanism that remained with him throughout his life. He attended the prestigious Dunbar High School in Washington D.C., the alma mater of several of his distinguished contemporaries and the educational stomping ground of the black elite.²¹ Later in 1925, as a senior at Amherst College, Cook won the Simpson Scholarship for his studies in French language and literature.²² The award permitted him to do a year’s study at the Université de Paris, Sorbonne, where the following year he earned a teacher’s diploma. Between 1934 and 1938, a General Education Board Fellowship for Study in Paris and a Rosenwald scholarship would allow him to reside for a significant amount of time in Paris. Another General Education Board Fellowship would allow him to live and study in Havana, Cuba, from 1942 to 1943, and in 1951 he would return to France on a Fulbright award. By the middle of the 1940s Mercer Cook had developed a relationship with the American State Department that eventually put him on track to assume his later ambassadorships in West Africa in the 1960s. From 1943 to

1945 he supervised an English Teaching program sponsored by the State Department at the Université d'Haiti (during which time he met Aimé Césaire) and the year before being named US ambassador to Niger (1961-1964) he served as the director of the African Program for the Congress for Cultural Freedom.²³

In the sense that travelling and living in France, especially from the end of the First World War until the late 1950s, had become something of a rite of passage for many African American writers, artists, musicians and intellectuals, Cook's presence in Paris was not unique.²⁴ For a generation of promising writers—and this would include, Richard Wright, James Baldwin, Chester Himes, and William Gardner Smith, among others—leaving for France meant escaping the racial strictures and ritual humiliations imposed on black life in the United States. What was unique in Cook's case, however, was the extent to which he used his expatriate experience to establish long-standing personal and professional relations with Francophone Caribbean and African writers and intellectuals. Mercer Cook, as Léopold Sédar Senghor has noted, was even among a group of black writers and intellectuals that would gather at the famed salon organized by Jane and Paulette Nardal in the 1930s.²⁵

In comparison to either Wright or Baldwin, Cook was the more traditional “race man.” He was able to intimately connect with Francophone African and Caribbean writers and intellectuals.²⁶ Thus as early as the 1930s, Mercer Cook had befriended and developed a professional relationship with the writer René Maran, a French Guianian winner of the prestigious Prix Goncourt for his novel *Batouala* (1921). Cook was among the first American writers to introduce Maran's work to an American public, publishing translations of the latter's stories for African American periodicals. He maintained a long

correspondence with the author until the latter's death in the 1960s.²⁷ Cook's relationship to Maran exhibits a form of reciprocity that also characterizes the connection he had with other African and Caribbean Francophone writers and intellectuals.²⁸ He was also well acquainted with Léopold Sédar Senghor and the young French Guianian poet Léon-Gontran Damas, who dedicated the poem "Hoquet" in his first volume *Pigment* to Cook and his wife Vashti. Cook was therefore a significant African American presence in this black transnational cultural milieu. It is therefore very surprising that he remains largely absent from accounts of this generation of writers and intellectuals.

Mercer Cook's stays in France during the 1930s and the 1940s, by the various scholarships and grants he received, certainly facilitated his work as a scholar and critic. During the same period of time, however, Cook would also use that opportunity to report on black life abroad for the major black publications of the period. Newspaper and journal articles he wrote ranged in topic from reports of acclaimed performances by African American black entertainers in Paris, to work that more directly presented the African American reading public to the work, challenges and achievements of distinguished Francophone black men and women as well as the social conditions that textured their lives. Cook was motivated by an apparent interest in exploring the international variations of black life. This interest was solidly grounded upon a critique of racial discourse that extended Du Boisian "double-consciousness" to the conditions of black colonized populations. Du Bois' notion of the "two irreconcilable strivings" in this case, however, spoke more broadly to a sense of the self as a Western subject and the erasure of that sensibility through constructions of blackness deemed as abject "other." Mercer Cook's perspective on the international inflections of black existence was firmly

rooted on an African-American intellectual tradition, whereby considerations over the meaning of race are accompanied with attempts to map out contributions of “raced” subjects to society at large in various fields, attempts to debunk myths of racial inferiority, attempts to create racial solidarity, and lastly expressed concerns over the ills of civic inequality.²⁹

Thus in such articles as “Benny Carter Plays for Italian Students,”³⁰ “Guadeloupe Loses Its First Negro Governor,”³¹ or “Colored Woman on Sorbonne’s Faculty,”³² published in African American newspaper publication in the late 1930s, Cook respectively illustrated the warm reception of an African American musician in Paris, the political machinations that led to the recall of the first black governor of Guadeloupe, the French-Guinean Adolph Félix Sylvestre Eboué, and the significance, in terms of racial progress, of the appointment of Marie-Therese Gertrude, a young black woman from Martinique, as faculty in the Science Department of the prestigious Sorbonne. In these articles as well as several others, Cook was not simply concerned with introducing an African American reading public to intriguing accounts of black life in foreign spaces. He was also translating those lives and experiences in ways that rendered them conversant with African American experiences. In the article on Governor Eboué, for instance, Cook notes that the governor’s downfall was in great degree due to tensions that surfaced between him and another black politician, the Guadeloupian deputy Gratien Candace. This fact leads him to ironically conclude, “once again, the Negro race has suffered from unnecessary political dissension.”³³

Cook’s use of “race” here is informed by a vision of black subjectivity that transcends national belonging and political status. An assumption of intimacy and a

moment of recognition are clearly indicated. He deploys the race concept in a way that assumes an obviousness, and a familiarity and transparency to those whose lives have been textured by racial otherness. We see clearly that Mercer Cook does not rhetorically attempt to create a sense of solidarity with an African Diaspora but rather assumes that connection and sense of identification as a natural and apparent condition. Cook's statement thus implicitly posits that the realms of subjective identification for the "Negro" subject inherently extend beyond the borders of nation. Even as the episode he relates denotes the lived conditions of Francophone Antillean colonial subjects, Cook's phrasing assumes an intimacy that bespeaks a recognition, an arching back from the colonial point of view to the African American experience of second-class citizenship. The positions of the black colonial subject and the African American subject are in effect brought within the same fold, and what Cook ultimately emphasizes is the failure of racial solidarity. Racial solidarity here functions as a trope deployed to imagine desirable political outcomes and also serves to explain the failure of such outcomes.

Similar ideas are illustrated in some of Cook's more scholarly works. Cook's essays on Francophone Caribbean and African writers show an acute awareness of the political significance of that literature and often attempt to link it to an African American context. For instance, in a 1939 short essay entitled "The Life and Writings of Louis T. Houat," Cook narrates the life of a little known Black writer and physician from Ile de la Reunion who lived in exile in Paris.³⁴ And in another essay of the same year "The Race Problem in Paris and the French West Indies," he provides an account of his impressions of the racial situation in Paris and the French West Indies after he has made trips to both places.³⁵ Although the article is not a comprehensive study of race in either context, for

its intended American audience it sought to refute the argument that the United States was the best possible place for people of color while at the same time demystifying racial dynamics in France and its colonies. In fact, Cook's portrayal of the Francophone black colonial condition in this article on the whole tended to support the notion that black subjects in France and its Antillean colonies were better positioned than African Americans in the United States.

All the figures that Cook used to illustrate his argument in "The Race Problem in Paris and the French West Indies," were well-educated black men who were able to attain professional occupations and distinctions that would have been denied them in the United States. The careful reader, however, is not presented with a simple eulogy of French humanism as a counterargument to American racism. For inasmuch as the article illustrates examples of black colonial subjects who have experienced forms of upward social mobility that would have been denied African Americans (especially in the South), it also regards the African American experience as one that allows for a certain degree of elucidation about modern black subjectivity. Throughout the essay, while it is apparent that Cook, as scholar and critic, peers into a different social, cultural, and historical context to understand something transcendent about black being(ness) in the West, he also presents the reader with the reciprocal interest of black colonial subjects who find in African American poetics a window frame to begin to view and articulate their own racialized subjectivity. The article both shows how Cook's reflections on race from a transnational perspective allowed for a more complex understanding of France's position as a colonial empire as well as how peering into different registers of black experiences of modernity allowed for a reciprocal understanding of such experiences.

Cook thus complemented his presentation of the experiences of African Americans abroad and his depiction of the currency of African American culture within an international context, with critical investigations and insights on the life conditions of Francophone African and Caribbean colonized subjects. An understanding of the differences in experience of Francophone Caribbean and African black subjects therefore textured Cook's vision and experience of African American cosmopolitanism. The reality of Francophone colonial black subjectivity was not elided and neither was African American cosmopolitanism used solely as a way to reflect upon the citizenship status of African Americans in the United States.³⁶

While the article on race relations in Paris and France's Antillean colonies provides a bird's eye perspective on race that is often based on Mercer Cook's personal impressions from his travels and encounters, Cook's "The Life and Writings of Louis T. Houat" by contrast is a researched essay that attempts to shed light on the life of a little known early 19th black writer from Ile de la Reunion. In this article Cook provides a literary analysis of some of Houat's poetry as well his lone novel *Les Marrons*, published in 1844. Cook readily admits however that Houat was not a particularly gifted writer. A lack of literary success eventually led Houat to shift the course of his professional life and to pursue a career as a physician. Cook's attempt to recuperate Houat's life story is therefore not premised upon the literary merit of his work. Rather, Cook's account foregrounds Houat's admirable attempt at forging for himself a literary voice and provides a compelling narrative of the unlikely trajectory of his life. Houat had arrived in Paris in the late 1830s as an exile. He had been accused and convicted of playing a

leading role in an unsuccessful attempt at a mass slave rebellion.³⁷ Deported to France, Houat frequented French abolitionist circles and also travelled throughout Europe.

These two articles ultimately suggest that during much of the 1930s into the 1940s, Cook found that the experiences of black colonial subjects living in exile in France and of colonial subjects living in the colonies are conversant with the experiences of African Americans. Even though the object of analysis is French colonialism and the position of Francophone black colonized subjects, both of the mentioned articles are conversant with an American racial reality. These accounts broaden the scope of the readers' understanding of the specificity of their racialized reality by extending racial belonging onto a larger geographical and spatial domain. Thus both of these articles partake in an act of recuperation in that Cook collects discrete black experiences to bring them together in an archive of black subjectivity that transcends national boundaries. In these early essays the black colonial subject and the African American subject living in a segregated racialized society inhabit the same plane of existence vis-à-vis white supremacy. Because of this juxtaposition of transnational black subjectivity positioned vis-à-vis white supremacy, solidarity is expressed both implicitly and explicitly. It is explicit when Cook notes at the end of the article on Louis Houat that:

The story of the continued struggle of this Negro, who arrived in France as an exile, seemed worth the telling. Because of that struggle, *we* have borrowed him, for a fleeting moment, from the literary oblivion in which he rests.³⁸

The act of appropriation, of borrowing, here is made explicit while the purpose of this borrowing remains unstated. What we understand, however, is that Cook does not refrain from associating Houat's struggle as a black colonial subject with the black struggle in

the United States. It can even be said that to Cook, Houat's colonial predicament is the predicament of the African American in a different social, political, and cultural context. Thus Cook's recuperation of Louis Houat's life's story is invested with the idea that Houat's life reveals something significant about the nature of black existence in the modern world. His life story, rescued from "the literary oblivion in which he rests," becomes inserted in a repository that illuminates and affirms the black subject's existence.

If it is obvious that Cook expresses ambivalence about the historical significance of the narrative he tells about Houat's life when he claims Houat's story "*seemed* worth telling," one understands that this ambivalence is based on the status of the subject concerned. Houat, as Cook has already informed the reader, is a figure of little literary significance in terms of the imprint he left on the French literary canon. Yet, the very title of Cook's essay, "The Life and Writings of Louis T. Houat," leaves the reader with the impression of a much grander personality. And while the words "fleeting" and "oblivion" reinforce the notion of Houat's marginal significance as a writer, these same expressions also hint that Houat's life narrative is indicative of a body of experiences that make his story relevant and indeed "worth the telling." Both words also connote transience, ephemeral memory, and loss. Hence Mercer Cook's elevation of Houat's marginal status is testament to his desire to preserve in narrative that which he feels is particularly compelling about Houat. What connects Houat's canonical insignificance to a grander narrative that is worth preserving at the last resort is his "continued struggle" as a "Negro."

Cook's use of these two terms: "continued struggle" and "Negro", assumes a

timelessness that bespeaks a universal. The racial signifier “Negro” no longer simply signifies racial demarcation and racial difference; it becomes conterminous with an abstraction of the human experience, “struggle.” Cook deftly posits Houat’s life as a raced subject, his status as a colonial subject, his experience of travel and exile, as illustrative of a particular form of modern black subjectivity. Houat is elevated from obscurity to serve as an exhibit of a more general condition: the black struggle. The reader’s imagination is here forced to consider what a minor literary and historical character can inform us about that condition.

In his usage of the pronoun “we” Cook also implies that Houat’s struggle as a black colonial subject is conversant with the black struggle in the United States. The narrative he weaves about Houat’s life already invokes several tropes we associate with antebellum and postbellum African American literary works, especially the slave narrative. Houat’s forced exile to France, and his succeeding travels throughout Europe, in this way is illustrative of how mobility and travel are tropes that are associated with forced migration and loss of homeland, as well as with a movement against physical and psychological confinement. Houat’s involvement in abolitionist circles while in Paris echoes the active involvement of figures such as Frederick Douglass, Maria Stewart, Frances E. W. Harper, William Wells Brown, Martin R. Delany, and Sojourner Truth, among many others, in abolitionist politics. This trope of political and civic engagement is deeply connected to yet another trope, that of the significance of the attainment of literacy and ability to present one’s own story in the written word. When Cook claims “we have borrowed him,” it is with the understanding that somehow Houat narrative resonates with African American experiences.

In this way, perhaps, we can offer a slight comparison between Cook's excavation of Houat's life for an African American reading public to a notion French philosopher Jacques Derrida advances as a function of the archive: that as a reification of a historical trace, it affirms temporal existence, by linking the past, present and future.³⁹ What we can broadly delineate in these examples of journal and newspaper articles Cook published from the 1930s to the 1940s is the contours of an epistemic project. As articulated earlier, in the context of African American intellectual life and history the epistemic dimensions of this kind of work cannot be separated from the political, insofar as the knowledge produced about the manifestations of black existence Mercer Cook is concerned are expressive of a form of political affirmation through representation. However, at its core, this form of political engagement is mostly concerned with shifting a discursive paradigm—the negation of the normative existence of the black racial other.⁴⁰ This is quite different from the more materially grounded work of writers and activists who offer a specific political program to address issues of inequality. So as Cook later was questioning Césaire's attempt to align the struggle of the colonized to the condition of African Americans, he was essentially rejecting the material political project he identified with Césaire's internationalist outlook.

Aimé Césaire: "Culture and Civilization"

After Richard Wright, Aimé Césaire stood as the most celebrated writer presenting at the Congress. Born in Basse-Pointe, Martinique, in 1913, he was raised in a petty bourgeois family that greatly valued education.⁴¹ After having earned an educational scholarship, he travelled to Paris in 1931 and matriculated at the secondary school lycée Louis-le-Grand (and later the Ecole Normale Supérieure). There, he

immediately met fellow student Léopold Sédar Senghor and began to associate with future poet Léon Gontran-Damas, the French Guiana native whom he already knew from his student days at the lycée Victor Schoelcher in Fort-de-France, Martinique. Césaire and his two comrades circulated in a Parisian atmosphere saturated with Popular Front politics, student activism, salon gatherings, and primitivist modernism's interest in the cultural artifacts of the African continent.⁴² In the midst of a transnational community of black colonial subjects, Césaire discovered his "Négritude," a term he coined in an article published in the short-lived journal he founded with Senghor, Gontran-Damas and others, *L'Étudiant noir* (1935-1936) and which announced his rejection of the stigma attached to his African cultural heritage.⁴³

If Césaire's understanding of his position as a raced and colonized subject occurred during those formative years in Paris, his "discovery" as a writer of rare talent took place in 1940 in his native Martinique, where he met the French surrealist poet André Breton. The latter immediately began to champion his work. In 1946 the prestigious French publishing house Gallimard published his volume of poetry *Les armes miraculeuses* (*Miraculous Weapons*). The following year his now classic long poem *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (*Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*), which had originally appeared in the French periodical *Volontés* in 1939, was published in book form. By the time the French existentialist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre would tout his literary talent and widely popularize the Negritude movement in the famous essay "Orphée noir" ("Black Orpheus"),⁴⁴ Césaire had progressively worked his way into the French literary cannon as a powerful and innovative voice in surrealist modernism. This newfound publicity was augmented by his involvement in politics, having in 1945

attained election as mayor of Fort de France and as a deputy in the French National Assembly under the French Communist Party ticket. Césaire at the Congress was thus quite a compelling figure. None the least because he had seemingly used the privileged platform afforded him to denounce European colonialism in the long essay *Discours sur le colonialisme* (*Discourse on Colonialism*), republished by Présence Africaine the year before the Congress.

One of the better accounts we have of Aimé Césaire's "Culture et colonisation" ("Culture and Colonization") — his lecture at the Congress — is provided by James Baldwin in the essay "Princes and Powers." Baldwin's essay is of particular interest in this discussion of Césaire's lecture because it reveals some significant misapprehensions that can be extended to the American delegation's reaction to Césaire's words, particularly Mercer Cook and John A. Davis. Baldwin reacted very strongly to what he perceived was the polemical nature of Césaire's ideas. In one instance he notes that the Martinican poet had skillfully played on the audience's emotions in constructing a watertight case against Europe.⁴⁵ And to further present an affective sense of what a critical listener would have experienced as a member of Césaire's audience, Baldwin claims that he himself "felt stirred in a very strange and disagreeable way."⁴⁶

Readers of the transcript of Césaire's lecture at the Congress, however, may come to a different conclusion. While Baldwin had correctly perceived the polemical nature of Césaire's views, he missed the form of intervention Césaire was in effect making. Césaire's lecture consisted of an eloquent set of musings that, as the literary scholar Nick Nesbitt has accurately pointed out, employed a "virtuosic assemblage of discourses" in various scholarly fields ranging from philosophy to anthropology.⁴⁷ To Nesbitt,

Césaire's vast engagement with a wide range of scholarship essentially reflected a form of intellectual discourse that held currency: "the assertion of mastery through the accumulation of discourses."⁴⁸ At several instances, Césaire's lecture also addressed comments that had already been made by the delegates Richard Wright, Jacques Stephen Alexis, Léopold Sédar Senghor, and the former French colonial governor Hubert Deschamps. Alioune Diop's biographer, Philippe Verdin, infers that Césaire's response to these figures was not incidental. After supposedly meeting with Diop the day before, Césaire was hoping to address and dispel different concerns that had been articulated by these different personalities at the Congress.⁴⁹

In the introductory note that prefaced his lecture Césaire thus asserted that the common denominator and a common concern of all gathered at the Congress was the colonial situation. He further noted that the majority of black countries lived under a colonial regime and that the colonial paradigm could even be extended to explain the political situation of an independent nation like Haiti (here a response to Alexis) or a minority population like African Americans living in the United States—a remark surely directed at Wright. This last statement, of course, was the one that grated the nerves of members of the American delegates. After a day in which they saw themselves subjected to the embarrassment of having their allegiance to the global black struggle questioned, John A. Davis and Mercer Cook would later feel compelled during the discussion session to question Césaire about the comparison he was making between the position of African Americans as a racial minority and the colonial paradigm. It is clear, however, that in these introductory remarks Césaire did not envision his words would lead him to any sort

of confrontation with the American delegation. If anything he had sought to create a way in which the different concerns that had been expressed could find convergence.

In the body of his lecture, Césaire proceeded to explain the diasporic nature of this gathering by noting that while he agreed with the statement that culture implies the nation, national cultures, he asserted, can have affinities with each other. Relying upon the work of the French sociologist Marcel Mauss, he calls the affinities of such national group formations civilization. To support this vision, Césaire provides as an example the idea of Europe as a civilization composed of different national cultures. To Césaire, the two terms, culture and civilization, describe two aspects of one reality: civilization describes the outer boundaries of a culture, its more general characteristics, while culture itself is at the core of that reality, its most interior element. Césaire thus inferred that in the African and African Diasporic context, the way to relate this reality is to think broadly of an African civilization whose cultures both within and without the African continent share certain similarities.

In an introduction to his translation of Césaire's lecture, Brent Hayes Edwards has pointed out that if Césaire's "distinction between culture and civilization [...] today may seem at once hopelessly generalized and needlessly technical" it served the apparent purpose of supporting "an argument for the existence and continuing relevance of 'Negro-African civilization, which includes the various cultures of countries in Africa and — at that civilization's 'margins'— the cultures of the diaspora ('in Brazil or in the Caribbean, as much in Haiti as in the French Antilles, or even in the United States')." ⁵⁰ Drawing from the work of A. James Arnold, Edwards further notes that Césaire's understanding of diasporic culture was a strategic intervention in the definition of

Négritude that stood in contrast to Senghor's metaphysical version.⁵¹ Edwards' comment essentially directs us to how Césaire chose to address Wright's and Alexis' concerns about the Congress and, to some extent, Senghor's lecture of the day before. Challenged by Alexis to provide a more concrete perspective on culture as geographically bounded and as the vector of the particular customs, practices and worldview of a specific population, Aimé Césaire pointed to the idea of a greater and looser assemblage of cultures he effectively calls "civilization." In so doing he demonstrated that the particularity of specific cultural traditions—which Alexis had criticized the Congress about in its approach to culture—did not preclude the existence of more overlapping cultural formations that extended beyond regional or national boundaries. Made to consider by Wright what particularly connected subjects of the African diaspora beyond the social construct of race, Césaire points to the historical conditions that produced the diaspora and the political paradigms that still affects it.

To further delineate the diasporic nature of the gathering, Césaire also commented on what he regarded as other layers of solidarity uniting the Congress attendees. He thus called "horizontal solidarity," a solidarity that rested on the common denominator of colonialism, and its variance—these variants arguably being the example of Haiti as an independent state, and the situation of African Americans as a racial minority in the United States. And he referred to a "vertical solidarity," a solidarity derived in time, from the fact of a commonality of origin. This was, of course, another way of restating the cultural and historical ties he envisioned bound the African Diaspora. While Césaire did not frame these ideas along the notion of "African survivals," or the continuing retention of some African cultural practices in the New World, it is clear that the way he

envisioned “civilization” as a larger assemblage of cultures, firmly places him in conversation with the works of such scholars as the American cultural anthropologist Melvin J. Herskovits and the Haitian ethnographer, pedagogue, writer and diplomat, Jean Price-Mars, whose works supported this thesis.⁵²

While Aimé Césaire made a point to acknowledge that different perspectives on the connection between culture and politics exist, he ultimately supported the idea that politics is an integral part of culture. Although Césaire’s argument here exemplified a point of concern African American delegate Mercer Cook would express about the political overtones of the Congress, the thrust of Césaire’s argument was meant to counter Hubert Deschamps’ view on colonialism. In responding to the Deschamps logic Césaire first saw it fit to establish the connection between culture and politics. He thus argued that political formations were products of particular cultural contexts and that such formations in themselves shape culture. Citing Lenin’s appropriation of a statement from Hegel’s *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* that emphasizes that there are forces beyond nature that shape culture, Césaire asserted the idea that a political regime that suppressed a people’s aspiration to self-determination, ultimately suppressed that people’s creative power.

Having taken the position of the inextricable link between culture and politics, Césaire then goes on to consider a view on colonialism as a benign system of cultural exchange. It is interesting to note here that Deschamps might have unintentionally provided Césaire with the opportunity to structure this part of his lecture in the rhetorical mode of *Discourse on Colonialism*. Césaire uses Deschamps as a stand in to colonialist logic in a way that parallels the rhetorical style of *Discourse*. In that work Césaire had

broadly implicated defenders of Western culture from various social positions to illustrate that the colonial enterprise was not simply the work of colonial governors, soldiers, and politicians, but also a project of intellectuals and scholars from various disciplines. Rehashing a main thread of his argument in that essay, Césaire noted that Deschamps' perspective was based on a myth that sought to veil the true nature of the colonial enterprise. Césaire thus called Deschamps' view of the colonial relationship as one in which colonized populations sought to gain the benefit of civilization an illusion that was based on the belief that somehow

le colonisateur [...] substitue une autre civilisation, une civilisation supérieure à la civilisation indigène.⁵³

[the colonizer [...] substitutes another civilization, one superior to the indigenous civilization.]

In rejecting this idea Césaire claims that,

Constatons en passant que l'ordre colonialiste moderne, n'a jamais inspiré de poète; que jamais hymne de reconnaissance n'a retenti aux oreilles des colonialistes modernes. Et que cela à lui seul constitue une condamnation de l'ordre colonialiste.⁵⁴

[Let us note in passing that the modern colonial order has never inspired a poet; that never an hymn of gratitude has sounded in the ears of modern colonialists.

That alone constitute a condemnation of the colonial order.]

To Césaire, what Europe introduced was not the idea of a system based on human dignity, but rather a particular form of economic relationship that privileged the interests of an elite group over others. Whatever stood in the way of that economic undertaking,

be it the native's religion, culture, philosophy was laid waste. Thus to Césaire, arguments that sought to emphasize the beneficent aspect of colonialism ignored that the very logic of the enterprise does not consider the interests of those who are colonized. Using Malinowsky's notion of the "selective gift" Césaire shows that it would be folly for the colonizer to present the colonized with the main instruments of European power: mainly, technological arms, political self-determination and political administration, and the control of natural resources.

Having argued these points, Césaire lastly considers the idea that with colonialism arises the opportunity for cultural borrowing. The perspective he presents is an extension of the case he was raising against a benevolent view of the colonial enterprise. To Césaire, cultural borrowing truly occurs only when it is balanced by an interior state that demands it and allows it to be integrated within the body that assimilates it. Césaire argued that the possibility of such cultural exchange could only be possible in a state of self-determination. Rather, to Césaire what occurs in the colonial situation is not a case of assimilation and integration of cultural ways, but rather a cultural mosaic—a juxtaposition of cultural elements that are not harmonized. He referred to this peculiar condition as a "métisse culture" and advanced the idea that while the rule of culture is that of heterogeneity, or a diversity of elements, this heterogeneity must necessarily be lived as homogeneity. Césaire was obviously referring to a process of naturalization, when what initially might have been experienced as alien becomes part and parcel of a cultural fabric. Césaire, however, does not see this happening in the colonial situation where foreign elements in the native's soil remain foreign, what belongs to the ways of the whites.

It is apparent here that even as Césaire is compelled to consider culture in the colonial setting with the idea of contact and exchange, he ends up reaffirming a very polemical position that does not altogether allow for a vision of culture in the colonial context as fluid. Césaire reverts to a political language that pits colonizer against colonized. The colonizer and the colonized become representatives of fixed cultural entities. Thus the culture concept itself becomes the battleground for another manifestation of a Manichean struggle. This is especially clear in how Césaire envisions and explains the “métisse culture.” Through that concept he effectively posits a dual view of culture in the context of the colonial setting. Implicit is the assumption that there exists an “authentic” culture, one even if heterogeneous in its composition, is lived through homogeneously. This “authentic” culture, however, gains its authenticity from the fact that it is not entangled within the power dynamic of domination and subordination characteristic of the colonial paradigm. Further, also inferred in Césaire’s vision of culture in the colonial context is the idea of an “inauthentic” culture. This is essentially what Césaire imagines as the “métisses” culture. It is a cultural mosaic of disparate inharmonious elements. This culture is the unnatural product of the colonial condition, whereby a “foreign” host inhabits the native setting, interacts with it like oil settles in water. This “inauthentic” culture exists only insofar as the colonial paradigm is in place.

Césaire’s representation of the Antillean setting over the last few decades has been revisited by a group of Antillean writers and intellectuals who identify with the Creolist school of Antillean cultural identity. Inspired by the works of Martinican poet, novelist and theorist Édouard Glissant, this group has expressed some dissatisfaction with

Césaire's resistance to considering Antillean cultural reality beyond the Manichean politics of colonialism.⁵⁵ They specifically object to the fact that Négritude has a tendency to present Antillean culture and identity along an ideological axis of a suppressed African heritage that they prioritize over an identification with European culture. They thus consider this ideological axis of African vs. European as a limited way to articulate the full complexity of Antillean cultural traditions. Instead, they emphasize a more fluid and hybrid culture, a Creole culture, that *sui generis* contains within itself a multiplicity of cultural and linguistic elements beyond the European and African cultural binary. The most acerbic critique is leveled independently by one member of the group, the Martinican writer Raphaël Confiant, who in his volume *Aimé Césaire: une traversée paradoxale du siècle*, demands not only a re-assessment of Césaire's cultural vision of the Antilles, but also his political practice and platforms. If at times the Creolists' critique of Césaire self-consciously borders on an opportunistic way for them to prepare the ground for another way to depict and theorize Antillean culture and identity in a postcolonial reality—the killing of the literary father, so to speak, to make room for the birth of a new body of literary and artistic production—it remains that their assessment of Césaire's at times fixed representation of Antillean culture and identity represents a very important intervention.

The significance of this intervention is reflected, for instance, in how in another, but not altogether unrelated context, the francophone literary scholar Valérie Loichot has commented on Césaire's vision of cultural contact. According to Loichot, for Césaire “the loss of one's particularity is inevitable in a cultural contact.” Yet while the occurrence of such a loss of particularity is inevitable, Loichot also maintains that in

Césaire's vision of cultural contact "the relationship of self and other [also] leads to impoverishment."⁵⁶ Césaire's "métisse culture," accords to what Loichot terms an impoverished culture. It is arguable that Césaire's representation of this culture reflects a strategic political position that more than attempting to provide a nuanced perspective on culture in the colonial context per se, specifically aims at providing a counter-argument against the logic of colonialism.⁵⁷ For if for Césaire cultural heterogeneity in the context of colonial oppression is unnatural and inharmonious (the "métisse" culture), in the context of a state of independence or autonomy, heterogeneity, Césaire informs us, is lived through as homogeneity. Thus heterogeneity is a natural condition for Césaire insofar it derives from a form of political agency.

Thus Césaire strategically made the case that it would be impossible not to take into account political considerations when discussing the cultures of the African Diaspora. Unlike Senghor, who in his presentation had intimated the link between the various cultures of the Diaspora on a metaphysical ground (an ontological/irreducible blackness), and unlike Jacques Stephen Alexis who questioned the existence of such a broad cultural formation and instead emphasized the specificity of a given national context, Césaire's understanding of the cultural reality that connected black populations from around the globe rested on the historical, political and discursive conditions that produced the modern black subject. Césaire does not locate that subject in relation to a traditional African world (Senghor), nor does he seek to imbue that subject with the savor of a particular locality (Alexis), rather, that subject is first and foremost the creation of a broad set of economic, political and historical circumstances that circulate around the world of the "other." So while he does not explicitly mention the history of forcible

displacement and slavery that has affected New World black populations, it is nonetheless understood that this history is conversant with the colonialism Césaire discusses.

Hence the connection Césaire makes between the colonial condition and how it speaks to the reality of an independent country like Haiti and the position of African Americans in the United States resonates with an inherent logic: modern black existence is the creation of specific modern historical conditions and remains bound to those conditions. Thus the history of slavery in the United States and contemporary Jim Crowism, Haiti's history of successful slave revolution and its contemporary condition of political and economic instability, and the African experience of colonialism reflect modulations of a similar condition of domination. And while Césaire does not make any specific references to the condition of his native Martinique, which through the 1946 Law of Departmentalization that he had advocated for had along with Guadeloupe, French Guiana, and Île de la Réunion, become integrated with France as an overseas departments, it is safe to assume his vision extends to his native land as well.

The similarities between Césaire's *Discourse on colonialism* and his lecture at the Congress however go beyond the simple fact of the vigorous condemnation of colonialism in both texts. For instance, while one finds in both texts a similar preoccupation with analyzing the objectives of the colonial enterprise and in denouncing the various humanist values apologists of colonialism have appropriated to support the enterprise, both works similarly appeal to their intended audience's sense of moral indignation. This is likely what James Baldwin was pointing to when he stated that Césaire's presentation appealed to the audience's emotions. While Baldwin's brief

comment does not reflect how Césaire had in fact displayed a profound engagement with the anthropological scholarship of his day, his statement rightly brings attention to the polemical quality of the lecture. This is a stylistic quality that “Culture et Colonization” shares with Césaire’s *Discourse*. Both of these addresses are rife with eloquence and nuance. And at no point in either work would Césaire’s audience not have grasped that they are being led to a particular way of thinking about the colonial condition. Deeply contemplative and reflective, “Culture et colonisation” and *Discourse* also adopt the tone of denunciation, warning and advocacy that is characteristic of the polemic. Therefore a sense of ideological investment inherent in the polemic form of writing and oral expression undergirds both texts. In fact it can be said that the conclusions Césaire arrive at in both instances are already foreclosed by that investment.

Thus in *Discourse*, Césaire’s jeremiad-style argument reached its apex with a warning of an impending capitalist American empire.

I know that some of you, disgusted with Europe, with all that hideous mess which you did not witness by choice, are turning—oh! in no great numbers toward America and getting used to looking upon that country as a possible liberator. “What a godsend!” you think.

“The bulldozers! The massive investments of capital! The roads! The ports!”

“But American racism!”

“So what? European racism in the colonies has inured us to it!”

And there we are, ready to run the great Yankee risk.

So, once again, be careful!

American domination—the only domination from which one never recovers. I mean from which one never recovers unscarred.⁵⁸

This passage is one of the concluding paragraphs of Césaire's essay. In this conclusion we are presented with not only a glib analysis of the connection between capitalism and colonialism, but also with the more traditional way Marxist intellectuals and ideologues have thought about the advent of capitalism: as a world economic system that reduces all relations to the relation of capital. Thus the specter of an American empire that Césaire presents his readers with, forebodes a vision of Europe as a former center of capital and empire that was increasingly becoming displaced by this new national entity called America. Césaire expressed the belief that American domination was the only domination one would not get back from intact and warned that European salvation laid in its willingness to adopt a policy of "nationalities," to respect the desire for autonomy of societies it had hitherto been oppressing.

In this portrayal of an eventual American rise to global dominance, one notices something akin to an inversion of the American exceptionalist ethos. Here the uniqueness of the United States is not couched in terms of the idea of vast possibilities of self-creation and recreation, or of a national newness that blows fresh air unto humanist values of freedom and democracy. Rather the United States stands in as potentially the fullest realization of a dystopic capitalism that represses, shackles and confines. Césaire's ideas here are not surprising in that as a Marxist and a member of the French Communist Party, his perception of the United States is indelibly influenced by the rise of the United States as the leading capitalist power. This perspective is compounded with a penchant for a racialist critique, thereby texturing his analysis of an oppressive

American capitalism with visions of a nefarious racism. However, somewhat surprisingly, Césaire ends *Discours*, an essay on colonialism, with a programmatic appeal stating the salvation of Europe rests in the preponderance of the Proletariat.

[T]he salvation of Europe is not a matter of a revolution in methods. It is a matter of the Revolution—the one which, until such time as there is a classless society, will substitute for the narrow tyranny of a dehumanized bourgeoisie the preponderance of the only class that still has a universal mission, because it suffers in its flesh from all the wrongs of history, from all the universal wrongs: the proletariat.⁵⁹

This statement is “programmatic” in that it can be read as a ready-made slogan that announces the author’s Marxist intellectual penchant as well as his ideological affiliation with the Communist Party. But to further understand this statement under a different set of contexts we have to keep in mind Césaire’s audience for this essay. This audience would have been composed of both a French and Francophone reading public concerned with current events. It is thus possible to imagine Césaire was playing on that public’s apprehension of the United States’ rise to supremacy, a fact that would have been best illustrated by the United States’ project to re-stabilize the European economy through the Marshall Plan after the Second War. This concluding statement places Europe and colonial populations on the same boat, as both in danger of an imperial United States. Césaire was rhetorically attempting to forge an alliance between the very forces he had been putting in opposition throughout the length of the essay (Europe and its colonies) by his depiction of the impending American threat.

While Césaire’s lecture at the Congress does not make use of the Jeremiad form as it reaches its crescendo, it does adopt a sentimental tone that appeals to its audience’s apprehension of something particular to their condition as colonial subjects. At the conclusion of the presentation, Césaire returned to the theme of the Congress—that of “culture”—and to the nature of the gathering—a meeting of “men of culture”— to provide a sense of common identification among those gathered. He established that sense of common identification through what he presents as an important historical mission, stating

Nous sommes aujourd’hui dans le chaos culturel. Notre rôle est de dire: libérez le demiurge qui seul peut organiser ce chaos en une synthèse nouvelle, une synthèse qui méritera elle le nom de culture, une synthèse qui sera réconciliation et dépassement de l’ancien et du nouveau. Nous sommes là pour dire et pour réclamer: donnez la parole aux peuples. Laissez entrer les peuples noirs sur la grande scène de l’histoire.⁶⁰

[We are now in a cultural chaos. Our role is to say: release the demiurge who alone can organize this chaos into a new synthesis, a synthesis that will merit the name of culture, a synthesis that will be the reconciliation and transcendence of the old and new. We are here to state and to claim that voice be given to the people. Let black populations enter the great stage of history.]

Here as in *Discours*, Césaire appeals to his audience’s apprehension of something specific to their condition to articulate a shared interest and a common goal. However, while in *Discours* the final appeal of anticolonial resistance was made in a way that brought together his Marxist leanings with his racist thinking in a marriage of

internationalist class struggle with anticolonialism, in his lecture Césaire kept entirely to the racialist and anticolonial tenor. The call for solidarity leaves out the European Left. It solely encompasses the experiences of the diasporic black subject. It is perhaps in this vision of a diasporic black subject rooted to an economic, political and historical condition that Césaire the polemicist and eloquent propagandist meet the canonical poet and playwright.

What Césaire's recent Creolist critics often tend to not emphasize is the nature of the project that Aimé Césaire was engaged in. The speech at the Congress provides us with a good understanding of that. While he was at the Congress Césaire stood as the mayor of Martinique and as an elected deputy to the French National Assembly. The Law of Departmentalization of 1946 that he had actively supported had made Martinique, as well as Guadeloupe, French Guiana, and Île de la Réunion overseas department of France. Thus de jure Césaire stood as a citizen of the French republic, an interesting status considering the colonial status of many others at the Congress. Yet what his presentation addressed was not this peculiar condition, albeit one could argue such a discussion would have been a significant contribution to discussions at the Congress. Rather, as will later be seen in future creative works such as *La Tragédie du roi Christophe* (1963), *Une Saison au Congo* (1966), and his appropriation of Shakespeare *Tempest*, *Une Tempête* (1969), Césaire displaces a concrete and material reality upon an abstract and discursive one. In all three of these works Césaire evinces a concern with a discursive condition, and if in *La Tragédie* and *Une saison* he draws from specific historical experiences (respectively, Haiti at a post-independence moment, and the Congo in the midst of decolonization) he does so in a way that emphasizes not the specificities

of these historical episodes, but their general applicability to a modern black condition. Hence, while the setbacks of Haitian independence and the Congolese anticolonial struggle in the work of Césaire may introduce us to local historical episodes, as readers we are compelled to apprehend these episodes more broadly, as representative of where aspirations for black liberation may lead.

In these creative works the shifting geographies of Haiti, the Congo, and in *Une Tempête*, an unnamed island at the moment of colonial encounter, bespeak the author's understanding of the diasporic nature of black modern subjectivity. They function as discrete yet representative articulations of a black existence mired in varied forms of domination. Thus Césaire's argument at the Congress for the ties that bind the Diaspora must be understood in the context of the writer's investment in representing a discursive condition much more so than an immediate political, social and cultural context. If Mercer Cook and other members of the American delegation reacted negatively to his attempt to align the colonial struggle with the African American struggle for civic equality, it is in great degree the result of the social political circumstances that inform their understanding of what this would mean. In the American context of the Cold War, such identification ran the great risk of being apprehended as a polemical critique of American democracy.

Aimé Césaire and Mercer Cook: A Misrecognition

The exchange that ensued between Aimé Césaire, Mercer Cook and John A. Davis following Césaire, was the direct result of this one statement by Aimé Césaire at the very beginning of his presentation:

C'est un fait que la plupart des pays noirs vivent sous le régime colonial. Même

un pays indépendant comme Haïti est en fait à bien des égards un pays semi-colonial. Et nos frères Américains eux-mêmes sont, par le jeu de la discrimination raciale, placés de manière artificielle et au sein d'une grande nation moderne, dans une situation qui ne se comprend que par référence à un colonialisme certes aboli, mais dont les séquelles n'ont pas fini de retentir dans le présent.⁶¹

[It is a fact that the majority of black countries exist under colonial rule. Even an independent country like Haiti is in many ways a semi-colonial country. And our American brothers, through the exercise of racial discrimination, are artificially placed within a great modern nation. Their situation can only be understood by reference to a colonialism, that while abolished still resonates in the present.]

In this statement Césaire focused on the examples of Haiti and the United States, arguably because of the singularity of the historical experiences of Haitians and African Americans vis-à-vis Europeans and racialized structures of domination. Alexis and Wright had drawn upon the singularity of those experiences to challenge what they considered the Congress' overly generalized assumptions about "black" subjectivity and "black" culture. In the case of Haiti, Césaire states that while the island nation was independent, it was ensconced in a neocolonial situation. In regards to the United States, the statement was a little more confusing because it was essentially historically inaccurate. For as he acknowledged the marginal position of African Americans, he connected their marginalization to a colonial past that while no longer the present reality still resonated in the contemporary moment. Césaire, here, had brought together the US colonial era with the period of American slavery without further disentangling the two.

His error was conceptual in nature. If colonialism in the US context had been overcome by a successful war of independence that led to the creation of a nominal republican democracy, African Americans had still remained on the outer periphery of that democracy. Césaire mistakenly collapsed American colonialism to Great Britain with African American slavery to white Americans. So while he had likely meant to say that the experience of slavery (and not colonialism) was a condition that resonated in the present day for African Americans, and that their marginalized position in the bosom of a great modern power must be viewed and understood in relation to that history, his statement could also be interpreted as saying that African Americans had been a colonized population and while colonialism in the United States had been abolished, African Americans were still subjected to a form of it. If apprehended in this way, Césaire could have been understood to make a case for “domestic colonialism,” an argument that throughout the 1930s, 1940s and the 1950s had been cultivated by black Americans in the Communist Party, and in the 1960s would be used to advance a new version of black internationalism promoted by radical black nationalist Malcolm X.⁶²

However, even with his failure to distinguish these important nuances in the American situation, Césaire’s demonstration was to some extent persuasive. The Haitian senator Émile Saint-Lot, who presided over the formal discussion following Césaire’s lecture, noted that while he had been somewhat surprised to hear Césaire characterize the Haitian situation as one of semi-colonialism, after reflecting upon it, he had to admit to himself Haiti’s colonial history had not completely been left behind.⁶³ Senator Saint-Lot’s statement was a profound understatement. He knew quite well that from 1824 until well into the first half of the twentieth century, the Haitian economy was severely

impacted by the country's government being forced to pay a large indemnity to France for the former colonizers' lost of their properties.⁶⁴ This essentially amounted to a "reparations" of sorts to the former slave masters in return for the security of Haiti's independence at a time when the United States, Haiti's only other independent neighbor, would not recognize it diplomatically.⁶⁵ In addition, by the time of the Congress Haiti had but two decades before come out of long American occupation (1915-1934), that if not colonialism per se, certainly reflected the neo-colonial relationship between the two nations that persist to this day. The senator surely understood this. However his cognizance of the historically high cost of Haiti's independence would not allow him to readily admit this fact. There was surely a bit of pride here, especially as the statement came from the representative of a population that had not made Haiti's historical leap. Martinique, as he well knew, had opted for the route of incorporation in the French nation-state.⁶⁶

Concerning his articulations about the American situation, Césaire's attempt to bring nearer in political dialogue race relations in the US to a global context of colonial dispossession were informed by his understanding of race relations in the United States in the 1950s. If the African American Civil Rights struggle indicated a sustained effort to have the United States live up to its democratic principles, it also threw a spotlight on a high level of agitation that given its racialized dimensions also spoke to mass movements against colonial regimes.⁶⁷ However the suggestion threatened the Americans in a way Aimé Césaire would not have anticipated. The discussion session that followed Aimé Césaire's lecture was the most tense of the entire Congress. During the session Mercer Cook expressed his displeasure with Aimé Césaire's prefatory statement by remarking:

[E]st-ce que c'est justement pour discuter ce colonialisme et seulement ce colonialisme que nous sommes-là [...] est-ce que les autres questions sur d'autres aspects de la culture ne sont-elles que pretextes pour ce congrès?⁶⁸

[Is it precisely to discuss this colonialism that we are here [...] are other questions on other aspects of culture simply pretexts for this conference?]

If Cook's statement reveals his concerns about Césaire's lecture, it also expresses how he imagines black transnational solidarity. Politics is taken out of that equation, while "culture," a term he does not quite define, becomes a linking mechanism. While Cook does not explain why "culture" would be a site of linkage, his fellow American delegate, John A. Davis, does. Addressing Césaire and the audience at the Congress, Davis would note,

As American Negroes (As Mr. Senghor said the other day) we are conscious of our Negro culture [...] I came up on the spirituals; I have spent many days listening to records where [my brother, a cultural anthropologist] stressed the relationship between Spirituals and African chants.⁶⁹

Davis here emphasizes the significance of African survivals in syncretic New World cultures. While the work of his renowned sibling, Allison Davis, did not specifically focus on African retentions in African American culture, his allusion to Allison Davis signals the important contributions other American cultural anthropologists such as Lorenzo Dow Turner and Melville Herskovits had by the mid-twentieth century made to a very important scholarly discussion. The linking mechanism, the glue to black transnational solidarity, as Davis thus sees and articulates it, ought to be considered around the relic of this common African cultural heritage. Later in this same statement

Davis would make another comment that would reveal the nature of his and Cook's uneasiness with Césaire's lecture. Davis exclaims,

What American Negroes want [...] is [...] complete equal status as citizens [...] We do not look forward to any self-determination in the belt if this is what Mr. Césaire had in mind.⁷⁰

Davis' reference to "self-determination" and "belt" reflects the American delegation's concern about Césaire's political affiliation with the French Communist Party and their apprehension that Césaire's statement revealed that he was toeing the line of Communist Party doctrine.⁷¹ In the 1920s the Communist International had devised the "black belt" or "nation within a nation" thesis that posited the idea that a distinct African American nation existed in the South.⁷² While by 1958 this was not a position the American Communist Party (CPUSA) advocated, a few notable black Communist Party members (notably Claudia Jones, William Patterson, and Ben Davis) continued to present a domestic colonial analysis of the African American situation even as they did not stress the claim for a separate nation. In the 1950s they had effectively been silenced by imprisonment, going underground, or in the case of the Trinidadian born communist political activist, Claudia Jones, by being jailed and deported.

Césaire's party affiliation was thus cause for some anxiety. This anxiety must in part be understood in light of a certain vision of American self-image that Davis and Cook were invested in, insofar as that self-image was tied to a vision of American democratic possibilities that was not in accord with how Césaire considered the US an impending capitalist imperialist threat (as expressed in the essay *Discourse on Colonialism*). They embraced the national mythology that America had rescued Europe

(from itself) during the Second World War, prevented the utter extermination of the Jews, and now, in racially integrated combat units, were defeating the communist North Koreans and Chinese. With a successful Supreme Court decision inspiring them, and tacit, if oftentimes uncommitted, federal government support for some Civil Rights agenda, the U.S. delegation could confidently believe that they had in their attaché cases tangible, viable solutions from a multi-racial democracy that arguably had outstripped a past of enslavement more fully devastating than colonialism.

Aimé Césaire's lecture at the Congress and Mercer Cook's reaction to it encapsulates the nature of a significant political and ideological misrecognition that characterized the event, especially on the side of the American delegates who were wary of the Communist Party affiliations of some of the writers who attended the Congress and were in close association with its organizer, Alioune Diop. Mercer Cook's reaction against what he perceives as the Congress' deviation from its proper focus on "culture" indicates a desire to dissociate the African American struggle for equality in the US from the political projects of anti-colonial movements. That he would find it necessary to reaffirm such a distinction conveys his uneasiness with the political dimension of black internationalist discourse during this period.

Césaire would later address the comment by Cook and as he did so he did not hide his surprise by the Cook's remark. Part of Césaire's dismay might have been due to his understanding of the distinction that could be made between his dual position as a writer and politician. Even as his lecture was on "Colonialism and Culture," Césaire was a French citizen and a politician. Given his citizenship status, it can ironically be argued that he shared with Mercer Cook and the rest of the American delegation a relationship

with a dominant Western power that none of the delegates from the French and British colonies shared. The significance of this becomes clear in the way he chose to explain his decision to support the controversial 1946 Law of Departmentalization that rendered Martinique, Guadeloupe, French Guiana and Île de la Reunion, overseas departments of France. He defended his support of the 1946 Law in an introduction he wrote for Daniel Guérin's *Les Antilles décolonisées*. A militant French Marxist, Daniel Guérin in this volume provided a blistering critique of harsh social and economic conditions facing Antilleans. Tracing these hardships to the legacy of slavery and colonialism and its informing racist discourses, Guérin's perspective on the Antillean reality was eerily similar to Césaire's own. Guérin, however, wrote that the Law of Departmentalization occasioned the reproduction of French colonial domination, and saw that the true path to liberation in the Antilles was predicated upon the struggle for independence from France. In the introduction to Guérin's account Césaire wrote:

D'hommes reconnus depuis des siècles citoyens formels d'un état, mais d'une citoyenneté marginale, comment ne pas comprendre que leur première démarche collective serait, non de rejeter la forme vide de leur citoyenneté, mais de faire en sorte de la transformer en citoyenneté pleine et de passer d'une citoyenneté mutilée à la citoyenneté tout court?⁷³

[Of men who were recognized for centuries as formal citizens of a state, but of a marginal citizenship, how can we not understand that their first collective act would be not to reject the empty form of their citizenship, but to transform it into full citizenship[,] to transition from a mutilated citizenship to citizenship as such?]

While Césaire did not rebuke Guérin's assertions, he attempted to provide another

perspective on the 1946 Law. It is worth remarking, however, that his attempt to explain the law's significance is predicated upon a dubious political narrative. Césaire aligns the French overseas departments (DOM/ Département d'outre-mer) with a French discourse of civic belonging. Césaire's characterization of the marginal citizenship of the colonized subject seems to infer that slave status, indentured servitude and colonized subjectivity—all aspects of the non-European Antillean historical experience—were different forms of citizenship and not, as perhaps some are more inclined to believe, different forms of negations of it. But in defending his politically pragmatic decision to support the 1946 Law, as opposed to stake a claim for independence or for more local autonomy, Césaire, in this instance, conveniently borrowed from American Civil Rights rhetoric.⁷⁴

One is tempted to say that Césaire's statement was as much a justification for his active support of the 1946 Law as it was an attempt to explain what he characterized as the public longing for it. Césaire's statement insinuates that his own personal views regarding the 1946 Law essentially took a backseat to the collective will of his constituency.⁷⁵ Here, Césaire, the politician and public figure, presents himself as the agent who fulfills the will of those he represents, while Césaire, the radical writer and private man, maintains an uncompromised dominion over his radical anticolonial articulations. The politician and the writer here are obviously at odds. The rhetoric that attempts to temper Daniel Guérin's assertions by shifting the ground of his critique of the 1946 Law from one of condemnation to one of reflective understanding by emphasizing the idea of Antillean collective action and collective desire for equal citizenship can readily be associated with American Civil Rights discourse of civic equality. However, while in the American context this discourse is one that is as old as the nation itself and

can be said to be central to the American democratic experiment, one would be hard-pressed to offer a comparable argument regarding a discourse of civic equality and national belonging and its relation to French colonial subjectivity.⁷⁶

There is therefore an important difference between Césaire, the pragmatic politician, and Césaire the radical writer. Césaire, the radical writer, was first and foremost engaged in a project that sought to address the problem of the black colonized subject's alienation. This is not to say that to Césaire the political question is epiphenomenal, but rather that Césaire's understanding of the political exigencies specific to the Antillean condition may have led him to appraise that situation more pragmatically, while the radicalism he evokes in his writing is a function of a different, although related, set of concerns—here the difference between the political and epistemic functions of black internationalist/transnationalist discourse.

One way to try to come to some form of a reconciliation between the pragmatic route Césaire took as a politician with his more radical poetic persona may simply be to take him at his word. In the aftermath of the 1946 Law, Césaire was often in the position of having to defend his advocacy of the law. The introduction he wrote to Guérin's volume on the French Antilles is one way in which he chose to address his advocacy of the law. At other times, Césaire would point out that political integration did not necessarily signify or have to lead to cultural assimilation. This is essentially the case he was making when he once remarked in an interview that: "Martinique is neither Provence nor Brittany."⁷⁷ Césaire was implying that even though Martinique was part and parcel of France, it was also culturally distinctive. His statement essentially suggests that there was something indigestible about the Martinican cultural context when considered along

the logic of traditional French culture. This otherness, or difference, as Césaire in this instance seems to envision it, would remain a mainstay even as Martinique was politically part of France. It is thus arguable that in his own way Césaire was making the case for the possibility of a form of cultural pluralism within the larger French civic body, whereby Martinique could retain the basic elements that marked its particularity.

The point on cultural particularity is very important because the very ideology that for quite some time dominated Césaire's thinking, *Négritude*, was at the first instance a rebellion against the ideology of cultural assimilation. While Francophone scholars such as Lilyan Kesteloot and A. James Arnold, among others, have convincingly pointed out that the *Négritude* poetics articulated by the acknowledged fathers of the movement (Aimé Césaire, Léopold Sédar Senghor, and Léon Gontran-Damas) among themselves differed in emphasis and perspective, all three writers associated cultural assimilation with a sense of alienation and an erasure of cultural contexts specific to themselves. This, according to the Belgian filmmaker, writer and anthropologist, Luc de Heusch, produced within the *Négritude* poets a longing for "a certain collective negro memory."⁷⁸ The longing de Heusch describes is relatable to the epistemic function of black internationalism/transnationalism in that it denotes a desire for a particular form of knowledge that provides a sense of continuity with a past in the context of seemingly ruptured and discontinuous histories. While the indebtedness of the *Négritude* movement to the Harlem Renaissance is often articulated along the lines of how useful it was for the *Négritude* poets to have as a precedent Harlem Renaissance writers and artists who were self-consciously exploring black culture and affirming a modern sense of black subjectivity that challenged racist discourses, a connection that has seldom been made is

in how perhaps Négritude poets were also greatly influenced by how the cultural work Harlem Renaissance artists and writers were doing did not posit itself in opposition to belongingness to a larger American body politic. Rather, there is a form of cultural pluralist outlook embedded in Harlem Renaissance/New Negro poetics that inflected American identity for the raced subject with difference.⁷⁹ This is perceptible, for instance, in Du Bois' theorizing of black identity through the concept of "double-consciousness," Langston Hughes' exploration of a jazz and blues aesthetic in poetic form, or, as in Jean's Toomer's *Cane*, in the mining of an evanescent folk southern landscape that provide of a black cultural repository.

One of the works that most influenced Césaire and the other Négritude poets was Claude McKay's novel *Banjo*.⁸⁰ The transnational setting of McKay's novel (the French port city of Marseilles) and the wide range of nationalities and ethnicities of the characters in the novel do not lend themselves to a reading of the work along the same lines of cultural pluralism and nation-bounded citizenship. However, in its original representation of black subjectivity in the era of modernity, McKay's novel had taken the theme of racial and cultural particularity to a philosophical realm of inquiry. If Banjo, the protagonist of the novel, was seeking freedom from regimented racialized structures in the American South by opting for the life of the expatriate in Marseilles, it is clear that he was also seeking to escape the capitalist logic of regulated labor in his opting for the life of the vagabond. McKay represented racism and capitalism as the dual nodes of oppression structuring the lives of black subjects in the West. He posited resistance in the ability of black subjects to reject bourgeois assimilation and to cultivate a philosophical disposition attuned to what anthropologist Gary Wilder has termed a

“primordial sense of African-ness.” While McKay’s novel can be accused of problematically over-relying on a romantic sense of black primitivism in the portrayal of its protagonist,⁸¹ what Césaire and the other Négritude poets would have understood from it was a sense that their experiences as black subjects in the West necessitated they adopt and develop a distinctive philosophical perspective that did not uncritically reflect the very structures that oppressed them. In the narrative, Banjo becomes a corporeal embodiment of that “primordial african-ness.” He represents a way of being in the world that challenges racial and capitalist logic by his willed efforts to not abide by their dictates. In and of the West, Banjo is also outside of it. One of the very questions the novel poses in the end is of the possibility that Banjo’s philosophical disposition can effectively be sustained.

This discussion is not meant to indicate that Césaire, the politician who supported political assimilation, was in ready and easy agreement with Césaire, the cultural worker who decried the logic of cultural assimilation. What is suggested is that Césaire was first and foremost engaged in a project that sought to address the problem of the black colonized subject’s sense of alienation. From this perspective, a case can be made that there is a good degree of consonance between the work Mercer Cook was doing in mapping out a transnational black subjectivity conversant with African American experiences, and Césaire’s own explorations of colonial and post-colonial subjectivity in his fiction and non-fiction. Both Césaire and Cook were actively engaged in presenting a complex picture of black modern subjectivity and in challenging racist discourses. While in the case of Mercer Cook this involved a bringing together under the lens of analysis discrete examples of transnational black experiences to provide a sense of a broader

realm of social and political affinities between African Americans and black colonized subjects, for Césaire it involved exploring the raced nature of colonialism, its social, cultural and political impact, as well as subjective dimension, the alienation of the colonized subject from his/her immediate social and cultural circumstances.

Césaire's political pragmatism, however, was not translated as such by an American delegation that was immersed in the Manichean logic of American Cold War McCarthyism. Adherence to Marxist ideology and Communist Party partisanship in the United States was enough to warrant a person "enemy of the state" status. The political witch-hunts characteristic of that period had already claimed such African American luminaries as W.E.B. Du Bois and Paul Robeson, and if it were not for his renunciation of communism, would have claimed the poet Langston Hughes as well. Of the members of the American delegation, Mercer Cook was the figure best positioned to understand the nuances and contradictions of Césaire's lecture. His fluency in French, personal acquaintance with Césaire and many of his black francophone contemporaries, as well the extent of his knowledge about the social and political realities of the black francophone world would have provided him a privileged perspective on some of the dynamics at the Congress.

Yet, Mercer Cook remained wary about Césaire's lecture and what he perceived as the overly political direction the Congress was taking. In assessing his reaction, however, it would be wise to consider how he might have apprehended Césaire's attempt at translating one set of cultural experiences to another. A couple of years before the Congress Cook delivered a paper before the College Language Association that was later published in *Phylon* magazine under the title "Race Relations as Seen by Recent French

Visitors.” Cook’s article presented a review of a number of publications written by French men and women who had visited the United States after the Second World War. In the article he explains that French interest in American culture and society was reflective of a more general curiosity Europeans had about the United States in the present Cold War moment, and how the issue of race relations featured as a prominent area of concern. Cook’s review of the authors’ accounts highlights their strengths and weaknesses as well as how these accounts are at times informed by either the authors’ political predispositions or their subjective views on race.⁸² What the reader is ultimately left with is a sense of how none of the accounts ever really faithfully represent the realities they pertain to analyze. Cook’s review, in this sense, was as much an analysis of the various works he discussed, as it was a statement of the failure of cultural translation—the term, here, referring specifically to the interpretation of a set of social and cultural reality from one context and its transmission to another. Near the conclusion of the essay, Cook would note:

Our French visitors since World War II have continued the tradition of reporting extensively on relations between whites and blacks in this country. With his usual perspicacity, their most illustrious predecessor, Alexis de Tocqueville, had accurately foreseen in 1835 how inextricably linked this situation would be to dangers facing the Union in the future. Yet, in predicting that Russia and the United States would one day control the destinies of the world, the author of *Democracy in America* could not have realized to what extent the problem of racial co-existence here would figure in what we know today as the Cold War.⁸³

Here Cook inscribes the practice of French writing about the United States within a

longer tradition that dates back to the seminal work of the French political thinker and historian Alexis de Tocqueville. He briefly alludes to the importance the author attached to the problem of race relations in that work. As he does so, however, he also raises the stakes for this form of commentary. The Cold War had inflected this transnational discourse with a significance that exceeded the goal of the production of knowledge for purpose of elucidation. The epistemic function of this form of transnational discourse is reduced to a political imperative. Knowledge, as he implicitly shows, is in this instance directly tied to the production of propaganda. Cook, however, does not push this analysis any further. He simply notes that there are consequences to these failures of translation. “While it would be difficult to estimate the influence of these travel accounts on contemporary French opinion on the United States,” he writes, “their popularity would suggest that this influence is considerable. And their comments on race relations constitute one of the salient features of their reporting.”⁸⁴

Cook’s apprehension of Césaire’s lecture should be seen in relation to his understanding of the dynamic of the European intellectual and commentator seeking to explain to a European public an American social and cultural dynamic without fully comprehending what he considers its nuances. To Cook, while the commentators themselves may or may not have a specific ideological agenda, it remains that their articulations—which he understands to often be partial, subjective, and the result of not always fully thought-out overgeneralizations—have the potential to serve as fodder for Cold War propaganda. Césaire’s attempt to relate the African American situation in the United States to the condition of colonial subjects quite likely signaled to Cook another example of a failure of translation that had the potential of having nefarious

consequences. What at an earlier period he could have apprehended as an attempt by Césaire to comment on the lived conditions of black subjects from a transnational perspective—here the idea of the epistemic function of black transnational discourse as reflected in his work of the 1930s and 1940s—by the 1950s he could only delineate the dangers of a political project.

Chapter 3

**Richard Wright, Léopold Sédar Senghor and the Material and
Ontological Dimensions of Blackness**

La mérite de cette ontologie existentielle est d'avoir, à son tour, informé une civilisation harmonieuse.¹

—Léopold Sédar Senghor, “L’esprit de la civilisation ou les lois de la culture négro-africaine,” 1956

[The merit of this existential ontology is to have, in turn, informed a harmonious civilization]

I wanted the opportunity to try to weight a movement like this, to examine its worth as a political instrument; it was the first time in my life that I’d come in contact with a mass movement conducted by Negro leadership and I felt that I could, if given a chance, understand it.

—Richard Wright, *Black Power*, 1954²

If within the walls of the Congress the lecture that stimulated the most interest was Aimé Césaire’s “Culture and Civilization” because of its impassioned critique of colonialism, and also because of the American delegation’s misapprehension of Césaire’s attempt to explain the historical conditions that connected those of the African diaspora by linking the African American situation in the United States with a form of

colonialism, the most controversial presentation would be that of Richard Wright. James Baldwin summed it up quite well when in a brief description of Wright's "Tradition and Industrialization: The Plight of the Tragic Elite in Africa"³ he would note that Wright had proposed in an awkward and tactless manner the idea that "Europe had brought the Enlightenment to Africa" and, specifically quoting Wright, that "what was good for Europe was good for all mankind."⁴ Wright was largely making the case that when it came to African development a withholding of the Western instrumentalities of modernity could only result in the not yet free African nations remaining in a permanent subordinate status. Baldwin's comment, however, highlighted the clumsy manner in which this basic idea was articulated. His comment reflects the viewpoint that Wright had laid bare in his lecture a sadly reductive and strangely Eurocentric outlook on African traditional culture. Strategically representing European history in teleological terms⁵—as the progressive triumph of science and industry over religion, custom and tradition—Wright proposed that for all the ills colonialism might be responsible for, its greatest effect, albeit unintentional, was a positive one. European colonization brought to African consciousness the spirit of objectivity that animated secularism and nurtured the rise of industrial modernity.⁶ Thus colonialism, to Wright, had provided the African with the means to "smash the irrational ties of religion and custom and tradition" and to this, Wright with a note of irony bid the "white man" thank you.⁷

Baldwin's comments picked up on the fact that the perspective Richard Wright's paper expressed did not well coincide with the thematic and ideological leanings of the Congress.⁸ Wright himself would acknowledge as much in remarks he made prefacing his address. Being the last to present, he had had either the good or bad fortune of having

heard several presentations before his own address. And reacting to what he had been hearing over the course of the previous two days of Congress proceedings, Wright expressed a degree of uneasiness about some of the ideas he was preparing himself to share with his audience, admitting that having been privy to others' thoughts and ideas, "certain kinds of realities emerged which has compelled [him] to want to modify some of he formulations in the latter part of [his] discourse."⁹ This realization would lead Wright to pepper his reading of his paper with off-the-cuffs comments that were reflections on the salience and applicability of his various statements in light of his experience at the Congress.

The thematic and ideological divergences with the Congress that Wright's presentation exhibited is all the more apparent when contrasted to Alioune Diop's opening lecture that set the tone for the Congress. Diop, as we recall, had lamented the pernicious role of Western representation of African cultures and announced the need for "black men of culture" to provide something of a corrective representation of these same cultures. Explaining one of the functions of the Congress, Diop had affirmed that

nous allons essentiellement [...] mesurer les richesses, la crise, et les promesses de notre culture. Le Congrès n'en aura pas moins le mérite, je l'espère, de révéler et d'offrir à l'admiration du monde des talents variés, certains, et que seul dissimulait jusqu'ici dans l'ombre et le silence concerté des puissances coloniales et du racisme.

[We will essentially [...] take stock of the wealth, crisis, and promises of our culture. The Congress, I hope, will do no less than to reveal and offer to the

world's admiration varied talents hitherto suppressed in the darkness and silence conjured up by the colonial powers and racism.]¹⁰

Diop implies that the African traditional cultural world had in the past been apprehended through a dominant imperial logic that was imbued with an endemic racism. To Diop, this racist and imperialist logic, along with the quest for material profit, fueled the colonial enterprise. He considers the project of rehabilitating the representation of traditional African culture by examining its wealth an important task by those at the Congress. For while here the word "crisis" connotes instability and uncertainty, the word "promises" denotes hope and possibility. What is also clear is that colonialism to Diop cannot be thought about as a passing historical encounter. Similar to Wright, he envisions it as a historical event with deep and lasting implications. However, while to Wright, one of colonialism's lasting imprints was to have created the conditions out of which could spring forth secular and industrial societies that parallel Europe's development, Diop envisioned a development more faithful to an African cultural heritage. Indicative of the influence of the Negritude movement on his thinking, to Diop, as it would be to a few other figures at the Congress, the project of liberation greatly necessitated an investment in forms of affirmations and in-depth understanding of the significance of the cultural heritage of traditional African cultures.¹¹ Underpinning this belief is the idea that if the history of colonialism on the continent has been one of social and political subjugation, for the cadre of African and Caribbean intellectuals educated in the metropole this experience has also been one of cultural alienation intensified by the French colonial policy of cultural assimilation, two key terms of the Negritude movement.¹² Thus Diop's call for an assessment of the ensemble of African cultural

values suggests that a collective sense of African tradition must be a departing point for beginning to engage the modernizing process.

The lectures given before Wright's address to the Congress reveal an adherence in one form or another to several of the ideas Diop expressed in his opening address. Paul Hazoumé's "La révolte des Prêtres" ("The Revolt of the Priests"), E.L. Lasebikan's "The Tonal Structure of Yoruba Poetry", Léopold Sédar Senghor's "L'esprit de la civilisation, ou les lois de la culture négro-Africaine" ("The Spirit of Civilization, or the Laws of Negro-African Culture") and A. Hampaté Ba's "Culture Peul" ("Fulani Culture"), all focused on certain aspects of the cultures from which the presenters originate. Hazoumé, a writer from Dahomey (later the nation of Benin) best known for his historical novel *Doguiçimi* (1935), looked into traditional Dahomean religious practices, focusing specifically on sets of rules and practices governing priests' interaction with the sacred and the profane. Lasebikan provided an account of the main characteristics of the Yoruba language. Senghor, a poet and Senegalese politician who was very much involved in the organization of the Congress, provided a nuanced account of the metaphysics of African subjectivity, oftentimes in relation to European subjectivity, and Ba's more general presentation provided a broad stroke perspective on certain aspects of Fulani culture, including religion, oral literature and family relations.

If Hazoumé's, Lasebikan's, Senghor's and Hampaté Ba's lectures spoke to the "wealth" of African tradition in their investigations of particular aspects of their respective cultures, this was counter-balanced by such presentation as the one given by the Cameroonian delegate Reverend Thomas Ekollo, who essentially spoke to that culture's "crisis" and "promise." In "De l'importance de la culture pour l'assimilation du

message chrétien en Afrique Noire” (“Of the Significance of Culture for the Integration of the Christian Gospel in Sub-Saharan Africa”), Reverend Ekollo considered the problematic historical ties between the work of missionaries and colonialism, but also envisioned the possibility of the integration of Christianity in the African cultural matrix. That integration would signify a salutary resolution to colonialism’s unsavory historical legacy.¹³ Of course, while not all of the presentations obviously dealt with issues concerning the African continent, those that did tended to provide such redemptive and salutary visions of African traditional cultures.

Taken within the context of these other presentations, it is clear why Wright’s statements would cause uneasiness. However, one conference participant who echoed Wright quite clearly was the socialist former French colonial governor Hubert Deschamps—the only white person to have addressed the Congress. Deschamps had remarked that:

[...] nous aussi Français nous avons été des colonisés. Oh, il y a longtemps évidemment. Nous avons été colonisés par les Romains et mon Dieu je ne dirai pas de mal de cette colonisation; en general, nous Français, nous n’en pensons pas de mal. Car la colonisation, je ne veux pas en faire son éloge, il y a beaucoup de mal à en dire, mais enfin il y a peut-être un côté positif.

[[...] we, Frenchmen, have also been colonized. Well, evidently, it was a long time ago. We were colonized by the Romans, but by God, I will not speak ill of this colonization. Generally, we, Frenchmen, do not think ill of it. I do not want to praise colonization; there are plenty of bad things to be said about it. But, all in all, there may well be a positive aspect to it.]¹⁴

In a disingenuous ploy aimed to diminish the ravages of colonialism, Deschamps compared the French consolidation of colonies in the 19th century to the Roman conquests of Bronze Age Franks. He thus directed his audience to consider whether the resulting Gallo-Roman culture that was created as a result of Roman conquest of Gaul did not in effect allow for the flowering of what is valued about French culture.¹⁵

Here, similar to Wright, Deschamps framed his argument not as a defense of colonialism per se, but rather as an objective analysis of its effects upon the cultures of those conquered. However, this objectivity of analysis relied upon what, in another instance, the philosopher Kwame Appiah has aptly termed “an inherited set of conceptual blinders.”¹⁶ Broadly speaking, Appiah’s concept of the “inherited set of blinders” speaks to a long history of an imposition of a “Western symbolic geography”¹⁷ on the African continent. The example par-excellence of this symbolic geography is the Hegelian construction of the African continent as residing outside the normative bounds of history and of Europe as that which brings Africa within the fold of normative history.¹⁸ In his discussion of Wright, however, Appiah was specifically placing Wright in the genealogy of 19th century proto-black nationalists such as Alexander Crummell and Edward Blyden who even as they held Pan-Africanist convictions still viewed the African continent as a place of barbarism that needed to be brought the light of civilization.¹⁹ Both Deschamps and Wright, for instance, felt compelled to associate Europe with the Enlightenment and progress, and Europe’s “other,” as regions that could benefit from contact with this wellspring of progress. As representative of a form of discourse on Africa, this underlying logic can be described as Hegelian in nature. Whether sugared with statement

of praise regarding African art (Deschamps), or peppered with remarks about African political potential (Wright), such an underlying logic would ring as troubling.²⁰

The above comparison made between Wright and Deschamps, however, omits a very important fact: the political and ideological framework that informed Deschamps' and Wright's perspectives. In its articulation of a cultural relativistic perspective on culture and an attendant paternalism, Hubert Deschamps' address to the Congress was conversant with a form of French liberalism that considered native African demands for self-determination while steadfastly remaining invested in suturing French social, political, and economic ties with its African territories, arguably along a more democratic model of representation and collaboration.²¹ Deschamps, as a representative of this liberal tendency, was a particularly intriguing figure, none the least because while he had spent most of his adult life as a colonial administrator, his interest in the African continent was also very much rooted in his intellectual curiosity about the region's history and cultures. Having written a doctoral dissertation on Madagascar (*Les Antaisaka: Géographie humaine, histoire et coutumes d'une population malgache*) he possessed erudite historical and anthropological knowledge of African societies. He would put this interest and knowledge to work when as governor of the Ivory Coast he would establish a museum of African art and a Center of Native Studies (*centre d'études indigènes*).²² In many ways, Deschamps' double duty as colonial administrator and scholar followed an earlier twentieth century tradition of which he would be among the last.

As late as 1954, Deschamps supported a vision of a reformed relationship between metropolitan France and its overseas territories on the continent. He publically

supported a federated system that none other than the poet/politician and Congress participant Léopold Sédar Senghor had proposed.²³ This new political territorial arrangement would de jure announce the end of French colonialism while allowing France to maintain strong ties with its African territories. According to this political model the former colonial territories would experience a significantly greater degree of autonomy within a federated system.²⁴ Concluding an article on this topic, Deschamps claims that,

Ce que je voudrais suggérer, c'est qu'il importe avant tout de ne pas rater la République française, sinon notre échec sera total. Nous avons une grande partie de l'Afrique à reconstruire. C'est là que nous pouvons prouver notre génie créateur.

[What I would like to suggest is that the most important thing is not to miss out on the opportunity to safeguard the French Republic. Otherwise our failure would have been complete. We have a large part of Africa to rebuild. This is where we can prove our creative genius.]²⁵

As can be seen, Deschamps did not perceive that colonialism was entirely unethical. While he fails to comment on the political and economic imperative that from its outset stood at its very core, he chooses to emphasize a rhetoric that can closely be associated with the propounded ideologies of colonialism as a “civilizing mission” and the “white man’s burden.” Deschamps’ statement reflects a belief that the politicians and electorates of the metropolitan countries themselves conceived of colonialism as a worthwhile commitment to a project that reflects the “creative genius” of the country that undertakes it.²⁶ His argument obfuscates the material terrain under which colonialism stood to place

into greater relief the ideological domain used to legitimize its existence—in this instance Deschamps’ aligning the maintenance of French overseas territories with the myth of a humanitarian and humanistic project. What is particularly striking, however, is the reference Deschamps makes to the Senegalese poet/politician Léopold Sédar Senghor.

Dans une étude que publie ce même numéro de *Politique Étrangère*, M. Senghor expose comment il conçoit une République une et divisible qui évoluerait vers la Fédération. C’est un système évidemment plus adapté aux réalités que notre assimilation départementale, sans les inconvénients de balkanization que pourra présenter le self-gouvernement des colonies britanniques d’Afrique occidentale.

[In a study published in this same issue of *Politique Étrangère*, M. Senghor reveals how he conceives of a Republic, one and divisible, that would evolve toward a Federation. This system is evidently better adapted to our present reality than our policy of departmental assimilation, without the inconveniences of balkanization that could present the self-government model of British West African colonies.]²⁷

In this statement Deschamps summarizes the political context of his time relating to the colonial situation. His references to departmental assimilation and self-governance represent respective attempts by the French and the British to come to terms with what is now envisioned as the impossibility of maintaining the colonialism of the past. He therefore juxtaposes the assimilation policy that has rendered Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Île de la Réunion, overseas departments of France, in contrast to the independence of Ghana from Great Britain, conceiving of both models as not necessarily representing the

best interest of the French republic. Implicit in this statement, of course, is an understanding of the reality that colonialism as a political paradigm is being successfully challenged by the organized resistance of the colonized themselves, as well as a changing international discourse on the topic brought about by such events as the end of the Second World War, the ensuing Cold War politics and Western European economic instability, and the founding of the United Nations. Deschamps' reference to Senghor, however, suggests the possibility that a degree of collaboration between the political class composed of the native elite and representatives wanting to safeguard the economic and political interests of the Metropole are feasible. His reference to Senghor in that sense is meant to offer the possibility of a common ground between the native elite's call for independence or greater autonomy and the desire of the metropolitan country to retain some economic and political influence over the direction of the territories it hitherto controlled. For what Deschamps' vision offered was the idea that "African emancipation [could] take place through integration within a Greater France."²⁸

The reference to Senghor, however, significantly presents us with an idea of the nature of the colonial native intellectual's political dilemma. Senghor, one of the three main theorists and architect of *Négritude*, is associated not with a radical politics of national independence and political self-fashioning, but with an attempt to re-envision French political ties with its soon to be former colonies in ways that would have rendered those ties conversant with democratic governance and the demand for greater autonomy. This federation Deschamps and Senghor envisioned would not come to fruition. There seems to be here however a glaring contradiction between Senghor's political imagination and the tenor of his literary poetics. His position, in a sense, is somewhat

reflective of the situation discussed in the earlier chapter on Aimé Césaire. Even though Césaire's body of work, with its discursive engagement with the colonial and postcolonial condition, is significantly more political in focus than Senghor's, there remains a degree of incommensurability between the literary figure we attach with the Négritude movement and the political figure so readily appropriated by Deschamps in his vision of a Greater France.

In contrast to Hubert Deschamps, however, Richard Wright was in close alliance with an unsentimental black nationalist political ideology that eschewed racial mysticism and de-emphasized a cultivation of cultural lore as a necessary scaffold for the nationalist project.²⁹ Hence if Deschamps' address at the Congress revealed some commonalities with Wright's own expressed ideas, the informing logic that textured their views—Deschamps' liberalism and Wright's black nationalism—stood far and wide apart. The two in essence spoke a different political language even as aspects of their understanding of the colonial condition bore some uncanny and, to some, ungainly resemblance.

Strangely enough, the figure at the Congress that best allows us to contextualize the essence of Wright's presentation at the Congress is not so much the colonial governor, as it is the poet/politician, Léopold Sédar Senghor. It is so in the sense that both of these figures provide us with an opportunity to grapple with some of the fundamental tensions in the cultural and political imagination of intellectuals of the African Diaspora. For if Wright's presentation might have offended some Congress attendants and delegates sensitive to how he was representing African tradition and culture,³⁰ it remains that his articulations were in the service of a form of black nationalism that prioritized material conditions over cultural and ideological

considerations as the necessary framework for a nationalist project. And if, as indicated on the discussion on Deschamps, Senghor's political vision was conversant with Deschamps' political liberalism, it remains that his literary poetics was ensconced in a movement (Négritude) that sought to create a ground floor out of which to articulate a sense of black being-ness in the world that stood in stark contrast to European subjectivity. While in the case of Aimé Césaire Négritude was articulated along political and historical lines, with Senghor the emphasis was placed on the idea of blackness or African-ness as an ontological condition, as comprising its own metaphysics of existence.

Thus to Wright's materialist oriented and politically grounded black nationalism is juxtaposed Senghor's racial idealism, a position that at the outset is more so invested in culture than it is in politics. While both of Wright's and Senghor's presentations at the Congress provide us ways to analyze through their differences in outlook, a significant body of their earlier work prior to the Congress further illuminates their respective positions. With Wright, for instance, it is impossible to read the transcript of his presentation at the Congress and not see articulated within significant components of his thoughts in a volume he published just two years prior to the Congress, *Black Power: A Record of Reactions in a Land of Pathos* (1954), or aspects of his take on African American culture in his famed memoir *Black Boy* (1945). *Black Power* recounts Wright's impression of Ghana at the dawn of its independence, and when read closely is essentially the foundational text for much of Wright's assertions at the Congress.

More so than Aimé Césaire or Léon Gontran-Damas, the two other acknowledged founders of Négritude, Senghor from the 1950s to the 1970s seriously took upon the mantle of theorist of the concept, allowing not only his poetry to represent its values, but

also dedicating nonfictional volumes to explicating its merits. And regarding Senghor, it must be noted that the presentation he gave at the Congress should be read as an early articulation of his version of Négritude. It is thus conversant with earlier volumes of poetry he published a decade before the Congress, specifically *Chant d'ombres* (1945), *Hostie noires* (1948) and *Ethiopique* (1956).

Léopold Sédar Senghor: Négritude as a Theorization of a Black Ontology

The interaction between Senghor and Wright by the very first day of the Congress had intimated elements of their way of thinking that clearly showed significant divergences in their overall perspectives. Wright was among the first to comment on Léopold Sédar Senghor's presentation, "L'esprit de la civilisation, ou les lois de la culture négro-Africaine" ("The Spirit of Civilization, or the Laws of Negro-African Culture). This very eloquent presentation was effectively a metaphysical speculation on African subjectivity in opposition to European rationalism as well as an exploration of the ways in which African religious and aesthetic sensibilities partook in its own inner logic. Senghor's brief introduction to his ideas serves not simply as a way to understand African traditional culture in relation to European ways of thinking and apprehending reality, but also as a point of departure for an understanding of more specific and detailed descriptions and analyses of African cultural traditions that were to be presented at the Congress. However, while he prefaced his ideas as a useful background for presentations that were to follow his own, what Senghor was actually offering, was considerably more ambitious. He offered no less than a general theory of African culture that considerably drew from what many scholars have associated with his version of Négritude.

The concept of Négritude, of course, has a long embattled history within both

literary and academic circles.³¹ Senghor's place within the debate was solidified with his publication of the volume *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache* in 1948³² for which the French existentialist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre wrote a stirring preface ("Orphée noir") that set in motion some of the major terms of that debate. The volume reunited the works of poets originating from France's Francophone Caribbean and Sub-Saharan African colonies to articulate a quality of thought, behavior and sentiment specific to the historical experiences of African and African diasporic populations. While Sartre's appraisal of the poetry of the volume and of the movement positively highlighted the successful marriage of a socially engaged literature and subjective aesthetic expression,³³ he also pointed out what he regarded as certain fundamental tensions. The main thrust of these tensions revolved around Sartre's apprehension of the revolutionary potential of Negritude poetics in relation to a universal understanding of class struggle in a capitalist society as well as his belief that a recurring tenet of some of the poetry rested upon a problematic assertion of an essential black identity.

Sartre's resolution to these tensions was to look upon Négritude within a Hegelian and Marxist framework, whereby

La notion subjective, existentielle, ethnique de négritude «passe », comme dit Hegel, dans celle - objective, positive, exacte - de proletariat.

[the subjective, existential, ethnic notion of Négritude "passes," as Hegel says, into that which one has of the proletariat: objective, positive and precise.]³⁴

To this perspective on Négritude, Sartre later adds:

En fait, la Négritude apparaît comme le temps faible d'une progression dialectique: l'affirmation théorique et pratique de la suprématie du blanc est la

thèse; la position de la Négritude comme valeur antithétique est le moment de la négativité. Mais ce moment négatif n'a pas de suffisance par lui-même et les noirs qui en usent le savent fort bien[.]

[In fact, Négritude appears like the up-beat [un accented beat] of a dialectical progression: the theoretical and practical affirmation of white supremacy is the thesis; the position of Négritude as an antithetical value is the moment of negativity. But this negative moment is not sufficient in itself, and these black men who use it know this perfectly well[.]]³⁵

Sartre proposes that the promise of Négritude as an ideology of liberation lies in its relationship to struggles he considers universal in nature, such as the class struggle and the struggle against racism. Thus Négritude in one form becomes an initial funnel into proletarian consciousness, and in another that which allows for the unraveling of racism and white supremacist ideology—or what in another instance he refers to as an antiracist racism. Négritude as he describes it, however, is a “moment of negativity,” that which serves as an instrument to counter racial forms of oppression but which is in no way “sufficient in itself.” Thus, to Sartre, Négritude is ephemeral.

la Négritude est pour se détruire, elle est passage et non aboutissement, moyen et non fin dernière.

[Négritude is *for* destroying itself, it is a “crossing to” and not an “arrival at,” a means and not an end.]³⁶

The Martinican psychiatrist and revolutionary theorist, Frantz Fanon, famously responded to Sartre’s assessment of the Négritude movement in ways that can help us understand the indelible impact of the latter’s words on some black intellectuals and

within the context of the Congress an important contemporary debate that would have affected how Senghor's presentation was being received.³⁷ In the essay "L'expérience vécu du noir" ("The Lived Experience of the Black Man"), Fanon initially approaches Négritude as a life philosophy that would allow him, a raced subject, to find wholesomeness and acceptance in the world. However, reflecting upon Sartre's assessment of the movement, he remarks:

Quand je lus cette page, je sentis qu'on me volait ma dernière chance. Je déclarais à mes amis: "La generation des jeunes poètes noirs vient de recevoir un coup qui ne pardonne pas." On avait fait appel à un ami des peuples de couleur, et cet ami n'avait rien trouvé de mieux que montrer la relativité de leur action. Pour une fois cette hégélien-né avait oublié que la conscience a besoin de se perdre dans la nuit de l'absolu, seule condition pour parvenir à la conscience de soi.

[When I read this page, I thought they had robbed me of my last chance. I told my friends: "The generation of young black poets has just been dealt with a fatal blow." We had appealed to a friend of the colored peoples, and this friend had found nothing to better to do than demonstrate the relativity of their action. For once this friend, this born Hegelian, had forgotten that consciousness needs to get lost in the night of the absolute, the only condition for attaining self-consciousness.]³⁸

Here Fanon objects to Sartre's foreclosing of the legitimacy of a possible form of raced subjectivity that Négritude represents. Turning Sartre's usage of Hegel against him, Fanon reminds the existentialist philosopher that the dialectical process through which

self-consciousness is attained necessitates consciousness to lose itself “in the night of the absolute.” Fanon is critiquing Sartre’s vision of Négritude as a passing moment of negation, and instead presents the idea that in the process of self-recognition, the black consciousness Négritude entails must be thought of as a certainty in itself, as comprising an absolute, a being for itself.³⁹

However, even with this critique of Sartre’s position, it is clear that Fanon withholds his own doubts about the movement. He characterizes Négritude, for instance, as his “last chance” to attain a subjective sense of wholeness in the world. This way of framing the movement already assumes a defensive position, as it implies a fear of Négritude’s limitations. Fanon also stages a series of internal dialogues within the black colonized persona of his essay that essentially presents the fear that the black consciousness Négritude reifies may contain within itself an element of the futile and sterile.⁴⁰ Thus, we see in the essay that he describes how the colonized subject’s initial turn to Négritude is predicated upon his rejection as a raced/black subject from the realm of reason. It is this rejection that leads him to embrace a stereotypical association with the realm of irrationality—albeit an irrationality that retains some important redemptive values (“Puisque sur le plan de la raison, l’accord n’était pas possible, je me rejetais vers l’irrationalité”⁴¹/ “Since there was no way we could agree on the basis of reason, I resorted to irrationality”). Yet when feeling a certain sense of security that irrationality, as a proposed essence of black subjectivity, is the foundation of his unique oneness with the world, he is reminded by hegemonic whiteness⁴² that the very metaphysics of his existence is but a developmental stage:

vos qualités ont été épuisées par nous. Nous avons eu des mystiques de la terre

comme vous n'en connaîtrez jamais.

[Your distinctive qualities have been exhausted by us. We have had our back-to-nature mystics such as you will never have.]⁴³

Fanon in this way suggests that the route of Négritude could well turn out to be a dead-end. The black subject in his essay fears Négritude will not open up a new path for a sense of his place in the world. Looking for a philosophy that would provide him with the possibility to transcend the strictures of a raced existence, Fanon finds that this path is continually obstructed by the pervading logic of hegemonic whiteness, the internalized white gaze that haunts him. While Fanon's response to Sartre ultimately suggests an affirmation of the immanence of black consciousness, this affirmation presents itself as a willed effort to prevent a form of psychic self-destruction (*Et je prends cette négritude et, les larmes aux yeux, j'en reconstitue le mécanisme. Ce qui avait été mis en pièces est par mes mains, lianes intuitives, rebatue, édifié/ And I take this negritude and with tears in my eyes I piece together the mechanism*”).⁴⁴

Considering the brevity of Fanon's discussion of Négritude in his essay, it is fair to note that his critique of the movement was articulated in an oblique manner. It was a means to explore the dynamics of black subjectivity and not so much an in-depth assessment of Négritude itself. A few other early critics of Négritude, however, would more directly express their views about the movement by the time of the Congress, at times with unmistakable acrimony. Among those would include the young Togolese student Albert Franklin and the Senegalese intellectual and politician Gabriel d'Arboussier, who each penned an article in response to Négritude and Sartre's appraisal of the movement.⁴⁵ Franklin concentrated on how the attributes Sartre associated with

Négritude—for instance, ideas of the supposed African’s sense of rhythm, close relationship to nature, and pan-religiosity—were either colonialist stereotypes of African subjectivity, or cultural attributes that if applicable to African traditional cultures, were by no means only possessed by them alone. D’Arboussier, on the other hand, a committed Marxist, who associated Négritude with what he argued was the bourgeois sensibility of Sartre’s existentialist philosophy, considered Négritude a petty bourgeois project that in its emphasis on “race” provided a distraction from the material concerns of the European and colonized workers. Lastly, a brief literary spat between the young Haitian writer René Dépestre and Aimé Césaire around the question of poetic form and national poetry that graced the pages of the Journal *Présence Africaine* in 1955 would further highlight the contested nature over the literary and poetic intonations of Négritude.⁴⁶

If Sartre and Fanon’s discussions of Négritude could be said to consider Négritude on its own terms even as they revealed some of its contradictions, Franklin and D’Arboussier’s articles were largely polemics against the movement’s premises: D’Arboussier identifying it as reactionary in terms of its politics, and Franklin in terms of the dimensions of its intellectual analysis. In that sense it can be said that Senghor in his presentation sought to redirect apprehensions of his vision of Négritude by presenting the depths of its tenets beyond Sartre’s framing of the movement as a necessary reaction against racism, Fanon’s apprehension of it as an instrument for subjective identification, and the Franklin and D’Arboussier’s reductions of its articulations along the narrow lines of reactionary politics and ideology.

Thus Senghor began his presentation by directly addressing one of the main

criticisms leveled against his vision of Négritude, that it presents the black subject as devoid of reason. To counter this perspective, Senghor affirms a dichotomy between “European” reason and “African” reason that comes to texture a broader dichotomy he establishes between the way Europeans experience reality and being in the world and a distinctly African metaphysics of existence, or ontology. The conclusion he reaches as it pertains to the category of reason, for instance, is fundamentally relative in nature, as he does not seek to establish a strict hierarchy of reason along racial lines. He notes that while for the European reason is discursive and antagonistic, and operates on the level of analysis through utilization, for the African reason is synthetic and sympathetic, and operates on the level of intuition through participation.⁴⁷ Therefore, to Senghor, reason is identical in all human beings, however differences in personality and temperament do exist, and they influence how Africans and Europeans relate to the external world. Thus for Senghor, in the African context knowledge of the other occurs through a form of subjective abandonment where the “self” extends itself to the “other” resulting in a mutual integration.⁴⁸ This subjective and sympathetic method goes beyond the apprehension of the appearance of things; it transcends the immediate reality to insert itself into its most intimate characteristics. As the Francophone scholar Sylvia Bâ notes, knowledge of the “other” in this way necessitates “a communion of emotions as well as of wills, a meeting of persons instead of the more abstract ‘meeting of the minds’ that describes the western norm for understanding among men.”⁴⁹ Significant in these affirmations is Senghor’s ultimate belief that African rationality in this particular instance, but more broadly speaking African metaphysics of existence writ large, must be understood as abiding to its own particular logic within a closed system.

The logic of this system, as Senghor further explains in his presentation, is undergirded by the idea that life is at the center of everything that is and all human activity is essentially geared toward increasing and expressing one's vital force. This vital force is possessed by all within an ordered hierarchy, whereby God stands at the summit and is succeeded by ancestral spirits, man, animals, vegetables and minerals. The human subject is prioritized in that animals and inanimate objects have no end in themselves other than to support the action of the living and the dead, while ancestors, in order not to remain "perfectly dead" depend upon the living and must dedicate themselves to the reinforcement of life.⁵⁰ Thus human subjects have an organic relationship to the inanimate world and to the sacred.

Having broadly painted a picture of what he considers a uniquely African cosmology, Senghor later goes on to discuss African practices, such as religious rituals and the production of literature and art objects, and their integration in the social world. Here, especially as it relates to literature and the arts, Senghor is intent on presenting African sense of the aesthetic as one that primarily bears upon the functional, or the idea that beauty in the art object is attached to its eliciting a desired effect, be it that of joy, sadness, or of a material utilitarian purpose. Thus African art, to Senghor is necessarily socially engaged. It does not abide to an individualist ideal ("art for art's sake") but is embedded in a collectivity. Senghor further pushes the comparison he makes between what he considers European and African conceptions of art by noting that while in the Greco-Latin tradition art aims to imitate nature, in the African tradition it aims at knowledge of it through felt participation.⁵¹

Lastly, Senghor introduces what he considers the fundamental traits of an

“African style”: the concepts of image and rhythm. Describing these concepts, he notes that they reflect

L’architecture de l’être, le dynamisme interne qui lui donne forme...l’expression pure de la force vitale...le choc vibratoire, la force qui, à travers les sens, nous saisit à la racine de l’être.

[the architecture of being, the internal dynamic that gives shape...the pure expression of the vital force...the vibratory pulsation that through the senses seizes us at the root of our being]⁵²

Specifically concerning image, Senghor notes that in the African context image is not image-equation, but image-analogy, a surrealist image. The object does not signify what it represents, but what it suggests, or creates. Image therefore is a symbol, an ideogram pregnant with suggestive meaning. Rhythm, which to Senghor is consubstantial with image, cannot simply be understood as reflecting sound or tempo as it also expresses itself through lines, surfaces, colors, architecture, sculpture, and paintings. As an expression of the vital force it is incarnated in the sensuous, but directs its manifestations towards the mind. Senghor’s vision of rhythm is corporeal, but not in the sense where a binary is established between mind and body. For while rhythm is to be found in the physical plain, it is also there to illuminate the mind; there is thus a rational aspect to rhythm as it is not simply located in or reflective of a material body.⁵³

Senghor’s vision of Négritude, especially as it has often been associated with racial essentialism, has been the subject of a lot of scholarship over the last few decades. The recent work of a scholar, Donna V. Jones, has attempted to reframe our understanding of the movement Senghor was an important part of. Concerning the work

of the Négritude poets, Donna V. Jones has noted that these poets “accepted colonial stereotypes only to valorize them, and not transcend them” and “intent on reconnecting blacks around ancestral values, [they] could not properly emphasize their dialogue with the European thought, with which they had profound engagement.”⁵⁴ Here the colonial stereotypes Donna V. Jones is referring to, and which can be observed in Senghor’s presentation at the 1956 Congress, are surely the association of the Black or African subject with nature, sensuality and intense emotions. However, the boundaries between “valorization” and “transcendence” Donna V. Jones points out are tenuous in the sense that Senghor’s exploration of the supposed characteristics of Black or African subjectivity did not seek to reinforce colonial ideology, but sought to alter the apprehension of colonial knowledge produced about the colonized subject by re-grounding this knowledge in relative as opposed to strict hierarchical terms. Here the African subject’s relation to nature, sensuality and emotions, does not relegate that subject to an inferior status on an imagined scale of the human, rather it is aimed at providing greater legitimacy to the possibility of another way of being in the world. And while it reasonably can be argued that Senghor prioritized this “other way of being” over how he envisioned European apprehension and beingness in the world, this perspective can be also understood as a strategic defense of African subjectivity in relation to European dominance.

Engaging the work of various Francophone scholars, most significantly the literary scholar, Abiola Irele, but also Sylvia Washington Bâ, Christopher L. Miller, Janice Spleth, A. James Arnold, and Gary Wilder, Donna V. Jones further asserts that the Négritude poets (specifically Senghor and Césaire) had a profound, if not completely

acknowledged, engagement with a tradition of European modernism that drew upon antipositivism and irrationalist philosophy. Exploring the depth of this engagement with European thought, Jones provides a genealogy of Négritude that links it to a tradition of vitalist philosophy, of which the work of the very influential contemporary French philosopher, Henry Bergson, was particularly relevant. Jones considers that Bergson's idea of the "fundamental self," for instance, was reflected in Negritude's emphasis on racial authenticity. And while Senghor's use of the concept of "vital force" is ostensibly borrowed from the work of the Belgian missionary and ethnographer Placide Tempels, and his notion of "participation" from the French ethnographer Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, it remains that both men in turn were deeply influenced by Bergsonian principles. Abiola Irele perhaps best summarizes the deep imprint of Bergson on Senghor by noting that:

To Bergson, Senghor owes the concept of intuition of which revolves his explication of the African mind and consciousness. Bergson abolished with this concept the positivist dichotomy of subject-object, and proposed a new conception of authentic knowledge as immediacy of experience, the organic involvement of the subject with the object of his experience.⁵⁵

Here it can be said that in the ontological and epistemological differences he establishes between the European and the African, Senghor opposed Cartesian rationalism with Bergsonian irrationalism and Kantian preclusion of the possibility of absolute knowledge to Bergson's belief of the possibility of such knowledge through intuition.

If Senghor does not overly emphasize his philosophical debt to Bergson in influencing his vision of the African subject, he would several different times aver to the importance of ethnographical works in shaping his understanding of traditional African

culture. Along with the works of such ethnographers as Placide Tempels and Lucien Lévy-Bruhl could be added the works of Leo Frobenius and Maurice Delafosse, among others. These ethnographers challenged theories of African inferiority by presenting the complexity of African civilizations. Concerning the Négritude poets' and the work of ethnographers, Donna V. Jones pointedly notes that the Négritude thinkers' intellectual debts to ethnographers could be acknowledged because ethnographies provided validity to their "claims of a core ancestral African identity."⁵⁶ Here it is important to point out that what is emphasized is the significance of ethnographies as "providing evidence" of something the Négritude poets believed was always already there: a core African identity. Jones seems to imply that to acknowledge a dialogue between *Négritude* and modernism and European anti-intellectualist philosophy, on the other hand, would disrupt the centrality of that accepted ancestral myth, as the framework to understanding African subjectivity and African cultural reality would no longer be based upon that ancestral myth, but would instead be displaced onto European philosophical formulations. And as Abiola Irele aptly notes, "Senghor's purpose is to present through Négritude an independent African system of thought, a distinctive African humanism."⁵⁷ It goes without saying that to be independent and distinctive, this African humanism Senghor elaborates upon must be able to stand on its own two feet.

In this way Senghor's racial idealism, even with its problematic essentialist racial propositions, functions to allow a space for the possibility of normative difference, or a difference not deemed inferior. For Senghor, as well as Aimé Césaire and Léon-Gontran Damas, the question of difference was particularly relevant in relation to the colonial discourse of assimilation, which they actively resisted. As an ideological basis of French

colonial policy, assimilation from a cultural perspective denoted an extension of French culture and language to colonial subjects who would then theoretically become normative Frenchmen or women, vested with the cultural essence of a deemed superior civilization. In an interview with the Haitian writer René Dépestre, Aimé Césaire would say about Négritude that it represented “a resistance to the politics of *assimilation*” as well a “struggle against *alienation*.”⁵⁸ This very basic definition of Négritude (and there are several) is one that Senghor would readily agree with, especially as it emphasizes a connection between a subjective sense of inner turmoil associated with the idea of alienation, and the condition of a loss of racial and cultural particularity associated with the idea of assimilation.

Frantz Fanon’s work *Peau noire, masques blancs* (*Black Skin, White Masks*), well illustrates the sense of alienation affecting the colonized subject in the midst of Metropolitan culture. In his treatment of the theme of a black consciousness alienated from itself, however, Fanon never clearly posits a definite resolution. The sense of alienation simply remains a fundamental characteristic of black modern subjectivity. And if one does want to make the argument that Fanon does propose some form of resolution, one would likely have to demonstrate a thematic continuity between *Peau noir* and the later work *Les damnés de la terre* (*The Wretched of the Earth*), where liberation for the colonized subject—both material and psychological—occurs through revolutionary acts of violence against the colonial regime in the struggle for independence.

To Léopold Sédar Senghor, however, there is a nonviolent remedy for this sense of alienation and it is contingent upon a reintegration of the black subject within an

African cultural matrix. As previously noted, Senghor's vision of Négritude adheres to the idea that it is a metaphysics of existence specific to the black subject. Hence the process of assimilation is particularly violent, as it demands of the subject a renunciation of a fundamental aspect of the self, that it must negate that self in order to assume an "other" way of being.

As far back as the 1930s, Senghor, along with Césaire and Damas, were insistent that the form of alienation produced as a result of the ideology of assimilation was the primary site of the black colonized subject's struggle for liberation.⁵⁹ For this reason they considered that "culture"—at different times denoting tradition, racial particularity, historical heritage, or collective consciousness, and conceived both in local and transnational terms—held priority over politics as the primary arena for resistance. It is in this way that the colonial governor Hubert Deschamps could cite Senghor to support his vision of a reformed political relationship of France and its overseas colonies. Political independence even by the middle of the 1950s did not necessarily strike the latter as the essential condition for liberation from colonial oppression.⁶⁰ The political arena to Senghor appeared to have been a condition that took a backseat to the ontological problem of black beingness in the world. What therefore concerned him more was what he considered to be more intrinsic to the problem of colonialism: the negation of the cultural values and worldview of the colonized subject and that subject's internalization of that negation through cultural assimilation. This of course does not mean Senghor was unconcerned about the material realities of colonial oppression, but simply that his vision of resistance to such oppression did not fall along strict political nationalist or independentist lines.⁶¹ Senghor was primarily concerned with the problem of the psychic

negative, the operation of negation and loss he felt an alienated and ontologically unmoored black subjectivity underwent in the era of modernity.

Léopold Sédar Senghor: Poetry and the Poet's Political Imagination

By the time of the Congress, Senghor had firmly established himself as a key political figure. In 1945, with the support of Lamine Gueyè, an influential Senegalese statesman and early mentor, Senghor won a seat in the French National Assembly, representing his native Senegal as deputy. Such early success in politics would be followed by further success, including positions in the cabinet of presidents Félix Faure, and culminating in Senghor's 1960 election as the first president of an independent Senegal. The man, however, who presented himself before the 1956 Congress did so not as a politician, but as an accomplished poet, or in the language of the language of the Congress, as a "man of culture." By the time of the Congress Senghor had published several volumes of poetry, including *Chants d'ombres* (1945), *Hosties noires* (1948) and *Ethiopiennes* (1956), which in their respective ways reflect aspects of both the poet's aesthetic vision and political imagination. These works all unvaryingly expressed key cornerstones of Senghorian poetry: e.g. recurring themes of memory and exile, expressions of visions of a pre-colonial African homeland as the kingdom of childhood, references to Christianity, as well as traditional African belief systems, and the significance of ancestral figures, among others.

While these various themes circulate in all three volumes, each volume stresses particular aspects of his poetry in terms of form and thematic concerns. *Ethiopiennes*, for instance, is notable for its sustained experimentation in dramatic verse (the narrative and staged dialogue in the long poem "Chaka"), thematic treatment of mythic African figures

(both mythological and historical—“L’homme et la bête”, “Le Kaya-Magan” and “Chaka”), and the simple fact that every poem of the volume is marked by a performance of some kind—all the poems in the volume, for instance, are meant to be accompanied for the most part by an African traditional musical instrument (the exception is the poem “À New York”, meant for a solo Jazz trumpet). Of the early volumes *Ethiopiennes* stands as the work most marked by Senghor’s interest in exploring the formal and aesthetic possibilities of long narrative verse in the presentation of distinctly African traditional stories and mythic figures.

While some of the poems in *Chants d’ombre* prefigure Senghor’s later work in *Ethiopique* as it relates to his use of long narrative verse, with both *Chants d’ombre* and *Hosties noirs*, we are provided with more of a sense of the poet’s grappling with more immediate realities, specifically his experience of living in France in the first volume and his experience of the Second World War as a prisoner of war in German occupied France. Several of the poems in *Chants d’ombre* constitute some of Senghor’s better known work (e.g. “Femme noire,” “Le Message,” “Neige sur Paris,” “Nuit de Sine” and “Prière aux Masques”), embodying the poet’s recurring preoccupation with a feeling of separateness and alienation from his European surroundings, his vision of a return to a pre-colonial homeland, his invocations of African masks and totemic figures as representative of both African art artifacts and, more generally, the spirit of African culture, and the poet’s celebration of the African milieu under various registers—e.g. the black woman in “Femme noire” as a corporeal presence that is an object of romantic desire as well a symbol of maternal love and nurturing, but also as an entity that allows for a counterhegemonic meditation on beauty with African cultural references serving as the

inspiration for such a meditation. The feeling that permeates throughout *Chants d'ombre* is of the poet—often in a hostile environment, and often having to rely on remembrance of his African homeland—attempting to retain a sense normalcy and wholesomeness.

It is notable that in comparison to the combativeness of Aimé Césaire's earlier treatment of the colonial situation in *Cahier d'un return au pays natal* (*Notebook of a Return to the Native*), or the sense of psychological turmoil and fragmentation we are presented with in Frantz Fanon's exploration of the sense of alienation of the black colonial subject in *Peau noir, masques blancs* (*Black Skin White Masks*), Senghor's treatment of the colonial condition in *Chants d'ombre* is remarkably relatively devoid of any allusions to wrenching conflict between colonized and colonizer or of a general spirit of indignation. "Neige sur Paris" is in fact the lone poem in the volume that references the European imperialist project under those lights. Reflecting upon this project, the speaker in the poem remarks,

Elles abattirent la forêt noire pour en faire des traverses de chemin de
fer

Elles abattirent les forêts d'Afrique pour sauver la Civilisation, parce
qu'on manquait de matière première humaine.

[They tore down the black forest to build a railroad,

They cut down Africa's forests to save Civilization,

Because they needed human raw material.]⁶²

However this feeling of anger and frustration quickly subsides and makes room for that of fraternity and Christian forgiveness.

Seigneur, je ne sortirai pas ma réserve de haine, je le sais, pour les

diplomates qui montrent leurs canines longues
 Et qui demain troqueront la chair noire.
 Mon cœur, Seigneur, s'est fondu comme neige sur les toits de Paris
 Au soleil de votre douceur
 Il est doux à mes ennemis, à mes frères aux mains blanches sans
 neige
 A cause aussi des mains de rosée, le soir, le long de mes joues
 brûlantes.
 [Lord, I will never release this reserve of hatred,
 For diplomats who show their long canine teeth
 And tomorrow trade in black flesh.
 My heart, Lord, has melted like snow on the roofs of Paris
 In the sunshine of your gentleness.
 It is kind even unto my enemies and unto my brothers
 With white hands without snow
 Because of these hands of dew, in the evening,
 Upon my burning cheeks.]⁶³

Here, despite the historical baggage of colonization and war, Senghor affirms the possibility of cultural acceptance and openness between Africa and Europe, whose differences in the volume are articulated more so along the lines of culture than politics. Thus throughout *Chants d'ombre* the reader is presented with a poetic voice ultimately concerned with engaging African myths and cultural rituals. These, as has been alluded, are often deployed as a means for the poet to preserve a sense of equilibrium in a hostile

environment, to in essence maintain his “ontological” African-ness. However, the poet’s articulations, also serve to present, describe and extol the value and vitality of traditional African culture.

The volume *Hosties noirs*, which was published three years following the end of the Second World War, consists of poems written for the most part while Senghor was living in German occupied France, during which he was for a stretch of two years a prisoner of war in various labor camps. Translated as “Black Hosts,” the volume’s title aptly directs the reader’s attention to the ritual of the Eucharist, as the two prevailing images circulating throughout this collection of poetry are the speaker’s devout Roman Catholic faith and a vision of the African soldiers who fought for France during World War II as Christ-like figures whose sacrifices allowed for the country’s rebirth. The introductory poem of the volume, “Poème Liminaire,” announces the project the speaker has in mind.

Vous tirailleurs Sénégalais, mes frères noirs à la main chaude sous la
 glace et la mort
 Qui pourra vous chanter si ce n’est votre frère d’armes, votre frère de
 sang?
 [You Senegalese Soldiers, my black brothers with the warm hands
 under ice and death
 Who could praise you if not your brother-in-arms, your brother
 in blood?] ⁶⁴

This project is to ensure that the memory of the valiant sacrifice of African soldiers—killed and mistreated during the war, and in its aftermath often denied their rightful place

along the pantheon of martyrs who died to safeguard the French republic—does not fall into oblivion. While Senghor does not refrain from displaying the various humiliations these soldiers were subjected to and the irony of their engagement as a colonized population in a war to liberate their colonizers, Christian forgiveness and the metaphor of Christ-like sacrifice as the necessary medium to bring about a new and better world allow for the surfacing of fraternity. Hence in “Prière de Paix”, the speaker can say,

Seigneur Dieu, pardonne à l'Europe blanche!

Et il est vrai, Seigneur, que pendant quatre siècles de lumières elle a
jeté la bave et les abois de ses molasses sur mes terres

[...]

Seigneurs, pardonne à ceux qui ont fait des Askia des maquisards, de
mes princes des adjutants

De mes domestiques des boys et de mes paysans des salariés, de mon
peuple un peuple de prolétaires.

[...]

Car il faut que Tu oublies ceux qui ont exporté dix millions de mes fils
dans les maladreries de leurs navires

Qui en ont supprimé deux cents millions.

[Lord, forgive white Europe!

Yes, it is true, Lord, that for four centuries of enlightenment

She has thrown her spit and her baying watchdogs on my lands

[...]

Lord, forgive those who turned Askias into guerilla fighters,

My princes into sergeants, my house servants into “boys,”
 My peasants into wage earners, and my people
 Into a race of the working class.

[...]

For You must forget those who exported ten million
 Of my sons in the leperous holds of their ships
 That killed two hundred million more.]⁶⁵

Here, while the poet’s message is one of reconciliation and forgiveness, he nonetheless lists the crimes for which forgiveness is sought, in so doing illustrating his awareness of colonial exploitation. And although the poet’s Catholic faith is an important element of what enables him to overcome feelings of anger and resentment, an overarching belief that the African continent can offer something salutary to mankind also significantly informs his ability to overcome such sentiments. This is expressed in “Au Gouverneur Éboué,” a poem dedicated to Félix Éboué a black French-Guinean born colonial administrator who during WWII was a leader of the Free France movement. In the poem, the speaker remarks,

Voilà que l’Afrique se dresse, la Noire et la Brune sa soeur.
 L’Afrique s’est faite acier blanc, l’Afrique s’est faite hostie noir
 Pour que vive l’espoir de l’homme.
 [Now Africa rises up, the black woman and her sister, the brown.
 Africa, become white steel, Africa, become black host
 So the hope of man can live.]⁶⁶

The African continent in the poem stands as a defender of hope out of the chaos of war.

In the continent's performance of that role the poet associates it both as a combatant in armed struggle and as willing sacrifice.

This succinct overview of Senghor's poetry prior to the Congress is meant to highlight a few aspects of his poetic vision that is expressive of the political intonations of his Négritude poetics. In its obvious preoccupation with the contribution of African soldiers *Hosties noirs* most clearly expresses a political vision. The poet continually refers to France as a republic even in relation to colonized African soldiers. The volume as a whole generally discusses France along its republican revolutionary tradition rather than its nationalist imperial undertakings. While troubling, one could not in good conscience accuse Senghor of simply turning a blind eye toward the problems of colonialism, or of ignoring the very fact that the revolutionary tradition he alludes to was never truly meant to include black colonial subjects. Rather the volume comes off as a strategic attempt to perform several functions. The first and most obvious is to commemorate the sacrifices of African soldiers in the war's aftermath, where erasure of their contributions both during and after the war was already being undertaken. The second, and slightly more subtle, is an appeal to France's republican revolutionary heritage as a means to have that nation live up to the ideals of that tradition. Lastly, the third, and possibly least apparent function (and depending on one's political ideological leanings exemplifying either a radical political imagination or a regrettable accommodationists and collaborationist one) is a tentative gesture towards writing the body of the colonized African within the constitutive narrative of the French nation-state. Here, relying on the discourse of the connection between the formation of the nation-state and warfare—a discourse in which the dead soldier becomes emblematic of the nation

that emerges out of the chaos of war as the guarantor of freedom and liberty, and as the mid-wife of a new political order—Senghor infers that the African soldier and his sacrifices should be understood as a contributive agent to the formation of the French nation-state.

Even as the political intonations of *Chants d'ombre* are indirect, a reading of this collection and *Ethiopiennes* as expressive of the political dimension of Senghor's Négritude poetics would consider the poet's relative lack of emphasis of the objective material conditions that inform colonialism, his vision of the African continent in a traditional and pre-colonial mode, and his subjective exploration of themes such as those of exile and alienation, highlight the significance of the notion of racial, cultural and ontological particularity in Senghor's thoughts. *Chants d'ombre* and *Éthiopiennes* work to construct African subjectivity along a very specific realm of experiences that is distinguishable from what is constructed as essentially European. Hence the African subject living in exile, for instance, experiences the feeling of alienation in so far as the African cosmological world that informs the essence of his or her being is no longer there. To Senghor this ontological particularity of the African is the essence of his or her being. It is more so threatened by the ideological imperatives of assimilation than it is by the political relationship colonialism entails. It is because of this that for Senghor culture is the primary site of the colonized subject's struggle for liberation. Culture represents an expression of a particular outlook upon the world. This perspective of the significance of culture for a people's liberation is more attuned to cultural nationalism than the ideals we associate with political nationalism. Hence if *Hosties noires* gestures toward the integration of the African within the French body politic through its discourse of soldierly

sacrifice, *Chants d'ombre* and *Éthiopiennes* can be said to express a pluralist political vision in that if colonialism is not fervently critiqued as a political formation, the ideological imperative of assimilation is critiqued as that which denies the African his or her right to normative difference within the political order.

Senghor ended his presentation at the 1956 Congress by expressing a series of thoughts that further exemplify his pluralist conception of humanity. Senghor declared that:

Chaque peuple réunit, en son visage, les divers traits de la condition humaine [...] La nature a bien fait les choses, qui a voulu que chaque peuple, chaque race, chaque continent cultivât, avec une dilection particulière, certaines vertus de l'homme; en quoi réside précisément son originalité.

[Each population gathers in own image the various features of the human condition. Nature has made it so that every population, every race, every continent, cultivates with own particular dilection certain human virtues; it is in this wherein precisely their originality lies.]⁶⁷

In this statement it is clear that Senghor views race as an objective reality that is indicative of an inner identity.. Senghor sees races as distinctive branches of the human family, each with its own particular predilection, gift and message to the broader human family. He thus conceives of humanity in plural terms, and views that the various branches of humanity have distinctive teleological historical missions and destinies that contribute to humanity's overall development. While it is clear here that Senghor's perspective on race can rightly be summed up as essentialist and his thinking very much racialist in mode, the project it supports cannot be reduced to the ideologies one might

readily associate with essentialism and racialism—racism and racial chauvinism. Rather, Senghor's perspective, which is also a purview into his vision of Négritude, can be said to be strategic, insofar as it attempts to create a space for normative difference using the very racist thinking that informs racist ideologies. In that sense, there is a radicalism to his vision as it promotes a non-hierarchical apprehension of the non-European racial other as belonging to a whole other order of being from an ontological standpoint, without the other's difference being deemed as abject and inferior.

In this way, it can perhaps be said that Senghor understood the problems of colonialism to have been the result of a fundamental misunderstanding: racial difference as indicative of inferiority, rather than—what he would propose—as indicative of a normative ontological difference characteristic of humanity. Senghor's pluralist vision of humanity can be seen by the time of the 1956 Congress as being at the root of a political vision that was conversant with Hubert Deschamps' advocacy of a restructuring of French relationship to its colonies along more democratic lines, in so far as what mattered to him most, and what he believed to be the most egregious aspect of colonialism, was not the lack of political autonomy—which in some ways a democratic federation would provide something of a resolution—but *the denial of the African subject's normative ontological particularity*. For a materialist thinker like Wright, however, Senghor's racial idealism was an insufficient, unrealistic, and overly romantic understanding and analysis of the conditions that inform racial oppression. Colonialism to Wright was the instantiation of a dynamic of power and domination as well as the legacy of not only European intrusion upon the African continent but also as the historical inability of traditional African societies to meet the challenges of industrial modernity.

Richard Wright: The Black Modern Subject and Historical Change

At the time of the Congress Richard Wright was living in France as the most renowned black writer in the world. Wright's status was essentially reflected in the fact that he had been chosen to deliver the Congress's closing lecture. Wright's significance to the event, however, would extend beyond his mere presence at the Congress. As a long-standing supporter and contributor to Alioune Diop's journal *Présence Africaine*, he had also served as a key organizer in the early days of the planning of the event and was initially specifically responsible for putting together the American delegation.⁶⁸ While none of the figures he originally had in mind became part of that delegation, throughout the Congress Wright was something of a mediator between the African American members of the U.S. delegation and other Congress attendants. The stress of this responsibility was apparent to even James Baldwin. The latter understood that especially after the Du Bois message accusing the American delegation of surveillance on behalf of the US State Department had publically been read, the members of that delegation (which of course included Wright) were in a very embarrassing situation.⁶⁹

Wright, however, would not let the controversy that transpired over the Du Bois message alter the essence of his message to the Congress. And while the various discussions and lectures he had been privy to over the course of the Congress made him consider revisiting his prepared lecture in order to take into account his changing perceptions and formulations, he ultimately felt it was more important for him to dedicate the time it would have taken him to revise the prepared lecture to the actual work of engaging the various writers, intellectuals and artists present.⁷⁰ The event was very significant for Wright. It reflected a culmination of his evolving interest in the

transnational dimensions of black liberation struggles, and the movement toward decolonization. In Wright's own words, this evolving interest was not altogether unrelated to his decision to leave the United States for France. It was one of the results of his break with his "former attitudes as a Negro and a Communist."⁷¹ As he would tell fellow expatriate writer William Garner Smith, it denoted his attempt to "grapple with the big problem—the problem and meaning of Western civilization as a whole and the relation of Negroes and other minority groups to it."⁷² Thus In the three years leading to the Congress Wright had visited and written about the Gold Coast (future Ghana) in its transition to national independence (*Black Power*, 1954), and had reported upon the seminal anticolonial Bandung Conference that took place in Indonesia in 1955 (*The Color Curtain*, 1956). The writer who had so poignantly made his mark in American literature and culture via the force of his fictional and nonfictional dramatizations of American racism in the 1930s and 1940s, was throughout the 1950s cultivating an internationalist outlook. This outlook consolidated Wright's materialist and psychological understanding of the operations of racial oppression and subordination, a Du Boisian-like understanding of the global contours of racial/racist discourses, and a vision that the contemporary global political economy mired in Cold War conflicts and anticolonial movements reflected a key historical moment of transition.

So while Wright was ambivalent about the "cultural" emphasis of the Congress, he saw in the event a political announcement of sorts and an opportunity to participate in a dialogue that included the leading black intellectual cadre of the age. Wright's correspondence with the pan-Africanist socialist George Padmore reveals as much. Seemingly responding to the "culture" theme of the Congress, Padmore who was in

conversation with Alioune Diop and the other organizers of the Congress, advised Wright that politics did not need to be stressed in the statement because, as he states, “it will take care of itself at the conference.”⁷³ The theme of “culture” to Padmore, and arguably to Wright as well, was interpreted as a convenient means to allow for the actual staging of the Congress. If, like everyone else, Wright apprehended the staging of the Congress through the history of slavery, imperialism and colonialism that characterized the African diaspora, his perspective on its aims was deeply informed by his vision of what needed to be achieved in the present moment, mainly decolonization and national liberation. In this way, it is significant to reiterate that Wright approached the concept of culture in very different ways than either Senghor or Diop, who were both invested in the Negritude movement’s idealist framing of culture and race. Wright’s perspective on “culture,” like the definition of the concept itself, was admittedly varied. But in its variations it was conversant with other participants at the Congress. Hence similar to the Frantz Fanon of *The Wretched of the Earth*, “culture” to Wright was something that should selectively be put at the service of the nation building process⁷⁴—a process that first and foremost needed the economic and intellectual capital to realize itself. Similar to another delegate at the Congress, the Haitian writer Jacques Stephen Alexis, Wright can also be said to have conceived of “culture” as the material and immaterial expression of a specific group of people bounded by time (history) and space (geography, region).⁷⁵ Also, although it had been over a decade since he had left the Communist Party, Wright still in some ways ascribed to a Marxist conception of “culture” along the lines of ideology—as a manifestation of the economic base of a given society.⁷⁶ All three aspects of his vision

on culture informed his lecture at the Congress. These aspects of his vision of culture were also reflected in *Black Power* (1954), his account about his trip to the Gold Coast.

Richard Wright began “Tradition and Industrialization: The Plight of the Tragic African Elite” by first couching his ideas in relation to who he is: a Western subject and a man of color. He posits these two aspects of who he is as the hard facts of his existence that to varying degrees condition his general outlook on life. Insofar as he is a black man and a Westerner, he considers himself in a split position that grants him a “double vision.” This “double vision” Wright explains,

stems from my being a product of Western civilization and from my racial identity which is organically born of my being a product of that civilization. Being a Negro living in a white Western Christian society, I’ve never been allowed to blend, in a natural and healthy manner, with the culture and civilization of the West...I regard my position as natural, though others, that is, Western whites, would have to make a most strenuous effort of imagination to grasp it.

In this statement, Wright defines his subjectivity in relation to his immediate circumstances: his spacial location (North American and European) and temporal situatedness (the era of modernity and the historical circumstances that are the result of his presence in the West as a racial other). Even though he considers himself an outsider precluded from an organic sense of belonging to the very place that informs his identity, he apprehends this condition as one that is natural. He is the West’s internal other who through the accidents of birth and history has been made to both be an insider and an outsider. In this way, as Wright later infers, while in and of the West, he is also detached

from it because of a hegemonic racial discourse embedded in the very idea of what the West is that excludes the raced subject as always other.⁷⁷

A strong comparison can appropriately be made between Wright's use of the term "double vision" here and W.E.B. Du Bois earlier theorization of the African American condition in the United States as a form of "double-consciousness." Both terms evoke the self-conscious individual's assessments of a fundamental contradiction between "being" in a place and "belonging" to it in wholesome and organic fashion. This similarity extends to the form of conscious this doubleness conditions. For if to Wright, this condition lies at the base of the raced subject's "detached" apprehension of his circumstances and his position as both an insider and outsider in the West, to Du Bois, "double consciousness" resulted in having "second sight," or a privileged epistemological perspective African Americans have by the virtue of belonging and exclusion, of being both inside and outside of the white world.⁷⁸

However, while Wright's idea of the Western black subject's "double vision" and Du Bois "double consciousness" share this idea of the privileged perspective of the insider who is also an outsider, it would be wrong to assume that Wright was doing no more than simply re-articulating a vision of black subjectivity that Du Bois had already posited. This is most noticeable when we look at his usage of the same term "double vision" in his 1953 novel *The Outsider*. Although not critically well received—in part because of Wright's departure from the social realist genre he had made his name on, but also because of his position as a writer in exile seemingly experimenting with a foreign literary genre, existentialist fiction—this novel is a complex meditation on American racism, with a central character, Cross Damon, who unlike the protagonist Bigger

Thomas of Wright's earlier novel, *Native Son*, possessed the intellect to articulate his discomfort and desire for freedom from America's racial status quo. At a crucial moment early in the novel, the character Ely Houston tells Cross Damon,

The way Negroes were transported to this country and sold into slavery, then stripped of their tribal culture and held in bondage; and then allowed so teasingly and over so long a period of time, to be sucked into our way of life is something which *resembles the rise of all men*...[my italics]

[...]They are outsiders and ...[t]hey are going to be self-conscious ; they are going to be gifted with a double vision, for, being Negroes, they are going to be both *inside* and *outside* of our culture at the same time...They will not only be Americans or Negroes; they will be centers of knowing, so to speak...The political, social, and psychological consequences of this will be enormous.⁷⁹

Commenting on this scene, the Marxist political scientist Cedric Robinson has aptly noted that Wright was in effect presenting the argument that African Americans had been re-created from

their African origins by an oppressive system of capitalist exploitation that had at one and the same time integrated them into the emergent organization of industrial production while suspending them from the full impact of bourgeois ideology.⁸⁰

The result of this was that black laborers, unlike their European counterpart, had faced a racial discourse that mediated their internalization of "the ruling ideas of American democracy" and this situation had conditioned a "psychic and cultural identity independent from bourgeois ideology."⁸¹ In Robinson's estimation of Wright's notion of

“double vision” we see a link to a material reality that has a political resonance, unlike with Du Bois’ theorization of “double-consciousness” that remains an epistemological condition. The idea of the black American’s “psychic and cultural independent identity” Robinson credits Wright with is effectively a reframing of Wright’s notion of the black subject’s “detached” apprehension of his surroundings that goes beyond identifying that subject with a privileged form of knowledge. Wright, as Robinson understands him, associates the insight of the black subject with an insurgent political consciousness that has the potential to be a “historical force that [could] challenge the very foundation of Western civilization[.]”⁸² In this sense, Wright’s “detached” raced subject, is potentially a powerful political agent. So in addition to denoting an epistemological condition, Wright’s usage of the term “double-vision” is also imbued with political valiance.⁸³

Within the context of the Congress Wright’s statement was also significant for another reason: it announced how different his vision was from those who would subscribe to Négritude ideology, especially Senghor’s version. In the passage from *The Outsider* quoted earlier, the character of Ely Houston notes that the tragedy of the black subject’s oppression by another group “resembles the plight of all men.” Here it is clear that Houston is arguing that oppression is not synonymous with blackness and in that sense the black American experience in the United States is not unique. He associates their plight with a universal human condition. And given Ely Houston’s ideological penchant, we can safely assume that his statement is reflective of a Marxist take on the position of an exploited working class in relation to the bourgeoisie. He therefore sees the specificity of the black struggle in relation to a global vision of class oppression. Race, from this perspective, is not considered a category that informs essential

differences between blacks and whites. What is more significantly emphasized is that as workers blacks and whites are lodged within the same class position vis-à-vis the economic forces that oppress them. However if Houston's view of the black American's position in the US is that it is not unique, it remains that he regards it as somewhat peculiar. For although Houston's statement implies a rejection of the notion of the essential or ontological particularity of the black subject vis-à-vis whites, he does regard that in the West the black subject's experience is indelibly racial. It is so as a product of racism as well as social, economic, and political exclusion. Black particularity as Wright expresses it through Houston is therefore not based on anything that has to do with the idea of an ontological difference. Black particularity is simply a product of a peculiar historical situation.

One can, of course, conceive of how the "two-ness" Wright describes can lead to a form of psychological estrangement or alienation, a significant theme in the poetry of Senghor. This sense of alienation Wright envisions, however, is actually not conversant with how Senghor characterizes the colonized subject. For Senghor the black colonized subject continually yearns for a traditional homeland, especially from a position of exile. If in Senghor's vision there is a duality to the black colonized subject's existence in the metropole, this condition is the result of that subject's distance from the cosmological world that informs his or her very existence. Nor is Senghor's despair over the prospect of cultural assimilation, an aspect of French colonial policy, similar to Wright's understanding of the Western black subject's situation who, to Wright, is already ensconced in the West. While cultural assimilation to Senghor connotes an erasure of an authentic and essential black identity, Wright conceives of no such a priori black identity.

The black Western subject's identity, to Wright, is a reflection of an immediate set of social, political, historical, economic and ideological circumstances characteristic of the Western milieu that informs his or her existence. This subject is therefore a particular reification of the era modernity. Blackness to that subject does not bespeak an ontological disposition; rather that subject's racial otherness, to Wright, is an imposed condition that gives rise to the dynamic of a constant wrestling with contradictions the raced subject cannot step outside of. A return to an ideal previous condition of existence, from this perspective, is not a realistic possibility.

Wright's brief allusion to his position as a Westerner early on in the presentation, at the same time that it presents a rebuttal of the Senghorian notion of an essential black identity, also allows him to make certain claims about the West, especially regarding what he believes are its positive values. Of these, Wright would note a tendency toward secularism, a belief in the separation of church and state, a belief in the freedom of speech, the idea that human beings can endow their lives with sufficient meaning, and lastly a belief in the autonomy of art. These values are reflective of what Wright regards as Western culture's spirit of objectivity. It is a spirit, he argues, that was initially observable in Ancient Greece, but was later subdued in the advent of a religious worldview throughout Europe. The Protestant Reformation spearheaded by Martin Luther and John Calvin, to Wright, signaled the eventual overturning of this religious worldview through the assertion that "each man has a right to stand face to face with God."⁸⁴ Wright associates Calvin and Luther's heresy with the rise of science and industry and "[the nullification] of past notions of social structures, negated norms of nobility, of tradition, of priestly values." This new set of conditions, Wright states,

fostered “new social classes, new occupations, new structures of government, new pleasures, hungers, dreams, in short, a new and unheard of universe.”⁸⁵

This broad and strategic teleological overview of European development Wright provides in the early part of his presentation is meant to serve both as a model for the African continent, and a foundation from which to build upon. For what Wright wants to highlight in Europe’s passage from the religiosity of the feudal era to the secularity of the era of modernity is a shift in what he refers to as a worldview characterized by irrationalism to one characterized by the spirit of objectivity and rationality. However, while he largely credits the period of the scientific revolution and the Enlightenment as that which allowed for Europe’s transition to an objective and secular spirit, he also infers that this project remains unfinished. The sign of the incompleteness of this project are the racism and Christian religious ideology that, along with economic imperatives, provided impetus for the imperialist enterprise, and that continued to linger in the West. Wright insinuates that rather than halt racism, the new social, intellectual and technological developments as well as the Christian religion combined to better arm racist ideology. Yet, as Wright later states, what European imperialism had also unintentionally done in its march toward economic plunder and exploitation was to “smash the irrational ties of religion and custom and tradition in Asia and Africa,”⁸⁶ a condition that propelled these regions and territories into the era of modernity.

Some scholars have represented Wright’s statement as a reflection of a clear Eurocentric bias. As previously noted, the philosopher Kwame A. Appiah would readily associate Wright’s views on the continent with a centuries old tradition of cultural outsiders misrepresenting Africa.⁸⁷ Responding specifically to Wright’s presentation at

the Congress, the scholar of African American letters, Henry Louis Gates, would on his own end acrimoniously dismiss Wright's lecture as an exemplification of what he describes as Wright's belief that the African artists and intellectuals who surrounded him were "so backward, so unenlightened, so unevolved, that he doubted that they would even be able to *take* in his analysis."⁸⁸ In light of the extent of Wright's involvement with the Congress, Wright's relationship to the African and Caribbean writers and intellectuals who worked to organize it, his deep engagement and concern with the fate of African countries, and the great historical role he places on the shoulders of African statesmen and intellectuals whom he believed were up to the task of meeting the challenges of nation-building, Gates' statement comes off more as a consequence of his personal dislike of Richard Wright⁸⁹ than as an objective assessment of Wright's perspective on the intellectual capacities of African intellectuals. Wright scholar John M. Reilley, on the other hand, has more sympathetically explained the author's statements at the Congress as connotative of the latter's "rationalist, and Western self-image."⁹⁰ In a very brief overview of Wright's presentation Reilley tried to provide some form of explanation for what he also apprehends as the condescending tone of some of Wright's statements by noting that Wright's speech was "[h]ardly designed to announce total solidarity with Third World leaders."⁹¹ Reilley, in this one instance, however, is also somewhat off the mark. For one, the Congress could not, unlike the Bandung Conference of 1955, be labeled a gathering of Third World leaders. While figures present such Aimé Césaire, Léopold Sédar Senghor, and Jacques Rabemananjara (from Madagascar), for instance, in addition to being creative writers, were also either politicians or engaged political activists, the overwhelming majority of the delegates present were writers and

intellectuals, who although critical of the colonial condition in their lives and works, were by no means leaders of political movements. Also, the sense that we are provided of Wright's presentation through the transcript is that he greatly misunderstood the significance to his audience of the traditional cultures and religious beliefs systems he was decrying. This is apparent in how he interspersed his presentation with remarks questioning how valid the perspective he was proposing was in light of his experiences at the Congress.

Rather, what the writer and literary critic J. Saunders Redding remarked about Wright in an estimation of the writer's life and work seems particularly fitting in regards to Wright at the Congress. Saunders wrote that Wright "did not have the ironic cast of mind and heart" and that "[i]n public—and his books were public—he took the world and all men as he took himself, with deadly seriousness."⁹² Saunders, an accomplished writer himself who was an avid, if not often vexed, reader and reviewer of Wright's works throughout the 1950s, was summing up some of what made Wright a particularly provocative writer, intellectual and critic ever since his publication of *Native Son*. His statement is therefore expressive of what he believed were important aspects of the writer's personality and writing style that often jarred the reader with its unsentimental honesty and grimness of outlook. Redding, however, was also likely commenting on Wright's surprising inability or unwillingness to consider in greater depth the inner logic of certain cultural nuances and to depict them in less judgmental language. In a review of *Black Power*, for instance, Redding took notice of Wright's tone of condescension toward certain aspect of traditional Ghanaian tradition. Commenting on this, he remarked that such "phenomena... even allowing for his writer's sensitivity, should not have phased

him.”⁹³ In this reaction, Redding insinuates that Wright’s life background should have enabled him to draw out a keener understanding of his experiences in Ghana. Also, although this review specifically concerned *Black Power*, it is doubtful Redding would not have in mind Wright’s representations of black rural culture in the South in his autobiographical memoir *Black Boy*. In this sense, J. Saunders Redding was surely taking note of Wright’s, at times frustrating and at times rhetorically rich, refusal to depict certain cultural encounters in what would now be called politically correct language.⁹⁴

Redding thus explains Wright’s insensitivity and lack of sympathetic understanding and reasoning as symptomatic of an imagination that he felt could sometimes be faulted for being too literal and a mindset that could not always catch certain important nuances, especially as it relates to behavior indicative of certain cultural practices.⁹⁵ His critique of Wright was in essence that the latter could be too much of an instrumental thinker, who could proverbially miss the “forest for the trees.”⁹⁶ Indeed, Wright’s lecture at the Congress did reveal a good level of programmatic consistency vis-à-vis his perspective on religion and tradition that is traceable to other works. This reinforces Reilly’s and Redding’s respective depictions of Wright as a writer whose grim seriousness could at times be jarring to his audience. Because if in his lecture Wright had reiterated *Black Power*’s critique of the structures that held in place native African religious beliefs and cultural traditions as backward, and if in *Black Boy* he had already begun to alienate certain members of the black intelligentsia by his unsentimental and, at times, unflattering description of certain aspect of black life in the South, the perspective he expressed about a medieval Europe ensconced in religion and tradition follows a

similar trajectory of a world in desperate need of modernizing and of developing a rational ethos.

Wright's lecture therefore exhibited a general consistency in his understanding of human progress. His understanding of such progress can be said to be teleological in nature, insofar as he envisions history as a movement from a worldview dominated by mysticism and irrationality to one of rationality and objectivity. Religious belief systems and traditional cultures, to Wright, therefore do not simply reflect how different communities and populations seek to explain their relation to their environment and to what they deem the divine and sacred; they are metonymic with a mystifying worldview that he associates with the "irrational." Implicit in Wright's perspective is that this traditional world, its values and belief systems, its social structures and hierarchies of chiefs and religious leaders, when facing the power of an industrializing Europe found no means to resist, and at times opted for collaboration. Wright's description of Europe's partial break with its traditional worldview serves to highlight the materiality of that movement and its embeddedness in a historical process that he considers is ongoing. In that way it can be said that Wright interprets the European colonial project as the inevitable march of history. As he further notes, while that march could have been "deliberate and intentional" and could have consisted of a "planned...global project,"⁹⁷ it remains that through it, "the spirit of the Enlightenment [and] of the Reformation now has a chance to be extended to all mankind."⁹⁸ Wrights thus asked his audience to consider that despite the contingent violence of the colonial enterprise, European imperialism had introduced the Enlightenment to Africa and Asia, or that which allowed for its "partial overcoming of the forces of tradition and oppressive religions."⁹⁹

While it is clear that Wright considered that the promise of African liberation relied on the capacity of the continent to model its development along a historical precedent already set forth in Europe, Wright does not conceive of the African or colonized subject as under European tutelage. Rather, that subject becomes associated with a particular form of historical agency, one comparable to Cedric Robinson's notion that the raced subject to Wright has the potential to be a great historical force. For as he articulates it in his presentation, European colonialism had the unintended effect of actually having created an African and Asian elite that was more secular than its European counterpart and that was furthermore unencumbered by an investment in racist ideology. For those very facts, Wright considered that this elite comprised the "freest of all men."

Wright's vision that the colonized elite were "the freest of all men," is expressive of the fact that he believed colonialism resulted in the construction of subjects (here, the colonized) who were full inheritors of the enlightenment. Wright positioned this group at the vanguard of historical change. However, in order for them to fulfill this historical role, Wright indicated that they must have the freedom to do so. This idea will lead Wright to make a statement in the coda of his lecture that would further shock his audience. Wright understandably noted that what the colonized elite needed was for European powers to step aside as they went about the business of building their nations. Wright admits, however, that this was a process that would likely entail a period of great violence, and that would also likely necessitate political formations dictatorial in nature.

Wright's narrative of the postcolonial state, while in many respects remarkably prescient, all the same posited a reality few would have dared to articulate.¹⁰⁰ A little

over a decade after a war that embroiled the entire world had ended, and in the midst of violent anti-colonial movements for national independence and a Cold War that could at anytime explode in atomic warfare, Wright's description of the likely necessary stage that would allow for the emergence of the African postcolonial state was: militarization, violence, and despotism. These were not endearing ideas and opinions, and in their divergent assessments of Wright's lecture, Reilly and Gates were attempting to explain the bleakness of Wright's outlook. As previously noted, for Reilly, Wright's lecture is presented as a series of statements that were not meant to serve as a call of solidarity with Third World leaders; and for Gates, Wright had condescendingly and summarily dismissed the intellectual capacity of the African. Neither assessments, however, is in fact the case. Wright's vision was indeed one of solidarity insofar as he identified with the political project he articulated, and in regards to his assessment of the Africans before him, while it is clear he had significant ideological differences with some, he also readily identified with them, because he considered them in the same light that he viewed himself: as a Westernized intellectual vanguard of the African diaspora, who are also inheritors of the Enlightenment.¹⁰¹

Richard Wright: *Black Power* and the Romance of the African Postcolonial State

Richard Wright's account of the emergence of Ghana (then the Gold Coast) as an independent state in his travelogue *Black Power* (1954) greatly informs his presentation at the Congress. Wright's lecture at the Congress is essentially a précis of the impressions he articulated in that work. The main tenets of his overall argument in the lecture: his critique of African traditional religion and culture, his view on the modernizing impulse of colonialism, and the initial stage of militarization and despotism

he envisions for a newly liberated continent, are all further elaborated upon in the volume. Over the last two decades, as more work has been done in the fields of black internationalism, black transnationalism, and the transnational dimensions of black radical politics, more scholars have turned their critical attention towards Wright's account of his sojourn in Ghana for more in-depth critical analysis. Their critiques in various ways reflect some of the promises and some of the dissatisfactions J. Saunders Redding had previously expressed when the volume was first published in 1954.¹⁰² Hence we have scholars such as Kwame A. Appiah and Henry L. Gates, focusing on aspects of the text that reflect what they consider Wright's glaring Eurocentrism and his tone of condescension towards certain aspects of traditional African cultures. We have others, however, such as historian Kevin K. Gaines, literary scholars John Reilley and Yoshinobu Hakutanni, and the cultural studies stalwart Paul Gilroy, who while recognizing some of the challenges Wright's account may pose to contemporary scholars, emphasize other aspects of the author's work they regard as severely understudied.¹⁰³

Gaines, for instance, challenges a popular perception of Wright as something of a maverick intellectual by placing him in a black radical tradition that also includes acquaintances such as C.L.R. James and George Padmore; Reilley, as previously mentioned, considered Wright's message a realistic and unsentimental apprehension of the politics of decolonization; Hakutani provides an assessment of Wright's fiction and nonfiction that connects the writer's ambivalence about the spiritual and metaphysical heritage of African Americans and Africans as a possible barrier for their advancement in the modern world; and lastly, Paul Gilroy, who while focusing more on Wright's fiction than his non-fiction in *The Black Atlantic*, still considers *Black Power* a text that

contributes to an anti-essentialist racial discourse while gesturing towards a radical politics of solidarity.

Among these various works, Abdul JanMohamed's essay "Richard Wright As a Spectacular Border Intellectual" is particularly significant as it seriously delves into the various tensions in Wright's travelogue. JanMohamed borrows the term "unbearable ambiguity" from Gilroy's brief discussion of *Black Power* in *The Black Atlantic* to explore the ambivalence inherent in Wright's text not only as a product of the author's own meditations about his identity, his relationship to the African surroundings in which he is placed, and his apprehension of the political event he is witnessing, but also as something that reflects the reader's apprehension of a text that can at times leave one with an unsettling feeling—that of not quite knowing exactly what to make out of it. Adopting a Lacanian psychoanalytical lens, JanMohamed focuses his attention on Wright's double-gesture of disidentification and identification in his nonfictional narrative. He associates, for instance, Wright's rejection of a racial connection with the African as emblematic of Lacan's notion of "imaginary" identification, a process in the Mirror Stage of the constitution of the subject whereby the ego posits "something/someone outside and opposed to the subject."¹⁰⁴ This, according to JanMohamed, produces an "identificatory relation that is full of aggressivity and alienation,"¹⁰⁵ and which in the logic of Wright's narrative is at the root of the latter's disidentification with his African hosts. This dynamic of self and other between Wright and his encounter with the African that JanMohamed exposes importantly rests around the question of the history of slavery, whom to Wright was not simply the story of

European intrusion on the African continent and of the capture of enslaved Africans by Europeans, it was also a story of Africans selling Africans.

On the other hand, Wright, according to JanMohamed does exhibit a form of what he refers to in Lacanian term as “symbolic” identification. JanMohamed describes this form of identification as follows:

a process in which we identify with the position of agency through which we are observed and judged, and through which we observe and judge ourselves; it is a process in which we identify with the *structure* of the process that identifies us.¹⁰⁶

JanMohamed further notes that in Freudian term, this identification is with the superego, or in Lacanian term, the “(negating) Law of the Father.” We see in JanMohamed’s usage of these terms that this symbolic identification has something to do with a guiding principle, a sought for ideal which is crystalized in a higher form of aspiration. In *Black Power* this higher aspiration presents itself as a vision of the kind of ordered and regimented life, the kind of instrumental thinking, and the forms of sacrifice—individual and societal—necessary for the African postcolonial state to emerge under the yolk of European domination.

Even as the argument presented here moves away from the elucidating psychoanalytical language and framework JanMohamed has provided to shed light into the “unbearable ambiguity” Wright’s work presents, what will be similarly emphasized is the element of disidentification in Wright’s narrative that occurred on the basis of the author’s refusal to conceive of solidarity with the African as founded on a principle of racial inheritance. The argument also draws from JanMohamed’s notion of Wright’s “symbolic” identification with the African as reflective of his espousal of a political ideal.

This reading of Wright's volume as a master text for his lecture at the Congress, however, focuses on the specific idea that even given Wright's preoccupation with distinguishing himself and his worldview from the culture and belief systems of the Ghanaians he encountered, *Black Power* is also importantly an account of a journey of political solidarity. If within that narrative is embedded the story of a search for racial solidarity, the failure of this search was already announced by the very fact that Wright, as biographer Michel Fabre has noted, had "always rejected any exclusively racial definition."¹⁰⁷ Thus what scholars have at times portrayed as Wright's inability to identify with Africans reflects the writer's deep ambivalence about feelings of affinities based on the category of race.

JanMohamed is right to note in his essay that the impression that Wright's account is more so a depiction of the failure of racial identification, than a depiction of the author's political solidarity with Africans, is based on the fact that the bulk of the work recounts personal encounters.¹⁰⁸ Throughout these encounters, one finds Wright in the position of the first person protagonist of a picaresque-like novel, going from one set of awkward and uneasy interactions to another with the ever-present question of what exactly does he share with his African interlocutors?¹⁰⁹ There is thus a dramatization of Wright's feeling of alienation woven throughout the whole text that is initiated with Wright's refusal to frame his interest in traveling to the Gold Coast at the beginning of his narrative along racial lines. In her biography of Richard Wright, Hazel Rowley has shown that the heavy reliance of Wright's account to narrations of his various encounters might have been due to the lack of access he had to either Kwame Nkrumah or representatives of Nkrumah's Convention's People's Party (CPP).¹¹⁰ Yet, even as

Wright's meditations on his interactions with Africans and his experience of the African environment comprise a good chunk of his narrative, it is clear that the author's concern remains fixed on the political fate of the land he was travelling through. With its emphasis on a political condition, the very title of Wright's value is in a sense testament to the author's overarching interest in examining a political reality.¹¹¹

An important way Wright dramatizes the search for political solidarity in the narrative is through his representations of two key figures in his account, a certain Justice Thomas, of the Nigerian Supreme Court, and Kwame Nkrumah, the then Prime Minister of the Gold Coast and the future leader of an independent Ghana, who had invited Wright to report on Ghana's transition to national independence. Given their elite status, the important role they play in Ghanaian and Nigerian society as members of the upper echelons of the political and legal systems they are respectively embedded in, and their Western education, these two figures would qualify as what Wright in his representation would refer to as the "colonized elite," a group he claimed in his presentation at the Congress to be the "freest of all men." However, within the context of Wright's lecture, it is also befitting to think of these two men as also representative of some members of Wright's audience as they would have shared a similar colonized status as well as social formations influenced by both the West and their native abode in the colonies.

The reader first encounters judge Thomas on the ship that will take him to the Gold Coast. However, even prior to boarding the ship, on a train ride to the English port city of Liverpool, Wright recounts an interaction he had at some earlier period with a working class Englishwoman that will later texture the reader's assessment of his

interaction with the judge. When he questioned the Englishwoman about her views on the colonies, the latter responded in the following manner:

I'm sorry, but they'll have to go it on their own. We've bled ourselves white to feed them, to lift them up; now they've got to stand on their own feet. We've had enough of carrying them on our shoulders.¹¹²

Although Wright does not elaborate on the Englishwoman's statement, he had this conversation strategically positioned immediately following a vivid description of the significance of the slave trade to the British merchant navy and to a then flourishing Liverpool economy.¹¹³ Shortly after the end of the slave trade the city of Liverpool would undergo a sharp economic decline. Here Wright's historical account of the significance of the slave trade on the British economy in and of itself provides a trenchant commentary on the perspective the Englishwoman expresses on British imperialism. Thus this juxtaposition of a fact based historical account of the colonial enterprise debunks the Englishwoman's "white man's burden" ideological explanation of what characterizes the relationship between the metropole and the colony. The reference to the woman's class also functions to point to the opportunities that would open up to the "many Englishmen reared on the easy profits of selling manufactured goods to backward peoples."¹¹⁴ Thus the trade in black bodies, which was succeeded by the exploitation of African raw material and the creation of a mercantilist economy that nourished the British economy, not simply benefited large trading and manufacturing entities, but also trickled down to working class English men and women.

Wright's account of the Englishwoman's response to his question about the colonial situation also serves to introduce an important recurring theme of the whole

volume, the idea of the African taking up the great historical challenge of national independence and postcolonial nation building. It is clear, of course, that the Englishwoman's words do not express any care or concern over colonized subjects undertaking this project. Her concern is solely about the welfare of the British national economy. At the same time, however, Wright accords her ideological perspective a certain degree of merit, not on its own accord (that colonialism was a great historical drain on a beneficent Great Britain), but as a matter of how her point of view might be informed by a changing world economy that has rendered the system obsolete. For as Wright states, "Now that mercantilism was dead and industrialization was the cock of the walk, what would the English do with their colonies?"¹¹⁵ And then slightly shifting the import of that great economic shift from mercantilism to industrialism to the vantage point of the colonized subjects themselves, Wright notes, "[t]he art of manufacture was no longer a secret, and machines had a nigger-loving way of letting even black hands operate them."¹¹⁶ Industrial technology, a European invention, is here both racialized and gendered as a white female that could not care less as to the racial identity of the workers that manipulate it. Wright thus proposes that in the era of advanced industrial economies, colonized subjects have the potential to ascend to a position where they can shape their national and economic futures. There are no mysticism and secrets here at work. Wright infers that the mastery of industrial technologies was the province of any population committed to the hard work of mastering the appropriate techniques "which the world today knew could be mastered by anybody[.]"¹¹⁷ Thus to Wright, colonized African elites were facing the challenge of becoming willful agents, of shaping themselves as independent historical actors.

We thus encounter Justice Thomas following Wright's brief narrative presentation on the material and ideological characteristics of colonialism. This judge, we learn, has an interesting background. His grandfather was a slave in the West Indies who made his way back to the continent to settle in Freetown, Sierra Leone. The fact of the judge's genealogical connection to the New World is enough for him to consider himself a brother, of sorts, to Wright the American and the westerner. At the instigation of Wright the judge freely expounds upon his views on the political predicament facing the continent in ways that immediately strike the reader as expressive of an unwillingness to assume the historic responsibility of decolonization. "My ideas are Left" Justice Thomas tells Wright in their conversation. This statement sounded strange to Wright who reflects to himself that "If you are a Leftist, you act it, you don't talk it."¹¹⁸ Wright felt he himself "had been farther Left than [the Judge could] ever dream of going."¹¹⁹ Thus from the moment of their first interaction, it is clear to the reader Wright had already sized up the judge, assessing him to be a particularly conservative political type in the colonial drama. Wright's line of questioning further helps to reveal that the judge is a staunch Anglophile who withholds deep reservations about the promise of national independence. He considers himself as comprising part of a small group of literate Africans who enable the daily functioning of bureaucratic colonialism ("we few literates rule by prescriptive right"), and when asked his opinion about "tribal Africans," he replies "I like to live well...I love good food, good whiskey...these natives running naked in the bush...they are not ready for freedom yet."¹²⁰

Justice Thomas' tone is at times eerily familiar with Wright's. Like Wright, the judge considers the "backwardness" of African tradition and culture as the real challenge

that needs to be overcome and that poses an imposing barrier to progress. Baited by Wright to provide him with more information, but at the same time a willing conversant seemingly enthused with having the opportunity to carry on an intellectual conversation with a figure of the Western cultural elite (Wright had introduced himself to the Judge as an American writer), Judge Thomas claims

you don't know Africa...[t]here are men in Nigeria who still enjoy human flesh...[t]his business of having five and six wives...[i]t's barbarous. I could have followed my people's customs, but I wanted to rise out of the mire.

To Wright, underlying the judge's rationale is a deep and painful self-hatred, as well as an unwillingness to assume the historic task of "going it alone." If it initially appears that judge Thomas' and Wright's characterizations of African "backwardness" are in accord, one must be reminded that the "irrationality" Wright associates with African religiosity and "tribal" culture are not specific to an African Weltanschauung. Wright also finds such "backwardness" and "irrationality" historically expressed in the West in its passage from feudalism to modernity, as well as within isolated pockets of geographies in the West (e.g. in Wright's *Black Boy*, the American South under a racist terroristic regime, and in his travelogue *Pagan Spain*, a fascist Spain under the dictatorship of General Francisco Franco).

Justice Thomas, however, appropriates a colonialist perspective on his native continent without seemingly any critical perspective on Western culture. He simply seems to have imbibed colonialist logic. If Wright's interaction with the judge borders on a sense of the familiar, it is possibly because the psychological type he delineates does bear some similarities with his characterization of the attitudes African Americans in the

South developed in response to the regime of racial terror. Commenting on this and its manifestation in Wright's famed autobiography *Black Boy*, fellow writer and critic Ralph Ellison, has noted that in Wright's work one sees that African Americans in the South generally responded to their predicament in three ways:

They could accept the role created for them by the whites and perpetually resolve the resulting conflicts through the hope and emotional catharsis of Negro religion; they could repress their dislike of Jim Crow social relations while striving for a middle way of respectability, becoming—consciously or unconsciously—the accomplices of the whites in oppressing their brothers; or they could reject the situation, adopt a criminal attitude, and carry on an unceasing psychological scrimmage with the whites [.]¹²¹

In his overall assessment of Wright's work, Ellison was responding to some of the more negative critiques the author had received for his at times unsavory depictions of African American culture in the rural South by inscribing the work within what he considered a blues idiom. With Ellison's description of these archetypal personalities in mind, Justice Thomas comes off as a hybrid figure of the first two personality types in that there is a degree of acceptance of his position within the colonial social structure; too, the judge's his self-perception is deeply influenced by the idea that his Western education has accorded a degree of respectability.

However to Wright, the Africans' capacity to create something out of the present colonial condition is contingent upon their ability to fashion themselves as historical agents by rejecting their colonized status. Within the logic of Ellison's critical assessment noted above, this would necessitate them to develop an oppositional stance

and “carry out an unceasing psychological scrimmage” against their oppressors. As Wright presents the judge with the example of the American Revolution and the resulting independence gained from Great Britain, the judge claims, “*we* are different. These boys in Africa want to go *too fast*. You and I have been in touch with the Western World for two, three hundred years.”¹²² And when Wright, seemingly in good humor makes the comment “if you were not black, I’d say that you were an Englishman” the latter responds with satisfaction “*I am English*.”¹²³ Justice Thomas accepts the “assimilated” status the Négritude writers decry in their writing. He is also perhaps an exemplification of the sort of colonized subjectivity postcolonial scholar Homi Bhabha has postulated in his concept of “mimicry,” the “*almost the same, but not quite*” reflection of the colonizer.¹²⁴ What he is not, however, is the historical agent Wright believes is capable of bringing about a new order of things. Wright’s parting words on the man reflects this idea:

How England had mangled is soul! The truth was that the judge was living in the wrong century. His enslaved grandfather had desperately pulled himself out of servitude, had lifted himself above the tribal level, and, in doing so, he had been akin to the millions of Europeans and Americans of the nineteenth century who had so valiantly overthrown the remnants of feudalism. Mr. Justice represented the victory of enlightenment: he could read, he could vote, he was free; but he was adamant against the hungers of the new generation. Mr. Justice’s grandfather had been a hero to him, but I doubted if Mr. Justice’s children would regard him in a heroic light.¹²⁵

Wright portrays the judge as the representative of a generation that had acquired the cultural capital of Western thought and tradition and profited from it in a complicit way. He insinuates that the generation that is following him has acquired the same intellectual and cultural capital but is ready to make more radical demands. This is apparent when shortly after this commentary on Justice Thomas, Wright conveniently narrates an animated conversation he overhears from a group of young Africans that essentially drives his point home. The young Africans' political demands are of a nationalist tenor. They are intrigued by the example of Russia, albeit not in an idealistic and uncritical manner. They argue that if Western powers are more congenial to them at the moment it is because of the fear that they might turn to the Communists. Wright depicts here something of an ideological trajectory that takes us from the complicity of Justice Thomas in colonial bureaucracy to younger voices of Africans clamoring for a break from the colonial political paradigm.¹²⁶

Wright's various encounters with Kwame Nkrumah, on the other hand, stand out as the culminating point of the form of political outlook he identifies with and holds as a guiding principle, a political black nationalism he sees as the vanguardist expression of the colonized elite, the "freest of all men." While in the volume Wright does not say much about how his voyage came about, he does provide a copy of a brief letter from the Prime Minister vouching for his presence in the Gold Coast. In three sentences Nkrumah states he has known Richard Wright for a number of years, and that Wright will be his guest as he pursues research into the social and historical aspect of the country; Nkrumah concludes the letter with a carefully phrased endorsement of Richard Wright's character,

[t]o the best of my knowledge and belief, I consider Mr. Wright a fit and proper person to be allowed to visit the Gold Coast for the reasons stated above.¹²⁷

The Prime Minister, while welcoming of Wright, would maintain a tone of wariness about the latter's inquisitiveness throughout his stay—an interesting contrast to Justice Thomas' relative effusive forwardness.

Wright explains at the beginning of the narrative that a casual conversation with his wife Ellen and Dorothy Padmore, the wife of the Trinidadian journalist and Pan-African political theorist, George Padmore, eventually led to his planned trip to the Gold Coast. While it is conceivable that this conversation could have prodded him to make the trip, Wright's interest in traveling to the African continent dated back to his arrival in France in 1946. One of his favorite books at the time was the anticolonial travel narrative *Travels in the Congo*, written by the French Nobel laureate André Gide about his travels to French Equatorial Africa from 1926 to 1927. Wright nourished his own desire to “write the only book on Africa that will be written in [his] time.”¹²⁸ 1953 was an opportune year. Prime Minister Nkrumah would in July of that year (1953) table his motion for self-government, a historical occasion Wright's wife excitedly exclaims would be a great experience for her husband. Wright is intrigued. His imagination, however, immediately ventures toward a consideration of the Africans' debt to him personally. He ponders what it would be like to look at “the black face of an African, feeling that maybe his great-great-great-grandfather had sold my great-great-great-grandfather into slavery.”¹²⁹ In what JanMohamed would characterize as an instance of the failure of “imaginary” identification, Wright at the outset of his narrative introduces his doubts about the value of a shared sense of common racial identity. He forecloses the

possibility that this trip would be about a search for a racial connection, emphasizing instead the political implications inherent in Nkrumah's historic motion. Later in the narrative Wright would describe his curiosity about the occasion in the following manner:

I wanted to be given the 'green light' to look, to know, to be shown everything. I wanted the opportunity to try to weight a movement like this, to examine its worth as a political instrument; it was the first time in my life that I'd come in contact with a mass movement conducted by Negro leadership and I felt that I could, if given a chance, understand it.¹³⁰

Wright here expresses the belief that this was the first time he would experience the possibility of black nationalism having the potential to actually realize itself. As a member of the Communist Party of the United States (CPUSA) from 1932 to 1944 Wright had already belonged to an organization that articulated a radical political ideology and that conceived of itself as a movement of the oppressed masses against bourgeois capitalist and imperialist interests. He had left that party, however, embittered by the fact that as a creative writer he felt cloistered and compelled to write in a programmatic and ideological manner. Too, for Wright, the Party's articulations of progressive and egalitarian racial politics had progressively shown glaring fissures as it revealed racially paternalistic tendencies and self-serving support of issues related to race. Thus the fact that this mass movement was directed by a black leadership cadre seeking to organize a black population was singularly intriguing to Wright as it likely evinced a form of political activism he himself had entertained.

While in this brief portrayal of his decision to travel to the Gold Coast Wright mentions George Padmore through his wife Dorothy, elided is the significant role George

Padmore actually played in having the trip take place. In Nkrumah's letter expressing his willingness to accept Wright as a guest, he mentions he has known Wright for several years. Although the truthfulness of this statement is not under question, it remains that what mediated the possibility of Wright's trip was not so much their acquaintance with each other as it was their mutual acquaintance with one man, George Padmore. A month before Wright's departure, Padmore wrote Nkrumah a three page letter explaining Wright's interest in taking the trip to the Gold Coast. Padmore devotes most of this letter of introduction to discussing the political merit of Wright's latest book, *The Outsider*, but by the end of it Padmore states, "Ghana needs all the publicity she can get of a favorable character in the outside world and I know no better person to do this than Wright with his tremendous prestige."¹³¹

This is not to imply that Wright was intending to write a piece of propaganda for the future Ghanaian state. The unflattering aspect of some of his statements about the Gold Coast would in and of themselves discount that possibility and affirm Wright's authorial independence. Rather, it further frames the nature of Wright's account and his interest in taking the trip. George Padmore, a staunch Pan-Africanist with a similar history of Communist Party membership and defection as Wright, had known both Nkrumah and Wright for a number of years, and can be said to have served as a mentor of sorts to the younger Nkrumah. He had also known Wright since the 1940s. He had therefore earned a certain amount of equity with both of these men, which would of course make it possible for him to be positioned as a mediator between the two. Thus the letter of introduction was also a statement as to Wright's political leanings to a politician who, given his position and the weight of his responsibilities, would have had

to be very careful about his associations. Padmore's extensive discussion of Wright's *The Outsider* in his letter reflected ideas he felt Nkrumah would have been particularly responsive to. The novel's explicit concern with the notion of freedom and the various social, political and ideological interests that seek to impinge upon it could be extrapolated to explicate the position of Ghana as it was motioning for its independence from Great Britain in a Cold War context that would require the country to position itself between, what to the Prime Minister would have been, the Scylla and Charybdis of American and Russian interests.

So even before he met Nkrumah in the Gold Coast, Wright through his association with George Padmore, would have had a sense of the political sensibilities and leanings of the statesman. And even before he would meet Wright, Nkrumah would have surely understood the dangers and pitfalls for his political movement in allowing a critical writer known for his independent mindset loose to report on such an important, nation-defining occasion. Wright and Nkrumah's interactions were not that extensive for the few months that the author was there, yet the historical significance of Nkrumah's role as statesman and the importance of the movement he was leading suffuse the entirety of Wright's account.

In their initial meeting, Nkrumah decides to take Wright through a quick tour of the city of Accra for him to witness how the people respond to his movement. He witnesses the adulation that the people bear the man believed to be a liberator and the future leader of the country. "They believe in you," Wright tells the Prime Minister, to which Nkrumah responds:

These were a cowed and frightened people. Under the British it would have been unheard of for people to sing and shout and dance like this... We changed all that. When I came from London in 1948, the mood of these people was terrible. They trusted nothing and nobody. They'd been browbeaten so long by both the black leaders and the British that they were afraid to act.¹³²

Nkrumah's words inform Wright of the self-consciousness of his movement. Unlike Justice Thomas who rejects nationalism on the basis that Africans had not yet arrived at the stage where they could make that demand and follow it through, Nkrumah voices the belief the nationalist project is contingent upon action and a form of leadership that would pull the people along and not wait for them to awake to action. Also, Nkrumah's statement indicates that he recognizes the problem that a character like judge Thomas poses. The "black leaders" Nkrumah refers to is essentially the cadre of African bureaucrats who, in the logic of Wright's narrative, are depicted as complicit figures in the instrumentality of colonial oppression. When Nkrumah asks Wright what is opinion is about what he has been witnessing thus far is, Wright answers "It's most impressive," to which the Prime Minister further replies "[t]hey're an unspoiled, a spiritually virgin people."¹³³

It is worth noticing here that Nkrumah's perception of the role of the leadership cadre is no different from how Wright imagines it in his lecture at the Congress. Both Wright and Nkrumah in effect acknowledge a wide gap between a population still steeped in a traditional cultural world that is out of touch with modernity and the leadership that represents that population. Both believe that it is the role of that leadership cadre to organize "an unspoiled [and] spiritually virgin people" and have them

march onto the modern historical stage. Lastly in tone, language and vision, a certain elitism oozes through, comparable to a form of colonialist logic: the association of the colonized subject's with near child-like innocence and an organic relationship to the primal and the elemental. In this way, what in his lecture at the Congress Wright critiques the European colonial project for not having done in a self-conscious way—that of extending the Enlightenment and technological and philosophical modernity to the African continent—Wright believes a political organization like Kwame Nkrumah's well has the capacity of doing.

Nkrumah's tour of the city leads to a meeting of female members of his Convention People's Party. Wright observes rituals taking place at the meeting. These rituals often involve, side-by-side, African native religious practices and Christian practices. Nkrumah asks Wright what he thinks is happening, to which Wright replies that what he is noticing is a mixing of tribalism and modern politics. The Prime Minister agrees. And again illustrating the self-consciousness of his party's leadership and the necessary forms of rapprochement it seeks to further its connection with the population, he notes:

Nobody wanted to touch these people. The missionaries would go just so far, and no farther toward them. One can only organize them by going where they are, living with them, eating with them, sharing their lives.¹³⁴

That Wright is satisfied with what he is witnessing thus far is reflected in his lack of commentary on Nkrumah's statement. His silence bespeaks a tacit agreement with the strategies employed by Nkrumah's party. But then, something else happens that initially seems to jolt Wright out of a passive identification with the Nkrumah and his party.

Wright witnesses an oath of allegiance from those gathered around the leader, and reflecting on this scene, he comments:

I was thunderstruck. Nkrumah had moved in and filled the vacuum which the British and the missionaries had left when they had smashed the tribal culture of the people! It was so simple and it was dazzling...But an oath to a Leader? In the twentieth century? Then I reflected. Well, why not? This oath was perhaps the most rational pledge that these women had ever given in all of their lives. Before this they had sworn oaths to invisible gods, pagan and Christian, and now, at last, they were swearing an oath that related to their daily welfare.¹³⁵

Wright knows that what he is noticing is the outward signs of an autocratic regime, something that given his yearning for individual freedom he would normally find himself viscerally against. However while shocked by the episode, he takes a step back and reasons that what he is seeing in this instance is a necessary step toward the organization of a better and, in the future, a more democratic society. Nkrumah, to Wright, is using tradition to usurp tradition, be it that of the people's allegiance to "tribal" authority, or to the centrality of religious authorities (nativist or Christian)—what in his presentation at the Congress he relegates to the category of the "irrational." Nkrumah then embodies the leader who, unlike the Nigerian Supreme Court Judge, Justice Thomas, is willing to take a historic leap of faith and become a historical actor. Nkrumah and his Convention People's Party come to embody in Wright's narrative the imagined possibilities of the nascent postcolonial African state.

As he is reflecting upon the significance of the oath of allegiance, Wright asks Nkrumah for a copy of it. But Nkrumah, who by then knew Wright to be uncomfortably

direct and who likely also suspected his motives, ignores him. Wright faults himself for being too forward. He begins to think that this request might have created an unnecessary chasm between them, as he finds himself unable to communicate to Nkrumah his feelings of identification with his methods. However, what Wright failed to articulate to Nkrumah, he succeeds quite well in articulating to the reader. Like he would do at the Congress, Wright explicitly endorses what he envisions is the authoritarian political turn that might be necessary for the creation of a viable postcolonial African state. This in and of itself is quite remarkable. It is so in light of Wright's own personal history of bucking against a political organization like the Communist Party—whom he felt had authoritarian tendencies and often worked to impinge upon individual creative freedom—¹³⁶ as well as his own meditation on the concept of freedom in the novel *The Outsider*.

John Reilley has addressed this significant contradiction in Wright's work. He notes that Wright's *The Outsider* is an articulation of an exaggerated sense of individualism that at a period of time effectively expressed the author's disillusionment with politics and the consequences of political action. Conceiving of the novel's protagonist, Cross Damon, as an occasional mouthpiece for Wright's own intellectual predicament, Reilley argues that what Wright needed was

a compelling subject to restore optimism of will, the means to project his self-created identity of intellectual, and a literary form that would empower him to speak [...] with the force of an agent of contemporary history.¹³⁷

Wright, according to Reilley, found this compelling subject in the struggles of the emerging nations of Asia and Africa. Further pushing this analysis, the critic S. Shankar,

on his end, has convincingly shown that Wright's very figuration of "the outsider" in his novel is already suggestive of how the author imagines a figure like Nkrumah. For Shankar, "the outsider" in Wright's novel is "the privileged possessor of an uncommon knowledge regarding power and society, as well as the agent capable of acting on this knowledge—the outsiders are agents of change."¹³⁸ So what Reilley considers Wright's passage from disillusionment to a renewed commitment to politics, Shankar sees instead as a form of "metaphysical continuity" between the novel and Wright's later nonfictional works. To illustrate this point, Shankar briefly discusses Wright's dedication of the volume of essays *While Men, Listen!* (1957). Wright dedicated the book to the then prime minister of Trinidad, Eric Williams, as well as to "the westernized and tragic elite of Asia, Africa, and the West Indies." In the dedication, Wright further notes that these figures were "the lonely outsiders who exist precariously on the cliff-like margins of many cultures—men who carry on their frail but indefatigable shoulders the best of two worlds."¹³⁹

Thus to Wright, the "westernized tragic elite" were "outsiders," positioned on the margins of many cultures. Full inheritors of the Enlightenment, they yet stood both within and without the ambit of western culture. Wright considered this a privileged condition, one that accorded them not only a privileged epistemological perspective (as in Du Boisian double consciousness), but also rendered them powerful historical agents. In her biography of Wright, Constance Webb has noted that part of Wright's attraction to this vision of "the outsiders," a theme that for some years preoccupied him, was due to the fact that he viewed them as men who were "dangerous to the status quo...[and who] no longer responded to the values of the system in which they lived."¹⁴⁰ In this

explanation we can also glean the third archetypal figure Ralph Ellison finds in Wright's *Black Boy*. The personality type that adopts a "criminal attitude" and is willing to carry on an "unceasing psychological scrimmage with the whites" is, in this sense, also an "outsider." Wright's vision of the "westernized elite" and the "outsider" are, as S. Shankar would rightly point out, ideological mirror images of himself.¹⁴¹

Wright ends his narrative with an open letter to Kwame Nkrumah. Considering his earlier inability to express his feelings of identification with the latter, the open letter reads as Wright's attempt to bridge an earlier misunderstanding. He warns Nkrumah about the challenges inherent in the politics of the Cold War, the necessity for the country to overcome the "stagnancy of tribalism," and march, forcefully if necessary, into the twentieth century. This message reflects Wright's parting statements in his lecture at the Congress. One reads the author's desire to erect the Nkrumah and his party as powerful historical agents. This vision of Nkrumah's and the CPP's potential is enough to provide him with a sense of optimism about the political potential of westernized colonial elite, that group he calls the "freest of all men."

Richard Wright and Léopold Sédar Senghor: Parting Ways

Following the Congress Wright fell under a momentary spell of depression.¹⁴² His view about the Congress, however, was that it had exceeded what was accomplished at Bandung. In his notes on the Congress he would jot down to himself that Europe had taken a defeat as a result of the event.¹⁴³ Wright's relationship with the people at *Présence Africaine* in the following years would not so much sour, as he would attempt to establish more distance between them. He did not attend, for instance, the Second International Congress of Black Writers and Artists held in Rome in 1959. Alioune Diop was again

spearheading the event, but it appears that Wright interpreted the choice of location as reflective of an attempt to bring the Congress under the auspices of the Vatican.¹⁴⁴ His supposition about the reason behind the Rome location was perhaps a reminder to Wright about how wrong he might have been in his opinion of the secular predisposition of the colonized African elite.

Senghor, on his end, remained an admirer of Wright throughout his life. He did feel, however, that the latter was a difficult person to know. He ascribed this to what he perceived was Wright's secretive disposition as well as the writer's psychologically wrenching internal life. Senghor accepted these ailments as a product of the intense racial environment Wright had sprung from. Pointing to Wright's *Black Power*, Senghor would briefly note in a letter to Michel Fabre that the famed African American writer had greatly misunderstood Négritude, considering the movement along the same line as his friend Jean-Paul Sartre: an "anti-racist racism."¹⁴⁵ Senghor was off-the-mark on that point. Wright's view of Négritude was not much informed by an assessment of the value of its racialism. Rather, like George Padmore, he considered it a form of ideological escapism, a positing of a black ontology that failed to address the materiality of the colonial condition.

It does not seem Senghor and Wright ever got to hash out their differences in their vision of blackness and the struggle for black liberation. The opportunity was presented in a correspondence Senghor initiated shortly after having read the French translation of Wright's *White Men, Listen! (Ecoute, homme blanc)*. Among the volume's four essays included a slightly altered version of Wright's lecture at the Congress. In a brief letter congratulating Wright on the book's publication, however, Senghor carefully avoided any

discussion of one of the main elements of their differences: Wright's negative appraisal of the value of traditional African cultures. Senghor noted instead that while Wright had offered a few ideas blacks and whites would find equally disagreeable, he had expressed some salutary truths in a volume that overall commendably articulated the value of human fraternity. Senghor's one critique was what he perceived as Wright's undue wariness about Christianity in general, and Roman Catholicism in particular. He specifically noted that the Catholic Church had taken significant steps since the end of World War II to further the process of decolonization.¹⁴⁶

What was also left unarticulated between Senghor and Wright was their different perspective on colonialism. Senghor considered colonialism to be the product of a great historical misunderstanding—that of the African's inferiority as opposed to the African's ontological difference. Wright's perspective on colonialism, on the other hand, was that first and foremost it denoted a relation of power. He considered colonialism to be the result of the great power imbalance between a Europe that had ascended to philosophical and technological modernity, and an Africa that was embedded in tradition and a religious worldview. For Senghor liberation was predicated upon the African's understanding and appreciation of his/her irreducible African-ness as an ontological condition, and the Western world's understanding that this difference did not denote inferiority. For Wright, the African's liberation could only come about through the attainment of philosophical and technological sophistication. This project necessitated hard labor and a regimented life. This was a project, however, Wright appears to have been willing to relinquish the same freedom he refused to give up as a member of the Communist Party.

Chapter Four

The Black Writer and His Worlds: George Lamming and**James Baldwin at the Congress**

[I]t was clear that our relation to the mysterious continent of Africa would not be clarified until we had found some means of saying, to ourselves and to the world, more about the mysterious American continent than had ever been said before.

James Baldwin—"Princes and Powers" (1956)¹

[T]he novelist was the first to relate the West Indian experience from the inside. He was the first to chart the West Indian memory as far back as he could go.

George Lamming—"The Occasion for Speaking" (1960)²

If some six decades following its staging the First International Congress of Black Writers and Artists continues to attract scholarly attention, much of it—in the US context at least—is indebted to a James Baldwin essay that overtime has come to preserve the event in the annals of African diasporic encounters. Baldwin's "Princes and Powers" first appeared in the British-based Anglo-American literary magazine *Encounter*³ in January 1957. It would in succeeding years reach a much wider reading audience as one of the essays comprising the critically acclaimed collection *Nobody Knows My Name*

(1961). The contemporary literary critic Irvin Howe's overall assessment of that volume as a "highly personal" work of "vivid reporting, personal recollection and speculative thought"⁴ can be extended to describe James Baldwin's account of the Congress. The essay was on one level a reporting on the general atmosphere at the Congress that positioned it within the larger social and political significance of the Cold War and anticolonial movements. On another level, the essay provided a selective discussion and analysis of the lectures given. Altogether, Baldwin's work rendered a compelling narrative of the Congress that succinctly dramatized the key moments of tension while allowing room for the author to provide his own insights into the nature of the gathering.

Baldwin's vision about the connections between African Americans and black colonial subjects, his insights about the Congress, and his response to the contribution of the young Barbadian novelist and delegate at the Congress, George Lamming, comprise the subject of this chapter. Baldwin but very briefly discussed Lamming's lecture, which was entitled "The Negro Writer and His World." His impressions, however, express a great affinity to the Barbadian writer's ideas, especially as it regards their vocations as writers and intellectuals. For while Baldwin recognized the significance of the 1956 Congress as a social and political event, he retained a good degree of wariness about what he perceived was a general tendency at the gathering to make facile assertions of transnational racial identification and to fold discrete cultural and political histories along a racial logic. To a large degree, this wariness was a reflection of Baldwin's unwillingness to conflate the historical experiences of a population he knew well, African Americans, to the experiences of colonial subjects, here specifically Africans, whom he

had been conditioned to apprehend through myths and stereotypes of the backward primitive.

On his own end, George Lamming's reflections were responsive to the politicized nature of the Congress even as they did not draw particular attention to any of the debates that had surfaced. Implicitly drawing on considerations he had previously examined in his debut novel *In the Castle of My Skin* (1953), especially as it relates to the deployment of racial rhetoric in nationalist anticolonial political movements, Lamming's lecture would address the challenging racial terrain black writers have to work through as their craft necessitates them to navigate between a private world of reflection and a public world of social responsibility. Baldwin's reception of Lamming's lecture, as well as the lecture itself, illustrates how both writers shared some similar ideas about what folks of the black diaspora held in common, the significance of the cultural and historical diversity of their experiences, and the role of the writer in providing nuanced reflections over the lived reality of the black experience.

Encounters on the Seine: A Native Son Meets the Colonial Native

By the time of the Congress, James Baldwin had already made his mark on the American literary scene. His second novel, *Giovanni's Room*, had come out in the same year he attended the event, and in the three previous years, the critical success of his semi-autobiographical debut novel, *Go Tell it On the Mountain* (1953), and his first collection of essays, *Notes of A Native Son* (1955), had solidified his place as a leading young black writer equally adept in his manipulation of prose fiction as he was with non-fiction. This literary success all came as Baldwin was living as an expatriate writer in France. Following the example of his early mentor, Richard Wright, and a host of other

African American writers and artists, Baldwin in 1948 bought a one-way ticket out of his native country to settle himself in Paris. This choice of voluntary exile was motivated by a desire to escape the racial atmosphere in the United States. But as he would later explain, the decision also came about as a result of his wanting to “prevent [himself] from becoming *merely* a Negro; or, even, merely a Negro writer.”⁵

If the psychological distance Baldwin’s move to France afforded him was beneficial for his writing, it also seems to have settled certain fundamental questions he might have had about his identity. Reflecting upon his life in Paris a decade into having left the United States, Baldwin would note:

In my necessity to find the terms on which my experience could be related to that of others, Negroes and whites, writers and non-writers, I proved, to my astonishment, to be as American as any Texas G.I. And I found my experience was shared by every American writer I knew in Paris. Like me, they had been divorced from their origins and it turned out to make very little difference that the origins of white Americans were European and mine were African.⁶

Baldwin’s vision of his indelible American-ness is significant here insofar as it influenced how he perceived himself in relation to black colonial subjects, especially Africans. Unlike Richard Wright, Baldwin never really showed much of an interest in examining in depth the intricacies of the African colonial condition.⁷ This does not mean, however, that he was blind to the fact that the Paris in which he sought refuge also happened to be the center of a colonial empire that had its raced others. One senses, in fact, that especially in the early days of his period of exile his understanding of the African colonial predicament was supplemented by his experience of financial hardship

and his occasional contact with African students. For instance, in the essay “Equal in Paris” which he originally published in *Commentary* magazine in 1955, Baldwin recounts getting arrested during the Christmas season a year into living in Paris over the issue of a stolen bedsheet an acquaintance of his had left him as a present. The essay emphasizes to some extent Baldwin’s inability to appropriate the correct cultural lens to fully understand how he would need to behave toward the French officers who arrested him. He finds, to his great surprise, that in the different context in which he is in, he is being treated like any other American—thus the irony of being “equal in Paris.” He does not have the form of leverage that his understanding of American race relations could have afforded him in order to deal with white police officers.

“Equal in Paris” essentially points to another instance in which Baldwin, from the standpoint of the expatriate, is made to reflect upon the contradictions inherent in his position. As Baldwin implies, his blackness, which in the American context signifies abject difference, is no longer a primary sign of “otherness” from a normative American identity. Throughout his interactions with the police officers he thus grapples with the fact that the American identity that is simultaneously his birthright and something that most of his life he has been denied in normative fashion, takes precedence over his racial identification. However, even though the essay explicitly examines this question of identity, there circulates throughout the piece an implicit question that is never addressed: what would Baldwin’s experience have been like if he were a raced colonial subject? What comparisons could be made between what he would have experienced in a similar context in New York City to what a Senegalese, a Cameroonian, or an Algerian would have gone through in Paris? What imaginary of the racial and cultural other would

colonized subjects draw from as leverage in their interactions with state authority structures in the metropole?

Baldwin's essay, which was published a year into France's conflict in Algeria, does not attempt to address these issues, and it is arguably because of his reluctance to consider racial identity as a solid ground to frame in a nuanced way the experiences of transnational black subjects. Already, in a 1951 periodical of the periodical *Rapports France-Etats-Unis*, Baldwin would emphasize how different in nature the African American situation was to the yearnings of colonized subjects by noting,

Il n'y a presque rien de commun entre la mentalité du Noir des pays coloniaux d'Afrique et celle du Noir américain [...] Sa situation, pour insupportable qu'elle soit, est très différente de celle du Noir américain qui n'a pas d'autre pays, et qui, s'il veut rejeter son expérience américaine ne peut la remplacer par aucune autre expérience, aucun autre passé.

[There is almost nothing in common between the psychology of blacks from colonial countries in Africa and the psychology of the black American[...] For however unbearable their situation may be, it is very different from the situation of the black American who has no other country to call his own, and who if he wants to reject his American experience cannot replaced it by any other experience, and any other past.]⁸

Baldwin articulated this idea in the essay "Le problème noir en Amérique," published in an American government backed publication. Whether he knew it or not, Baldwin's words were meant to inform a French and European public in near propaganda-like fashion of the state of race relation in the United States.⁹ From that perspective, the

concluding statement of the essay is a gem of pro-American Cold War rhetoric. After having affirmed that the race problem in the United States reflects the nation's attempt to live up to its principles and is but one facet of a broader world struggle between those who believe in freedom, and all it implies, and those who do not, Baldwin affirms the commitment of both black and white Americans to find a resolution to the problem. In his framing of the universal nature of the American plight for racial justice, he manages to end the essay with a very sophisticated indictment of Soviet-like repressive regimes.

Ce sont des hommes, et comme tels, ils sont imparfaits. On ne saurait le leur reprocher. Seuls les régimes totalitaires demandent davantage des humains et ce en quoi consiste leur mensonge.

[They are men, and as such, they are imperfect. We cannot blame them. Only totalitarian regimes require more from human beings and therein lies their lie.]¹⁰

“Le problème noir en Amérique” is one of the more academic essays Baldwin has written. It does not draw extensively from personal experience and it at different turns engages the historical and sociological works of such scholars as W.E.B. Du Bois and E. Franklin Frazier. If the overarching framework of the essay— which, as depicted, involves a disentangling of the workings of American racial segregation from colonial forms of domination—seems to conveniently reflect a pro-American message that is in accord with the ideological work of *Rapports France—États-Unis* (the organ that published the essay), it nonetheless could not be said Baldwin's views were inconsistent with what he had written before. The year prior to the publication of “Le problème” in *Rapports* Baldwin wrote a short piece for the magazine *The Reporter* entitled “The Negro in Paris.” That same essay later became part of his collection *Notes of a native Son* under

the different title “Encounter on the Seine: Black Meets Brown.” In this earlier piece, the objective tone of Baldwin’s analysis in “Le problème” is replaced by what comes off as a more intimate insight into the difference between the African and the African American embedded in their respective positions as colonial subjects of an empire and second-class citizens within a democratic nation.

Baldwin’s essay begins with an account of the lived conditions of African Americans, who other than the celebrated musicians, tend to avoid each other in order not to constantly butt head against the very past they were taking a refuge from. Encounters with white Americans are no less uneasy given the distorted nature of the racial screen that has conditioned much of their interactions. And if in their relations with Europeans they are seemingly provided with an opportunity for self re-definition, it remains that they are continually made to explain the nature of race relations in the US in ways that oftentimes does not present the fullness of its complexity. Thus like most of Baldwin’s musings about his experience of life as an expatriate, the essay becomes a meditation on the problems of coming to terms with his American identity in a different cultural context.

It is in his relations with African colonial subjects that this problem in the essay seems to find some form of resolution. At the outset, however, it should be mentioned that there is a certain lack of depth in Baldwin’s representation of the African colonial subject’s predicament. The literary critic Ezenwa-Ohaeto has accurately related this to the fact that “Baldwin did not conceive [the continent] as sensitively as he did his American heritage.”¹¹ So, for instance, in a key moment in the essay when it is apparent that Baldwin ultimately wishes to highlight the contrast in group behavior between

African Americans (whom he has described as having a tendency to avoid each other in Paris) and African students (whom he sees living together in the same neighborhood) as reflective of the differences in their social and psychological conditioning, he avoids carrying through a fuller presentation of his analysis. His reflections avoid a deeper engagement with the lives of the African students and what we are left with is a rather derisive remark about their impoverished conditions.

They live in groups...and under conditions which cannot fail to impress the American as almost unendurable. Yet what the American is seeing is not simply the poverty of the student but the enormous gap between the European and American standards of living. *All* of the students in the Latin Quarter live in ageless, sinister-looking hotels; they are all forced to choose between cigarette and cheese at lunch.¹²

Baldwin's presentation of the financial hardships the African students experience does not open up to an investigation of the intricacies of their communal existence as students in an alien land. Neither does his depiction of their poverty seek to make a deeper connection to what he himself might have experienced being raised in Harlem in an impoverished household or even of his early days in Paris. What he offers in the last instance is an abrupt comparison between "American" and "European" standards of living that points to the relative affluence of American tourists who visited the economically struggling city in the immediate post-war period. From the standpoint of the contrasting standard of living between Americans and Europeans, Baldwin essentially brings the "African" within the fold of the European and aligns his own voice with the traveling American's presence in the city. The correlations he establishes between the

“African/European” and “the African-American/(white) American,” while not necessarily convincing, essentially serve the purpose of constructing differentiated identities: the African American whose cultural logic is firmly rooted in American ways, and the Africans whose colonial relationship with the European indelibly shapes their identities.

Similarly, when African Americans (the Brown of Baldwin’s essay) meet Africans (the Black), there is no resulting dialogue about their respective conditions. There is a certain muteness to their interaction as the reader is not presented the sense that there occurs any meaningful verbal exchange. Baldwin’s account of these encounters, which is presented from the subjective standpoint of the African American, emphasizes a failure of identification. The past that the African represents for Baldwin appears irretrievable and unusable. Instead of turning toward an imagined ancestral homeland, the African American’s gaze more intensely focuses on the only land he/she has ever known, the American republic. Baldwin, thus informs us that

[The African American] begins to conjecture how much he has gained and lost during his long sojourn in the American republic. The African before him has endured privation, injustice, medieval cruelty; but the African has not yet endured the utter alienation of himself from his people and his past. His mother did not sing “Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child” [...] They face each other, the Negro and the African, over a gulf of three hundred years—[...] This alienation causes the Negro to recognize he is a hybrid.¹³

African Americans are here again brought to consider their indelible American-ness. And if in his use of the term “hybrid” Baldwin might seem to point to the idea of the possibility of African cultural retentions informing African American subjectivity, the

reader soon learns otherwise. Baldwin considers the African American's hybridity in two ways. He sees it on the one hand as reflective of a biological condition; More importantly, however, he considers it a function of what he calls "the memory of the auction block and the impact of the happy ending."¹⁴ What we see is that Baldwin's usage of the term "hybrid" implies factors rooted on the American soil. His brief allusion to miscegenation (physical/biological hybridity), connotes not only the reproduction of a racially mixed progeny, but also a world of sexual desire, violence and terror that comprises a significant aspect of the underbelly of American race relations. The point of origin he associates with the slave past is the auction block. It is not an African point of embarkation or the Middle Passage, which would have provided a stronger connection to the African continent. And while there is a playfulness to his usage of the term "happy ending," the term seriously posits cultural predispositions that inform the American mindset. Here, of course, it is the general tendency that narratives wrap up in happy and satisfying fashion. Even the African American relationship to his/her past to Baldwin bespeaks this indelible American-ness. For as he explains it, the "depthless alienation from oneself and one's people" the African American undergoes comprises "in sum, the American experience."¹⁵

Prior to the Congress, Baldwin mostly articulated such ideas in a peripheral fashion. It was not his intent to seriously examine the African American's place within the broader framework of the African diaspora. In fact, a strong argument can be made that Baldwin considered the issue of an African heritage from a discursive standpoint, whereby this heritage which is biologically marked upon his skin becomes emblematic of several layers of individual and social alienation. This is illustrated, for instance, in some

of his comments about how in his formative years he envisioned his relation to the African continent. His words indicate that when considering that connection he was immediately confronted with racist myths and stereotypes he desperately wanted to avoid. In alluding to this, he would point to the feeling of shame he experienced when watching films with representations of the eye-rolling “African savage.” This visual representation had its American counterpart in the demeaning stereotypical depictions of Stepin Fetchit.¹⁶

Baldwin’s reflections about these stereotypes indicate they were the racial ideological measures that in the absence of any real information about the continent informed his early thinking of his African ancestry. Thus discussing his first thoughts on Africa,¹⁷ he would note how he connected the continent with his father, a man whom, as his fiction and nonfiction show, he had a very difficult relationship with:

my first association with Africa comes through him. I compared the people in my father’s church to African savages. This was because of my relation to my father... I was ten or twelve. The church and my father were synonymous. Music and dancing, again sweat, out of the jungle. It was contemptible because it appeared to be savage. But this was also my image of my father. I guess I was hipped on being American and the things they did seemed so common, so vulgar.¹⁸

This remark came from a 1959 interview conducted by the journalist and MIT political scientist Harold Isaac. While Baldwin’s words are shockingly disparaging toward Africans, they must in part be understood within the logic of the context in which they were articulated. Baldwin was offering a commentary on the form of racial conditioning

Americans of any hue were subjected to. His feeling of alienation from his father and the community of church folks that characterized his early upbringing in Harlem and his association of that feeling with their perceived “Africanness” dually speak to a spirit of adolescent rebellion against authority figures whom he found oppressive and stifling, and a marginalization of those figures’ authority by associating them with abject difference. The African heritage that Baldwin in his youth aligned with his father and the community of churchgoers is associated with a different shade of black, a black darker than black.¹⁹ This “blackness” of the African stands in stark opposition to a normative Americanness that the young Baldwin aligns himself with.

Of course, the Baldwin reporting at the Congress, would not necessarily have subscribed to the perspective of this younger self, or at the least, not under the same premise of the African’s abject otherness. Rather, what by the time of the Congress influenced Baldwin’s views was his perception of the “gulf” between African Americans and Africans which rendered the terms of his own identity in relation to an African ancestral past elusive. In the same interview with Harold Isaac, Baldwin would note that this gulf created significant misunderstandings and feelings of estrangement that were illustrated in how he interacted with Africans. He felt an uneasiness in those interactions. This uneasiness was reinforced by his perception of the Africans’ lack of understanding of the nuances of the African American experience in the United States and yet their willingness to forward opinions about that experience on racial grounds. “The terms of our lives were so different,” Baldwin would tell Isaac, that “we almost needed a dictionary to talk.”²⁰ Baldwin would carry with him to the Congress the idea

that race did not provide an adequate language to breach significant differences between the experiences of populations of the African diaspora.

James Baldwin and the Politics of Black Transnational Identity

In Assessing James Baldwin's views on Africa, James Campbell, one of his biographers, would claim that the writer "never came to a coherent and thought-out position on the Afro-American's predicament *vis-à-vis* his ancient African cousins" and that it is therefore "impossible to discern a meaningful pattern."²¹ Reading his brief discussion of Baldwin and Africa, one can make out that Campbell bases this assertion on the following factors: the writer's lack of interest in exploring what was happening on the continent in his writings, his expressed difficulty in interacting with Africans, his self-perception as a westerner and an American, and lastly on what Campbell considers the vacillation of Baldwin's thoughts on the question of his ties to the continent. However, if we explore Campbell's use of the word "coherent" more fully, it becomes clear that the word itself betrays another realm of signification that does not altogether accord with the actual meaning we assign to it, i.e. "coherent" as logical clarity and consistency. What Campbell refers to as Baldwin's lack of a "coherent" position in regards to "his African cousins," from this standpoint, must be understood as indicative of Baldwin's reluctance to uncritically express identification with either a rhetoric or a politics of transnational black solidarity and the way he has expressed this reluctance.

What is meant here may be explained by a brief comparison between James Baldwin and Richard Wright. Both of these writers shared a similar vision of their identity that emphasized their irreducible American-ness. They also both considered themselves to be products of the West, even as they understood that as raced subjects

they were also the West's internal "other"—in one of his better known essays, for instance, Baldwin would famously call himself a "bastard of the West."²² Thus neither writer shared a romantic view of an African homeland. There is a sense, however, that Campbell's framing of Baldwin's vision of his relation to Africa as lacking coherence would not apply to Wright. It is so because this idea of "coherence" has more to do with an expressed position that either firmly affirms or rejects the political and/or cultural premise of the black transnational condition. So with Wright, for example, even as he rejected a racial ground for transnational black identification, there is a degree of cross-fertilization between his understanding of racial oppression in the US context and the colonial condition. The cross-fertilized nature of his understanding of these two conditions is essentially reflected in how he considers Western educated black intellectuals as comprising a unique historical cadre, the Westernized elite. This cadre of intellectuals and political agents share a related historical mission. From one perspective, they are agents of anticolonial/black liberation; from another perspective they are also universal agents who have the tools to extend the promise of the European Enlightenment because, as he sees it, they had dealt with the irrationalities of two reactionary ideologies: racism and religiosity.²³ Wright's position is a reflection of the form of political rapprochement he makes between different forms of racial oppression. Thus his identification with black transnationalism occurs through the prism of politics. As discussed in the previous chapter, another form of identification with a black transnational condition would be expressed from a cultural and ontological perspective, which was best represented at the Congress from the opinions advanced by the Senegalese poet and statesman Léopold Sédar Senghor.²⁴

Baldwin did not subscribe to Wright's interest in the political condition of colonized populations.²⁵ But like Wright, neither did he subscribe to an ontological basis of racial identification. In fact, one of the more noteworthy aspects of Baldwin's report on the Congress—the essay “Princes and Powers”—concerns just how his narrative rendition of the event became a musing ground of sorts over the complex nature of transnational racial identification. Baldwin would consider, for instance, what brought together people whom he deemed “might otherwise be divided as to what a man should be.”²⁶ This statement was rhetorical insofar as he would provide the reader with his thoughts on the matter (“What they held in common was their precarious, their unutterably painful relation to the white world”²⁷). Yet this idea was connected to a broader concern Baldwin expressed that directly questioned the framing of the Congress: was race and a history of oppression in and of themselves enough of a common ground to articulate cultural commonality and solidarity for people of the African diaspora? Here, Baldwin's doubts about the rhetoric of solidarity and commonality expressed at the Congress significantly resonated with the ideas of such delegates as Richard Wright and Jacques Stephen Alexis, who had challenged what they interpreted was the event's deep investment in Negritude ideology. As previously discussed, Wright had done so on the basis of his disagreement with Senghor on the idea of an essential ontological blackness that connected black populations across the diaspora, and Alexis, on the basis of his belief that there is a materiality to “culture” (e.g. regional and national boundaries as well as material artifacts) that the Congress' broad and overgeneralized diasporic vision was not paying due diligence to.²⁸

As if to underline his viewpoint on this matter, Baldwin would at different moments in the essay emphasize the play of difference at work in the composition of the African diaspora through his remarks about some of the lectures and through his own understanding of what informed African American subjectivity. Commenting on the lecture of the Nigerian delegate Ebenezer Latunde Lasebikan on “The Tonal Structure of Yoruba Poetry,” Baldwin would remark that he found himself “fascinated by the sensibility which had produced”²⁹ the poetry Lasebikan spoke of and the style of life out of which it came, even as he doubted he had learned much as to the structure of that poetry. He would express similar fascination with Senghor’s theory of a distinctive African aesthetic sensibility, whereby a contrast is made between European Cartesian duality of body and mind to an African incorporation of both (“sentir c’est apercevoir”/ “feeling is knowing”). Even as he admits to not fully comprehending the way of life Senghor was painstakingly depicting in his lecture, he notes that “[i]t was the aesthetic which attracted me the idea that the work of art expresses, contains, and is itself part of that energy which is life.”³⁰

Baldwin’s point about “the aesthetic” is something we will return to a little later in relation to the Barbadian writer George Lamming because it bears upon his vision of the role of the black writer in representing different dimensions of his/her lived existence. For the time being, however, it suffices to note that these above statements reflect Baldwin’s fascination with sensibilities he finds alien to his own. Baldwin’s appreciation of the aesthetic world Senghor and Lasebikan’s lectures were presenting are informed by his respect for their articulated difference. In this way, we can compare Baldwin’s vision of the African “other” with how the Martinican philosopher and man of letters, Édouard

Glissant, has theorized the concept of “opacité/opacity” as “le non-reductible, qui est la plus vivace des garanties de participation et de confluence/ that which cannot be reduced, which is the most perennial guarantee of participation and confluence.”³¹ Baldwin’s statements reveal a degree of satisfaction and contentment with being introduced to ways of being and thinking ascribed to black subjects that he finds himself unfamiliar with. From his perspective, one sees that blackness is “other-ed” onto itself; Baldwin perceives African-American and African subjectivities as discrete entities that do not find a common ground along a racial construct. His vision of the African’s otherness, in this instance, accords it its own realm of legitimate existential possibilities without attempting to reduce it or to render it transparent to his own subjective understanding.³²

Baldwin’s valuing of difference within blackness in the essay is highlighted in other ways as well. After listening to Senghor’s statement that a work like Richard Wright’s *Black Boy* could be shown to reflect an African heritage, for instance, Baldwin seems to realize that Senghor’s vision of a distinctive African ontology, or way of being in the world, was not bounded by the specific cultural reality of his traditional African cultural background. Senghor’s theory, as Baldwin suddenly comes to understand, addressed a general black condition that in its logic is supposed to speak to Baldwin’s own condition as well. Baldwin summarily dismisses this analysis, noting that “in Senghor’s vast re-creation of the world, the footfall of the African would prove to have covered more territory than the footfall of the roman.”³³ Baldwin’s reaction to Senegalese Egyptologist and physicist Cheikh Anta Diop’s lecture connecting Ancient Egypt to sub-Saharan African follows a similar logic, even though in this instant he could

rightly be accused of uncritically folding Diop's scholarly contribution to the field of Egyptology to the ideological imperatives of identity politics.³⁴

Baldwin's perception of the African difference is also presented in contrast to his understanding of factors influencing African American identity. He presents this in a passage in the essay that seeks to provide an explanation of what separates the American delegation at the Congress from colonial subjects hailing from Africa and the Caribbean. Baldwin claims that this separation was the result of:

[T]he banal and overwhelming fact that [African Americans] had been born in a society, which, in a way quite inconceivable to Africans, and no longer real for Europeans, was open, and in a sense which had nothing to do with justice or injustice, was free. It was a society, in short, in which nothing was fixed and we had therefore been born to a greater number of possibilities.³⁵

In his eagerness to emphasize the specificity and particularity of the African American experience, Baldwin uses a rhetorical approach that deploys the myth of American exceptionalism, with its emphasis on the uniqueness of American culture and values as well as principles of the country's democratic experiment. Partly basing her assertions on the work of Michael Denning and Gayatri Spivak's notion of "strategic essentialism," literary scholar Cheryl Wall notes that Baldwin's "strategic" use of this myth in his non-fiction was conversant with its usage throughout the 1950s in journals, academic monographs and the new discipline of American Studies. To Wall, Baldwin's use of the myth's rhetoric resonated with a number of pro-US Cold War intellectuals, with the important difference that Baldwin's deployment of it generally implied a critique of its premises.³⁶ However, what we see reflected in its specific use in the above passage is a

rather unsuccessful attempt to reconfigure it, breathe a different kind of life into it.

Wanting to present the African American experience as a particular reification of the American exceptionalist ethos, Baldwin adopts a language of “freedom,” “open-ness,” and “fluidity,” key concepts of that myth, at the same time that he has to admit that these concepts do not reflect the African American experience in the US; for as it pertains to that experience, these concepts, as Baldwin explains his usage of them, do not address the issue of “justice” or “injustice.” Thus even as he presents the idea that American society and culture is “open,” “fluid,” and characterized by a realm of “possibilities,” he has to concede that there was “a popular impulse to keep [African Americans] at the bottom” and that this impulse often served to provide white Americans a sense of “where the bottom was.”³⁷

Looking at it closely, the perspective Baldwin offered here differs but slightly from some of the ideas he had expressed in the previously mentioned essay written for the French-American publication *Rapports France—États-Unis*, “Le problème noir.” If in “Le problème” Baldwin had emphasized the immigrant narrative as a focal point of American identity, whereby the African American’s forced migration to the New World is presented as conversant with the homelessness of other Americans who are compelled to make of the New World a home, in this brief passage in “Princes and Powers” he presents a contingent narrative of the values that inform this new home (and therefore of the values that inform African American life). In both instances, as it concerns the relation between African Americans and black colonial subjects the point Baldwin is driving home is summed up in the following statement: “[w]e had been dealing with, had been made and mangled by, another machinery altogether.”³⁸

Even though examining the colonial condition and the connections between the experiences of African Americans and black colonial subjects were not topics Baldwin was overly concerned about, there is a certain coherence and meaningful pattern to his thoughts on these matters. His approach to the question of African American identity, which he exclusively binds to the US nation-state, suggests that he viewed American culture as something akin to a closed system with its own specific cultural logic. He considers the African American experience an integral constituent element of the logic of that cultural system. It in various ways helps to shape and inform it, and it is also shaped and informed by it. While he is not dismissive of the African American's historical link to the African continent, Baldwin sees the American soil as the cauldron of African American identity. One way to interpret Baldwin's feeling of estrangement from Africans and black colonial subjects and his unwillingness to consider race as a departing point for a transnational form of identification as well as a means to articulate a rapprochement between the conditions of African Americans and African/black colonial subjects, is to consider the possibility that his vision of African American cultural particularity also extends to a consideration of the irreducible cultural particularities of other black populations. In this we see that his perspective on the African diaspora is informed by the idea of reciprocal difference, or as previously stated, of a perspective on blackness as other(ed) onto itself.

If Baldwin's account of the Congress reveals how he conceptualized his identity as a raced American subject in relation to Africa and its other diasporas, there is also another important aspect of his essay that expresses a different concern: the question of the role of the black writer in presenting fuller and more complex renditions of the lived

realities of black subjects. It is something that Baldwin hints at in his commentary on Aimé Césaire's lecture at the Congress, "Culture et Civilisation," although it is more fully articulated in his brief discussion of the lecture by the young Barbadian writer George Lamming. Baldwin's remarks about Césaire's critique of colonialism in his lecture is quite insightful. His commentary indicates that he clearly understood the force of the Martinican writer's polemic, even as it is arguable that he missed some of its importance nuances.³⁹ This polemical aspect of the lecture would lead Baldwin to claim, "I myself felt stirred in a strange and disagreeable way,"⁴⁰ and to wrap up his analysis of the poet's words by noting "Césaire's speech left out of account one of the great effects of the colonial experience: its creation, precisely, of men like himself."⁴¹

These statements are significant because they closely approximate in logic what a few years earlier Baldwin had identified with the limits of the social protest tradition in American writing. In the 1949 essay "Everybody's Protest Novel," Baldwin offered the argument that an important difference between the pamphleteer and the serious writer rested on the latter's dedication to revealing "truth," a concept which to him implied "a devotion to the human being, his freedom and fulfillment; freedom which cannot be legislated, fulfillment which cannot be stated."⁴² Baldwin considered Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, for instance, as the work of an impassioned pamphleteer and not that of novelist, for the reason that the book had no other goal than to show how wrong slavery was. The novel took up a social responsibility, a good cause, and in its work to further the interest of that cause, overlooked, denied, and evaded the full complexity of the reality it sought to present to its reading public. Baldwin's essay, of course, is best known for its critique of the fiction of social protest, and for placing

Richard Wright's novel *Native Son* within the body of this tradition of writing, thereby essentially questioning the novel's literary merit and the depth of its analysis of a human condition. In stating that Césaire left out of his account the existence of men like himself, Baldwin was in a similar manner critiquing Césaire for treating the colonial condition in short-handed fashion, for presenting stock arguments that while moving, did not reflect the nature of his own condition: one characterized by layers of paradox and ambiguity that could not be reduced to a racial and political logic.

There is a sharp contrast between Baldwin's reception of George Lamming's lecture, "The Negro Writer and His World," to his reception of the lecture given by Césaire. The former's lecture—which shall be discussed in greater depth later in the chapter—consisted of a meditation on the condition of black writers that at the outset significantly shifted the Congress' prior focus on broad political and ideological concerns to a consideration of matters more intimate in nature, closer to black writers' understanding of the particular challenges that characterize their engagement with a racialized social reality. Commenting on how Baldwin responded to Lamming's ideas, the historian Kevin Gaines has noted that the lecture served as "A major catalyst for Baldwin's quest for personal and intellectual integrity amid the clamor for unity."⁴³ Gaines' remark rightly indicates that Baldwin experienced the Congress as a clamor for unity, and that Lamming's contribution to the event was to have highlighted the value of the private self. However, Gaines' remark overly estimates the impact Lamming's lecture had on Baldwin's thinking. For Lamming's ideas did not so much serve as "a major catalyst" for Baldwin's personal and intellectual integrity, as they simply well resonated with ideas the writer himself already held. For like Baldwin, Lamming was

“concerned about the immensity and the variety of the experience called Negro”⁴⁴ and was unwilling to abide to facile assertions of racial identity. If according to Baldwin Césaire in his lecture had shied away from rendering an honest account of who he was, Lamming, by contrast stood as someone who Baldwin admirably felt was not “intimidated by the fact that he is a genuine writer.”⁴⁵

George Lamming: the West Indian Subject and the experience of Migration and Exile

In an interview conducted near the University of Miami—Coral Gables, in the spring of 2011 at an event to commemorate the work of Dr. Sandra Pouchet Paquet (who had published the first serious monograph on Lamming’s novels), George Lamming revealed that he was the youngest delegate presenting at the Congress. He had made his way to the event, interestingly enough, not via the black intellectual circle he had been introduced to while living in London, and which included among others the West Indian pan-African socialists C.L.R. James and George Padmore, but through his contact with Jean-Paul Sartre and the existentialist philosopher’s journal *Les Temps Modernes*.⁴⁶ Sartre, who would place him in contact with the Congress organizers at *Présence Africaine*, had been introduced to Lamming’s debut novel *In the Castle of My Skin* (1953) by Simone de Beauvoir.⁴⁷ The novel would in 1958 be published in *Les Temps Modernes* in series form. If this brief synopsis explaining Lamming’s presence at the Congress shows anything, it is that by the time of the Congress the Barbadian writer shared with James Baldwin the exciting experience of being a promising up- and-coming writer.⁴⁸ By 1956, not only had Lamming published a critically acclaimed semi-autobiographical first novel, but he had also followed that success with a well received

second novel, *The Emigrants* (1954), a work whose narrative plotline parallels the author's migration from Barbados and Trinidad to the colonial metropole of London.⁴⁹

Lamming had been invited to present on the topic "The Negro Novel in English," but with the permission of the organizers of the Congress, he had slightly changed his lecture's focus to "The Negro Writer and his World." The change in title, as he would explain it in somewhat abstract and hazy fashion, suggested a "difference of range and limitations."⁵⁰ But what perhaps Lamming was avoiding having to discuss is a topic he considered futile: the question of what the black writer was bringing to the English language. As he saw it, the colonial enterprise had made it such that English was "no longer the exclusive language" of the English.⁵¹ He would inform his audience at the Congress, however, what would remain constant in his lecture was his discussion of "that species...[who] belong to a category of men called Negro."⁵²

Lamming was likely the most qualified West Indian writer of his generation to speak on this topic. Even at this early stage in his career, there was a self-consciousness to his literary practice that demonstrated an acute awareness and understanding of the cultural and political significance of the body of writing that was suddenly emerging out of the West Indies. Between 1949 to 1959, some twenty different writers coming from the Caribbean wrote no less than fifty-five novels.⁵³ To Lamming this literary enterprise was all the more significant because as he saw it the West Indian man of letters "was the first to relate the West Indian experience from the inside."⁵⁴ This was a project that Lamming associated with a critical engagement with, if not a much needed dismantling of, what he referred to as "colonial structures of awareness" that determined West Indian values." This form of "awareness" to Lamming was not simply the result of the colonial

political structure and its attendant economic arrangement; it was also a result of the relatively brief historical span of time that saw the rise and organization of West Indian societies, the fragmentary nature of its histories and its cultures, and, among other factors, the colonial inhabitants' dependency on the values implicit in the language of the colonizer. Cradled by a distant "Mother" culture, and generally free from the violent naked hostility of a US-type regime of racial oppression, West Indian societies, as Lamming observed, were fearful of the demands for political autonomy even as they had met its structural prerequisites.⁵⁵

Of course, the paradox of this situation was that the very survival of the generation of West Indian novelists Lamming belonged to depended on their ability to make their way out of their native abode to the heart of the colonial empire.⁵⁶ The limited opportunities in the native setting in the 1950s were at the root of the movement of writers and intellectuals abroad. As Sandra Paquet Pouchet has noted, there were no publishing houses in the West Indies to support the eruption of creativity in the period. Presses like Pioneer Press in Jamaica, she notes, were not big enough for the task at hand. Added to this was the fact that there was no significant reading public to support a literary movement. For the ambitious artist, encouragement came mostly from the BBC's *Caribbean Voices* and the local publications of *BIM* (Barbados), *Kyk-over-al* (Guyana), and the sporadic publishing of *Focus* (Jamaica).⁵⁷ In that way, the migration of writers and intellectuals in the immediate period following the Second World War followed the pattern of workers who flocked to the metropole for improved opportunities.

While the migration of West Indian writers was influenced by such material concerns, in his discussions on this subject Lamming also seriously considered the

workings of colonial ideological conditioning, both in positive and negative terms. The negative aspect of this can be related to what Lamming referred to as the “colonial structure of awareness.” This is so insofar as he presented an affective dimension to the difference between colony and metropole. Lamming perceived that this difference was viewed and experienced by the West Indian on hierarchical terms: the superiority of anything coming from, or stamped with the approval of, the metropole over whatever is native to the colonial setting. In the essay “The Occasion for Speaking” Lamming briefly depicted how this form of thinking even influenced him. Reflecting on his reaction to the critical success of his first novel, Lamming noted that while he had placed great value on the opinion of English critics, when it came to the novel’s reception by an American public, he was mostly concerned with the opportunity presented for lucrative book sales. To Lamming, this reflected how on a subconscious level he had somehow felt validated by the positive reviews coming out of the metropole because of the colonial “myth of England’s supremacy in taste and judgment” and also because within the logic of that myth, “America [did] not even exist.”⁵⁸

The positive aspect of the West Indian’s migration to Lamming concerned the possibility of dismantling this colonial structure of awareness by the fact of being confronted with its myth. Lamming partially developed this theme in his second novel, *The Emigrants*, by depicting how a desire to escape the restrictions and limitations of colonial island life, its humiliations and sense of stunted opportunities and possibilities, ultimately opened onto a psychologically wrenching experience of uprootedness, loss of community and alienation. However, while Lamming considered these themes connotative of the experience of exile, his vision of it was also informed by the idea that

the experience provided a vantage point to view the West Indian setting in elucidating and intellectually enriching ways. For to Lamming, West Indian intellectuals living in exile began to learn about not only their own relationship to the metropole but also to begin to value their relationship to other black colonized populations, be it from the Caribbean or the African continent. For instance, when asked about what other Caribbean writers at the Congress he had been acquainted with prior to attending the event, Lamming noted that when he left Barbados to teach at a Venezuelan college in Trinidad (where he remained from 1946 to 1950), he became acquainted with the works of the Cuban poet Nicolas Guillen and the Martinican poet Aimé Césaire because they were on the curriculum he had to teach.⁵⁹ This knowledge came about through the very short migration from one colonial context to another neighboring one. Yet one can imagine his discovery of these writers opened up to the young writer a different frame of transnational identification that also crossed the linguistic boundaries characteristic of colonial arrangements.

By the time of the Congress itself, Lamming had been living in London for some six years, having moved there from Trinidad in 1950. London, he would note, was where a generation of West Indian writers who did not know of each other in their native islands would meet. If the colonial center had separated them by establishing linear relationships between metropole and individual colony, it would ironically also be what brought them together. This, to Lamming, spoke to one of the pleasures of exile: the possibility of reconnecting with a larger cultural region through the act of leaving the home soil. The West Indies, as Lamming discovered it, was in fact created in London.⁶⁰ London was also the site of his encounters with English-speaking Africans for this first time. While at

the Congress in Paris he recognized the influence of different national traditions and the colonial structures they produced and how they informed the behavior and outlook of Anglophone and Francophone black writers and intellectuals, he felt a sense of familiarity with the environment because of his transnational encounters in London.

Thus, Lamming's vision of the colonial subject who had migrated from the native colonial setting to the metropole is informed by the idea of that subject gaining the ability to view the colonial condition from a different standpoint. While Lamming's *The Emigrants* dealt explicitly with the lived reality of the condition of exile, his first novel, *In the Castle of My Skin*, best articulated his perspective on how exile can provide a privileged insight into the inner workings of colonial life. The novel is on one hand a semi-autobiographical bildungsroman that follows the growing political awareness of a young protagonist named G from adolescence to early adulthood; on the other hand it is also the story of a small village that within a ten year period experiences the evanescence of a feudal pattern of life and social relations under the pressure of a rising labor movement with nationalist political underpinnings. The narrative fluctuates from a first person narrator to an omniscient narrator in a way that draws focus on the fact that the novel essentially has two protagonists: the young G and the village itself and with its various cast of characters.

The dominant influence in the village is the great house of the landlord, Mr. Ceighton. The house perches above the village like a luminous fortress. It is both the center of everything and this otherworldly thing that barely seems to have any real physical connection to the rest of the village. The landlord owns the vast majority of the land in the village; his possessions are managed by an overseer, who along with the

police constable and an array of civil servants function as intermediary figures of the colonial authority structure. They have in common their social positions as intermediary middlemen, as well as the fact that they have internalized the idea of the superiority of the governing agents of the colonial structure. The people, their people, are to them the “low-down nigger people,” whose heads they must continue to knock, and whom they must continually try to outsmart. In his description of the village’s school Lamming posits that little about the colonial educational system prepares the young students to see beyond the nature of their oppression.

The few characters able to provide a cogent critique of the colonial conditions they are living under in the novel are those whose perspectives are in one form or another informed by knowledge that is coming from outside the colonial setting. An example is the character of the shoemaker. An avid reader of books and newspapers, the shoemaker has insight into the political structure and set of social relations that characterize the island and its neighbors few others are able to articulate. Unlike other characters who have a hazy and mythic conception of the British empire, and who view their native island of Barbados as “Little England,” or England’s little sister, he is aware of what is happening on the other islands of the region; when the first stirrings of political self-assertions occur, he is able to connect it to the labor struggle occurring in the nearby island of Trinidad. The character of Pa, a grandfather figure of the village and a source of folk wisdom, is also able to construct a vision of his lived reality that draws from an outside context. On one hand, his experience as a laborer who worked on building the Panama Canal affords him a perspective that challenges the feudal nature of the colonial arrangement of the village insofar as he had the experience of being an industrial worker

who partook in a globalized economy. Although articulated in a subconscious dream vision sequence, Pa also has a racial memory that sutures the colonial setting to a plantation slave economy and an African past. This historical context is an important missing element of village consciousness. While neither the shoemaker nor Pa are exiles, the knowledge they have about their colonial condition exceeds the colonial structure of awareness that inform their everyday lives. In this way their way of thinking can be associated with a consciousness that emerges within the context of a form of migration.

The feudal framework of the village and the traditional relationship between the landlord and the villagers begin to collapse with the rise in significance of Mr. Slime, a former teacher turned thriving entrepreneur whose Penny Bank and Friendly Society win the support of the village community. Mr. Slime—who throughout the novel remains a shadowy figure whose thought process is never revealed to the reader—parlays his popular appeal into a political platform, demanding more land ownership for the village's inhabitants. His many village supporters interpret this as their opportunity to potentially own the plots they have lived on for generations, while the more skeptical consider this surge of a previously dormant nationalist outlook an unwelcomed threat to the old feudal order. Following the overflow of a riot from a nearby city into the small village that results in Mr. Creighton barely escaping with his life, it is revealed that Creighton has sold his land to a group of investors headed by Mr. Slime. The latter in turn does the unthinkable: he sets a price for individual plots that the villagers cannot meet and he sells those plots to the more affluent members of the island's professional class who are eager to finally own land. Through ruse and cunning, Mr. Slime essentially succeeded in replacing Mr. Creighton in power, influence and stature; in what the novel posits as the

condition of the postcolonial state, the villagers, many of whom become displaced from the lands they have lived on, remain as powerless as before in the new order.

If the novel ends in tragic episodes of the villagers' displacements and with a sense of uncertainty about the future, the character who has the most to say about these events is Trumper, the most politically conscious of G's boyhood friends who had just returned from the United States. G himself had overheard a conversation between Mr. Slime and the headmaster of the village school that revealed to him the nature of Mr. Slime's betrayal and the complicity of the respected headmaster. However, like other villagers, he did not quite know what to make of that betrayal. Trumper's position on these matters, however, is by contrast clear and unbending. He has a deep-seated contempt for Mr. Slime, but at the same time he relates to G that he is not at all surprised by Slime's actions. Trumper credits his time in the United States for his growing awareness of the politics of the island. To Trumper, the villagers' only chance to change their situation is to understand the power they have as a block. As he sees it, Mr. Slime was able to galvanize this power to his own benefit because the funds he used to purchase Creighton's lands came from the money the villagers invested in his business ventures. Yet, he sees that the villagers, like G, consider the business of politics "external relations" that are the concerns of certain types of men. This, to Trumper, is an effete political outlook that he compares to "a monk with a rotten cock who ain't know how he come by the said same infirmity."⁶¹

What G becomes more intrigued by over the course of the conversation is Trumper's newfound sense of a racial identity. Trumper has G listen to Paul Robeson's rendition of the Negro Spiritual "Go Down, Moses." As G is trying to memorize the

lyrics, Trumper mentions that Robeson is “One of the greatest o’ my people.”⁶² G does not understand who this “my people” is. For the moment he simply senses that it is a community of people that is much bigger than the village. After he questions Trumper, the latter reveals that this new awareness of his identity is the result of his time in the United States. Trumper attempts to explain how British colonial subterfuge occluded this form of racial knowing and offers the idea that a black identity is above everything else a form of awareness. “[I]t ain’t have nothin’ to do with where you born,” Trumper tells G, “Tis what you is, a different kind of creature. An’ when you see what I tellin’ you [...] you become a Negro.”⁶³ While Trumper’s conception of racial identity seems to bear upon an essentialist framework, it is in fact in stronger alignment with a constructive way of understanding race. What Trumper emphasizes is how awareness of the discourse of race informs the raced subject as to the nature of his/her oppression. This racial awareness is itself supposed to be a source for the possibility of resistance. Trumper further tells G,

An’ when you see what I tellin’ you an’ you become a Negro, act as you should an’ don’t ask Hist’ry why you is what you then see yourself to be, ‘cause Hist’ry ain’t got no answers. You ain’t a thing till you know it [.]⁶⁴

Thus racial awareness and assertion to Trumper allows for historical agency.

Trumper leaves G with the assurance that one day he will understand everything he has told him. This assurance rests on the fact that he envisions G’s voyage to Trinidad is but the beginning of a longer journey to areas much farther away from his native Caribbean region. G, in turn, meditates over Trumper’s words. On the one hand, he feels some anxiety about meeting the challenge of a black identity that Trumper has conferred

upon him even as he is curious as to what that identity would mean for him. On the other hand he is not quite sure that his experiences and awareness would ever lead him to arrive at the same conclusions as Trumper. Reflecting on this matter G notes:

[Trumper] had found what he needed and there were no more problem to be worked out. Henceforth his life would be straight, even, uncomplicated. He knew his race and he knew his people and he knew what that knowledge meant.⁶⁵

G's words here reflect the idea that Trumper's conclusions are not necessarily the ones he himself will adopt. The way G describes Trumper demands that we question Trumper's self-assuredness and his "knowledge" of his race and people. What, in fact, does it mean for one's life to be "straight" and "uncomplicated"? Is it possible that Trumper is simply avoiding life's painful realities? Is it possible he has simply found a way not to have to confront its problems and uncertainties? Because if G provides the reader a sense that Trumper has found a salutary way to interpret his world and make sense of his existence in it, it cannot be said he views Trumper's solution as having universal applicability. There is an aspect of this statement that lends to the idea that Trumper's outlook concerns him personally, in much the same way how an atheist may view the belief system of a religious person as that person's approach to making sense of life's pains and uncertainties.

Also, the notion of a "different kind of creature" that informed Trumper's vision of his racial identity is something G struggles to comprehend. As he notes to himself, he had known "the subterfuge the whites employed to keep a club for themselves" but he also knew that "blacks employed a similar subterfuge to exclude other blacks who weren't equal to their demands."⁶⁶ G is not able to reconcile Trumper's vision of black

racial identity as denoting “a different kind of creature” with the prejudices he himself has witnessed in the island between “whites and blacks” and “blacks and blacks.” Yet, this is a form of knowledge Trumper assures G he will eventually come to understand. By the end of the novel it is clear G admires Trumper’s self- assurance and his ability to create meaning in his life by embracing being a “different kind of creature.” However, this feeling of admiration for his friend does not denote a complete acceptance of his ideas. It is posited as the traveler’s marvel at the incredible distance he/she will have to travel and a fear as to whether reaching the desired destination is actually at all possible. Within the logic of the narrative, the beginning of this intellectual journey will extend to G’s new destination of Trinidad, and follow the route of a migration to England and/or the United States.

There is a sense that for both Lamming and Baldwin the condition of exile allows for a sharper perspective on their respective conditions as a colonial subject (Lamming) and a second-class citizen in a supposed democracy (Baldwin). Motivated by a desire to physically escape the racial violence in the US and the need to have psychological distance from that environment in order to develop as a writer, James Baldwin’s considerations of exile and his transnational encounters eventually lead to his re-affirmation of the African-American’s indelible American identity. This affirmation of an American identity, however, also relied on asserting the particularity of the African American experience and how that experience does not align itself with a colonial condition. For George Lamming, the movement from colony to metropole is also motivated by material concerns, albeit very different ones; and while this movement is

one that incurs experiences of uprootedness and alienation, it also allows for privileged insight into the colonial structures that inform West Indian identity.

In contrast to Baldwin, Lamming's status as a colonial subject and his preoccupation with the colonial experience would have made him more in tune with overarching concerns of the Congress. These concerns can essentially be summed up with Lamming's own phrasing: "a dismantling of the colonial structures of awareness." However, as his lecture illustrates, Lamming at the Congress shied away from some of the more overt political and ideological concerns raised. His main contribution to the debates was to have brought in a self-reflective quality to the work of the writer and intellectual as both a public figure and a private person that James Baldwin was in complete accord with.

The Black Writer and His Worlds

According to James Baldwin, George Lamming began his lecture at the Congress with a quotation from the American writer Djuna Barnes that he directly addressed to fellow writers Aimé Césaire and Jacques Stéphen Alexis: "Too great a sense of identity makes a man feel he can do no wrong. And too little does the same."⁶⁷ Was Lamming's use of this quotation meant to express a critique of the two writers? Or, on the contrary, was it that the three writers were all in agreement about a particular set of exchanges that had occurred at the Congress? There is also the fact that the quotation reflects in its considerations ideas informing the most important scene about racial identity in Lamming's *The Castle of My Skin*: the protagonist G's conversation with Trumper at the end of the novel, where Trumper's assured sense of his racial identity is counterposed with G's ambivalence about his relation to that identity. It is therefore possible Lamming

was simply further extending upon this theme, especially given that some of the tensions that characterized the Congress up to the time of his lecture would have made the quoted statement particularly apropos.

Baldwin, however, does not provide any further context to Lamming's alleged use of the quotation. The only thing that is clear is the fact that he thought Lamming's lecture was a significant departure from what he had been hearing over the course of the Congress. This is a point that Lamming himself would have agreed with, as in his lecture he would state:

I have the impression, from some of the briefs I have read, that you are concerned with matters which go far and fast beyond the strictness and delicacy of creative literature.⁶⁸

Lamming acknowledges that this interest in issues beyond literature is a reflection of the fact that various disciplines were represented at the Congress. He further implies, however, that the Congress' stated aim to establish "the validity of the African contribution to human civilization" is partially motivated by another factor that has little to do with the pursuit of knowledge: the unrelenting gaze of the white Other. "It is difficult to think at all" Lamming affirms, "without being constantly mindful of the sympathy and attitude of [that] Other."⁶⁹ Lamming was commenting on how the very aims of the Congress could unfortunately not be divorced from an impulse to provide evidence of the legitimacy and relative parity of African and African diasporic cultural systems that within racist discourses is always denied.

Lamming extends the import of this statement about the European Other's gaze to begin to examine how the demands of that gaze affect black writers who must navigate

the discursive field of their racial categorization and the pressures this places upon their craft as literary artists. Central to Lamming's approach to this inquiry is to consider the constructed nature of racial identity. For Lamming, the concept of the "Negro" presents itself as both a fact and a fallacy. The "fact" of "Negro-ness," he infers (and Baldwin would agree), rests upon political grounds. He sees this as the case insofar as he views politics as the galvanizing basis for what calls a "universal Negro sympathy." Politics, to Lamming, provides the concept of the Negro a "definite universal clarity."⁷⁰

To further illuminate this particular idea, Lamming invited his audience to consider what in essence African writers whose literary sensibilities are influenced by an oral literary tradition they have immediate access to and a language that bears little rapport to the romance language in which they writes, have in common with West Indian writers. As Lamming sees it, the works of West Indian writers betray a confusing similarity with the European "Other" in regards to themes, anxieties, and desires. Here, adopting the perspective of a European reading public reflecting upon West Indian writers, Lamming locates the confusion that this public experiences within inherent incongruences between a racial logic that compels one to think in terms of essential difference, and a conception of culture that is fluid. As Lamming sees it, to the European, West Indian writers "feel" different insofar as they look like their African counterpart, a remark that indelibly bears the mark of racial logic. Yet that affective sense of difference is challenged by that European's public's perception that West Indian writers seem to belong entirely to "a wholly different patterns of calculations and ambitions"⁷¹ than their African counterparts, to a cultural universe in essence that is closer to the European's own.

Thus to Lamming herein lies the “fallacy” of the Negro concept: that it is “used to contain an amalgam of man, who whatever the similarity of their origins, now share, through different accidents of history, fairly widely different heritages of habits and intellectual orientation.”⁷² On the surface, Lamming’s statement does not appear to significantly diverge from earlier remarks that the African American writer Richard Wright and the Haitian writer Jacques Stephen Alexis had made earlier at the Congress, specifically in response to Léopold Sédar Senghor’s presentation.⁷³ Responding to the latter’s attempt to present ontological differences between African and European ways of being, both Wright and Alexis had sought further explanation about how the African subjectivity Senghor defined applied to them as Western subjects. Baldwin, himself, would have agreed with Lamming’s assessment. The views he expressed in his essay about the Congress on Lasebikan’s lecture on Yoruban poetry and Senghor’s vision of an African aesthetic, on the whole indicate an affinity with Lamming’s view that African literature was informed by a “different patterns of calculations and ambitions.” Baldwin, however, was not well read in the fiction coming out of the continent, so his vision of African difference was simply informed by an acceptance of African cultural particularity. In contrast, Lamming’s argument used his critical understanding of the works of African and West Indian authors to present a similar vision of a difference that escapes the parameters of racial logic.

Lamming’s reflections, however, did not simply end there. Having established the double nature of the “Negro” concept as both fact and fallacy, he then engages in a meditation over how that very concept affects the creative realm in which the black writer operates. Here, “Negro-ness” or blackness as “fact” and “fallacy” is presented in

relationship to not only the imaginative space circumscribing the works of black writers, but to black writers' very conception of themselves. Adopting language that approximates Frantz Fanon's theorization of black subjectivity vis-à-vis whiteness in the essay "the Lived Experience of the Black Man," Lamming, similar to Fanon, proposes that blackness as racial signifier is that condition imposed upon the colonized black subject by the European Other. To highlight the fact that this condition is not reciprocal, that the argument in effect cannot be made, that "whiteness" is given its racialized meaning through a black gaze, Fanon had noted that "the black has no ontological resistance in the eyes of the white man."⁷⁴ Fanon's statement here implied that "ontology," as that branch of metaphysics that deals with the essence and nature of things or of existence, must be put aside when considering the position of the black subject, because that same said subject is constructed in relation to whiteness, not in and of itself. Adhering to a parallel logic, Lamming claims that the black writer carries the racial marker "like a limb." This marker, he remarks, "travels with him as a necessary guide for the Other's regard."⁷⁵

The comparison made with Fanon can even be extended to the form of consciousness of the self this condition creates. Because like Fanon, Lamming points to a dynamic whereby consciousness of the self occurs in the third-person. While to Fanon, however, this consciousness of the self initially presents itself as an apprehension of the black body in relation to the outside world, Lamming considers this third-person consciousness of the self as a function of an internalization of the white gaze that forces the black subject to "encounter himself in a state of surprise and embarrassment."⁷⁶ This, to Lamming, produces a feeling of being known. It is a state of transparency that

Lamming associates with a feeling of shame; as he very eloquently put it, it is “the shame of every consciousness which feels that it has been *seen*.”⁷⁷

The similarities drawn with Fanon’s essay here illustrate that Lamming’s presentation is very much a reflection on both the objective and subjective dimensions of racial identity. This reflection, however, within the purview of the Congress should not be thought of as an attempt to demarcate an unproblematic space for black subjectivity in relation to whiteness alone, or as a racialized dialectic of self and other. Lamming’s lecture, much like Baldwin’s essay on the Congress, expressed the reaction of a skeptic, who, understanding the political grounds for a clamor for racial unity and solidarity, remained keenly aware of his/her own difference, a difference both Baldwin and Lamming would associate with what they envision as the diversity of the black experience.

Thus, Lamming’s presentation resonated with Baldwin in large part because the latter already identified with several of Lamming’s propositions. Baldwin, for instance, perceived that like himself, Lamming was more “concerned about the immensity and the variety of the experience called Negro”⁷⁸ and that as a writer Lamming, again like himself, was unwilling to abide to facile assertions of a racial identity. This was a critique that Baldwin expressed on various occasions in his essay in regards to the Congress. The nature of the variety of the “Negro experience” for both writers, made it necessary to regard this experience as one with a double edge: it stood not only in a contested relation to a white world, it also stood in a not so harmonious relationship to itself.

Lamming expressed this last idea by asking his audience to consider that “A negro may [...] cash in” on the fallacy of the race concept, and that the enemy therefore is “not only on the outside, he is on the inside as well.”⁷⁹ As with the Djuna Barnes quotation, with this statement Lamming was venturing into familiar territory. His depiction of the character Mr. Slime in *In the Castle of My Skin*, illustrated this dynamic of betrayal in his lecture. Mr. Slime in the novel represents the nationalist anticolonial leader who, to the detriment of many in the village, makes strategic usage of black nationalist rhetoric to serve his own individual interests. Thus Lamming’s statement unmistakably implied that black people were no less susceptible to exercise an oppressive power than their white counterpart. In his essay discussing Baldwin’s reception of Lamming’s lecture at the Congress, Kevin Gaines claims that Baldwin associated Lamming’s depiction of intra-racial oppression with the stigma imposed on black gay life, irrespective of race.⁸⁰ While this is a very reasonable assessment, it should be noted that within the context of the Congress, it is more likely that Baldwin simply foresaw that the issue of oppression would not necessarily find an uncomplicated resolution in a postcolonial context.

At the end of his discussion, Lamming would explore what he meant by the title of his lecture, “The Writer and his World,” by further focusing on how the race concept can very much be an entrapment that imposes itself between the writer and creative freedom. To begin with, Lamming explains the vocation of writing as an engagement in continual acts of self-inquiry, as explorations and clarifications over writers’ relations to others, and as mediated by examinations of the depth of the human condition. For Lamming, the pursuit of these goals necessitates that black writers stage an initial act of

rebellion against the social classification that entraps them. That social classification, as Lamming presents it in his lecture, is one aspect of the world of the black writer: that this writer lives in a society that marks him as different. However, Lamming conceives that black writers' engagement with this external social world should be mediated by another aspect of their existence: that which he refers to as "the world of his private and hidden self." While this "world of the private self," to Lamming, "belongs to each man aware of himself as separate existence"; he sees that it is particularly significant for writers because it is their priceless possession. The vocation of writing requires that writers attempt to put into words that hidden area of the private self, or the hidden part of their consciousness, that is left unarticulated even as they struggle with the language in which to articulate it.

These ideas of the black writer and his/her craft significantly resonated with Baldwin, who at different times in his own writing has meditated upon this subject on very similar terms. The essays "Autobiographical Notes" and "Everybody's Protest Novel" from *Notes of a Native Son* and "What It Means to Be an American" from *Nobody Knows My Name*, for instance, all have significant statements about the black writer and the craft of writing. In "What It Means to Be an American" Baldwin famously frames his decision to leave the United States for France around not only a desire to physically escape racial tensions, but also as a means to unburden himself of some of the psychological weight obstructing his path to becoming a writer. In the essay "Autobiographical Notes," he concludes with the statement "I want to be an honest man and a good writer."⁸¹ While the phrases "honest man" and "good writer" appear at first to reflect two unrelated life desires, they are in fact very much connected within the logic of

the essay. Good writing, as Baldwin conceives of it for any writer, demands an honest engagement with one's experiences, however sweet or bitter, in order "to recreate out of the disorder of life that order which is life."⁸² Using his own circumstances as an example, Baldwin acknowledges that for black writers this form of honesty is complicated by the fact that there is a certain prohibition against "examining [their] own experience[s] too closely" because of the "tremendous demands and the very real dangers of [their] social positions."⁸³

The essay that perhaps best illustrates the terms of Baldwin's affinity with Lamming's ideas about the writer is "Everybody's Protest Novel." There is in fact a possibility that Baldwin's essay might have influenced Lamming's thought process as he was preparing his lecture, given that in his collection of essays *The Pleasures of Exile* (1960) Lamming briefly discussed Baldwin's *Notes of a Native Son*, which was published the year before the Congress.⁸⁴ Baldwin's essay, of course, is best known for calling for an end to the literature of social protest, best represented by the writings of Richard Wright. When read closely, it is apparent that the reasons informing Baldwin's rejection of social protest literature well coincide with Lamming's portrayal of the writer's obligation to explore the world of the private and hidden self. This is the case insofar as Baldwin associates much of social protest fiction with the work of advancing a cause for the public good, and considers that in this endeavor, in-depth treatment of the human condition is often sacrificed. Concerning this very idea, Baldwin writes

In overlooking, denying, evading his complexity—which is nothing more than the disquieting complexity of ourselves—we are diminished and we perish; only within this web of ambiguity, paradox, this hunger, danger, darkness, can we find

at once ourselves and the power that will free us from ourselves. It is this power of revelation which is the business of the novelist, this journey toward a more vast reality which must take precedence over all other claims.⁸⁵

The way Baldwin conceives of the work of the novelist accords with Lamming's vision of the writer's need to explore and find the language to articulate his private world.

Lamming's vision of the writer's private word is conversant with Baldwin's perspective on the complex nature of the human condition and the novelist's obligation to examine it. In terms that resonate with Baldwin's own views, Lamming would note that the writer's ability to deeply delve into the complexity of human experiences is his/her "one priceless possession" that "cannot be sacrificed to his immediate neighborhood."⁸⁶

If by this point it appeared that Lamming had effectively extricated the writer from any sense of social responsibility, he would go on to slightly complicate this vision. As Lamming sees it, the writer's private world is in various ways penetrated by the social reality in which he/she lives. And when the writer carries a mark of difference, belongs to a group in which this mark of difference carries the consequences of gross injustices, his or her relation to the social world in which he or she lives bear few differences to the misfortunes that have befallen that group. Because this difference penetrates his/her private world, then it can be expected that the work this writer produces would in part be a witnessing of the misfortune of the group he/she belongs to. To Lamming, however, this act of witnessing was not a moral obligation; it was the writer's responsibility to him/herself. Lamming in essence regarded that the writer's rendering the impact of the social world on his "hidden and private self" remains the province of the serious writer engaged in finding the language to articulate the nature of his/her private existence. Thus

the act of witnessing here is both objective and subjective, it engages a social reality but from the privileged purview of that private realm of reflection.

James Baldwin and George Lamming: Parting Ways

Baldwin's reception of Lamming's address at the 1956 Congress illustrates how both writers shared similar ideas in regards to the notion of what black populations of the African diaspora held in common, the cultural and historical diversity of their experiences, and the role of the writer in providing nuanced reflections over the lived reality of the black experience. While Baldwin recognized the significance of the 1956 Congress as a social and political event, it is clear that he gravitated towards Lamming because he felt that the latter refused in his own way to present himself as anything else than a writer, an intellectual unwilling to place his musings in the service of propaganda. Given how Baldwin depicts the broader political and ideological context that categorized the nature of the Congress, it is arguable that he saw in Lamming's address a moment of temporary relief from discussions that did not always reflect the nuances of black experiences.

To both writers these experiences were to be most cogently articulated through an approach to their craft that privileged the private realm of reflection. This, however, did not preclude them from being fundamentally politically engaged writers throughout their careers. Of his generation of writers coming out the West Indian, Lamming was the most political conscious; as Sandra Pouchet Paquet would note, at the center of all of his novels was the examination of private experiences in relation to a larger public reality.⁸⁷ If, on his end, Baldwin's career signifies anything, it is a continual reflection on his personal circumstances in relation to a broader oppressive social structure. If earlier he

had considered that his very existence as a writer necessitated a flight from American racism, by the late 1950s he had already begun to consider that his voice as writer now depended on being able to serve as witness. As he would write in the collection of essays *No Name in the Street*, “Everybody else was paying their dues, and it was time I went home and paid mine.”⁸⁸

Epilogue

The 1956 Congress came to a close on the late afternoon of Saturday, September 22nd. Its ending was similar to its beginning, with moments of excitement and frustration. This time, however, the cause was not an unexpected Trans-Atlantic message from an esteemed scholar. The cause was a message that was all too expected. The delegates met in the morning to draw up a “cultural inventory.” This had to be done, our not so impartial eye and ear, James Baldwin, tells us, because the Congress delegates were intent on drafting a resolution to present to the world. After some back and forth about the composition of the committee, a decision was finally made to select eighteen men to deliberate over an hour. Mercer Cook, Baldwin reports, immediately explained that this could not be done in an hour. In fact, it would take over five hours for Dr. Jean Price-Mars, the President of the Congress, and for the rest of the committee to emerge from their seclusion. The hours-long deliberation had two immediate effects. One was an affirmative political statement about the need for an end to colonialism and racism. The other was a plan to draft the “Société Africaine de Culture” (SAC), an association that was essentially another of Alioune Diop’s brainchild.

At some point after all the conversations on that last day, Diop or Davis either met or scheduled a meeting with each other, and perhaps other members of the American delegation, to discuss the possibility of founding a tributary organization to SAC. This tributary organization would come to be known as the American Society of African Culture (AMSAC). AMSAC quickly became more solvent than SAC. From the moment of its founding until its demise in the late 1960s, AMSAC was involved in

several important cultural endeavors that sought to connect and raise mutual awareness between African Americans and Africans. In addition to the cultural initiatives, the organization published several important monographs,¹ organized several conferences, opened an office in Lagos, Nigeria, and published the short-lived journal dedicated to African culture, *African Forum* (1965-1967). This, of course, all came to an end, when the organization that provided AMSAC with its operating funds, the CIA funded Council on Race and Caste in World Affairs (CORAC) stopped its support of AMSAC. It was clear by then that AMSAC was also serving the CIA's interest in using soft power to influence the ideological and intellectual predispositions of African writers, artists and intellectuals.

That historical connection, if it is known at all, does not appear to have changed some key members of the organizing committee at the Congress. Alioune Diop's wife, Christiane Yandé Diop and his best friend, Jacques Rabemananjara, when questioned about the Congress beamed about what it had achieved. Both acknowledged the impact of McCarthyism on the stances of the American delegation, and noted that there were some bitter conflicts there. They relegated this, however, to the politics of the period. For them, the 1956 Congress was most importantly the first among a number of conference and seminar initiatives undertaken by *Présence Africaine* to fulfill its mission of exploring and illustrating African cultural contributions.² The Beninese journalist Paulin Joachim who worked alongside Alioune Diop's in the early days of the magazine similarly considered the event a magical moment in *Présence Africaine*'s history. He became friends with Langston Hughes while they both were at the Congress; they later travelled to Kampala, Uganda together; they went to the Festival of Negro Arts in Dakar.

They met with their black Anglophone counterparts (among them the Nigerian writer Wole Soyinka, who would criticize the Francophone group for being too French). In Joachim's own words, "it was a real celebration and a moment of rediscovery. We were impressed by all of the art and by our visit to Gorée Island, where *our brothers were shipped away to America.*"³

Turning our attention back to the last day of the Congress, we find an impatient Baldwin, likely eager at this point to divest himself of the role of reporter and wanting to enjoy the remaining hours of a Saturday in Paris, reporting on another scene of friction. An unassuming European addressed a simple question to Aimé Césaire: "how [...] do you explain the fact that many Europeans—as well as many Africans, *bien entendu*—reject what is referred to as European culture?" He followed that question with comments expressing the idea that he did not believe in the race concept and that it was possible to be European without accepting the Greco-Roman tradition. He thus wanted to know what exactly "Negro-African culture" consisted of and why it was deemed so important to preserve.⁴ These comments, according to Baldwin, precipitated something of a storm, with Alioune Diop and another man in the audience ineffectively attempting to reply to them. Responding to the comments, Césaire would claim a European rejecting European culture, does not lose his European identity, that the argument of cultural relativity the European man presented in and of itself undermined French justification for its presence in Africa, and while it may well be that the man in question rejected the race concept, it did not change the fact that the concept itself was a European invention.

In describing Césaire's replies to these comments, Baldwin initially emphasized the Martinican writer's "deliberate, mocking logic." Yet as Césaire proceeds in making

his comments, Baldwin in very un-Baldwinian fashion allowed Césaire to be the voice of authority. In fact in the last three pages of his account of the Congress, Baldwin positions himself as a muted observer, if not tacit supporter, while the four personalities he had been most critical of throughout his account of the Congress assumed an authority that had been denied them. Césaire's statements go unchallenged by Baldwin. Cheikh Anta Diop is provided with the space to express probably the most arresting remark of Baldwin's account: " 'Where,' Diop asked, 'is the European nation which, in order to progress, surrendered its past?'" Wright provides the closing remarks and Senghor concludes by telling the audience this was the first of many gatherings to come. In what might be read as a gesture of solidarity with his fellow participants at the Congress, Baldwin places himself in the crowd of black faces leaving the Sorbonne: "As night was falling *we* poured into the Paris streets."⁵

NOTES

Introduction

¹ Jacques Stéphen Alexis, “Débats,” in *Le Premier Congrès International des Écrivains et Artistes Noirs: Compte Rendu Complet. Présence Africaine* 8-10 (1956): 69.

² Ralph Ellison, *Shadow and Act* (New York: New American Library, Signet, 1964), 255.

³ See Phillipe Verdin’s *Alioune Diop, le Socrate noir* (Paris: Lethielleux, 2010), 240. A clear list of all those who participated in organizing the Congress is not provided in any of the literature that covers the event. It is likely the bulk of the work of organizing was done by Diop himself, his wife Christiane Yandé Diop, and the various staff/committees Alioune Diop worked with at *Présence Africaine*. Diop also sought out the advice of the Trinidadian Pan-African socialist George Padmore, likely because of the latter’s experience in organizing the 1945 Pan-African Conference that took place in Manchester, England. I learned from an interview conducted with the George Lamming about Mario Andrade’s significance at *Présence Africaine*, hence the reason his name is included in the list. A December 1955-January 1956 issue of *Présence Africaine* carried an advertisement of the Congress that was signed by nineteen generally well-known black writers, intellectuals, and artists. Among those who signed the “Appeal to Black Writers and Artists” were Jazz musician Louis Armstrong and the singer/dancer Josephine Baker. It is doubtful that the level of participation of all those who signed the “appeal” was extensive. What seemed to matter most, for the organizers, was to illustrate the transnational nature of the gathering and the wide ranging support it was getting from well known and well-respected writers, artists, intellectuals and entertainers. It was one of Alioune Diop’s great gifts to garner a wide range of support from a variety of writers and intellectuals for his intellectual endeavors.

⁴ The Pan-African socialist activist George Padmore had played a significant role through correspondence in advising Diop throughout the course of organizing the Congress. However, he was not able to make it to the Congress because of medical issues (See, *Le Premier Congrès International des Écrivains et Artistes Noirs: Compte Rendu Complet. Présence Africaine* 8-10 (1956): 384). Padmore’s correspondence with Richard Wright reveals a little of the extent of his participation (See, The Richard Wright Papers, box 103, folder 1522, Beinecke Library, Yale University).

⁵ The Congress was a largely male-dominated affair. This is something that Richard Wright was disturbed by and addressed on the first day of Congress, during the first formal debate between the delegates. The two most prominent women associated with the Congress were Josephine Baker, the African American singer and dancer who had been living in France for over three decades, and the Martinican actress and singer Jenny Alpha. Although Alpha is in the famed photograph of all the official delegates (standing in the first row, fifth from the left, and in between Alioune Diop and Dr. Jean Price-Mars) very little is known of her participation at the Congress. Bob Swain’s 2006 documentary of the event in *Lumières noires*, for instance, only shows her picture.

⁶ See “Chapter Four” of this dissertation for a discussion of Baldwin at the Congress and his reception of the lecture by George Lamming.

⁷ Aimé Césaire's descriptions of the Congress' three themes came about during an exchange with the Haitian novelist Jacques Stephens Alexis during the initial formal debate period on the first day of the Congress. Césaire was reacting to Alexis' stated displeasure with the limited topics discussed. Césaire's reply suggests that Alexis' objection was disingenuous, as he infers Alexis well knew the break down of the topics to be discussed in advance. For the exchange, see "Débats" in *Le Premier Congrès International des Écrivains et Artistes Noirs: Compte-Rendu Complet. Présence Africaine* 8-10 (1956): 69-70.

⁸ Bennetta Jule-Rosette, *Black Paris: The African Writers' Landscape* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 53.

⁹ Lilyan Kesteloot's seminal volume *Black Writers in French* (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1991) immediately comes to mind as a text that considers the Congress as an outgrowth of the Négritude movement. Other volumes include the more volumes by Bennetta Jules-Rosette (*Black Paris*), and Buata B. Malela (*Les écrivains afro-antillais à Paris (1920-1960): stratégies et postures identitaires* (Paris: Khartala, 2008)).

¹⁰ Damas does not appear to have been present at the Congress; neither did he contribute to its organization.

¹¹ Literary scholar T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting has drawn attention to the fact that there were women who were also part of that group in a very prominent way and contributed to its ideas from the moment of its founding. These would include the two sisters Paulette and Jane Nardal, as well as Aimé Césaire eventual wife, Suzanne Césaire. See, T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting's *Négritude Women* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002). Also, Léopold Sédar Senghor makes sure to credit Alioune Diop as one of the movement's founders of the movement in the "Preface Letter" to V.Y. Mudimbe's *The Surreptitious Speech: Présence Africaine and the Politics of Otherness, 1947-1987*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), XI-XII.

¹² Ellen Conroy Kennedy, "Translator's Introduction," in Lilyan Kesteloot's *Black Writers in French: A Literary History of Négritude*, trans. Ellen Conroy Kennedy (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1991), xvii.

¹³ For an in-depth discussion of this, see Kenneth E. Silver's *Esprit de corps: the Art of the Parisian Avant-Garde and the First World War, 1914-1925* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989).

¹⁴ Lilyan Kesteloot, *Black Writers in French*, 93-101

¹⁵ *ibid.*, 46-55.

¹⁶ See the documentary *Aimé Césaire: Une parole pour le XXème Siècle*.

¹⁷ Lilyan Kesteloot, 85

¹⁸ Aimé Césaire, *Lettre à Maurice Thorez* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1956).

¹⁹ See Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 16.

²⁰ Senghor, qtd. in Kesteloot, *Black Writers in French*, 56. This quotation is from a letter that was written from Senghor to Kesteloot in 1960.

²¹ Buata B. Malela, *Les écrivains afro-antillais à Paris (1920-1960): stratégies et postures identitaires* (Paris: Khartala, 2008), 111.

²² See “Chapter Two” of this dissertation for a discussion on Mercer Cook’s connection the francophone African and Antillean group of writers and intellectuals.

²³ Lilyan Kesteloot, *Black Writers in French*, 119-120.

²⁴ Jean-Paul Sartre’s “Black Orpheus,” translated by John T. McCombie, *The Massachusetts Review* 1 (6) (1964-1965): 18.

²⁵ Maya Jaggi, “Village Voice”, *The Guardian*, Saturday 14 May 2005.

²⁶ Wole Soyinka, *Myth, Literature, and the African World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 126-127.

²⁷ “On National Culture” is the fourth chapter of Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 2004). The essay evolved from the lecture Fanon delivered at the Second International Congress of Black Writers and Artists in Rome in 1959, also organized by Alioune Diop and Présence Africaine.

²⁸ Alioune Diop, “Discours d’ouverture,” *Le Premier Congrès International des Écrivains et Artistes Noirs*, 11.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 13.

³⁰ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 244.

³¹ According a biographical note on the author’s life in an edition of his novel *Les Arbres Musiciens* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1997), Jacques Stephens Alexis is a descendant of Jean Jacques Dessalines, the military general who led the Haitian army to victory against the French to establish the first black Independent nation in the Western hemisphere in 1804.

³² Even as he began writing out of the social realist and Marxist peasant novel tradition, by his second novel, *Les arbres musiciens*, published by Gallimard the year after the Congress, Alexis was moving away from this form of writing, introducing elements of “marvelous realism” in his work. His lecture at the Congress “Du réalisme merveilleux haïtien” essentially announced this new departure. The lecture also presented an argument against Négritude’s broad conceptualization of culture through its focus on the cultural particularity of Haiti and the Caribbean region writ large.

Chapter One

¹ Alioune Diop to John A. Davis, March 31, 1958, *Horace Mann Bond Papers*, Emory University, MICRO 1667.

² John A. Davis to Horace M. Bond, February 11, 1957, *Horace Mann Bond Papers*, Emory University, MICRO 1667.

³ This was Philippe Verdin’s understanding of the Du Bois message in his discussion of the Congress in his biography of Alioune Diop. See, *Alioune Diop: le Socrate noir* (Paris: Lethielleux, 2010). Verdin mistakenly writes that the American delegation itself was under watch and the members of that delegation were being cautious because of surveillance. While he provides no evidence to substantiate this claim, it is likely Verdin was relying on the scholarship on the surveillance culture of the Cold War. There was an interesting moment at the Congress, however, which could be interpreted as an instance where an American delegate was trying to disavow a form of political radicalism in order to deflect attention from himself. Before beginning his lecture on the last day of the Congress, Richard Wright made sure to address a statement by the Indian scholar Cedric

Dover that connected him with an essay he had written while still a member of the American Communist Party in the 1930s, “Blueprint for Negro Writing.” The essay was critical of Harlem Renaissance writers whom he felt were betoken to a white audience, and it challenged black writers to consider the nationalist imperatives of their lives. Wright notes he wrote this essay at a different time and since then much progress had been made on the race front in the United States. It is likely, however, Wright was also strategically distancing himself from a nationalist take on the African American struggle for civil rights.

⁴ James Baldwin, “Princes and Powers,” *Nobody Knows My Name* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 18.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁶ W.E.B. DuBois, “To the Congrès des Ecrivains et Artistes Noirs,” *Le Premier Congrès International des Écrivains et Artistes Noirs: Compte Rendu Complet. Présence Africaine* 8-10 (1956): 383.

⁷ John A. Davis to Alioune Diop, April 7, 1958, *Horace Mann Bond Papers*, Emory University, MICRO 1667, Part II Reel 10.

⁸ There is a bit of irony here in the fact that Marcus Garvey and Chandler Owens, socialist editor and activist, repeated very similar accusations of US government collaboration against Du Bois when Du Bois was preparing to attend the Second Pan-African Congress in Paris in 1921. See Robert A. Hill, ed. *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers*, Vol. 1, 395-399.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 383.

¹⁰ According to Pan-African socialist C.L.R. James, Du Bois had been “the moving spirit and active organizer” of the five Pan-African congresses that took place before 1950 (1919, 1921, 1923, 1927, and 1945). See C.L.R. James, *The Future in the Present: Selected Writings* (Conn.: L. Hill, 1977) 202, 208. Also for a historical perspective on Du Bois’ Pan-Africanism see Manning Marable’s “The Pan-Africanism of W.E.B. Du Bois” in *W.E.B. Du Bois on Race and Culture*, eds. Bernard Bell, Emily R. Grosholz and James B. Stewart (New York: Routledge, 1996), 193-218.

¹¹ Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972), 60.

¹² W.E.B. Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn: An Essay Toward an Autobiography of the Race Concept* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 110.

¹³ An interesting aspect of Du Bois’ vision of African communalism is how he sees it can be translated to meet the political and cultural needs of African Americans. Although he considers African Americans a more artificial group, he notes that they have sources of strength in their history of common suffering. What he ultimately sees as promising is the possibility that an implementation of African communalism into the group life of African Americans also connotes a healthy meeting of black folk life with the modern world. Du Bois associates this with the possibility of creating an industrial and a cultural democracy, which essentially means a society that has a more equitable distribution of wealth and a democratic society that is culturally pluralist in nature.

¹⁴ I use the word “romantic” here because in the message to the Congress Du Bois does present his political beliefs as conversant with two unrelated social and political

organizations (African communal life and Soviet socialism) in a way that uncritically assumes they are extensions of each other. In his *In the Shadow of Du Bois: Afro-Modern Political Thought in America* Robert Gooding-Williams also alludes to a tendency in Du Bois' political philosophy in the 1930s and the 1940s to abide to a form of romantic idealism in that he invokes African folklore and music and a vision of African communalism to present the possibility of effective black leadership. This is an interesting point that I am not quite sure that I altogether agree with because it seems Gooding-Williams is critiquing Du Bois for relying on a myth of cultural particularity in order to posit the possibility of successful group leadership. My main issue here is whether a cultural myth of any sort is not a basic requirement for a sense of group identity and whether there can be group leadership without the group in question having a sense of their particular identity.

¹⁵ W.E.B. Du Bois, "To the Congrès des Ecrivains et Artistes Noirs", 383.

¹⁶ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 98.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 100.

¹⁸ According to Richard Wright biographer Hazel Rowley, Diop's *Présence Africaine* had already lost its subsidy from the French government because of its leftist and anti-colonial editorial policy. See *Richard Wright: The Life and Times* (New York: Henry Holt, 2001), 584 (note 28).

¹⁹ While Frantz Fanon's biographer, David Macey, does not discuss the 1956 Congress at length, he infers Fanon would not have been able to attend the Congress if his connection to the FLN had by then been revealed. See, *Fanon: a Biography* (New York: Verso, 2012), 278-287.

²⁰ It was later revealed that *Encounter* was the most prized of several periodical publications that received their operating funds from the CIA backed Congress for Cultural Freedom. See Frances Stonor Saunders' *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Art and Letters* (New York: New Press, 2000), 44-45. In the 1970s Baldwin would comment he was essentially reporting on the Congress for the CIA. The manner in which he makes this statement does not imply he was at the time actually aware of the CIA connection to *Encounter* magazine. See Baldwin's *No Name on the Street* (New York: The Dial Press, 1972), 49.

²¹ Other than Richard Wright, all of the American delegates had strong ties to historically black colleges. Horace Mann Bond, the president of Lincoln University, was an alumnus of that institution as was William T. Fontaine (at the time of the Congress, Fontaine was teaching in the Philosophy department of the University of Pennsylvania. Shortly afterward he would become the first tenured black faculty at an Ivy League institution). John A. Davis before his tenure at City College (of the City University of New York) taught both at Howard University and Lincoln University. Like fellow delegate Mercer Cook, he was also a graduate of the famed Dunbar High School in Washington, D.C. Cook in turn taught at both Atlanta University and Howard University. Although he had replaced W.E.B. Du Bois as the editor of the NAACP's flagship organ *The Crisis*, James W. Ivy had previously taught black literature at the Hampton Institute.

²² Mercer Cook and W.E.B. Du Bois' tenure at Atlanta University from the 1930s to the 1940s coincided. Du Bois was also acquainted with Mercer Cook's father, the famed music composer Will Marion Cook. Horace Mann Bond and James W. Ivy were in correspondence with Du Bois as early as in the mid 1920s. John A. Davis, who considered himself a product of Du Bois' talented tenth who had to rebel against him, noted that his relationship to Du Bois was dramatically affected by an editorial the latter wrote in the 1930s concerning Davis' work with the New Negro Alliance, an organization Davis had founded in Washington D.C. following his graduation from Williams College that aimed to pressure white businesses to hire black employees. Davis, recalls Du Bois' dismissal of his endeavor as dividing the white and black working class. Lastly, Du Bois had been acquainted with Richard Wright since at least 1940, after the latter's publication of *Native Son*. See Wayne Urban's biography of Bond, *Black Scholar: Horace Mann Bond, 1904-1972* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1992), 28; correspondence between Ivy and Du Bois: James W. Ivy to W.E.B. Du Bois, July 18, 1927, *W. E. B. Du Bois Papers* (MS 312), Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries; correspondence between Davis and sociologist Martin Kilson, John A. Davis to Martin Kilson, 25 April 1962, AMSAC Papers, Moreland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University; and a brief article Du Bois wrote concerning his meeting with Richard Wright, W.E.B. Du Bois, "As the Crow Flies," *New York Amsterdam News*, 9 March 1940).

²³ See Penny M. von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Plays the Cold War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004); Lawrence P. Jackson, "Irredeemable Promise: J. Saunders Redding and Negro New Liberalism," *American Literary History* 10 (3) (2007): 735; Helen Laville and Scott Lucas, "The American Way: Edith Sampson, the NAACP, and African American Identity in the Cold War," *Diplomatic History* 20 (4) (1996): 568-578.

²⁴ David Levering Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: A Biography* (New York: Macmillan, 2009), 689.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 201.

²⁶ For a brief discussion of the origin of the "Talented Tenth" concept, see Joy James' *Transcending the Talented Tenth* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 16-18.

²⁷ This is no where else more apparent in a series of editorials by the young socialists Owen Chandler and A. Philip Randolph in the magazine *The Messenger*, published between 1917 and 1928. For the first half of the magazine's existence, the two committed young radicals would frequently criticize Du Bois and his editorship of *The Crisis*. They often identified him as the representative of an older and more conservative generation not quite in touch with the present time.

²⁸ W.E.B. Du Bois' adopted son, David Du Bois, has commented on the tendency within some circles to wish to only hold on to the Du Bois associated with the concept of the "Talented Tenth" and to omit the Du Bois who later rejects this elitist theory of African American leadership. See, David Du Bois, "Understanding the Legacy of W.E.B. Du Bois," *Emerge*, October 1993.

²⁹ Kate Baldwin, *Beyond the Color Line and Iron Curtain* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), Chp.3 149-201.

- ³⁰ Joy James, *Transcending the Talented Tenth*, 26-27.
- ³¹ Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 128.
- ³² Mark Van Wiener and Julie Kraft, "How the Socialism of W.E.B. Du Bois Still Matters: Black Socialism in *The Quest of the Silver Fleece*—and Beyond," *The African American Review*, Volume 41, Number 1, 2007, 67.
- ³³ *Ibid.*, 77.
- ³⁴ David Levering Lewis, 200.
- ³⁵ W.E.B. Du Bois, "The Negro and Communism." *The Crisis* 38 (1931): 313.
- ³⁶ Arnold Rampersad, *The Art and Imagination of W.E.B. Du Bois* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976).
- ³⁷ Adolph L. Reed Jr., *W.E.B. Du Bois and American Political Thought: Fabianism and the Color Line* (New York: Oxford University Press), 72-79.
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*, 77.
- ³⁹ Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 200-203.
- ⁴⁰ Lewis discusses at length the impact of an innuendo-laden 1947 article by Harvard University historian Arthur Schlesinger ("The US Communist Party") linking the American Communist party (CPUSA) to the NAACP, the intensifying of Cold War paranoia, Du Bois' identification with the left and his uneasy relationship with the Secretary of the NAACP Walter White, in hastening Du Bois' second departure from the NAACP in 1948. See David Levering Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: A Biography*, 669-682.
- ⁴¹ David Levering Lewis, 678-679
- ⁴² *Ibid.*, 678-679.
- ⁴³ Joy James notes that at the time of his writing *Dusk of Dawn* Du Bois' perspective on race leadership was inching toward democratic reform, even as he continued to consider black elites as the natural leadership cadre. James proposes that Du Bois essentially made a distinction between an aristocracy with materially wealth (that he identifies with Booker T. Washington) and an aristocracy with "existential wealth" who had the appropriate wherewithal to provide political and moral leadership. See *Transcending the Talented Tenth*, 23.
- ⁴⁴ W.E.B. Du Bois, "The Talented Tenth Memorial Address," in *Writings by W.E.B. Du Bois in Non-Periodical Literature Edited by Others*, ed. Herbert Aptheker (Millwood, NY: Kraus-Thomson, 1982), 80.
- ⁴⁵ W.E.B. Du Bois, *In Battle for Peace, the Story of My 83rd Birthday* (New York: Masses and Mainstream, 1953), 76.
- ⁴⁶ W.E.B. Du Bois, "The Talented Tenth Memorial Address" in Henry L. Gates and Cornel West's *The Future of the Race*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996), 161.
- ⁴⁷ W.E.B. Du Bois, *Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 41.
- ⁴⁸ W.E.B. Du Bois, "The Talented Tenth Memorial Address" in Henry L. Gates and Cornel West's *The Future of the Race*, 168.
- ⁴⁹ W.E.B. Du Bois, "Negroes and the Crisis of Capitalism in the United States," *Monthly Review*, April 1953.

⁵⁰ Richard Wright, “Debats”, “Le Premier Congrès International des Écrivains et Artistes Noirs: Compte Rendu Complet,” 67

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁵² Alioune Diop to Richard Wright, October 2, 1947, Box 104, folder 1557, Richard Wright Papers, Beinecke Library, Yale University.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, The writing of this letter in itself indicates how Alioune Diop felt correspondence and association with Richard Wright may go a far way in having the different projects he had in mind come into fruition. In his biography of Alioune Diop Philippe Verdin mentions how private the man was, and could only trace one extensive document where Diop talked at length about his life and upbringing (*Alioune Diop, le Socrate noir*, 26-29).

⁵⁴ Philippe Verdin, *Alioune Diop, le Socrate noir*, 154-155

⁵⁵ James Baldwin, *Nobody Knows My Name*, 18.

⁵⁶ In making this remark I am reminded of political scientist Jerry Gaffio Watts’ discussion of ways African American writers, artists and intellectuals were able to circumnavigate the conundrum of American racism to find and create spaces for themselves that would allow them to nurture, protect, and develop their talents. He uses the notion of “social marginality facilitators” to explain such strategies. They include, among others, the artist’s experience of life in exile, which both Wright and Baldwin shared, membership in the Communist Party, which was the case for Wright, and living the Bohemian lifestyle, which characterized Baldwin’s life in New York City’s West Village. I would add black institutions of higher learning as another “social marginality factor” and one that would have been greatly indebted to Du Bois’ work. See Watts’ *Heroism and the Black Intellectual: Ralph Ellison, Politics, and Afro-American Intellectual Life* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 16.

⁵⁷ Biographer David Leeming’s description of Beauford Delaney’s life in Boston and New York City in the 1920s and 1930s indicates the artist’s acquaintance with significant figures of the New Negro Movement. See Chapter 2 and 3 of *Amazing Grace: a Life of Beauford Delaney* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

⁵⁸ One of the most promising black scholars of his generation, Allison Davis is also John A. Davis’ older brother.

⁵⁹ W.E.B. Du Bois, “As the Crow Flies,” *New York Amsterdam News*, 9 March 1940.

⁶⁰ W.E.B. Du Bois, “Richard Wright Looks Back”, *New York Herald Tribune*, 4 March 1945.

⁶¹ See Herbert Apetheker, ed. *The Correspondence of W.E. B. Du Bois, Volume III* (Massachusetts: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997), 375 (footnote 1).

⁶² One of the novel’s key scenes occurs while Wright is with his grandmother attending a church service. After hearing the prophet Jacob’s conversion story from the church elder, Wright tells his grandmother that “if” he saw an angel like Jacob, then he would believe in God. Wright’s grandmother misunderstands him. She believes him to have said he saw an angel and now believed in God. Uncomfortable with his grandmother’s enthusiasm, to her great disappointment he has to explain to her what he had actually said. The scene draws its poignancy in part from the near-comic aspect of an adolescent (Wright) acting as a voice of “reason” against “superstition” (Wright’s grandmother’s

religiosity). Also, by this time Wright had recounted enough of his poverty-stricken childhood to implicitly posit a critique of the inefficacy of a religious faith that does not put food on the table. For a discussion of Wright's representation of his grandmother's religious faith in *Black Boy* as well as an unpublished essay ("Memories of my Grandmother") see Qiana J. Whitted's "Using my Grandmother's Life as a Model": Richard Wright and the Gendered Politics of Religious Representation," *The Southern Literary Journal* 36 (2) (2004): 13-30.

⁶³ In the essay "Stranger at Home: James Baldwin on what it means to be an American," literary scholar Cheryl Wall refers to Baldwin's appropriation of American Exceptionalist rhetoric as an intervention that strategically allows him to be heard as he presents a critical perspective on American identity. According to Wall, "Baldwin makes a purposeful and strategic use of American exceptionalism to advance the scrupulously visible political interest of African Americans, indeed, of Americans in general." See Cora Kaplan and Bill Schwartz's edited volume *James Baldwin: America and Beyond* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2011), 36-37.

⁶⁴ See James Baldwin, "Le Problème Noir Américain," *Rapport France-États Unis*, September 1951.

⁶⁵ Michel Fabre, *The Unfinished Quest of Richard Wright* (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 433.

⁶⁶ Hazel Rowley, *Richard Wright: The Life and Times*, 474. Also see, Anonymous, RE: First Congress of the Presence Africaine, US Embassy, Paris, to Department of State, Washington, May 3, 1956, FBI file on Richard Wright, online (The statement includes a brief description of *Présence Africaine*, which is described as a Leftist cultural review; a statement of Aimé Césaire's Communist Party affiliation and the possible tie to the Communist Party of the Haitian writer René Dépestre; that the French government had suspended its subsidy to the journal because of its anti-colonial rhetoric; that Wright on his own accord had gone to the US embassy to warn them of the event and his concerns as to who might be invited to form the American delegation; that Wright was provided a list of names through the agency of who might be considered for the delegation and he himself had forwarded a list to Roy Wilkins, whom he suggested ought to work with the State Department; and that a political advisor in the French Ministry of Overseas Territories considered *Présence Africaine* an increasingly important organization of liberal thinkers who might be veered toward Communism if no effort was made to orient them toward the West).

⁶⁷ John Henrik Clarke Papers, "The Origin and Nature of the American Society of African Culture", Box 35, folder 12, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ CORAC was a main backer of the American Society of African Culture (AMSAC), an organization that was founded by the American delegation that went to the 1956 Congress. AMSAC was meant to be a subsidiary of the *Société Africaine de Culture* (African Society of Culture), which was founded during the 1956 Congress and was associated with *Présence Africaine*. It was found out in the 1960s that CORAC received its budget from the United States Central Intelligence Agency. See *Organizing Black America: An Encyclopedia of African American Associations*, 57-59, 162. For a fuller

examination of CORAC's ties to AMSAC, see Hugh Wilford's "The American Society of African Culture: The CIA and Transnational Networks of African Diaspora Intellectuals in the Cold War" in Luc van Dongen, Stéphanie Roulin and Giles Scott-Smith's *Transnational Anti-Communism and the Cold War: Agents, Activities, and Networks* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014).

⁷⁰ See Obituary. "Orin Lehman, 88, Park Stewarts, Dies", *New York Times*, February 23, 2008.

⁷¹ Hugh Wilford's "The American Society of African Culture: The CIA and Transnational Networks of African Diaspora Intellectuals in the Cold War" in Luc van Dongen, Stéphanie Roulin and Giles Scott-Smith's *Transnational Anti-Communism and the Cold War: Agents, Activities, and Networks* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014), 26.

⁷² John A. Davis to Richard Wright, September 5, 1956, Box 96, Folder 1296, Richard Wright Papers, Beinecke Library, Yale University.

⁷³ See the Richard Wright chapter in *The God that Failed* and chapters 18-20 in the restored edition of Wright's autobiography *Black Boy*.

⁷⁴ Hazel Rowley, *Richard Wright: The Life and Times*, 475. This statement is from a letter written by Richard Wright to James Holness, which Hazel Rowley found in Michel Fabre's private papers. Michel Fabre had also quoted from this letter in his own biography of Wright (*The Unfinished Quest of Richard Wright*, 492-493). In that biography Fabre does not mention Wright's trips to the American Embassy in Paris, and did not make the possible connection between those moments of collaboration with the State Department and Wright's fear of being deprived of his passport.

⁷⁵ Horace Mann Bond, "Report of the First Congress of Negro Writers and Artists," *Horace Mann Bond Papers*, MIC 1667; Part 2 Reel 15, Emory University.

⁷⁶ I discuss Mercer Cook in greater depth in the succeeding chapter.

⁷⁷ Wayne Urban, *Black Scholar: Horace Mann Bond, 1904-1972* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008), 93.

⁷⁸ See Wayne Urban's *Black Scholar: Horace Mann Bond, 1904-1972*.

⁷⁹ Bruce Kuklick, "William Fontaine and the Dilemma of the Negro Intellectual", Alumni Relations File, the University of Pennsylvania Archives. Also see by same author, *Black Philosopher, White Academy: the Career of William Fontaine* (Pennsylvania, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008).

⁸⁰ Very little has been written about John A. Davis. Noted scholar Martin Kilson has written an essay about him that captures the significance of his professional life. See "Political Scientists and the Activist-Technocrat Dichotomy: The Case of John Aubrey Davis" in *African American Perspectives on Political Science*, ed. Wilbur C. Rich (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2007), 169-192.

⁸¹ James Baldwin, *Nobody Knows My Name*, 19.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 19.

⁸³ Richard Wright Papers, Beinecke Beinecke Library, Box 104, folder 1557.

⁸⁴ John A. Davis to William T. Fontaine, November 17, 1956, AMSAC Papers, Morland-Spingharn Research Center, Howard University.

⁸⁵ Membership in AMSAC was by invitation only. It was limited to individuals of African descent, although the year after it was founded the category of “associate membership” was created for people of non-African descent and for Africans temporarily living in the US. The executive council recruited African Americans whom they deemed significantly contributed to the advancement of black culture. Among the organizations’ members were writers and critics Arna Bontemps, Langston Hughes, and Jay Saunders Redding, sociologists E. Franklin Frazier, St. Clair Drake, and Adelaide Cromwell Hill, Musician Duke Ellington, and future Supreme Court justice Thurgood Marshall among others. See AMSAC Papers at the Moreland Spingarn Research Center and *Organizing Black America: An Encyclopedia of African American Associations*, ed. Nina Mjagkij (New York: Garland Publications, 2003), 50-51. For AMSAC’s ties to CORAC see Hugh Wilford’s intriguing account of the clandestine relationship between the CIA and its front organizations, *The Mighty Wurlitzer: How the CIA Played America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), Chapter 9: “Into Africa: African Americans”; also see Wilford’s “The American Society of African Culture: The CIA and Transnational Networks of African Diaspora Intellectuals in the Cold War” in Luc van Dongen, Stéphanie Roulin and Giles Scott-Smith’s *Transnational Anti-Communism and the Cold War: Agents, Activities, and Networks* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014).

⁸⁶ Hugh Wilford argues Davis knew about the CIA connection, and implies most of the officials of the AMSAC would have known as well.

⁸⁷ John A. Davis to Richard Wright, November 18, 1957, Box 96, Folder 1276, Richard Wright Papers, Beinecke Library, Yale University.

⁸⁸ Alioune Diop to John A. Davis, March 31, 1958, *Horace Mann Bond Papers*, Emory University, MICRO 1667.

⁸⁹ SAC, “Pour une communauté de la civilisation des peuples noirs” *Présence Africaine* 110 (1979): 6.

⁹⁰ See Léopold Sédar Senghor’s *On African Socialism*, translated by Mercer Cook (New York: Praeger, 1964).

⁹¹ Macey, *Fanon: a Biography*, 283; also see “Mario de Andrade, 62, a Founder of Angola’s Governing Movement.” [New York] 27 August 1990 *New York Times*. Web.

⁹² Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the rise of Black Internationalism* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2003), 5.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁹⁵ Mary Dudziak, “Desegregation as a Cold War Imperative.” *Stanford Law Review* 41 (1) (1988): 61-63.

⁹⁶ John A. Davis to Horace M. Bond, February 11, 1957, *Horace Mann Bond Papers*, Emory University, MICRO 1667.

Chapter Two

¹ “The Life and Writings of Louis T. Houat”, *Journal of Negro History* 24 (1939): 198.

² Daniel Guérin, *Les antilles décolonisées* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1969), 12.

³ James Baldwin, “Princes and Powers” in *Nobody Knows My Name* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 32.

⁴ Although he does not footnote any evidence to support the claim, Philippe Verdin writes that the American delegation had talked to Diop about pulling out from the Congress altogether. According to Verdin, Diop later talked to Césaire about this the night before the latter delivered his lecture. See, *Alioune Diop: le Socrate noir* (Paris: Lethielleux, 2010).

⁵ For Richard Wright’s perspective on Négritude see Michel Fabre’s essay “Richard Wright, Negritude, and African Writing” in *European-Language Writing in Sub-Saharan Africa, Vol. 2*, ed. Albeert S. Gerard (Budapest: Akademiai Kiado, 1986), chapter XVI. J. Michael Dash discusses Jacques Stephen Alexis’ perspective on the Négritude movement in the article “Marvelous Realism—The Way Out of Négritude,” *Caribbean Studies* 13 (4) (1974): 57-70.

⁶ Jacques Stephen Alexis’ lecture at the Congress can be considered an expression of his rejection of Négritude and his prioritizing of the autonomy of a national culture (i.e. the culture of the Haitian population as the result of a distinctive historical process that should not be subdued to a broad racial logic). J. Michael Dash article “Marvelous Realism—the Way Out of Négritude” discusses this at some length. What is also significant about Alexis’ presentation is that in many ways it announced something of a departure from his previous aesthetic concerns. While Alexis remains best known for the Marxist proletarian novel *Compère Général Soleil* (1955) (*General Sun, My Brother*), by the time of the Congress he was moving toward a literary aesthetic that was foregrounding the Caribbean locale as a specific cultural zone. His two last novels—*Les Arbres Musiciens* (1957) and *L’Espace d’un Cillement* (1959) (*In the Flicker of an Eyelid*) are expressive of this evolving aesthetic concern. While *Les Arbres Musiciens* maintains an element of the political outlook expressed in *Compère Général Soleil*, Alexis essentially stages a narrative of Haitian society and culture as a battleground of conflicting cultural and political interests that will essentially determine Haitian identity. One of the novel things that Alexis does in this work is to represent traditional Haitian culture as a meeting point of the phantom presence of Amerindian culture, symbolized by the boy-mystic character Gonaïbo, and African cultural retention, symbolized by the character of a hougan (voodoo priest). This traditional culture is presented as being engaged in a Manichean struggle against American transnational corporate interests (a rubber company laying waste to the Haitian forest) and the Roman Catholic campaign against the Haitian Voodoo religion.

⁷ Jacques Stephen Alexis, “Débats” *Présence Africaine. Le Premier Congrès International des Écrivains et Artistes Noirs: Compte Rendu Complet. Présence Africaine* 8-10 (1956): 69.

⁸ Richard Wright, “Débats” *Présence Africaine. Le Premier Congrès International des Écrivains et Artistes Noirs: Compte Rendu Complet*, 67-68.

⁹ Throughout I will be using the terms black transnational(ism) and black international(ism) interchangeably.

¹⁰ Lewis R. Gordon, *An Introduction to Africana Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 163.

¹¹ See Robert A. Hill, ed. *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Papers*, Volume 10 (Berkeley: University of California Press c1983), c-ciii.

¹² Bernard Magubane, "The Political Economy of the Black World—Origins of the Present Crisis" in *The Next Decade: Theoretical and Research Issues in Africana Studies*, ed. James E. Turner (New York: Africana Studies and Research Center, 1984), 284-287.

¹³ Tiffany Ruby Patterson and Robin D. G. Kelley, "Unfinished Migrations: Reflections on the African Diaspora and the Making of the Modern World" *African Studies Review* 43 (2000): 13. Here Patterson and Kelley do not make a claim for the existence of an "international black community." Rather they explain that black writers and activists as early as the sixteenth century were attempting to "identify and make sense of the African diaspora."

¹⁴ Alexander Walters, *My Life and Work* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1917), 257-260.

¹⁵ The exact quotation is "At this point we leave Africa, not to mention it again. For it is no historical part of the World; it has no movement or development to exhibit." See Georg W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History* [1837] (New York: Dover, 1956), 99.

¹⁶ Political scientist and philosopher Achille Mbembe dramatically describes the African continent's relegation to an "absolute otherness" in the early part of his introduction to *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 1-6.

¹⁷ The chapter "Masters, Mistresses, Slaves, and the Antinomies of Modernity" in Paul Gilroy's *Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993) 41-71, discusses this dynamic in relations to accounts of modernity.

¹⁸ Alain Locke, *The New Negro* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997), 11.

¹⁹ George Hutchinson has pointed out that Alain Locke's edited volume *The New Negro* was very much informed by a vision that encompassed racial pride, a cosmopolitan sensibility, and a belief that African American culture must partake in the pluralist future of the United States. Hutchinson also maintains that "*The New Negro* is less significant for presenting a particular position than for framing a field of commerce and conflict," therefore highlighting a degree of contestation in the meaning of the term. See *The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1995), 397.

²⁰ Mercer Cook's work has unfortunately been overlooked by literary historians and critics who have studied the transnational dimensions of African American arts and letters in the first half of the century. This is apparent, for instance, in Brent Hayes Edwards' volume *The Practice of Diaspora*, where Locke is prominently featured and Cook only mentioned in passing.

²¹ Lawrence P. Jackson, *The Indignant Generation: A Narrative History of African American Writers and Critics, 1935-1960* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 36. Cook's classmates includes the poets Jean Toomer and Sterling A. Brown, the historian Rayford Logan, and Charles Drew, future inventor of blood plasma and blood banks. This impressive group were trained by writers Jessie Fauset and Angelina Grimké, historian Carter G. Woodson, and Sorbonne PhD Mary Church Terrell.

²² Dr. W.M. Lewis "Mercer Cook, 1920, Wins \$1,500 Sorbonne Scholarship at Amherst College," *Washington Post*, May 10, 1925, R11.

²³ For the connection between the Congress for Cultural Freedom and US Central Intelligence Agency see Frances Stonor Saunders' *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters* (New York: New York Press, 1999), 1.

²⁴ Tyler Stovall provides one of the most comprehensive accounts of the presence of African American artists and musicians from World War I to the late 1960s in his *Paris Noir: African Americans and the City of Light* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1996).

²⁵ Léopold Sédar Senghor, "Discours du Président Senghor à Howard University", September 28, 1966, Will Mercer Cook Papers, box 2, folder 22 Moorland-Spingarn Research Center—Manuscript Division, Howard University.

²⁶ Although Wright interacted with the Parisian black francophone writers and early on in the 1940s contributed to Diop's efforts to found *Présence Africaine*, he was a bit of a distant figure. This is reflected in a letter Léopold Sédar Senghor wrote to Michel Fabre (one of Wright's biographers) for instance, where the former notes that Wright came off as somewhat secretive. The fact Wright did not consider too highly the Négritude movement is attributed as a reason for this distance, although the question of language and cultural outlook should not be dismissed. See, Senghor to Fabre, February 28, 1964, Richard Wright Papers, Beinecke Library, Yale University.

²⁷ See Mercer Cook Papers, box 2, folder 21, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center—Manuscript Division, Howard University.

²⁸ Mercer Cook's relationship with many of the Francophone Antillean and African intellectuals at the Congress were both personal and professional in nature. Besides translating some of René Maran's works for black newspaper publications, he more famously translated Haitian writer Jacques Roumain's novel *Gouverneurs de la rosée* (*Masters of the Dew*) and years later edited and translated Cheikh Anta Diop's *Antériorité des civilisations nègres; mythe ou vérité historique* (*The African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality*).

²⁹ W.E.B. DuBois ironically wrote a review Mercer Cook's *Five French Negro Authors* (1943) for *Phylon* magazine that essentially points out how Mercer Cook's work was flying under the radar, even as he was one of a very few scholars working on black writers and intellectuals who were producing works in other cultures and in different languages. See, W.E.B. Du Bois, "Five French Negro Authors by Mercer Cook," *Phylon* 5 (2) (1944): 189-190.

³⁰ Mercer Cook, "Benny Carter Plays for Italian Students," *Amsterdam News*, Saturday March 19, 1938, 19.

³¹ Mercer Cook, "Guadeloupe Loses Its First Negro Governor," *Chicago Defender*, April 22, 1939 (originally published in *Opportunity* magazine).

³² Mercer Cook, "Colored Woman on Sorbonne's Faculty," *Amsterdam News*, Saturday March 19, 1938, 15.

³³ Mercer Cook, "Guadeloupe Loses Its First Negro Governor," *Chicago Defender*, April 22, 1939.

³⁴ Mercer Cook, "The Life and Writings of Louis T. Houat", *Journal of Negro History* 24 (1939): 2.

³⁵ Mercer Cook, "The Race Problem in Paris and the French West Indies," *Journal of Negro Education* 8 (2) (1939):

³⁶ Cook's understanding of the workings of race and colonialism in France reflects a nuanced perspective that ran counter the popular myth of France's as a country free of racism. The contradiction between an African American vision of France as free of racism and the fact of the country being a colonial power was the basis of an interesting exchange between Harlem Renaissance figure Alain Locke and the French-Guianean writer René Maran. After Locke published an essay in the 1920s praising France's nonracist policies, Maran wrote an open letter to rebuke what he considered Locke's blindness towards the reality of French colonialism. See, René Maran, "Lettre ouverte au professeur Alain-Leroy Locke, de l'Université d'Howard (Etats-Unis)," *Les Continents* 3 (June 15, 1924); René Maran and Alain Locke, "French Colonial Policy: Open Letters," *Opportunity* 2 (September 1924): 261-263.

³⁷ Mercer Cook's presents the idea that Houat had most likely been framed. Houat's release was in large part due to the work of French abolitionists who created a public outcry regarding his case.

³⁸ Mercer Cook, "The Life and Writings of Louis T. Houat", *Journal of Negro History* 24 (2) (1939): 198.

³⁹ Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 29.

⁴⁰ It is relevant to point out that there are certain aspects of Mercer Cook's background that would lead him to understand the political aspect of his work. Cook's father, the composer Will Marion Cook, was a pioneer in exploring the depth of the African American folk musical tradition for his own compositions. Also, while attending Dunbar High School, Cook and his classmates were trained by such prominent intellectual figures as writers Jessie Fauset and Angelina Grimké, historian Carter G. Woodson, and activist Sorbonne PhD Mary Church Terrell. See Lawrence P. Jackson, *The Indignant Generation: A Narrative History of African American Writers and Critics, 1935-1960* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 36.

⁴¹ Romuald Fonkoua's recent biography of Césaire recounts the uniqueness of his family's educational background and the family's devotion to education, *Aimé Césaire* (Paris: Perrin, 2010), 25-39; also see Gregson Davis, *Aimé Césaire* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 5-7.

⁴² See Lilyan Kesteloot, *Black writers in French: a Literary History of Negritude*, trans. Ellen Conroy Kennedy (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1991), 15-74.

⁴³ For further scholarship on Negritude, see Lilyan Kesteloot, *Black writers in French: a Literary History of Negritude*, trans. Ellen Conroy Kennedy (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1991); Abiola Irele, *The African Experience in Literature and Ideology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991); A. James Arnold, *Modernism and Negritude: The Poetry and Poetics of Aimé Césaire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981); Sylvia Washington Bâ, *The Concept of Negritude in the Poetry of Léopold Sédar Senghor* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973); Bennetta Jule-Rosette, *Black Paris: the African Writers' Landscape* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998); Belinda Elizabeth Jack, *Negritude and Literary Criticism: The History and Theory of "Negro-African" Literature in French* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1996); T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, *Negritude Women* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota

Press, 2002); Gary Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation-State: Negritude and Colonial Humanism between the Two World Wars* (Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 2005); Donna Jones, *The Racial Discourses of Life Philosophy: Négritude, Vitalism, and Modernity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

⁴⁴ Jean-Paul Sartre's essay served as an introduction to Léopold Sédar Senghor's seminal edited volume of poetry, *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache de langue française* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1948), ix-xliv. The essay popularized Negritude as a literary and social movement, and essentially set the framework for the movement's critical reception.

⁴⁵ James Baldwin, "Princes and Powers" in *Nobody Knows My Name*, 32.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁴⁷ Nick Nesbitt, *Voicing Subjectivity: History and Memory in French Caribbean Literature* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003), 125.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 126. Nick Nesbitt provides a very eloquent and generally thoughtful description of how Césaire's work was engaging a wide field of intellectual discourse. He also convincingly connects it to Césaire's poetic practice. However, it is a little unfortunate that he would frame the 1956 Congress as an event where "the capabilities of black intellectuals were to be demonstrated to the world" and of Césaire's own use of various source material in his lecture as something that would allow him to "demonstrate [his mastery of those materials] to his assembled peers" (126). While the gaze of the unraced Other should never be taken out of the occasion, in this instant it might behoove us to take it for granted that the writers and intellectuals gathered at the Congress had more important projects in mind than to demonstrate their intellectual capacities and mastery of intellectual discourses.

⁴⁹ Verdin, *Alioune Diop: le Socrate noir*, 250-252. Philippe Verdin does not corroborate this account of the meeting Diop reportedly had with Césaire with any evidence. However, in his lecture Césaire does make a reference to Deschamps by name and several of his comments are reflective of the concerns Wright and Alexis expressed. This would indicate that he was strategically responding to them.

⁵⁰ Brent Hayes Edwards, "Introduction: Césaire in 1956 *Social Text* 103 (28:2) (2010): 118.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 118.

⁵² The notion of African survivals was a real fault-line between several of the writers and intellectuals here discussed. John A. Davis would, during the "debat" segment of the day of lecture, rely on that concept to make a claim for the cultural ties between African Americans and Africans. He notes that African-American spirituals were manifestations of African cultural retentions. Wright, on the other hand, rejected the concept and aligned himself with the African American sociologist E. Franklin Frazier. Going against Melvin J. Herskovits' theory of African cultural retentions ("African survivals"), Frazier considered African retentions in the US negligible. Jacques Stephen Alexis, on his end, tended to emphasize the notion of a "national" culture when referring to Haiti. While this perspective does not necessarily oppose the idea of a continuing presence of cultural traditions that travelled with the enslaved to the New World environment, it does foreground the specificity of the New World locale and its specific history as the locus of

Haitian culture. Also, even though Lexis uses the word “national” to describe that culture, through his literary works a serious argument can be made that he considered the Caribbean setting as a whole a unique hybrid cultural zone. For more on Wright and Alexis, see Michel Fabre’s essay “Richard Wright, Negritude, and African Writing” and J. Michael Dash’s “Marvelous Realism—The Way Out of Négritude.”

⁵³ Césaire, “Culture et Colonisation,” 196. The translation is my own.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 197. The translation is my own.

⁵⁵ See Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphaël Confiant’s *Eloge De La Créolité. In Praise of Creoleness* (Paris: Gallimard, 1993).

⁵⁶ Valérie Loichot’s statement reflects her analysis of a statement Césaire made to an interviewer regarding his use of French literary sources. Césaire noted that the Caribbean writer “must assimilate in order not to be assimilated.” It should be noted that Césaire might have derived this idea from Léopold Sédar Senghor who similarly articulated this idea of the necessity of the colonial writer to assimilate, rather than be assimilated to a Western literary tradition. In the essay “Le français et les langues africaines” for instance, Senghor states at one point: “D’où ma formule : Assimiler, non être assimilé” (“From which my saying: to assimilate and not to be assimilated”), *Liberté V* (Paris: Seuil, 1993), 243). While Loichot notes that Césaire’s body of work should not be reduced to the idea of assimilation because it engages European literary traditions in much too complex a fashion, she opposes his vision of literary assimilation to Suzanne Césaire’s call for a more radical literary cannibalism. The difference between these two terms as Loichot explain is it that while “assimilation” implies “conservation” and “adoption,” cannibalism denotes a “violent destruction of the eaten object by the eater.” See *The Tropics Bite Back* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 147-48.

⁵⁷ By this I mean that for Césaire the “métisse culture” must be represented as impoverished because its impoverishment negates the claim that colonialism is a civilizing and cultural enriching endeavor.

⁵⁸ Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. Joan Pinkham (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000), 77.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 78.

⁶⁰ Aimé Césaire, “Culture et Colonisation,” 205. The translation is my own.

⁶¹ Aimé Césaire, “Culture et Colonisation,” 190. The translation is my own.

⁶² Harold Cruse, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual: A Historical Analysis of the Failure of Black Leadership* (New York: The New York Review of Books, 2005), 420-448.

⁶³ Émile Saint-Lot, “Débats” *Le Premier Congrès International des Écrivains et Artistes Noirs: Compte Rendu Complet. Présence Africaine* 8-10 (1956): 219.

⁶⁴ Hans Schmidt, *The United States Occupation of Haiti, 1915-1934* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1995), 32-33.

⁶⁵ The United States recognized Haiti’s independence in 1862.

⁶⁶ The irony is that incorporation within the French nation-state was a political way out of the colonial paradigm. This is something that did not seem to come up at the Congress, as in his lecture Césaire presented himself as a colonial subject. It is conceivable that in his response to Senghor’s lecture, the Haitian writer Jacques Stephens Alexis, was also

being critical of the politics of Négritude. This is so insofar as the anti-colonial rhetoric of Senghor and Césaire were not always aligned with more forceful demands for independence.

⁶⁷ This would be most apparent over a decade later. In 1969 Césaire published *Une tempête*, an adaptation of William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, (1969). Césaire re-imagines the characters of Caliban and Ariel in his dramatization of the colonial encounter, specifically drawing out the non-violent resistance program advocated by Martin Luther King, Jr. (Ariel) and Malcolm X's black nationalist outlook (Caliban).

⁶⁸ Mercer Cook, "Débats" *Le Premier Congrès International des Écrivains et Artistes Noirs: Compte-rendu Complet*, 213. The translation is my own.

⁶⁹ John A. Davis, "Débats," 214.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 215.

⁷¹ Davis would later write to Diop expression his satisfaction with the fact that Césaire had resigned from the Communist Party. John A. Davis to Alioune Diop, November 1956, AMSAC Papers, Moorland-Spangarn Research Center, Howard University.

⁷² Harry Haywood, *Black Bolshevik: autobiography of an Afro-American Communist* (Chicago: Liberator Press, 1978), 234-235; William J. Maxwell, *New Negro, Old Left: African American Writing and Communism Between the Wars*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999) 63-94; Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2000) 294-311; James E. Smethurst, *The New Red Negro: the Literary Left and African American Poetry*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999) 23-31; Gerald Horne, *Black Liberation/Red Scare: Ben Davis and the Communist Party*, (Newark, Del.: University of Delaware Press, 1994).

⁷³ Daniel Guérin, *Les Antilles décolonisées*, 12.

⁷⁴ I used the word "convenient" here because Guérin's volume did not represent departmentalization in a positive light. Césaire appeared to have been in a position where he had to explain his decision to support a law that by the time of the publication of the volume he felt had not had its intended effects. Césaire was perhaps anticipating critics who would point out the contradictions between his radical literary articulations and his pragmatism as a politician on the issue of departmentalization. For such a critique see Raphaël Confiant's *Aimé Césaire: une traversée paradoxale du siècle* (Paris: Stock, 1993).

⁷⁵ Scholars who have written about him do not dispute Césaire's active participation in the passing of the Law of Departmentalization. While in the introduction he wrote for Guérin he portrayed himself as a passive agent following the will of his electorate, in other occasions he has portrayed himself as a more active participant. The perspectives offered by scholars on this issue are generally sympathetic, highlighting the social, political, and economic exigencies that influenced Césaire's decision (e.g. See David Alliot's *Aimé Césaire: le nègre universel* (Gollion: Infolio, 2008); Romuald Fonkoua, *Aimé Césaire* (Paris: Perrin, 2010); Georges Ngal, *Aimé Césaire: un homme à la recherche d'une patrie* (Paris: Editions Présence Africaine, 1994); Femi Ojo-Ade, *Aimé Césaire's African Theater* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2010)). The most acerbic critique has been the one offered by Raphaël Confiant in his *Aimé Césaire: Une traversée*

paradoxale du siècle (Paris: Ecriture, 2006). While *Confiant* provides a compelling critique that highlights the contradictions between Césaire, the politician versus Césaire, the man of letters, the tone of *Confiant*'s polemic reflects that of a man with an axe to grind.

⁷⁶ What I mean by this is that in the American context the discourse of citizenship as it concerns African Americans is as old as the nation itself. It is so even during the period that normative citizenship was not necessarily extended to African Americans. Such key national documents as the "Declaration of Independence" (the original version where statements on slavery were struck out) or the *US Constitution* and its Three-Fifth clause can be read as failed attempts to adequately come to terms with inherent contradictions in the promise of American democracy. Also we can think of certain key texts and figures as contributing to this discourse, be it Thomas Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia*, Phillis Wheatly *Poems on Various Subjects*, or David Walker's "Appeal," and 19th c slave narratives. This long-running discourse is not reflected in the French national context, and one wonders if Césaire should not be among those credited for beginning it. While in the Guérin introduction he alludes to a longer genealogy of Antillean desire for civic equality, in an interview he did with George Ngal, he locates the organized effort for political assimilation in the early part of the twentieth century. See, *Aimé Césaire: un homme à la recherche d'une patrie*.

⁷⁷ David Alliot, *Aimé Césaire: Le nègre universel*, 99.

⁷⁸ Luc de Heusch, "Préface" in Lilyan Kesteloot's *Les écrivains noirs de langue française: naissance d'une littérature* (Bruxelles: Université libre de Bruxelles, 1965), 11.

⁷⁹ In *The French Imperial Nation-State: Negritude and Colonial Humanism Between the Two World Wars* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005) Gary Wilder very briefly discusses how Alain Locke linked the New Negro to a rejection of assimilation while claiming membership in the nation (this is what I mean by the implicit cultural pluralist democratic ethos of the New Negro movement). Wilder posits Locke's stance in contrast to how the writer Claude McKay would write characters who "were unable and unwilling to find places for themselves in nations that insisted on their racial inferiority" (176).

⁸⁰ Césaire, Senghor, and Damas have all commented on the imprint McKay's poetry and prose left on their thinking. Damas used a quote from McKay's poem "To the White Fiends" as an epigraph in his first volume of poetry (*Pigment/Névralgies* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1972), 11) and has commented on how he and his friends would read and circulate *Banjo* ("Naissance et vue de la Négritude" in Daniel Racine's *Léon-Gontran Damas: L'homme et l'oeuvre* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1983), 185. In an interview with the Haitian writer René Depestre, Césaire noted that *Banjo* was "one of the first works in which an author [presented] the Negro [with]...a sense of literary dignity" (See, Depestre, Interview with Césaire, in *Discourse on Colonialism* by Aimé Césaire (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000), 87). In the lecture "La Poésie Negroaméricaine" Senghor expressed that he considered McKay an inventor of the values of Négritude (See Edris Makward's "Claude McKay: The African Experience" in *Claude McKay: Centennial Studies*, ed. A.L. McLeod (New Delhi: Sterling, 1992) 94-95).

⁸¹ Banjo's primitivism is counterbalanced in the novel by the character Ray, a Haitian intellectual whose dialogues at times voices Banjo's life Dionysian life philosophy of corporal pleasure and consumption.

⁸² An example of this is Cook's depiction of two of the better known authors whose works he discussed in the essay: Simone de Beauvoir's *L'Amérique au jour le jour* (1948), and by Daniel Guérin's *Où va l'Amérique*, (1951). His discussion of de Beauvoir's work emphasizes that while it is a sympathetic portrayal of the conditions African Americans have to live under, it is an anecdotal text that is at times overly concerned with the issue of race. Cook dedicated two full pages to the Guérin volume, which he considered an impressive study. His only qualms with Guérin's book regards the author's pessimism about race relations and his reluctance to consider the progress that was being made in the period after the war. While Cook does not directly attribute this to Guérin's political identification as a socialist, his comments do imply that this self-identification rendered him less objective.

⁸³ Mercer Cook, "Race Relations as Seen by Recent French Visitors" *Phylon* 15 (2) (1954): 137.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 137.

Chapter Three

¹ Léopold Sédar Senghor, "L'esprit de la civilisation ou les lois de la culture négro-africaine," *Le Premier Congrès International des Écrivains et Artistes Noirs: Compte Rendu Complet. Présence Africaine* 8-10 (1956): 54.

² Richard Wright, *Black Power: a Record of Reactions in a Land of Pathos* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1954), 63.

³ Richard Wright would later publish an altered version of this lecture in the volume *White Men Listen* under the modified title "Tradition and Industrialization: The Historical Meaning of the Plight of the Tragic Elite in Africa and Asia." The original lecture was published in the special edition of the journal *Présence Africaine* covering the 1956 Congress.

⁴ James Baldwin, "Princes and Powers" in *Nobody Knows My Name* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 41.

⁵ I am not arguing that Richard Wright overall embraced a positivist teleological perspective on history. I am saying, however, that his representation of European history in his lecture has a teleological overarch. This is so insofar as he wishes for African nations en route toward independence to appropriate certain characteristics (mainly technological and intellectual capital) that drove the process of European modernization. African modernization to Wright is the essential condition for overcoming a state of dependency. Thus I consider his teleological representation of European history strategic because it is essentially aimed at highlighting an aspect of European development he considers subordinate populations can benefit from.

⁶ This idea is reflected in how the African philosopher V. Y. Mudimbe has characterized the period of colonialism on the African continent. Mudimbe has made the case that the colonial enterprise largely transformed "non-European areas into fundamentally European constructs." To Mudimbe this was the result of what he refers to as the

colonizing structures, which include the processes of 1) a domination of physical space 2) the reformation of *natives*' minds and 3) the integration of local economic histories into the Western perspective. See, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 1-2.

⁷ Richard Wright, "Tradition and Industrialization: The Plight of the Tragic Elite in Africa," *Le Premier Congrès International des Écrivains et Artistes Noirs: Compte Rendu Complet. Présence Africaine*: 8-10, 354-55.

⁸ As articulated in the "Introduction" the Congress was largely an outgrowth of the Négritude movement. For Alioune Diop, the main organizer of the event, African customs and traditions were important elements to any project of African liberation.

⁹ Richard Wright, "Tradition and Industrialization," 348.

¹⁰ Alioune Diop, "Discours d'ouverture," *Le Premier Congrès International des Écrivains et Artistes Noirs: Compte Rendu Complet. Présence Africaine* 8-10, 17. The translation is my own.

¹¹ Even though Alioune Diop is not recognized as a founder of Négritude, he espoused the movement's values, especially the belief that the cultural field held primacy over the political field for colonized subjects. This was part of the reason he was never an adherent to Marxism. He considered that dialectical materialism did not speak to the cultural work he felt needed to be done to achieve true and lasting African liberation. See his article "Pour une communauté de la civilisation des peuples noirs" *Présence Africaine* 110 (1979): 6.

¹² For a selected list of reference on the scholarship on Négritude, see Chapter Two, footnote 42.

¹³ Reverend Ekollo had not been allowed to finish his lecture. While Alioune Diop pointed to time consideration as the reason, the American delegate Horace Mann Bond felt members of the audience in an act of "hooliganism" prevented Ekollo from finishing (See "Débats," *Le Premier Congrès International des Écrivains et Artistes Noirs: Compte Rendu Complet. Présence Africaine* 8-10: 207-208). Even though Ekollo presented a critical perspective on Christian missionary activity on the continent, some might have objected to the fact that he believed that there remained a revolutionary potential in Christianity that had yet to be realized in Africa.

¹⁴ Hubert Deschamps, *Le Premier Congrès International des Écrivains et Artistes Noirs: Compte Rendu Complet. Présence Africaine* 8-10, 391. The translation is my own.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 391.

¹⁶ Kwame A. Appiah, "A Long Way from Home: Wright in the Gold Coast" in *Richard Wright: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1984) 189. Appiah's essay is revelatory of the contentious, side-taking nature of a good degree of the scholarship on Richard Wright, especially as it pertains to works broaching his representation of black cultures (African and African American). It is perhaps why concerning Wright's representation of Africa specifically, Comparative Literature and Film scholar, Manthia Diawara would feel compelled to write, "one think is certain: Wright was for Africa." See the chapter "Richard Wright and Modern Africa" in *In Search of Africa* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 75.

¹⁷ Kwame A. Appiah, "A Long Way from Home: Wright in the Gold Coast," 188.

¹⁸ See Georg Hegel, *The Philosophy of History* [1837] (New York: Dover, 1956), 99.

¹⁹ I use Appiah's terminology "inherited set of conceptual blinders" because I find it usefully way to frame the Eurocentric aspects of Wright's statements, and its reliance on a longstanding discourse on the African continent. However, his discussion of Edward Blyden and Alexander Crummell tends to not fully account for the epistemological framework out of which both Blyden and Crummell articulated their proto-black nationalism. The question here is simply whether there are any 19th century figures that leapt out of a Eurocentric framework when discussing the African continent. Philosopher V.Y. Mudimbe in *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), presents a more nuanced perspective of Blyden's proto-black nationalist vision, highlighting in some ways what Appiah would consider Blyden's "inherited set of blinders" within a context of the kind interventions he was making in racialist and imperialist thinking. See the chapter "E.W. Blyden's Legacy."

²⁰ The historian and physicist Cheikh Anta Diop was present at the Congress and presented sometimes before Richard Wright on the same day. His comments about Richard Wright and the American delegation reveal an African perspective on their position at the Congress. Diop would note that the American delegates were "representative of the society that produced them" and "They sounded like Americans, not like blacks." Diop considered Wright a person of a more philosophical bent who envisioned a Western-educated African leadership cadre that could graft a "superior Western rationalism onto the traditional beliefs of their people." See, Robert W. July, *An African Voice: The Voice of the Humanities in African Independence* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1987), 38-39. I am not presenting Diop's perspective as an authoritative interpretation of Wright's lecture at the Congress and of his overall presence there, but simply as the perspective of a scholar of repute whose opinion was very likely shared by many others. Also, in his report on the 1956 Congress in the first publication of the Nigerian-based journal *Black Orpheus*, Janheinz Jahn would express some befuddlement over Wright's framing of colonialism's impact on traditional African cultures. The journal, which was founded by German expatriate Ulli Beier and German scholar Janheinz Jahn, in later years would become an influential Anglophone counterpart to the Francophone *Présence Africaine*. Both Beier and Jahn had attended the 1956 Congress. See, Janheinz Jahn, "World Congress of Black Writers," *Black Orpheus* 1 (1957): 39-46 and Henry Louis Gates, Kwame A. Appiah, ed. *Encyclopedia of Africa*, Vol. 2 (Oxford University Press, 2010), 189.

²¹ See Hubert Deschamps, "Les assemblées locales dans territoires d'outre-mer," in *Politique étrangère* N°4, 1954: 427-436. Also see, Hubert Deschamps, *L'union française*. In the third chapter of this book Deschamps provides a breakdown of the political relationship and status of mainland France to its various overseas possessions/areas of influence after the ratification of the 1946 Constitution. Deschamps no longer considers France a colonial empire, and explains the amalgam of France, its overseas departments and territories as comprising the "Union Française."

²² See Ruth Ginio, "French Colonial Reading of Ethnographic Research" in *Cahiers d'études africaines*, 166 (2002), 341-342.

²³ See Léopold Sédar Senghor, “L'avenir de la France dans l'Outre-Mer,” in *Politique étrangère* 4 (1954): 419-426.

²⁴ While Deschamps emphasizes Léopold Sédar Senghor's support of this federated system, it should be noted that this conversation was being had as far back as 1943 when at the Brazzaville Conference the idea was presented as a means for France to maintain its overseas empire. The degree of economic and administrative freedom for the colony that this new system would put into place was regarded as a mediation of various interests: African demand for autonomy, US proposal that all colonies should be placed under international trusteeship and be put in route to national independence, the Atlantic charter of 1941 that declared the right of peoples to choose their own government, and French desire to maintain its national grandeur by holding on to its colonies. See Tony Chafer, *The End of Empire in French West Africa* (New York: Berg, 2001), 55-61.

²⁵ Hubert Deschamps, “Les Assemblées locales dans les territoire d'outre-mer,” *Politique étrangère* 4 (1954): 436.

²⁶ Prosser Gifford and William Roger Louis, ed. *Decolonization and African Independence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), *xiii*.

²⁷ Hubert Deschamps, “Les Assemblées locales dans les territoire d'outre-mer,” *Politique étrangère* 4 (1954): 436. The translation is my own.

²⁸ Tony Schafer, *The End of Empire in French West Africa* (New York: Berg, 2002), 5.

²⁹ See Michel Fabre's “Richard Wright, Negritude, and African Writing” in *European-Languae Writing in Sub-Saharan Africa, Vol. 2*, ed. Albert S. Gerard (Budapest: Akademiai Kiado, 1986), chapter XVI.

³⁰ James Baldwin's representation of Wright speech in “Princes and Power” highlighted its controversial nature (see note 2), and Cheikh Anta Diop's comments about his perception of the American delegation illustrates significant differences between some of the African delegates and audience members at the Congress and the African Americans (see note 18). A month following the Congress, John A. Davis would also write a letter to write where at one point he congratulates him for doing something unpopular, “preventing our African friends from returning to the irrationalism of primitivism, and from turning to xenophobia.” See John A. Davis to Richard Wright, November 17, 1956, The Richard Wright Papers, box 96, folder 1276, Beinecke Library, Yale University.

³¹ See the “Introduction” to this dissertation. Also, for a list of reference to the main scholars on Négritude, see footnote 42 of “Chapter Two” of this dissertation.

³² The anthology was published on the centenary of the Revolution of 1848, which is also the date of the publication of the decrees permanently abolishing slavery and establishing free and compulsory education in the colonies.

³³ Sartre specifically contrasts Negritude poetics with the inability of the European proletariat to create a poetry that is both social and subjective. Although he reduces this tendency to the idea that the instruments of the worker's struggle—rationalism, materialism, positivism—do not lend themselves to the creation of poetics myths, Sartre apprehends the limitation upon proletarian literary expression as a failure to deal with the subjective intricacies of the class struggle in a way that is communicative with communal experience, a quality he ascribes to Negritude poetry. He later extends this positive

assertion of the revolutionary potential of Negritude poetry in a later discussion of the work of Aimé Césaire.

³⁴ Jean-Paul Sartre, “Orphée noir” in *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1948), XL. Translated by John MacCombie, “Black Orpheus,” *The Massachusetts Review* 1 (6) (1964-1965): 48.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, XLI. Trans. John T. MacCombie, “Black Orpheus,” 49.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, XLI. Trans. John T. MacCombie, “Black Orpheus,” 49.

³⁷ Frantz Fanon also attended and presented at the 1956 Congress of Black Writers and Artists.

³⁸ Frantz Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs* (Paris: Edition du Seuil, 1952), 108. Translated by Richard Philcox, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 2008), 112. Fanon’s essay was initially published in the French Review *Esprit* (May, 1951).

³⁹ Nigel G. Gibson’s brief but brilliant reading of Fanon’s response to Sartre is very useful, especially as he later connects to Fanon’s perspective on the development of national consciousness in *Les damnés de la terre* (*The Wretched of the Earth*). See “Fanon and the Pitfalls of Culture Studies” in *Frantz Fanon: Critical Perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 106. Also see Penelope Ingrams’ *The Signifying Body: Toward an Ethic of Sexual and Racial Difference* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2008), 116-117.

⁴⁰ Fanon does not necessarily subscribe to Sartre’s vision of Négritude. However his expressed ambivalence concerning the movement does seem to contradict his desire to apprehend it as an absolute, and not a means to an end. Concerning what can be interpreted as Fanon’s “strategic essentialism,” Nigel Gibson proposes instead Fanon’s form of black consciousness as abiding to a type of Hegelian self-certainty that “always already knows it is really anti-essential.” See “Fanon and the Pitfalls of Culture Studies” in *Frantz Fanon: Critical Perspectives*, 121 (Notes 6).

⁴¹ Frantz Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs*, 99. Trans. Richard Philcox, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 102.

⁴² The operation of the “white gaze” in much of *Black Skin, White Masks*, operates in Gramscian hegemonic fashion. This is so insofar as Fanon’s black subject is continually confronted with a dominant form of racial logic that is presented to him as natural, inevitable and beneficial. His own attempts at rebelling against this worldview necessitate an internal psychic struggle as he has also internalized this logic.

⁴³ Frantz Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs*, 104. Trans. Richard Philcox, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 109.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 112. Trans. Richard Philcox, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 114.

⁴⁵ Albert Franklin, “La Négritude: réalité ou mystification? Réflexion sur ‘Orphée noir,’” *Présence Africaine* 14 (1953): 287-303; Gabriel d’Arboussier, “Une dangereuse mystification: la théorie de la négritude,” *La nouvelle critique* (1949): 34-47.

⁴⁶ The debate between Aimé Césaire and René Depestre occurred over Depestre’s assessment of a series of articles that the French poet and French Communist Party (FCP) stalwart Louis Aragon had written about poetic form and national poetry in the FCP backed review *Lettres Françaises* between 1953 and 1954. Initially resistant, Depestre finally accepted Aragon’s poetic regime. This led Césaire to compose a poem published

in *Présence Africaine* imploring Depestre to reconsider his position. For an account of this debate see James Arnold's *Modernism and Negritude: the Poetry and Poetics of Aimé Césaire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 180-184..

⁴⁷ Léopold Sédar Senghor, "L'esprit de la civilisation ou les lois de la culture négro-africaine," *Le Premier Congrès International des Écrivains et Artistes Noirs: Compte Rendu Complet. Présence Africaine* 8-10, 52.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 52.

⁴⁹ Sylvia Washington Bâ, *The Concept of Negritude in the Poetry of Leopold Sedar Senghor* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), 78.

⁵⁰ Léopold Sédar Senghor, "L'esprit de la civilisation ou les lois de la culture négro-africaine," 53-54.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 52.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 60. The translation is my own.

⁵³ Senghor was articulating such ideas as early as 1939, when he published the essay "Ce que l'homme noir apporte" ("What the Black Man Contribute"). He specifically explored in that work the notion of rhythm as constitutive of what he called "the negro style." Similar to his presentation at the Congress, Senghor was expressing the idea that African art was to be understood first and foremost as the language of an ontology of vital forces specific to an African cosmology. See Senghor's "Ce que l'homme noir apporte" (1939) in *Liberté I: Négritude et Humanisme* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1964).

⁵⁴ Donna V. Jones, *The Racial Discourse of Life Philosophy: Négritude, Vitalism, and Modernity* (New York: Columbia university Press, 2010), 131.

⁵⁵ Abiola Irele, *The African Experience in Literature and Ideology*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 80.

⁵⁶ Donna V. Jones, 131.

⁵⁷ Abiola Irele "Contemporary thought in French Speaking West Africa," in *Africa and the West: The legacies of empires*, ed. Isaac James Mowoe and Richard Bjornson (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 129.

⁵⁸ René Dépestre, "Interview with Césaire," *Discourse on Colonialism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000), 72-76. The *italics* are mine.

⁵⁹ See Gary Wilder's discussion of the student magazine *L'Étudiant noir*, particularly Aimé Césaire's rejection of assimilation in the essay "Nègreries: Jeunesse noire et assimilation" in *The French Imperial Nation-State: Negritude and Colonial Humanism Between the Two World Wars* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 185-192.

⁶⁰ This is possibly another reason why the Harlem Renaissance was such an influential movement for Senghor, Césaire and Damas. From an ideological and transnational perspective the movement of course was a contemporary affirmation of blackness and of black cultural and aesthetic values that they undoubtedly veered toward. However, it was also the expression of artists who, while voicing the sensibilities of a racially oppressed population, also understood themselves to be politically subjugated citizens of the nation that oppressed them. While in terms of its political articulations, the movement stood for civic equity and integration/assimilation within the broader body politic, as a cultural expression it denoted the particularity and difference of a population self-consciously mining its own folk tradition to express its ontological condition. The nationalist

tendencies of the Harlem Renaissance, similar to that of Négritude, tended to be cultural and not political.

⁶¹ In the chapter “Involution and Revolution” of *Nationalists and Nomads: Essays on Francophone African Literature and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998) Christopher L. Miller briefly discusses Senghor’s political leanings, contrasting him to an earlier generation of African radicals, most notably Lamine Senghor. Miller notes Senghor was “less hostile to French power” and considers his politics in the 1930s one of “comfortable accommodationism”(40). In her biography of Senghor, *Black, French, and African: A Life of Léopold Sédar Senghor* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), Janet G. Vaillant provides a more sympathetic analysis of Senghor’s political vision. In the chapters “Master Politician” and “Toward Independence,” she frames Senghor’s politics as a thought-out and strategic pragmatism.

⁶² Léopold Sédar Senghor, trans. Melvin Dixon, *The Collected Poetry* (Virginia: University Press of Virginia, 1991), trans.13, French original 276.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, trans. 13, French original 276-277.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, trans. 39, French original 309.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, trans. 69-70, French original 347.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, trans. 56, French original 328.

⁶⁷ Léopold Sédar Senghor, “L’esprit de la civilisation ou les lois de la culture négro-africaine,” 65.

⁶⁸ See “Chapter One” of this dissertation for a discussion of Wright’s involvement in putting together the American delegation as well as his role in the controversy of the absence of W.E.B. Du Bois.

⁶⁹ See “Chapter One” of this dissertation.

⁷⁰ Richard Wright, “Tradition and Industrialization,” 348.

⁷¹ This statement is from an interview with Wright contacted by the writer William Garner Smith, *Ebony* 8, (July 1953): 40.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 40.

⁷³ George Padmore to Richard Wright, March 13, 1956, The Richard Wright Papers, box 103, folder 1522, Beinecke Library, Yale University.

⁷⁴ Fanon’s vision of the significance of national culture is certainly more complex than Wright’s, in so far as he seriously considers the inescapability of an affective dimension for the desire to recuperate past traditions. But Like Wright, however, he ultimately considers the liberation struggle in material terms and priorities. For Wright, this is apparent in his lecture at the Congress as he makes the argument for the elimination of any cultural traditions and practices that stand in the way of progress. This emphasis on the material conditions of liberation is also perceivable in *Black Power*, as he considers the success of Kwame Nkrumah party with its ability to make use of selective aspects of Ghanaian traditional culture. For Fanon, see the chapter “On National Culture” in *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2004).

⁷⁵ This is at the heart of Wright’s rejection of Négritude, and to some extent the then still recent scholarship on African retentions/survivals of Melvin J. Herskovits. Jacques Stephen Alexis made remarks at the Congress that reflected his objection to how the organizers were framing an African diasporic culture, without due attention to the

historical and material conditions that affect cultural formations. His own lecture at the Congress, “Du réalisme merveilleux des Haïtiens,” provided a regional outlook to Haitian culture. See “Débat” and “Du réalisme merveilleux des Haïtiens” in *Le Premier Congrès International des Écrivains et Artistes Noirs: Compte Rendu Complet. Présence Africaine* 8-10: 69-71, 245-271.

⁷⁶ This is noticeable in how Wright throughout his presentation describes Europe’s passage from feudalism to capitalism. According to Wright, the shift in Europe’s economic base was reflected in different social and cultural formations. Africa, until the advent of colonization had experienced no such changes. See, “Tradition and Industrialization,” 353-358.

⁷⁷ Richard Wright considered the “West” a social, cultural, historical and geographic reality, and thereby a social scientific fact. Some of his assertions about what it means to be a Western subject reflect some of the problems Stuart Hall’s work, especially in his essay “The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power,” discusses. For Hall’s essay, see the volume *Modernity: An Introduction to Modern Societies*, Stuart Hall et al, ed. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995).

⁷⁸ It is important to note however that while in this instance, Wright’s notion of “double vision” is comparable to with Du Bois’ “double-consciousness,” a significant body of his work can be read as in fact negating the possibility of second sight. In his last published novel, *The Long Dream*, for instance, Wright presents through the perspective of Fishbelly, the novel’s protagonist, the idea that there is a real and tangible world, and it is the world of those with power—the world of whites. Fishbelly’s reflection comes after having learned about the lynching of the brother of one of his classmates. He cannot imagine that black subjects in the South possess second sight. He feels they are privy to a particular existential position that demand of them to continually compromise their ideal values (i.e. courage, resistance, self-assertion) in order to survive. To Wright, in this moment, the black subject’s second sight is not one that can be associated with privileged understanding. It is too suffused with fear and the terror of death; this fear and terror is in large part what shapes his behavior and allows him to survive.

⁷⁹ Richard Wright, *The Outsider* (New York: Harper, 1953), 118-119.

⁸⁰ Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000) 300.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 300.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 300.

⁸³ This is also a point that literary and cultural historian Alan Wald makes in *Exile form a Future Time: The Forging of the Mid-Twentieth Century Literary Left* (North Carolina: The University of North Carolina, 2002), 80-81.

⁸⁴ Richard Wright, “Tradition and Industrialization: The Plight of the Tragic Elite in Africa,” 352.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 352-353.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 354.

⁸⁷ Kwame A. Appiah, “A Long Way from Home: Wright in the Gold Coast,” 188-90.

⁸⁸ Henry Louis Gates, Jr. “Third World of Theory: Enlightenment’s Esau” *Critical Inquiry* 34 (5) (2008): 193.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 193.

⁹⁰ John M. Reilley, "Richard Wright and the Art of Non-Fiction: Stepping Out on the Stage of the World," in *Richard Wright: A Collection of Critical Essays*, 178.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 178. John Reilley based his statements not on the transcript of Wright's lecture published in the special volume of *Présence Africaine* but in the altered version he published in the volume *White Man, Listen!*, under a slightly different title.

⁹² J. Saunders Redding, "Home is Where the Heart Is," *The New Leader* 44, December 11, 1961, 24.

⁹³ J. Saunders Redding, *Baltimore Afro-American*, October 23, 1954.

⁹⁴ Interestingly enough, J. Saunders Redding published a travelogue to a State Department sponsored trip to India (*An American in India: A Personal Report on the Indian Dilemma and the Nature of her Conflicts* (Indianapolis, Bobbs-Merrill, 1954)) that he published the same year Wright's *Black Power*. In her review of Redding's work, Mertz Tate points out similar problems Redding would accuse Wright of in *Black Power*. See, *The Journal of Negro History* 40 (2) (1955): 188-191.

⁹⁵ In a very rich and engaging essay tracing the friendship between Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison, literary scholar Lawrence P. Jackson provides a purview of Wright's vision on culture in his response, by correspondence, to Ellison's review of *Black Boy*. Ellison, who even though by then had grown critical of the school of social realism that Wright represented, in defending Wright's work explained that the latter had tapped into a folk/cultural philosophical tradition ingrained in the African American experience, or what he refers to as the "blues idiom." While Wright expressed admiration for the sagacity of Ellison's review he admitted he saw little in his work of the folk philosophy Ellison articulated. Jackson additionally notes "Wright, a devoted materialist, found little of interest in the theoretical inner working of African American culture." See Lawrence P. Jackson, "The Birth of the Critic: The Literary Friendship of Ralph Ellison and Richard Wright," *American Literature* 72 (2) (2000): 339.

⁹⁶ J. Saunders Redding, *Baltimore Afro-American*, October 23, 1954.

⁹⁷ Richard Wright, "Tradition and Industrialization," 357.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 356.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 357.

¹⁰⁰ Manthia Diawara has noted that another figure at the Congress who shared Wright's perspective and expressed similar ideas was Frantz Fanon. To Diawara, Fanon's heavy reliance on "theory and abstraction" might have rescued *Wretched on the Earth* from the form of criticism *Black Power* has received. See *In Search of Africa*, 67-68.

¹⁰¹ Wright's vision of the colonized African elite as comprising a Westernized intellectual vanguard for black liberation in many ways de-territorializes the concept of the West from the materiality of physical location to a terrain of values that are quite abstract in nature. The year following the Congress, Wright would muse over what it meant to be "Western" in his last travelogue *Pagan Spain*. This volume comprised his recollection of the fifteen weeks he spent in a fascist Spain that at the time was under the dictatorship of Francisco Franco. Wright's reflection would reveal how to him the term cannot simply be considered along a geographical axis, i.e. Spain's location in Western Europe. Wright notes "What did being Western mean?...It was not my task to define the totality of the

contents of Western civilization...Spain was a holy nation, a sacred state—a state as sacred and as irrational as the sacred state of the Akan in the African jungle.” See *Pagan Spain* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1957), 192.

¹⁰² Redding in his review thought the early pages of Wright’s account showed great promise, especially as he discusses an interaction with a Western educated Ghanaian, Justice Thomas of the Ghanaian Supreme Court, in vivid psychological detail. He felt however the account quickly disintegrated into “the dark complexity...of Wright’s involvement with his own socio-political orientation and his own philosophical ambivalence.” See *Baltimore Afro-American*, October 23, 1954.

¹⁰³ See Kevin K. Gaines, “Revisiting Richard Wright in Ghana: Black Radicalism and the Dialectics of Diaspora,” *Social Text* 19 (2) (2001): 75-101; John M. Reilley, “Richard Wright and the Art of Non-Fiction: Stepping Out on the Stage of the World,” in *Richard Wright: A Collection of Critical Essays*; Yoshinobu Hakutani, “Black Power” in *Richard Wright and Racial Discourse* (Columbia: University of Mississippi Press, 1996); and Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double-Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

¹⁰⁴ Abdul JanMohamed, “Richard Wright as A Specular Border Intellectual,” in *Beyond Dichotomies: Histories, Identities, Cultures, and the Challenge of Globalization*, ed. Elisabeth Mudimbe-Boyi (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 235.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 235.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 235-236.

¹⁰⁷ Michel Fabre, *The Unfinished Quest of Richard Wright* (Urbana: The University of Illinois Press, 1993), 402.

¹⁰⁸ Here is the exact quote: “Wright’s attempt to identify with his African hosts fails terribly on the imaginary register and yet succeeds on the symbolic register. However since the bulk of black power is articulated on the imaginary register and strenuously attempts to cement an imaginary identification between the author and his hosts, the impression of failure easily overwhelms the success of symbolic identification.” The “imaginary” register denotes identification with something or someone outside of oneself (here, Wright’s various African hosts), and the “symbolic” register denotes identification with the structure of a process that identifies us (here, the political black nationalism Wright supports). See, Abdul JanMohamed, “Richard Wright as A Specular Border Intellectual” (*Beyond Dichotomies*, 236).

¹⁰⁹ While my discussion of Wright account does not broach the topic of literary genre, I do find that *Black Power* is best read as a hybrid text of fiction/nonfiction. From the viewpoint of nonfiction, it is indisputable that Wright was in Ghana to observe and report on a significant historical event, and his accounts of those he met and the places he has been, as well as the tenor of his conversations, essentially occurred as he wrote them down. From the viewpoint of the fictional, however, there is a way in which Wright constructs himself as the protagonist of a narrative and uses archetypal characters to dramatize his experiences in Ghana that exceed the nonfiction form he is writing out of.

¹¹⁰ See “Chapter 23: Journey to the Gold Coast” of Hazel Rowley, *Richard Wright: the Life and Times* (New York: Henry Holt and Company).

¹¹¹ Among other titles Richard Wright had considered were: “This Heritage,” “Black Brothers,” “Dark Heritage,” “Ancestral Land,” and “Ancestral Home.” These titles foreground the idea of a racial connection between the author and the environment he seeks to portray. “Black Power,” on the other hand clearly foregrounds politics and the state. See, Michel Fabre, *The Unfinished Quest of Richard Wright*, trans. Isabel Barzun (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 404.

¹¹² Richard Wright, *Black Power* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1954), 12.

¹¹³ Wright recounts he had brought with him for the trip several volumes of scholarly work on the continent, among them Eric Williams’ *Capitalism and Slavery* from which this historical account is drawn.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 213.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 213.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 14. This statement sounds eerily familiar with how the Nigerian writer, Wole Soyinka, would characterize the Négritude movement in the 1960s: a tiger does not proclaim his tigrity, he pounces. See Janheinz Jahn, *Neo-African Literature*, trans. Oliver Coburn and Ursula Lehrburger (New York: Grove Press, 1968), 266.

¹¹⁹ Richard Wright, *Black Power*, 14.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 16.

¹²¹ Ralph Ellison, “Richard Wright’s Blues” *The Antioch Review* 57 (3) (1999): 267-268.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 16.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 16-17.

¹²⁴ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 127.

¹²⁵ Richard Wright, *Black Power*, 27.

¹²⁶ It is quite possible that the scene of the conversation among the young Africans Wright overhears might be either fictional or conveniently juxtaposed right after his discussion with Justice Thomas. It is so insofar as the young Africans’ opinions well reflect Wright’s own perspective on the political route Africans ought to take, as well as his optimism that the Western educated African elite is leaning towards more assertive political demands. Also, given Wright’s interest in engaging informed Africans about their political views, it is strange that he would not have approached the young Africans to allow them to further elaborate on their views.

¹²⁷ Kwame Nkrumah to Richard Wright, 4th May, 1953, *Black Power*.

¹²⁸ Hazel Rowley, *Richard Wright: the Life and Times*, 416-417.

¹²⁹ Richard Wright, *Black Power*, 4.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 63.

¹³¹ George Padmore to Kwame Nkrumah, 14th April, 1955, The Michel Fabre Papers, box 13, folder 20, MARBL, Emory University.

¹³² Richard Wright, *Black Power*, 55.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 58.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 59-60.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 60.

¹³⁶ For Wright's account of the reasons he left the Party, see an essay he published in the volume *The God that Failed*, ed. Arthur Koestler et al. (New York: Harper & Row, 1949), 115-162. Also Wright's account of his time in the Communist Party can be found in the posthumously published second half of *Black Boy, American Hunger* which focuses on his time in Chicago from 1927 to 1937. See the restored edition of *Black Boy* (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2007).

¹³⁷ John M. Reilley, "Richard Wright and the Art of Non-Fiction: Stepping Out on the Stage of the World," 178.

¹³⁸ S. Shankar, *Textual Traffic: Colonialism, Modernity, and the Economy of the Text* (Albany: State University Press of New York), 126.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 127. For the dedication, see *White Man, Listen!* [1957] (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1978).

¹⁴⁰ Constance Webb, *Richard Wright: A Biography* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1968), 313.

¹⁴¹ S. Shankar, *Textual Traffic*, 127.

¹⁴² Michel Fabre, *The Unfinished Quest of Richard Wright*, 440-441.

¹⁴³ See Richard Wright Papers, box 104, folder 1557, Beinecke Library, Yale University.

¹⁴⁴ Michel Fabre, *The World of Richard Wright* (Jackson: University of Press of Mississippi, 1985), 208.

¹⁴⁵ Léopold Sédar Senghor to Michel Fabre, [incomplete date] 1964, The Michel Fabre Papers, box 14, folder 2, MARBL, Emory University.

¹⁴⁶ Léopold Sédar Senghor to Richard Wright, July 21, 1959, The Richard Wright Papers, box 106, folder 1606, Beinecke Library, Yale University.

Chapter Four

¹ James Baldwin, "Princes and Powers" in *Nobody Knows My name* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 21.

² George Lamming, *The Pleasures of Exile* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992) 38.

³ *Encounter* magazine was an Anti-Stalinist left publication that was a joint effort between American and British intelligence interest to counter Soviet propaganda. See "Footnotes 20" in "Chapter One" of this dissertation.

⁴ Irvin Howe, "Nobody Knows My name" *New York Times*, July 2, 1961.

⁵ James Baldwin, "What It Means to Be an American" in *Nobody Knows My Name*, 3.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁷ Baldwin did make a trip to West Africa in July 1962. He had apparently intended to write a travel essay about his experiences and impressions there for *The New Yorker* but eventually felt uncomfortable with his role as a reporter and chose not to write the piece. He would instead draft the essay "Down at the Cross," which was published in the *New Yorker* as "Letter from a Region in My Mind." The essay later became part of the book *The Fire Next Time* under the title "Down at the Cross: Letter from a Region in My Mind." See, David Leeming, "Africa and *The Fire Next Time*" in *James Baldwin*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2007), 141-148.

⁸ James Baldwin, “Le problème noir en Amérique” *Rapports France-États-Unis*, September 1951, 40. The article was originally published in France. The translation is my own.

⁹ *Rapports France-États-Unis* was a widely circulated French language periodical published by the information division of Mission France, the lead body of the Marshall Plan in France. The magazine sought to present American society and culture in positive light and to counter Communist and Non-Communist criticisms about the United States. For more on the periodical and its ideological work during the Cold War, see “Chapter 5: The Makers of Stories” in Brian A. McKenzie’s *Remaking France: Americanization, Public Policy and the Marshall Plan* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2005).

¹⁰ James Baldwin, “Le problème noir en Amérique,” 47.

¹¹ Ezenwa-Oaheto, “Notions and Nuances: Africa in the Works of James Baldwin” in *Of Dreams Deferred, Dead or Alive: African Perspectives on African American Writers*, ed. Ojo-Ade (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1996) 113.

¹² James Baldwin, “Encounter on the Seine: Black Meets Brown” in *Notes of A Native Son* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), 122.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 122.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 123.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 123.

¹⁶ Harold Isaacs, “Five Writers and Their Ancestors Part 2” *Phylon* 21 (4) (1960): 327.

¹⁷ For a more in-depth treatment of Baldwin’s views on Africa, see Douglas Field’s “What is Africa to Baldwin: Cultural Illegitimacy and Step-Fatherland” in *James Baldwin: America and Beyond*, ed. Cora Kaplan and Bill Schwartz (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2011), 209-228.

¹⁸ Harold Isaacs, “Five Writers and Their Ancestors Part 2,” 327.

¹⁹ Here is another quotation from the Harold Isaac article that illustrates this point: “Africa, he said, made him think of: ‘a very black man, much blacker than me, naked, very romantic, very banal, sweat, something very sensual, very free, something very mysterious. Africa’s mental and emotional structure [...] is hard for me to imagine. It intrigues me. Also frightens me.” See, Harold Isaacs, “Five Writers and Their Ancestors Part 2,” 327.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 324.

²¹ James Campbell, *Talking at the Gates: A Life of James Baldwin* (New York: Viking, 1991), 109.

²² James Baldwin, “Autobiographical Notes” in *Notes of A Native Son*, 6.

²³ See “Chapter Three” of this dissertation.

²⁴ *Ibid.*.

²⁵ In the interview with Harold Isaac Baldwin mentions specifically how he disliked and avoided discussions with Africans because of their misconceptions about each other and also because the question of politics continually surface. See, Harold Isaacs, 324.

²⁶ James Baldwin, “Princes and Powers” in *Nobody Knows My Name*, 29.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 29.

²⁸ Baldwin brief dismissed in his essay Alexis’ statement that the Congress ought to make a cultural inventory. Baldwin missed the point that Alexis was pointing out how an

essential element of “culture” are material artifacts and also that cultures have a tendency to be bounded within specific regions. This was his challenge to what he apprehended as Négritude’s abstract consideration of a black diasporic culture. Baldwin interpreted Alexis’ challenge literally, that the Congress would need to make an actual inventory of the material elements of a black diasporic culture.

²⁹ James Baldwin, “Princes and Powers,” 22.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 25.

³¹ Édouard Glissant, *Poétique de la Relation* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1990), 206-207. For translation see *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press), 191.

³² I understand this is a very sympathetic reading of Baldwin’s vision of the African “other.” Baldwin makes a few unsavory remarks in the Harold Isaac interview about Africa and Africans that would raise eyebrows. My assessment of his views however is based on what I perceive is a general consistency in how he conceives of African and African American cultural particularity.

³³ James Baldwin, “Princes and Powers,” 32.

³⁴ Baldwin’s discussion of Cheikh Anta Diop’s lecture spanned a brief paragraph summed up with the statement “while his claims of the deliberate dishonesty of all Egyptian scholars may be quite well founded for all I know, I cannot say he convinced me.” *Ibid.*, 43.

³⁵ James Baldwin, “Princes and Powers,” 20.

³⁶ Cheryl Wall, “Stranger at Home: James Baldwin and What it Means to Be an American,” in *James Baldwin: America and Beyond*, ed. Bill Schwartz and Cora Kaplan (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2011), 36.

³⁷ James Baldwin, “Princes and Powers,” 20.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 21.

³⁹ For a discussion of Césaire’s lecture, see Chapter Two of this dissertation.

⁴⁰ James Baldwin, “Princes and Powers,” 36.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 36-37.

⁴² James Baldwin, “Everybody’s Protest Novel”, in *Notes of A Native Son*, 28

⁴³ Kevin Gaines, “Exile and the Private Life: James Baldwin, George Lamming, and the First World Congress of Negro Artists and Writers.” in *James Baldwin: America and Beyond*, 177.

⁴⁴ James Baldwin, “Princes and Powers,” 42.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁴⁶ Author’s interview with George Lamming, March 5, 2011, University of Miami, Coral Gables, Florida.

⁴⁷ See Mary Chamberlain’s “George Lamming” in Bill Schwartz’s edited volume *West Indian Intellectuals in Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 203), 179.

⁴⁸ This was exemplified by the fact that the American publication of *In the Castle of My Skin* had an introduction written by Richard Wright. While Wright’s approach to Lamming’s novel in the introduction was very sociological, it clearly evoked his appreciation of Lamming’s debut effort.

⁴⁹ Ian Munro has convincingly shown that Lamming's novels have the uncanny tendency to chronicle the breadth of West Indian history in its depiction of the colonial setting (*In the Castle of My Skin*, 1953 and *Of Age and Innocence*, 1958), the era of a great migration (*The Emigrants*, 1954), the achievement of independence (*Season of Migration*, 1960), the post-independence moment (*Water with Berries*, 1971). The only novel that does not seem to build upon a representation of that history in chronological fashion, *Natives of my Person* (1972), essentially presents an allegory of the underlying pattern of Caribbean history, arching back from the colonial setting to the moment of independence. See Ian Munro's "George Lamming" in *West Indian Literature*, ed. Bruce King (London: McMillan Education Ltd, 1995), 163-175.

⁵⁰ George Lamming, "The Negro Writer and His World," *Le Premier Congrès International des Écrivains et Artistes Noirs: Compte Rendu Complet, Présence Africaine* 8-10 (1956): 318.

⁵¹ George Lamming, *The Pleasures of Exile*, 36.

⁵² George Lamming, "The Negro Writer and his World," 318.

⁵³ See Kenneth Ramchand's *The West Indian Novel and its Background* (London: Faber & Faber, 1970), 3. In *The Pleasures of Exile*, Lamming accounts for "a dozen or so novelists [...] with some fifty books to their credit" between the years 1948 to 1958 (p. 29)

⁵⁴ George Lamming, *The Pleasures of Exile*, 38.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 35-36.

⁵⁶ George Lamming very eloquently discusses this in the essay "The Occasion for Speaking" of *The pleasures of Exile*, especially the short segment he has on the Trinidadian novelist Edgar Mittelholzer (pp. 39-42).

⁵⁷ Sandra Paquet Pouchet, "The Fifties" in *West Indian Literature*, Bruce King, ed. (London: McMillan Education Ltd, 1995), 51.

⁵⁸ George Lamming, "The Occasion for Speaking," 27.

⁵⁹ Author's interview with George Lamming, March 5, 2011, University of Miami, Coral Gables, Florida.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ George Lamming, *In the Castle of My Skin* (New York: McGraw Hill Book Company, Inc., 1953), 302.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 303.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 306.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 306.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 307.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 307.

⁶⁷ James Baldwin, "Princes and Powers," 41. The statement itself is not in the transcribed version of Lamming's lecture.

⁶⁸ George Lamming, "The Negro Writer and His World," 319.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 319.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 318.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 320.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 318.

- ⁷³ See Chapter Three of this dissertation.
- ⁷⁴ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2008), 90.
- ⁷⁵ George Lamming, "The Negro Writer and His World," 321.
- ⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 321.
- ⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 321.
- ⁷⁸ James Baldwin, "Princes and Powers, 42.
- ⁷⁹ George Lamming, "The Negro Writer and His World," 321.
- ⁸⁰ Kevin Gaines, "Exile and the Private Life: James Baldwin, George Lamming, and the First World Congress of Negro Artists and Writers," in *James Baldwin: America and Beyond*, ed. Cora Kaplan and Bill Schwartz (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2011), 178.
- ⁸¹ James Bladwin, "Autobiographical Notes" in *Notes of a Native Son*, 9.
- ⁸² *Ibid.*, 7.
- ⁸³ *Ibid.*, 7.
- ⁸⁴ Another connection between Baldwin and Lamming regards their respective references to Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, specifically the characters Caliban and Prospero. Concerning these two characters and language, Baldwin makes the following remark in passing: "You taught me language," says Caliban to Prospero, and my profit on't is I know how to curse" (See, "Autobiographical Notes" in *Notes of a Native Son*, 6). Several of the essays of Lamming's *The Pleasures of Exile* invoke the figures of Caliban and Prospero as parables of the colonial encounter and the colonial experience. The question of Caliban's appropriation of Prospero's language is a key element throughout those essays.
- ⁸⁵ James Baldwin, "Everybody's Protest Novel" in in *Notes of a Native Son*, 14.
- ⁸⁶ George Lamming, "The Negro Writer and His World," 324.
- ⁸⁷ Sandra Pouchet Paquet, *The Novels of George Lamming* (London: Heinemann, 1982), 1.
- ⁸⁸ James Baldwin, *No Name in the Street* (New York: Dial Press, 1972), 49-50.

Epilogue

- ¹ This includes, *Africa Seen by American Negro Scholars* (1958), *The American Negro Writer and his Roots* (1960), *West African Vignettes* (1960), *Pan-Africanism Reconsidered* (1962) and *Southern Africa in Transition* (1965).
- ² Bennetta Jule-Rosette, *Black Paris: The African Writer's Landscape*, 47
- ³ *Ibid.*, 81. The Italics are mine.
- ⁴ James Baldwin, "Princes and Powers," 52.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, 55. The italics are mine.

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