

## AND SHINE SWAM ON

*... Just then the Captain said, "Shine, Shine, save poor me  
I'll give you more money than a nigger ever see."  
Shine said to the Captain: "Money is good on land and on sea,  
but the money on land is the money for me."  
And Shine swam on ...  
Then the Captain's lily white daughter come up on deck,  
She had her hands on her pussy and her dress around her neck.  
She say, "Shine, Shine, save poor me,  
I'll give you more pussy than a nigger ever see."  
Shine, he say, "There's pussy on land and pussy on sea,  
but the pussy on land is the pussy for me."  
And Shine swam on ...*

The quote is taken from an urban "toast" called the Titanic. It is part of the private mythology of Black America. Its symbolism is direct and profound. Shine is US. We have been below-deck stoking the ship's furnaces. Now the ship is sinking, but where will we swim? This is the question that the "New Breed" which James Brown sings about, asks.

We don't have all of the answers, but have attempted, through the artistic and political work presented here, to confront our problems from what must be called a radical perspective. Therefore, most of the book can be read as if it were a critical re-examination of Western political, social and artistic values. It can be read also as a rejection of anything that we feel is detrimental to our people. And it is almost axiomatic that most of what the West considers important endangers the more humane world we feel ours should be.

We have been, for the most part, talking about contemporary realities. We have not been talking about a return to some glorious African past. But we recognize the past—the total past. Many of us refuse to accept a truncated Negro history which cuts us off completely from our African ancestry. To do so is to accept the very racist assumptions which we abhor. Rather, we want to comprehend history totally, and understand the manifold ways in which contemporary problems are affected by it.

There is a tension within Black America. And it has its roots in the general history of the race. The manner in which we see this history determines how we act. How should we see this history? What should we feel about it? This is important to know, because the sense of how that history should be felt is what either unites or separates us.

For, how the thing is felt helps to determine how it is played. For example, the 1966 uprising in Watts is a case of feeling one's history in a particular way, and then acting it out in the most immediate manner possible. The emotions of the crowd have always played an integral role in the making of history.

Again, what separates a Malcolm X from a Roy Wilkins is a profound difference in what each believes the history of America to be. Finally, the success of one leader over another depends upon which one best understands and expresses the emotional realities of a given historical epoch. Hence, we feel a Malcolm in a way that a Roy Wilkins, a King, and a Whitney Young can never be felt. Because a Malcolm, finally, interprets the emotional history of his people better than the others.

There is a tension throughout our communities. The ghosts of that tension are Nat Turner, Martin Delaney, Booker T. Washington, Frederick Douglass, Malcolm X, Garvey, Monroe Trotter, DuBois, Fanon, and a whole panoply of mythical heroes from Br'er Rabbit to Shine. These

ghosts have left us with some very heavy questions about the realities of life for black people in America.

The movement is now faced with a serious crisis. It has postulated a theory of Black Power; and that is good. But it has failed to evolve a workable ideology. That is, a workable concept—perhaps Black Power is it—which can encompass many of the diverse ideological tendencies existent in the black community. This concept would have to allow for separatists and revolutionaries; and it would have to take into consideration the realities of contemporary American power, both here and abroad. The militant wing of the movement has begun to deny the patriotic assumptions of the white and Negro establishment, but it has not supported that denial with a consistent theory of social change, one that must be rooted in the history of African-Americans.

Currently, there is a general lack of clarity about how to proceed. This lack of clarity is historical and is involved with what DuBois called the “double-consciousness”:

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

The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife—this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double-self into a better and truer self . . .

This statement is from *The Souls of Black Folk*, which was published in 1897. The double-consciousness still exists, and was even in existence prior to 1897.

Nat Turner, Denmark Vesey, and Gabriel Prosser attempted to destroy this double-consciousness in bloody revolt.

In 1852, a black physician named Martin Delaney published a book entitled, *The Destiny of the Colored Peoples*.

Delaney advocated repatriation—return to the Motherland (Africa). He believed that the United States would never fully grant black people freedom; and never would there be anything like “equal status with the white man.”

Frederick Douglass, and many of the abolitionists, strongly believed in the “promise of America.” But the double-consciousness and its resulting tension still exist. How else can we explain the existence of these same ideas in contemporary America? Why was Garvey so popular? Why is it that, in a community like Harlem, one finds a distinctly nationalistic element which is growing yearly, according to a recent article in *The New York Times*? And it is a contemporary nationalism, existing in varying degrees of sophistication; but all of its tendencies, from the Revolutionary Action Movement to the African Nationalist Pioneer Movement, are focused on questions not fully resolved by the established Negro leadership—questions which that leadership, at this stage of its development, is incapable of answering.

Therefore, the rebirth of the concept of Black Power opens old wounds. For the conflict between Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. DuBois was essentially over the question of power, over the relationship of that power to the status of Black America. The focus of the conflict between Washington and DuBois was education: What was the best means of educating black people? Should it be primarily university education, as advocated by DuBois; or one rooted in what Washington called “craft skills”? Since education functions in a society to enforce certain values, both men found it impossible to confine discussion simply to the nature of black education. It became a political question. It is a political question. Therefore, what was essentially being debated was the political status of over ten million people of African descent who, against their wills, were being forced to eke out an existence in the United States.

Queen Mother Moore once pointed out to me that black

people were never collectively given a chance to decide whether they wanted to be American citizens or not. After the Civil War, for example, there was no plebiscite putting the question of American citizenship to a vote. Therefore, implicit in the turn-of-the-century controversy between Washington and DuBois is the idea that black people are a nation—a separate nation apart from white America. Around 1897, the idea was more a part of Washington's thinking than DuBois'; but it was to haunt DuBois until the day he died (in Ghana).

The educational ideas of both Washington and DuBois were doomed to failure. Both ideas, within the context of American values, were merely the extension of another kind of oppression. Only, now it was an oppression of the spirit. Within the context of a racist America, both were advocating a "colonialized" education; that is, an education equivalent to the kind the native receives, in Africa and Asia, under the imperialists. The fundamental role of education in a racist society would have to be to "keep the niggers in their place."

All of the Negro colleges in this country were, and, are even now, controlled by white money—white power. DuBois recognized this after he was dismissed from Atlanta University. In 1934, he further proceeded to advocate the establishment of independent "segregated" institutions and the development of the black community as a separate entity. The advocacy of such ideas led to a break with the NAACP, which was committed to a policy of total integration into American society. Here then, is the tension, the ambiguity between integration and segregation, occurring in the highest ranks of a well-established middle-class organization. Hence, in 1934, DuBois had not really advanced, at least not in terms of the ideas postulated above, but was merely picking up the threads of arguments put forth by Washington and Marcus Garvey. And the double-consciousness dominated his entire professional life.

He had been everything that was demanded of him: scholar, poet, politician, nationalist, integrationist, and finally in old age, a Communist. His had been a life full of controversy. He knew much about human nature, especially that of his people, but he did not understand Garvey—Garvey—who was merely his own double-consciousness theory personified in a very dynamic and forceful manner. Garvey was, in fact, attempting the destruction of that very tension which had plagued all of DuBois' professional career.

It involved knowing and deciding who and what we are. Had Garvey an organizational apparatus equivalent to the NAACP's, the entire history of the world might have been different. For Garvey was more emotionally cohesive than DuBois, and not as intellectually fragmented. DuBois, for all of his commitment, was a somewhat stuffy intellectual with middle-class hangups, for which Garvey constantly attacked him. The people to whom Garvey appealed could never have understood DuBois. But Garvey understood them, and the life-force within him was very fundamental to them. The NAACP has never had the kind of fervent appeal that the Garvey Movement had. It has rarely understood the tension within the black masses. To them, Garvey was a fanatic. But are these the words of a fanatic, or of a lover?

The N.A.A.C.P. wants us all to become white by amalgamation, but they are not honest enough to come out with the truth. To be a Negro is no disgrace, but an honor, and we of the U.N.I.A. do not want to become white. . . . We are proud and honorable. We love our race and respect and adore our mothers.

And, in a letter to his followers from prison:

My months of forcible removal from among you, being imprisoned as a punishment for advocating the cause of *our real emancipation* [emphasis mine], have not left me hopeless or despondent; but to the contrary, I see a great ray of light and the bursting of a mighty political cloud which will bring you complete freedom. . . .

We have gradually won our way back into the confidence of

the God of Africa, and He shall speak with a voice of thunder, that shall shake the pillars of a corrupt and unjust world, and once more restore Ethiopia to her ancient glory. . . .

Hold fast to the Faith. Desert not the ranks, but as brave soldiers march on to victory. I am happy, and shall remain so, as long as you keep the flag flying.

So in 1940, Garvey died. He died in London, an exile. He was a proud man whose real fault was not lack of intense feeling and conviction, but an inability to tailor his nationalism to the realities of the American context. And also he was a threat to Europe's colonial designs in Africa, a much greater threat than the Pan-African conferences DuBois used to organize. Garvey wanted a nation for his people. That would have meant the destruction of British, French and Portuguese imperialism in Africa. And since it was a movement directed by blacks here in this country, it would also have internally challenged American imperialism as it existed at that time.

But Garvey was no Theodor Herzl or Chaim Weizmann,\* with their kind of skills and resources behind him. Had he been, he might have brought a nation into existence. But neither he nor his people had those kinds of resources, and, worse, the black bourgeoisie of the period did not understand him with the same intensity as the masses.

In 1940, the year Garvey died, Malcolm Little was fifteen years old. He caught a bus from Lansing, Michigan, and went to Boston to live with his sister Ella Collins, who is now head of the organization Malcolm started when he broke with the Nation of Islam. It is probably the most important bus ride in history.

\* NOTE: Herzl (1860-1904) and Weizmann (1874-1952) are two important thinkers in the history of Jewish Zionism. During the 19th century, Jewish intellectuals began to describe analytically the problem of the Jews since what is called the Diaspora—the dispersion of the Jews among the Gentiles after the Exile. The efforts of these two men and many others culminated in the erection of Israel. Because Garvey also advocated a “return,” some writers have called his movement “Black Zionism.”

Malcolm X, whose father had been a Garveyite, was destined to confront the double-consciousness of Black America. But his confrontation would be a modern one, rooted in the teachings of the Nation of Islam and in the realities of contemporary politics. That is to say, his ideas would be a synthesis of black nationalism's essential truths as derived from Martin Delaney, DuBois, Garvey, the honorable Elijah Muhammed, Fanon, and Richard Wright. And his speech would be marked by a particular cadence, a kind of “hip” understanding of the world. It was the truth as only the oppressed, and those whose lives have somehow been “outside of history,” could know it.

Civil rights and brotherhood were in vogue when Malcolm started “blowing”—started telling the truth in a manner only a deaf man would ignore. And many of us *were* deaf, or if not, in a deep sleep. He shot holes through the civil rights movement that was the new “in” for the white liberals. James Baldwin was also “in,” pleading for a new morality to people who saw him as another form of entertainment. And there were sit-ins, pray-ins, sleep-ins, non-violence, and the March on Washington. And the voice of Malcolm cut through it all, stripping away the sham and the lies. He was the conscience of Black America, setting out, like a warrior, to destroy the double-consciousness. He did not eschew dialogue. He attempted, instead, to make it more meaningful by infusing some truth into it. For this reason, it was both painful and beautiful to listen to him.

Malcolm covered everything—nationhood, manhood, the family, brotherhood, history, and the Third World Revolution. Yet it always seemed to me that he was talking about a revolution of the psyche, about how we should see ourselves in the world.

But, just as suddenly as he was thrust among us—he was gone. Gone, just as Black America was starting to understand what he was talking about. And those who killed him, did so for just that reason. For Malcolm wanted to make real

the internationalism of Garvey and DuBois. Our problem had ceased to be one of civil rights, he argued, but is, instead, one of human rights. As such—he extended the argument—it belongs in an international context. Like Garvey and DuBois before him, he linked the general oppression of Black America to that of the Third World. Further, he strongly advocated unity with that world, something few civil rights leaders have dared to do.

Hence, what has come to be known as Black Power must be seen in terms of the ideas and persons which preceded it. Black Power is, in fact, a synthesis of all of the nationalistic ideas embedded within the double-consciousness of Black America. But it has no one *specific* meaning. It is rather a kind of feeling—a kind of emotional response to one's history. The theoreticians among us can break down its components. However, that will not be enough, for like all good theories, it can ultimately be defined only in action—in movement. Essentially, this is what the "New Breed" is doing—defining itself through actions, be they artistic or political.

We have attempted through these historical judgments to examine the idea of nationhood, the idea, real or fanciful, that black people comprise a separate national entity within the dominant white culture. This sense of being separate, especially within a racist society with so-called democratic ideas, has created a particular tension within the psychology of Black America. We are saying, further, that this sense of the "separate" moves through much of today's black literature.

There is also a concomitant sense of being at "war." Max Stanford explains that this sense began the minute the first slaves were snatched from their lands. These two tensions, "separation" and "war," are pressing historical realities; both are leading to a literature of Armageddon.

We must face these ideas in all of their dimensions. In some cases, the literature speaks to the tension within, say, the family; or it deals with the nature of black manhood.

At other times, especially in something like Jimmy Garrett's play *We Own The Night*, the "war" seems directed against an unseen white enemy; it is, in fact, an attack on the Uncle Tomism of the older generation.

The tension, or double-consciousness, is most often resolved in violence, simply because the nature of our existence in America has been one of violence. In some cases, the tension resolves in recognizing the beauty and love within Black America itself. No, not a new "Negritude," but a profound sense of a unique and beautiful culture; and a sense that there are many spiritual areas to explore *within* this culture. This is a kind of separation but there is no tension about it. There is a kind of peace in the separation. This peace may be threatened by the realities of the beast-world, but yet, it is lived as fully as life can be lived. This sense of a haven in blackness is found most often in the poetry selections.

But history weighs down on all of this literature. Every black writer in America has had to react to this history, either to make peace with it, or make war with it. It cannot be ignored. Every black writer has chosen a particular stance towards it. He or she may tell you that, for them, it was never a problem. But they will be liars.

Most contemporary black writing of the last few years, the literature of the young, has been aimed at the destruction of the double-consciousness. It has been aimed at consolidating the African-American personality. And it has not been essentially a literature of protest. It has, instead, turned its attention inward to the internal problems of the group. The problem of living in a racist society, therefore, is something that lurks on the immediate horizon, but which can not be dealt with until certain political, social and spiritual truths are understood by the oppressed themselves—inwardly understood.

It is a literature primarily directed at the consciences of

black people. And, in that sense, it is a literature that is somewhat more mature than that which preceded it. The white world—the West—is seen now as a dying creature, totally bereft of spirituality. This being the case, the only hope is some kind of psychic withdrawal from its values and assumptions. Not just America, but most of the non-colored world has been in the process of destroying the spiritual roots of mankind, while not substituting anything meaningful for this destruction.

Therefore, many see the enslavement of the Third World as an enslavement of the Spirit. Marxists carefully analyze the *material* reasons for this kind of oppression, but it takes a Fanon to illustrate the spiritual malaise in back of this enslavement. I tend to feel that the answer lies outside of historical materialism. It is rooted in how man sees himself in the spiritual sense, in what *he construes existence to mean*. Most Western philosophical orientations have taken the force of meaning out of existence.

Why this has happened is not really known, at least not in any sense that is final. We do know that the Western mind construes reality differently from that of the rest of the world. Or should I say, *feels* reality differently? Western mythological configurations are even vastly different from other configurations. Such configurations lead to the postulation of certain ideas of what art is, of what life is (see Jimmy Stewart's essay in this book).

Let us take, for example, the disorientation one experiences when one sees a piece of African sculpture in a Madison Avenue art gallery. Ask yourself: What is it doing there? In Africa, the piece had ritual significance. It was a spiritual affirmation of the connection between man and his ancestors, and it implied a particular kind of ontology—a particular sense of being. However, when you see it in that gallery, you must recognize that no African artist *desired* that it be placed there. Rather, it was stolen by force and placed there. And

the mind that stole it was of a different nature from the mind that made it.

In the gallery or the salon, it is merely an *objet d'art*, but for your ancestors, it was a bridge between them and the spirit, a bridge between you and your soul in the progression of a spiritual lineage. It was art, merely incidentally, for it was essentially functional in its natural setting. The same goes for music, song, dance, the folk tale and dress. All of these things were coalesced, with form and function unified. All of these were an evocation of the spirit which included an affirmation of daily life, and the necessity of living life with honor.

The degree to which the artists among us understand some of these things is the degree to which we shall fashion a total art form that speaks primarily to the needs of our people. The temptation offered by Western society is to turn from these essential truths and merge with the oppressor for solace. This temptation demands, not merely integration of the flesh, but also integration of the spirit. And there are few of us for whom this would not have dire consequences. Further, the tension, the double-consciousness of which we have already spoken, cannot be resolved in so easy a manner, especially when, within the context of the racist society, the merger has little chance of being a healthy one.

In an essay entitled, "Blue Print for Negro Writing," Richard Wright attempted to define all aspects of the writer's role—especially as it is related to his status as an oppressed individual. Wright saw the problem in the following manner: The black writer had turned to writing in an attempt to demonstrate to the white world that there were "Negroes who were civilized." I suppose, here, he meant people like Charles Chestnutt and William Braithwaite. The writing, Wright attempted to prove, had become the voice of the educated Negro pleading with white America for justice. But

it was "external to the lives of educated Negroes themselves." Further, much of this writing was rarely addressed to black people, to their needs, sufferings and aspirations.

It is precisely here that almost all of our literature had failed. It had succumbed merely to providing exotic entertainment for white America. As Wright suggests, we had yet to create a dynamic body of literature addressed to the needs of our people. And there are a myriad of socio-economic reasons underlying this failure. The so-called Harlem Renaissance was, for the most part, a fantasy-era for most black writers and their white friends. For the people of the community, it never even existed. It was a thing apart. And when the money stopped, in 1929, to quote Langston Hughes: "... we were no longer in vogue, anyway, we Negroes. Sophisticated New Yorkers turned to Noel Coward. Colored actors began to go hungry, publishers politely rejected new manuscripts, and patrons found other uses for their money. The cycle that had charlestoned into being on the dancing heels of *Shuffle Along* now ended in *Green Pastures* with De Lawd. ... The generous 1920's were over." For most of us, they had never begun. It was all an illusion, a kind of surrealistic euphoria.

Wright insisted on an approach to literature that would reconcile the black man's "nationalism" and his "revolutionary aspirations." The best way for the writer to do this, he wrote in "Blue Print," was the utilization of his own tradition and culture—a culture that had developed out of the black church, and the folklore of the people:

Blues, spirituals, and folk tales recounted from mouth to mouth; the whispered words of a black mother to her black daughter on the ways of men; the confidential wisdom of a black father to his black son; the swapping of sex experiences on the street corners from boy to boy in the deepest vernacular; work songs sung under blazing suns—all these formed the channels through which the racial wisdom flowed.

And what of the nationalism about which we spoke earlier? Here again, the tension arises. The question of nationalism occurs repeatedly in the works of Wright. Like DuBois and other intellectuals, Wright found that he could not ignore it. Within Wright himself, there was being waged a great conflict over the validity of nationalism. In the essay under discussion, he forces the question out into the open, asserting the necessity of understanding the function of nationalism in the lives of the people:

Let those who shy at the nationalistic implications of Negro life look at the body of folklore, living and powerful, which rose out of a common fate. Here are those vital beginnings of a recognition of a value in life as it is lived, a recognition that makes the emergence of a *new culture in the shell of the old*. [emphasis mine] And at the moment that this process starts, at the moment when people begin to realize a *meaning* in their suffering, the civilization that engenders that suffering is doomed. ...

A further reading of this essay reveals that Wright was not trying to construct a black ideology, but was, instead, attempting a kind of reconciliation between nationalism and Communism. The essay was written in 1937. By then, the Communists had discarded the "nation within a nation" concept and were working to discourage black nationalism among the Negro members of the Party. Wright was trying to re-link nationalism and Communism, but the two were incompatible. The Communists discouraged the construction of a black theoretical frame of reference, but did not substitute a theory that was more viable than the one some of its black Party members proposed. Hence, the double-consciousness was not resolved. Wright ended up splitting with the Party to preserve his own identity.

Even though he had failed, Richard Wright was headed in the right direction. But the conditions under which he labored did not allow success. The Party, for example, had never really understood the "Negro question" in any manner that

was finally meaningful to black people. Further, the nationalistic models which Wright and a contemporary of his, Ralph Ellison, saw around them were too "brutal" and "coarse" for their sensibilities (Ras, in Ellison's novel). Ultimately, the tension within Wright forced him to leave America, to become a voluntary exile.

The last years of his life were spent explaining the psychology of the oppressed throughout the Third World. In *White Man Listen!*, he attempted to analyze, much like Fanon, the malaise accompanying the relationship between the oppressed and the oppressors. And the double-consciousness never left him. *White Man Listen! Black Power*, and *The Color Line* are Wright's attempt to understand his own racial dilemma by placing it in an international context, thus linking it to the general affects of colonialism on the psychology of the oppressed. Therefore, these works, historically, link Wright with Garvey and DuBois, as well as foreshadow the ideas of Fanon and Brother Malcolm. To be more germane to our subject, these latter works are certainly more pertinent to the ideas of the "New Breed" youth, than say, *Native Son*.

They are especially more pertinent than Ralph Ellison's novel, *Invisible Man*, which is a profound piece of writing but the kind of novel which, nonetheless, has little bearing on the world as the "New Breed" sees it. The things that concerned Ellison are interesting to read, but contemporary black youth feels another force in the world today. We know who we are, and we are not invisible, *at least not to each other*. We are not Kafkaesque creatures stumbling through a white light of confusion and absurdity. The light is black (now, get that!) as are most of the meaningful tendencies in the world.

... Let us waste no time in sterile litanies and nauseating mimicry. Leave this Europe where they are never done talking of Man, yet

murder men everywhere they find them, at the corner of every one of their own streets, in all corners of the globe. For centuries they have stifled almost the whole of humanity in the name of a so-called spiritual experience. Look at them today swaying between atomic and spiritual disintegration.

FRANTZ FANON—*The Wretched of The Earth*

Our literature, our art and our music are moving closer to the forces motivating Black America. You can hear it everywhere, especially in the music, a surging new sound. Be it the Supremes, James Brown, the Temptations, John Coltrane, or Albert Ayler, there is a vital newness in this energy. There is love, tension and spiritual togetherness in it. We are beautiful—but there is more work to do, and just being beautiful is not enough.

We must take this sound, and make this energy meaningful to our people. Otherwise, it will have meant nothing, will have affected nothing. The force of what we have to say can only be realized in action. Black literature must become an integral part of the community's life style. And I believe that it must also be integral to the myths and experiences underlying the *total* history of black people.

New constructs will have to be developed. We will have to alter our concepts of what art is, of what it is supposed to "do." The dead forms taught most writers in the white man's schools will have to be destroyed, or at best, radically altered. We can learn more about what poetry is by listening to the cadences in Malcolm's speeches, than from most of Western poetics. Listen to James Brown scream. Ask yourself, then; Have you ever heard a Negro poet sing like that? Of course not, because we have been tied to the texts, like most white poets. The text could be destroyed and no one would be hurt in the least by it. The key is in the music. Our music has always been far ahead of our literature. Actually, until recently, it was our only literature, except for, perhaps, the folktale.



Therefore, what we are asking for is a new synthesis; a new sense of literature as a *living* reality. But first, we must liberate ourselves, destroy the double-consciousness. We must integrate with *ourselves*, understand that we have within us a great vision, revolutionary and spiritual in nature, understand that the West is dying, and offers little promise of rebirth.

All of her prophets have told her so: Sartre, Brecht, Camus, Albee, Burroughs and Fellini, have foretold her doom. Can we do anything less? It is merely what we have always secretly known—what Garvey, DuBois, Fanon and Malcolm knew: The West is dying, as it must, as it should. However, the approach of this death merely makes the power-mad Magog's of the West more vicious, more dangerous—like McNamara with his computing machines, scientifically figuring out how to kill more people. We must address ourselves to this reality in the sharpest terms possible. Primarily, it is an address to black people. And that is not protest, as such. You don't have to protest to a hungry man about his hunger. You have either to feed him, or help him to eliminate the root causes of that hunger.

What of craft—the writer's craft? Well, under terms of a new definition concerning the function of literature, a new concept of what craft is will also evolve. For example, do I not find the craft of Stevie Wonder more suitable than that of Jascha Heifetz? Are not the sensibilities which produced the former closer to me than the latter? And does not the one indicate a way into things absent from the other?

To reiterate, the key to where the black people have to go is in the music. Our music has always been the most dominant manifestation of what we are and feel, literature was just an afterthought, the step taken by the Negro bourgeoisie who desired acceptance on the white man's terms. And that is precisely why the literature has failed. It was the case of one elite addressing another elite.

But our music is something else. The best of it has always

operated at the core of our lives, forcing itself upon us as in a ritual. It has always, somehow, represented the collective psyche. Black literature must attempt to achieve that same sense of the collective ritual, but ritual directed at the destruction of useless, dead ideas. Further, it can be a ritual that affirms our highest possibilities, but is yet honest with us.

Some of these tendencies already exist in the literature. It is readily perceivable in LeRoi Jones's *Black Mass*, and in a recent recording of his with the Jihad Singers. Also, we have the work of Yusuf Rahman, who is the poetic equivalent of Charlie Parker. Similar tendencies are found in Sun-Ra's music and poetry; Ronald Fair's novel, *Many Thousand Gone*; the short stories of Henry Dumas (represented in this anthology); the poetry of K. Kgositsile, Welton Smith, Ed Spriggs, and Rolland Snellings; the dramatic choreography of Eleo Pomare; Calvin Hernton's very explosive poems; Ishmael Reed's poetry and prose works which are notable for a startling display of imagery; David Henderson's work, particularly "Keep On Pushin'," where he gets a chance to sing. There are many, many others.

What this has all been leading us to say is that the poet must become a performer, the way James Brown is a performer—loud, gaudy and racy. He must take his work where his people are: Harlem, Watts, Philadelphia, Chicago and the rural South. He must learn to embellish the context in which the work is executed; and, where possible, link the work to all usable aspects of the music. For the context of the work is as important as the work itself. Poets must learn to sing, dance and chant their works, tearing into the substance of their individual and collective experiences. We must make literature move people to a deeper understanding of what this thing is all about, be a kind of priest, a black magician, working juju with the word on the world.

Finally, the black artist must link his work to the struggle for his liberation and the liberation of his brothers and sisters.

But, he will have executed an essential aspect of his role if he makes even a small gesture in the manner outlined. He will be furthering the psychological liberation of his people, without which, no change is even possible.

The artist and the political activist are one. They are both shapers of the future reality. Both understand and manipulate the collective myths of the race. Both are warriors, priests, lovers and destroyers. For the first violence will be internal—the destruction of a weak spiritual self for a more perfect self. But it will be a necessary violence. It is the only thing that will destroy the double-consciousness—the tension that is in the souls of the black folk.

## Contributors



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CHARLES ANDERSON is a revolutionary brother in exile. Brother Charles, please get in touch!

S. E. ANDERSON: "My writing began at Pratt Institute, but didn't become stylized until I went to Lincoln University in 1962. A group of students and I formed a controversial black literary magazine called *Axiom*. I have been an activist in such organizations as the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, the National Student Movement, The Black Arts (Harlem) and the Black Panther Party. My work has appeared in the *Liberator* magazine and *Negro Digest*. I am United States Editor of the *New African Magazine*."