

# NEW THEATRE

NEGRO NUMBER  
JULY 1935 15c

TROUBLE WITH THE ANGELS—LANGSTON HUGHES  
SCENES FROM "JOHN HENRY"—HERBERT KLINE  
ON THE WHITE MAN'S STAGE—AUGUSTUS SMITH

*"Exhibit A"—Negro People's Theatre—Photo by Ralph Steiner.*



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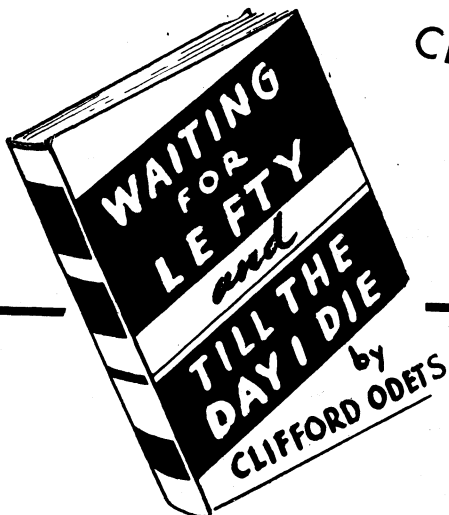
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# NEW THEATRE

JULY, 1935

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IT'S time we had a Negro Theatre in America. It's time we had a theatre with courage enough to present on the stage the life issues and realities which confront the twelve million Negroes in this country everywhere. We've never had such a theatre in America. Not until very recently, when the working-class theatre emerged and shot up into full flower, was there even the faintest glimmer of it.

For the American theatre has never really given up its minstrel-show conception of the Negro. The fiction of that conception has continued from the first "burnt cork" end-man down to Amos and Andy today. It was the fiction which played up the mythical idiosyncrasies of color and made those idiosyncrasies a butt for the white man's laughter. It was the fiction of Sambo, the lazy, good for nothing, crap shooting, razor toting, ghost ridden, sex hopped Negro. And although the long tradition of the white actor in black-face was finally broken and the Negro himself allowed to appear on the stage, that fiction still prevails. Cork or no cork, it was still the white man's fabrication of the Negro. And it still persists when you see an Ethel Waters on the stage, a Buck and Bubbles in vaudeville, a Cab Calloway in a night club, or a Stepin Fetchit in the movies. These performers have, consciously or unconsciously, allowed themselves to fall in with that fiction and to be utilized in this way because the commercial theatre allows for no other conception.

And even in the legitimate theatre, when the Negro is treated more seriously, the same thing holds true. In such plays as *Porgy*, *Harlem*, *Singin' the Blues*, and *Run Lil' Chillun* we have virtually the same conception of the Negro. Sensationalism is profitable and sensationalism has been provided.

Never have we had a realistic picture of the Negro. Certainly not in *Green Pastures* where the characters are quaint, romantic, picture-postcard caricatures whose whole existence seems to be centered in fish fries, crap shooting, loving and sinning. Nor in the much more sincere psychological probings of the *Emperor Jones* and *All God's Chillun* where O'Neill indulges in mystic maunderings about the Negro problem whose only resolution he can find in an acceptance of jungle primitivism.

Not so in the working class theatre. Here for the first time the Negro has been truthfully and realistically portrayed; here for the first time have we

faced his essential problems and struggles. From its very inception the working class theatre has made the Negro issue a paramount one. In its crudest beginnings, when the "agit-prop" theatre was presenting its very first mass chants, the story of the Scottsboro boys was being dramatized for audiences in *Scottsboro*, *Scottsboro*. This was only one of a number of skits and short plays agitating for Negro rights which were performed in workers' theatres, in clubs and halls, at demonstrations, on picket lines, and in the streets. Langston Hughes' *Scottsboro Limited*, Jerome's *Newsboy*, Martin's *Black Is Only a Color*, *Sharecroppers Unite*, *In the Hog House*, *Mass Pressure*, and *Eviction* have in their countless performances brought home the truth of the life struggle of the twelve million Negroes in America.

And in the professional theatre it remained for a revolutionary playwright, John Wexley, to write a play like *They Shall Not Die*.—And for a revolutionary theatre, The Theatre Union to produce a play like *Stevedore*—plays which have reached some 300,000 people.

Under the leadership of the New Theatre League, the Negro theatre movement has experienced a phenomenal growth within the past six months. Seven new Negro groups have become affiliated with the League and the Negro People's Theatre organized itself as a professional Negro social theatre.

Nor have the other working class cultural movements ignored the Negro. The film *Harlem Sketches* has just been released by the Film and Photo League. And such dances as *Black and White*, *Scottsboro*, *Cause I'm a Nigger*, and *Lynch* have been sponsored by the New Dance League.

This new vitality is not an ephemeral or sporadic thing. There is a crying demand for a real Negro theatre and culture, for permanent groups and regular performances. This demand is reflected in the amazing turnout of four thousand people who jammed Rockland Palace the other night to see leading professionals of the Negro Peoples Theatre perform *Waiting for Lefty*.

It cannot be denied. The need is there; the audience and forces are there.

NEW THEATRE has devoted this issue to the Negro in the theatre precisely because it realizes this need, precisely because it realizes the importance of having a real Negro theatre in America.

—GEORGE SKLAR

ALL of the discrimination practiced by theatres—both legitimate and cinema—are by no means against Negro actors alone. In fact this is only a small manifestation of a practice by theatre owners which extends to the vast majority of Negro theatregoers.

In fact, the Jim Crowism, segregation and discrimination which is spectacularly practiced against Negro actors and actresses in the more fundamental and basic policy of keeping Negro audiences in peanut galleries. The Negro players are merely the most conspicuous victims of a system which has its roots in the many subtle and overt methods used by the theatre owning class in oppressing the Negro people.

There is an unwritten law in the downtown Broadway theatres of New York that Negroes must sit in the "peanut galleries." When a Negro patron asks at the box office of the legitimate theatre for a seat in the orchestra, he is usually told that all seats in the orchestra have been taken. He is then offered "choice" seats in the balcony.

This policy extends not only throughout the legitimate theatres, but also to the "high-class" movie houses. For example in Chicago at the United Artists Theatre, in the Loop section, the theatre employees are instructed to bar all Negroes from the loges.

Considerable embarrassment has been suffered by the theatres due to the fact that Negroes secure tickets to the orchestra by having their white friends purchase them. But this is only evading the issue, instead of forcing down the bars at the box offices against Negro ticket purchasers.

Even on 125th Street, in the heart of Harlem, Loew's Victoria theatre until recently denied Negroes tickets in the orchestra. This discrimination was broken down only after mass violations of the Negro people in Harlem against this Jim Crow restriction.

In sharp contrast to the general run of theatres downtown, is the policy of the Theatre Union, the Group, the Theatre of Action, the Artef and others which refuse to play at houses which practice discrimination against Negroes.

These theatres present the left drama, or plays of social protest, and there is a clear understanding on the part of the players and the producers that the discrimination practiced against Negro patrons has its roots deep in the general oppression of the Negro people. There is a recognized unity between the actors and the audience, in the sense that there must be joint action and protest against all forms of exploitation of actors and patrons.

Whenever a theatre practices discrimination against Negroes, actors should refuse to play in those theatres. The rising tide of support which the social protest type of play is receiving, provides a basis upon which there can be the closest unity between those on opposite sides of the stage lights.

ANGELO HERNDON faces eighteen years on a Georgia chain-gang for working to better the frightful conditions of Negro and white sharecroppers in that state. When a group of New York actors invited Herndon to address them last month, they saw life produce stirring drama which outstrips anything that the theatre can offer. Arrangements were made to have Herndon speak in the rehearsal room of the Belasco Theatre, but when the crowd proved too great, the meeting was moved to the auditorium. The Belasco currently houses Clifford Odet's piece, *Awake and Sing*. Herndon spoke from the stage; behind him—as he spoke one could continually see the stage piece which dominates Grandfather Berger's room—a portrait of Sacco and Vanzetti. Only 100 people saw the actual incident, but NEW THEATRE urges its many hundreds of readers to re-create it for themselves, and realize action from it. Do not let Angelo Herndon go to his death on a Georgia chain gang! Send your demand for the freedom of Herndon to the Governor of Georgia today.

**T**ROUBLE with the Angels by the well-known Negro poet and essayist is Langston Hughes' first contribution to NEW THEATRE. Augustus Smith, a Negro actor of many years experience, is now active in the Negro People's Theatre. Eugene Gordon, the Bostonian Negro critic, is now in the Soviet Union. Because the magazine was unable to obtain the projected long page issue, we have been forced to cut some of Mr. Gordon's treatment of his extensive subject. Forthcoming issues will contain additional discussions on the controversial subject of O'Neill and Green by Charmion Von Wiegand and Randolph Edmunds, Negro professor.

NOTE: By an error, *Dancing in Church*, by Lawrence Gellert was not included in the table of contents.



Dan Rice, the first Negro impersonator as "Jim Crow" in an 1830 Minstrel Show.

ON May 19th Actors Equity passed a ruling that actors are to receive an expense account for their living costs during rehearsal periods. This is a major victory. It puts an end to the incredible situation of their working without pay for four weeks, during which, if they had no reserve funds, they accumulated debts or went begging for advances on their coming salaries. Now senior members are to receive \$20 and junior and Chorus Equity members \$15 a week after the end of the probationary period.

In 1924 this reasonable proposition appeared so hopeless that one lone actor raised his hand in open meeting to vote that the union attempt to secure it. How was it possible to put this through now, when managers are pleading harder-than-usual luck? First through the urgent demands of the general membership of the union. Second, because of the leadership given by the spirited Actors Forum group within Equity. From its first meeting the Forum urged such a measure. It wrote the bill, collected support behind it, presented it in open meeting, and through its members on the Council secured its final passage. The campaign was conducted with logic, with careful statistical study of the situation and with strong faith in the power of actors to improve their condition through concerted action in their union.

The Forum is continuing to work for its second major plank: abolition of the differential between senior and junior minimum pay. This becomes necessary because of the managers' practice of discriminating against senior members. The Forum has already secured a provision that only two members out of ten in a cast may be junior members of Equity.

With the Forum's effectiveness proved, and the soundness of their program established, there is little doubt that in the next season's elections the membership will support their platform.

WHEN the FERA announced, on June 12th, that a dramatic project was under way which would revive the road, revive the little theatres, revive the actors, revive everything in sight, including the FERA, the first impulse was toward cheers: here might be the combination of jobs and culture! And then one understood what the Federal Government would require of its theatre at this point, with actors everywhere becoming more and more class-conscious, and with social plays reaching outlying districts where no state art has tried to penetrate. However, the misgivings of all of us who have watched the theatre in the last several years lie in the possibilities of a national theatre to subdue many actors into parrots of The Eagle, to act as censor, angel, and cop on the beat.



# "I Breathe Freely"

An Interview in Moscow with  
**PAUL ROBESON**

**P**AUL ROBESON, looking for a medium and a starting-point from which to determine the true African culture, has found in Soviet Russia the closest and most friendly attitudes to his own. The internationally known Negro singer and actor, at the end of his first visit to the Soviet Union early this year, said, "In Soviet Russia I breathe freely for the first time in my life. It is clear, whether a Negro is politically a Communist or not, that of all the nations in the world, the modern Russians are our best friends."

Since he speaks Russian, Robeson was able to talk directly with children, peasants and workers. Everywhere, in tramways, buses, streets and parks, he met with the same reaction from the people, he told this interviewer. "I was rested and buoyed up by the lovely, honest, wondering looks which did not see a 'negro,'" he said. "When these people looked at me, they were just happy, and interested. There were no 'double looks,' no venom, no superiority. . . ."

Looking for roles and songs, he has reached the same conclusion as Professor Kislitsan, the Russian sociologist, who has announced facts to prove that all races are related in culture, differing in the degree of their development only so far as they are affected by natural resources or the hindrances of exploitation.

"I find," declared Paul Robeson, "that the handicraft of certain periods of the Chinese and African cultures are almost identical; and that the Negro is more like the Russian in temperament and character."

Robeson has taken a keen interest in the Soviet minorities, their culture and the policy on national minorities. During his short stay in Moscow, he talked with representatives of the Commissariat of Public Education, and saw the policy in action. He plans to return to the Soviet Union to make a serious study of minority groups, which is to be linked with his intensive researches into Asiatic and African culture. He has insisted, in answer to press comments labelling his interest in Africa "jingoistic," that he is not trying to "escape" race oppression in America and Europe by taking a nationalist attitude.

"I came here," he says, "because the Soviet Union is the only place where ethnology is seriously considered and applied. . . . Africa does not realize that it has something to contribute, that it has a culture as clear as the European.

The Africans, instead of preserving their own culture, are fighting the idea of 'be what you are,' and go European as soon as they can. . . . The African and American Negro problem is not purely racial. These cultures must be freed, formulated, and developed, and this cannot be done without a change in the present system. The Negro cannot develop his culture until he is free."

Africa must be taught to be proud of its contributions. "Stalin speaks of the cultures of the different nationalities of the Soviet Union as 'socialist in content and national in form.' . . ."

Mr. Robeson was interested in the Eastern and Russian music, which he believes African music strongly resembles.

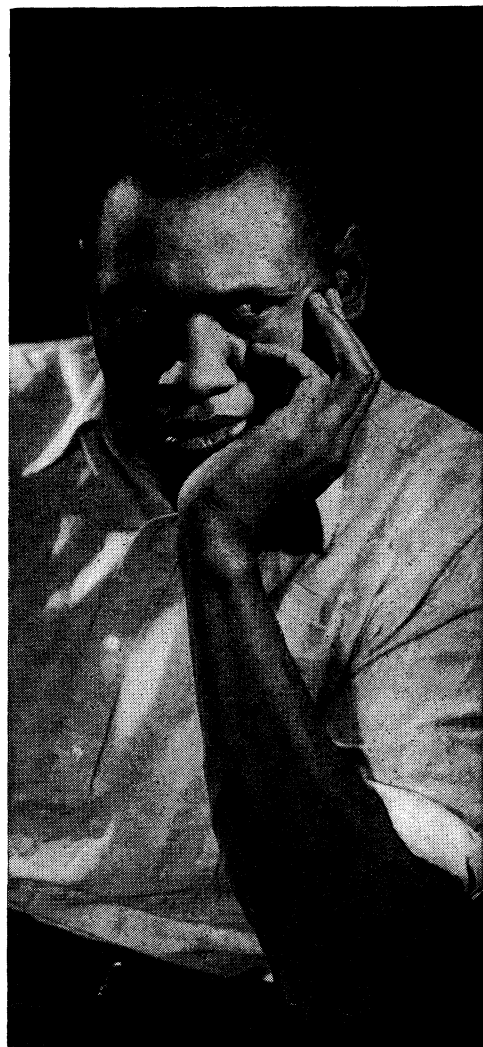
"The Negro folk songs and African music strongly resemble Eastern and Russian music. When I approached Russia, I found that I was interested in the Eastern part. I can't read Turgenev, whose language is influenced by France and the West," said Mr. Robeson, who reads and speaks Russian fluently, "but I am interested in Gogol and Pushkin, who show more Eastern and Tartar influence. . . ."

**P**AUL ROBESON is vitally interested in the efforts of the Western Negroes to free themselves. He stated, "I believe there is no such thing in England and America as inter-racial *cooperation* from the NAACP point of view. Our freedom is going to cost so many lives that we mustn't talk about the Scottsboro case as one of sacrifice. When we talk of freedom, we don't discuss lives. Before the Negro is free, there will be many Scottsboros. The Communist emphasis in that case is right."

Becoming more personal, Mr. Robeson spoke of needing something to sing outside of Negro and English folk songs, and Western peasant folk material, and of discovering, about four years ago, the Hebrew and Russian songs. He learned the two languages, finding that they were both quite easy for him.

"There is little audience in England and America for the things I feel like singing or playing. They want Negro religious songs from which they take, not the suffering, but the comfort of the resignation they express (not heeding that the song's cry for heaven is only a reflex from the Negro's having suffered hell on earth). . . ."

Although he did not give any concerts during this visit, Mr. Robeson sang some of his most popular songs to the workers of the Kaganovitch Ball Bearing Plant, where he was applauded by a group including a great many foreign and American workers. He also broadcast; and on his return, he plans a concert tour of folk songs, and there is talk of a film with Eisenstein. He



Paul Robeson

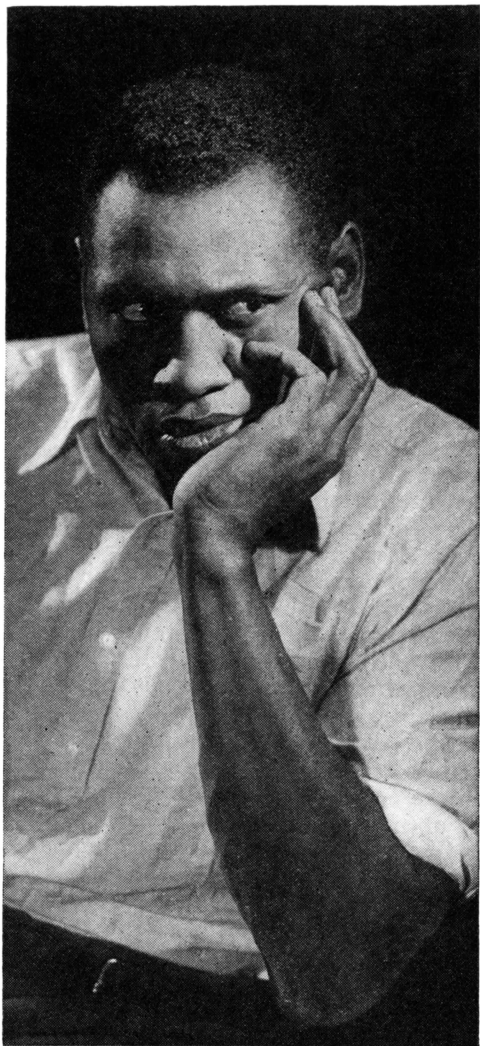
Alfred Valente

said, "The most important development in Soviet culture I have seen is in the moving picture field."

Among the theatres he visited, Mr. Robeson was most interested in the Moscow Children's Theatre, and the Realistic Theatre. At the former, he was pleased by *The Negro Boy and the Monkey*, a popular play about a little African who comes to the Soviet Union and is guided by his Pioneer comrades. The production method of Oxlopkhov (regisseur of the Realistic Theatre) impressed him with its similarity to motion picture technique, which he feels is best adapted to the tempo of life in the Soviet Union. Its plan, with the audience surrounding the stage platform, and participating in the performance, agrees with his own feeling that the artist should be in close contact with his audience.

Paul Robeson's activities have been put, with the enlargement of his interests, on an international scale, including studies and experiments in Eastern cultures along with his participation in African and American affairs. In correlating racial cultures, he sets a standard of awareness, saying, "The Negro must be conscious of himself and yet international, linked with the nations which are culturally akin to him."

—JULIA DORN



**Paul Robeson**

*Alfred Valente*



# Trouble With The Angels

BY LANGSTON HUGHES

AT every performance lots of white people wept and almost every Sunday while they were on tour some white minister invited the Negro actor who played God to come and speak to his congregation of white Christians, and thus help improve race relations—because almost everywhere they needed improving. Although the play had been the hit of years in New York, the Negro actors and singers were paid much less than white actors and singers would have been paid for performing it. And although the dramatist and his backers made more than a half a million dollars, the colored troupers, now on tour, lived in cheap hotels and slept often in beds that were full of bugs. Only the actor who played God would sometimes, by the hardest effort, achieve accommodations in a white hotel, or be put up by some nice white family, or be invited to the home of the best Negro family in town. And thus God began to think that everything was lovely in the world. As an actor he really got awfully good write-ups.

Then they were booked to play Washington, and that's where the trouble began. Washington, the capital of the United States, is as every Negro knows, a town where no black man is allowed inside a theatre, not even in the gallery. Of course they have a few moving picture houses in their own African ghetto where they can go. But downtown in the legitimate playhouses, no accommodations are made for colored people. Washington is worse than the deep south in that respect.

But God wasn't at all worried about playing Washington. He thought sure his coming would improve race relations. He thought it would be fine for the good white people of the Capital to see him—a colored God—even if the Negroes couldn't. Not even those Negroes who worked for the government. Not even Congressman DePriest!

But several weeks before the Washington appearance of the famous "Negro" play about the charming darkies who drink eggnog and fry fish in heaven, and sing almost all the time, storm clouds began to rise. It seemed that the Negroes of Washington had decided, strangely enough, that they wanted to see this play. But when they approached the theatre management on the question, they got a cold shoulder in return. The theatre management said they didn't have any seats to sell to Negroes. They couldn't even allot a corner in the upper gallery—there was such a heavy demand from white folks.

Now this made the Negroes of Washington mad, especially those who worked for the government and consti-

tuted the best society. The colored singers got mad, too, and the teachers at Howard, and the ministers of the colored churches who wanted to see what a black heaven looked like on the stage.

But nothing doing, the theatre management was adamant. They really couldn't sell seats to Negroes. Although they had no scruples about making a large profit on the week's work of the Negro actors, they just couldn't permit Negroes to sit in their theatre.

So the Washington Negroes wrote to God, this colored God who had been such a hit on Broadway. They thought sure he would help them. (But Negroes have always been stupid about God, even when he is white, let alone colored. They still keep on expecting help.)

So the Ministerial Alliance wrote to him when he was playing in Philadelphia. What a shame, they said: white folks will not allow us to come to see you perform in Washington! We are getting up a protest. We want you to help us! Will you?

NOW God knew that for many years white folks had not allowed Negroes in Washington to see any shows—not even in the churches, let alone in the theatres! Of late even the Catholic churches were barring them out of mass. So how come they suddenly thought they ought to be allowed to see Him in a white theatre?

Besides God was getting paid pretty well, and pretty well known. So he answered their letters and said that his ink was made of tears and his heart bled, but that he couldn't afford to get into trouble with Equity. Also, it wasn't his place to go around the country spreading dissension and hate, but love and beauty. And it would surely do the white folks of the District of Columbia a lot of good to see Him, and it would soften their hearts to hear the beautiful Negro spirituals, and see the lovely black angels.

And maybe the company would try to give one special show for the Race.

So the black drama lovers of Washington couldn't get any satisfaction out of God by mail—their colored God. When the company played Baltimore, a delegation of the "best" Washington Negroes went over to their neighboring city to interview God. In Baltimore, Negroes, at least, are allowed to sit in the galleries of the theatres. After the play, God received the delegation in his dressing room and wept about his inability to do anything concerning the Washington situation. He had, of course, spoken to his management about it and they thought it might be possible to arrange a special Sunday night performance for Negroes. God said it hurt him to his soul to think how his people

were treated, but the play must go on.

The delegation left in a huff—but not before they had spread their indignation to other members of the cast of the big show. And among the angels there was a great discussion as to what they might do about the Washington situation. (Although God was the star, the angels, too, were a part of the play.)

Now, among the angels there was a young Negro named Johnny Logan, who had never really liked being an angel, but who, because of his baritone voice and his Negro features, had gotten the job during the first rehearsals of the play in New York. Now he was an old hand at being an angel, since the play had been running three years.

Logan was from the South—but he hadn't stayed there long after he grew up. The white folks wouldn't let him. He was the kind of a young Negro most Southern white people hate. He believed in fighting, in bucking against the traces of discrimination and Jim Crow, and in trying to knock down any white man who insulted him. So he was only about eighteen when the whites of Augusta ran him out of town.

He finally came to New York, married a waitress, got a job as a redcap and would have settled down forever in a little flat in Harlem, had not some of his friends discovered that he could sing, and persuaded him to join a Red Cap Quartette. And out of that had come this work as a black angel in what turned out to be a Broadway success.

Just before the show went on the road, his wife had their first kid, so he needed to hold his job as a singing angel, even if it meant going on tour. But the more he thought about their forthcoming appearance in a Washington theatre that wasn't even Jim Crow—but that barred Negroes altogether—the madder he got. And finally he got so mad that he caused the rest of the cast to get all worked up, too—except God. And the angels decided to organize a strike!

At that distance from Washington, the black angels—from tenors to basses, sopranos to blues singers—were up in arms, and practically everybody in the cast, except God, agreed to strike.

"The idea of a town where colored folks can't even sit in the gallery to see an all-colored show. I ain't gonna work there myself."

"We'll show them white folks we've got spunk for once. We'll pull off the biggest actor's strike you ever seen."

"We sho will."

THAT was in Philadelphia. In Baltimore, their ardor had cooled.

"Man, I got a wife to take care of. I can't lose no week's work!"

"I got a wife, too," said Logan, "and a kid besides, but I'm game."

"You ain't a trouper," said another.

"Naw, if you was you'd be used to playing all-white houses. In the old days . . .," said the man who played



Langston Hughes

Methusaleh, powdering his gray wig.

"I know all about the old days," said Logan, "when black minstrels blacked up even blacker and made fun of themselves for the benefit of white folks. But who wants to go back to the old days?"

"Anyhow, let's let well enough alone," said Methusaleh.

"You ain't got no guts," said Logan.

"You're just one of them radicals, son, that's all you is," put in the old tenor who played Saul. "We know when we wants to strike or don't."

"Listen, then," said Logan to the angels who were putting on their wings by now, as it was near curtain time, "if we can't make it a real strike, then let's make it a general walk-out on the opening night. Strike for one performance anyhow. At least show the white folks that we don't take it lying down. And show the Washington Negroes that we back them up—theoretically, at least."

"One day ain't so bad," said a skinny black angel. "I'm with you on that."

"Me, too," several others agreed as they crowded into the corridor at the curtain call, and went up on the stage. The actor who played God was standing in the wings in his frock coat.

"Shss-ss!" he said.

**M**ONDAY in Washington. The opening of that famous white play of Negro life in heaven. Original New York cast. Songs as only darkies can sing them. Uncle Tom come back as God.

Negro Washington wanted to picket the theatre, but the police had an injunction against them. Cops were posted for blocks around the playhouse to prevent a riot. Nobody could see God. He was safely housed in the quiet home of a Negro professor, guarded by two detectives. The papers said black radicals had threatened to kidnap him, to kidnap God!

Logan spent the whole day rallying the flagging spirits of his fellow actors. They were solid for the strike when he was around, and weak when he wasn't. No telling what them Washington cops might do to them if they struck? They locked Negroes up for less than that in Washington. Besides they might get canned, they might lose their pay, they might never get no more jobs on the stage. It was all right to talk about being a man and standing up for your race, and all that—but hell, even an actor had to eat. Besides, God was right. It was a great play, a famous

play! They ought to go on, and hold up its reputation. It did white folks good just to see Negroes in such a play. That nigger Logan was crazy!

"Listen here, you might as well get wise. Ain't nobody gonna strike tonight," one of the boys told him about six o'clock in the lobby of the colored Whitelaw Hotel. "You just as well give up. We ain't got no guts."

"I won't give up," said Logan.

**W**HEN the actors reached the theatre, they found it surrounded by cops and the stage full of detectives. In the lobby there was a long line of people—white, of course—waiting to buy standing room. God arrived with motorcycle cops in front of his car. He had come a little early to address the cast. With him was the white stage manager and a representative of the New York producing office.

They called everybody together on the stage. The Lord wept as he spoke of all his race had borne to get where they were today. Of how they had struggled. Of how they sang. Of how they must keep on struggling and singing—until white folks saw the light. The strike would do no good. The strike would only hurt their cause. With sorrow in his heart—but more noble because of it—he would go on with the play. And he was sure his actors—his angels—his children—would, too.

The white men accompanying God were very solemn, also, as though hurt to their souls to think what their Negro employees were suffering—but far more hurt to think that they wanted to jeopardize a week's box office receipts by a strike! That would hurt everybody—even white folks!

Behind God and the white managers stood two big detectives.

All gave up but Logan. He went downstairs to fight, to drag them out by force, to make men of darkies just once, to carry through the strike. But he couldn't. Nobody really wanted to strike. Nobody really wanted to sacrifice anything for race pride, or decency, or elementary human rights. No, they only wanted to keep on appearing in a naive dialect play about a quaint funny heaven full of niggers.

The management sent two detectives downstairs to get Logan. They were taking no chances. Just as the curtain rose they dragged him off to jail—for disturbing the peace. All the other colored angels were massed in the wings for the opening spiritual when the police took the black boy out. They saw a line of tears running down his cheeks. Most of the actors thought he was crying because he was being arrested—and in their timid souls they were glad it wasn't them.

The Lord God Jesus in his frock coat did not even turn his head. He was getting "in the mood" for his triumphant first appearance before the Washington white folks.





Langston Hughes

# Hollywood's Imitation of Life

By ROBERT STEBBINS

IN the August, 1929 issue of *Close Up*, an English periodical devoted to the cinema, Geraldyn Desmond, American Negro actor, permitted himself the following assertions: "Because of the Negro movie, many a prejudiced white who would not accept a Negro unless as a servant, will be compelled to admit that at least he can be something else; many an indifferent white will be beguiled into a positive attitude of friendliness, many a Negro will have his race-consciousness and self-respect stimulated. In short, the Negro movie actor is a means of getting acquainted with Negroes and under proper direction and sympathetic treatment can easily become a potent factor in our great struggle for better race relations." Off-hand it would be difficult to hit upon another example of wishful prophecy so precisely unfulfilled.

The history of the Negro in the Hollywood film has been exactly the contrary. With the advent of the talkie, hope was expressed in certain quarters that the Negro actor would assume a merited place in cinema art. For instance, it was pointed out, to quote further from Mr. Desmond's article, "White America has always made much of the fact that all Negroes can sing and dance. Moreover, Americans are supposed to get particular pleasure out of Negro dialect, colloquialisms and quaint humor." The fact of the matter is that, except for three or four films, namely, *Hallelujah*, *Emperor Jones*, *Imitation of Life*, and a mere handful of shorts, the Negro actor has not been put to extensive use at all. And every one of these films without exception, sustains and emphasizes the Negro's position as a member of a menial, if not a slave race. The Negro is presented as stupid, lazy, indifferent to his fate, obsequious, superstitious. A perfect typification of this is the use made of Steppin Fetchit, who since 1929 has dawdled and shuffled through identical performances in *Hearts In Dixie*, *The Ghost Talks*, *Carolina*, *County Chairman*, *David Harum*, *Judge Priest*, as if he were bent on demonstrating the descent of the Negro from a lower order of the animal kingdom.

Granted the Negro's innate sense of rhythm and musical genius—but these qualities derive from his African heritage. The thrilled movie-palace anthropologist inquires "Isn't Cab Calloway's Voodeohdo in his latest short strikingly like the crazed chant of an African witch doctor?" The Negro on American soil is by implication from this type of reaction an exotic who would be far better off in the jungle with his spear and war paint.

A more detailed examination of the major Hollywood efforts in the field of

the Negro film will substantiate these points. *Hallelujah* was made for MGM by King Vidor, one of Hollywood's social-minded directors. After the New York premiere which took place simultaneously in two theatres, the Lafayette in Harlem and the Embassy in the theatre district, (a tactical move to spare the feelings of the swanky white audiences who might object to sitting with Negroes) the press was loud with hosannas of thanksgiving. Congratulations were the order of the day. Heretofore, partly because of the black-face minstrel tradition, partly because bigoted white audiences disliked seeing Negroes in the exalted position of "stars," and finally because the Negro was not considered intelligent enough, Negro roles had been chiefly played, that is travestied, by white actors in black-face. This repulsive tribe of impersonators indeed is numerous, including such profound students of the Negro race as Amos and Andy, Moran and Mack, Pick and Pat, Eddie Cantor and Al Jolson. Vidor, on the other hand, had actually achieved artistic success with an *all Negro cast*. Of course, only the genius

of Vidor could have accomplished this miracle! As *Variety* pointed out. "Apparently in the massed ensemble groups Vidor had a *mighty tough job holding that bunch down*, (italics mine) yet he held them under remarkable restraint and still brought out the effects desired. . . . Haynes (the male lead) *also apparently followed Vidor's direction* and made something of the role." Success notwithstanding, *Hallelujah* was the last Hollywood movie with an all Negro cast.

Critics were most impressed by the sense of reality Vidor had imparted to the treatment of the Negro in his "natural" setting. The nature of this "reality" we can best discover by quoting from some of the reviews. Mordaunt Hall, late and unlamented critic for the *New York Times*, took particularly to the portrayal of the "peculiarly typical religious hysteria of the darkies and their gullibility . . . their hankering after salvation, the dread of water in the baptism, the lure of come seven, come eleven, or the belated marital ceremonies." He recorded that the audi-









### IMITATION OF LIFE?

AT LEFT: This Fox Films photo bore the following inscription "Happy Days and a Happy Day!" Stepin Fecht leads a cargo of Pullman porters to illustrate the Labor Day theme in an original fashion. Stepin is all dolled up for a big parade sequence in "Stand Up and Cheer."

ABOVE: Away down south in Dixie—body of Lloyd Warner after the lynchers had burned him to death on a charge of rape. From a suppressed news-photo.

ence was especially amused by the baptism scene "with a host of white-clad hallelujah-raving blacks standing on the side of the water ready to go through the baptism but evidently somewhat fearful of the ducking."

AT this point it may prove illuminating to consider the treatment of practically the identical problem, the religious practices of a racial minority, in the Soviet film. Pudovkin's *Storm*

*Over Asia* recalls itself to mind at once, particularly two scenes: one where the ailing father of the hero is being ministered to by the native medicine-woman, and the other, the rites attendant upon the ceremony of Buddha's reincarnation in a child. Although Pudovkin makes his points, although the essential mockery of the White Russian general's genuflection to the drooling baby is exposed, the approach nevertheless is of great dignity and earnestness. And in the dances of the Lamas on the temple court we have been given a document of authentic beauty and ethnographic significance. The reason for the divergence in conception between a *Hallelujah* or an *Emperor Jones* and a *Storm Over Asia*, *Three Songs About Lenin*, *Turk-Sib*, or *China Express* is apparent and therein lies the answer to the failure of Hollywood. The sincerity of the Soviet film of the National minorities was consonant with and expressive of the general Soviet policy on the question. That policy as-

sured the oppressed races of the former Russian Empire the fullest freedom and autonomy. The film was an expression of this point of view and but one instrument in the process of emancipation. On the other hand, the moving picture industry in the United States exists as a machine for the dissemination of the wishes of the master class. What those wishes are concerning the Negro race can be inferred from the behavior of Senators Tramell of Georgia, Connally of Texas, Russel of Florida and Smith of South Carolina, to mention a few, on the day Senator Costigan brought up a motion to consider his anti-lynching bill. These worthies, members of the highest legislative body in the land, sprang up from all sides and declared "We'll filibuster here until Christmas before this thing comes to a vote." In order to proceed with what was ironically enough called "vital" legislation the entire matter had to be dropped, with little reluctance, one may surmise. In light of the some five thousand lynchings re-





corded between the years 1885-1934 the inference is clear. The Negro race in America must be kept in a continual state of terror and subservience so it dare not demand a standard of living the campaign of systematic slander perpetrated by those who raise the "rape scare" in order to preserve the institution of lynching. While on this subject one ought mention D. W. Griffith's silent movie, *The Birth of a Nation*, which Harry Alan Potamkin, founder of American movie criticism from the above a starvation level, so it can always be used as a threat to white workers who participate in a struggle for better conditions.

To return for one last remark concerning *Hallelujah*. This film consistently played up the reputed concupiscence of the Negro. He is shown as a creature of sudden and unpredictable lusts, his very religiosity turning into love fever. Pictures of this sort aid in Marxian point of view, called "the bible of the Klu Klux Klan."

*Emperor Jones*, featuring Paul Robeson and an all-Negro cast save for the role of Smithers (Dudley Digges), was produced in 1933 and maintained unbroken the chain of white chauvinism forged in the carbon-arc lights of the Hollywood studios. Paul Robeson is presented as a vainglorious braggart, a murderer, a tin-foil Napoleon who imposes upon and exploits heartlessly the members of his own race. And when finally they rise against him his false front falls away. He is revealed for what he is, and by extension, what what all Negroes are supposed to be, creatures who stand trembling in a murky land of shadow, peopled with the ghosts that rise up out of the swamps and jungles of the primitive mind.

THE case of Paul Robeson is tragic to contemplate. Here we have the pathetic spectacle of one of the most gifted and distinguished members of his race placed in a position where in actuality he is forced into caricatures of his people. Nor has Mr. Robeson's experience with the London Film Production's feature, *Sanders of the River*, been any less unfortunate. There could be no more fitting comment on the anti-Negro direction of this film than the enthusiastic remarks of the reviewer in the *London Times*. "*Sanders of the River* if shown abroad will bring no discredit on Imperial authority . . . . the tale of the struggle of an English District Commissioner (Leslie Banks) in alliance with a loyal tribe led by Mr. Robeson to preserve peace and order among the fierce and superstitious peoples of the Congo is a vigorous narrative that will enthrall men and children alike." *The London Daily Herald* went to the extent of suggesting that "if we could only give every subject race a native king with Mr. Robeson's superb physique, dominant personality, infectious smile and noble, deep voice, problems of self-government might be

largely solved." This film has not yet been shown in America. Its exhibition here should be the signal for the united protests of all those who are opposed to imperialist exploitation in any of its varied ramifications. That Mr. Robeson has been imposed upon and has pronounced his distaste for *Sanders of the River* is indicated by the letter of Laurie James to the *New Masses* in the May 28th issue of this year.

The Negro character as it figures in the Hollywood film is self-effacing almost to the point of extinction. But in Louise Beaver's part, the Aunt Delilah of *Imitation of Life*, Universal feature directed by John M. Stahl and based on the novel by Fannie Hurst, a new, all-time low for obsequiousness was established. Aunt Delilah has in her possession a recipe for a pancake flour that has been a family secret for generations. Her mistress (Claudette Colbert) decides to market the flour in boxed form and offers Delilah a twenty per cent interest in her concern. "Now Delilah you're going to be rich. You'll be able to move away and buy yourself a nice house." Delilah's reply is "Don't send me away, Miss Bee. Ain't I always been a gook cook? Don't send me away, Miss Bee. I wan to always be here and take care of you." Delilah doesn't want money except for a fine funeral. The comment of Miss Bee's business manager (Ned Sparks) is probably the most insulting ever directed toward a Negro on the screen. "Well, all I can say is, once a pancake always a pancake." One is put in mind of old Karamazov's remarks about the Russian peasant. ". . . . We've left off thrashing the peasants, we've grown so clever, but they go on thrashing themselves. And a good thing too."

Aunt Delilah has a daughter, Peola, whose life has been made an unending torture because, although her skin is quite as white as Miss Bee's child, she can never hope to take a place in the world of the free whites as long as her mother who is markedly dark insists on claiming the relationship. Peola runs away thus breaking the old lady's heart. Here was a situation that cried out for some independence of mind, some courage. But the only advice Delilah ever gave her child was "to bow your head. You got to learn to take it. . . . Your pappy kept beating his fists against life all his days until it eat him through." In short, eternal submission to a slave's fate.

THESE then are the major Hollywood "films of Negro's life." All that remains are some shorts that display similar tendencies; an Ethel Waters' film, for instance, the burden of which was "You've got to stay on your own side of the fence." Cab Calloway's short, *Jiggernut Club*, with its refrain of

"When it's sundown in Harlem  
Nothing's run down in Harlem."

coming as it did a fortnight after the

Harlem hunger-riots of March 19th, was especially vicious. The rest of the Negro's activity in the Hollywood film is confined to fleeting shots of him as a lazy servant, (*Judge Priest*), a boot-black, a newsboy, a stableboy, (*Broadway Bill, Reckless, Princess O'Hara*), or a coachman who has been made to look ridiculous by a hat and long frock-coat, sizes too large for him, to whom the irate W. C. Fields can say, as happens in *Mississippi* "Get along, you Senegambian." He is a repulsive misshapen zombie in *The Lost World*, a voodoo-maddened villain bent on exterminating the white race in *Black Moon* or at best, a benighted prisoner intoning the ubiquitous spiritual in the death house while the hero is being prepared for his walk along the "last mile" (*Last Mile, Criminal Code, If I had a Million*). One looks in vain for the creative vigor that is Langston Hughes', for the culture and talent that is Roland Hayes' and Paul Robeson's, for the militance that is the Sharecroppers Union and Angelo Herndon, for the spirit of undying defiance expressed in the Negro songs of protest discovered and compiled by Lawrence Gellert, one of which, *Sisters and Brethern*, concludes:

"Yo haid 'tain no apple  
Fo' dangling f'om a tree  
Yo body no cahcass  
Fo' bahbecuein' on no spree.

Stan' on you feet  
Club gripped 'tween yo' han'  
Spill dere blood too  
Show 'em yo' is a man."



Ethel Waters

Vandamm



**Ethel Waters**

*Vandamm*



Typical Minstrel Show Billposter of 1863

From an old print

## On the White Man's Stage

By AUGUSTUS SMITH

IN 1821, while Negroes enslaved on Southern plantations used the banjo and the bones and created minstrelsy—the only distinctive American contribution to the theatre, a group of Negroes in New York performed Shakespeare and received a foretaste of the discrimination which was to handicap the progress of their race in the theatre. Before an enthusiastic audience, in a theatre in African Grove at the corner of Bleeker and Mercer Streets, they performed Shakespearean dramas popular at the time. A summons to magistrate's court interrupted their schedule and upon a promise never again to act Shakespeare, they were dismissed. But the players cleverly outwitted the authorities for at least two years. An 1823 play-bill in G. C. D. Odell's *Annals of the New York Stage* shows that they circumvented the decision by interspersing scenes from *Othello* and *Richard III* with comic acts.

Colored minstrelsy developed and continued—until white actors, realizing its cash value, capitalized upon it by introducing black-face impersonations. *The Atlantic Monthly* of 1867 tells us that the first of these impersonators was Dan Rice. During 1830 he heard a Negro singing in the streets of Cincinnati, appropriated his songs and imitated his character, and ended with a successful country-wide tour doing "black-face impersonations." There followed a deluge of white actors in burnt cork—exaggerated caricatures of the Negro people. The vogue grew until it was only by

blacking himself, and imitating his imitators, that the Negro could keep a place for himself in the theatre!

The entry of the Negro on the professional minstrel stage came in 1852 when Lew Johnson, Negro, organized a group of free Negroes near Richmond, Virginia, into "Lew Johnson's Plantation Georgia Minstrels." These performers introduced new features to the minstrel pattern of that day: the tantalizing Stop-Time Dance, and developments of the Jigg and Buck-and-Wing. Billy Ker-sands, the most famous minstrel of the time, introduced the Virginia Essense. The Bohee Brothers brought in the Soft Shoe Dance, which they performed as they played their banjos.

To whom did they play? At first to empty orchestras—because—although whites did not attend, Negroes could sit only in the balconies. Later, when their vogue increased, to all-white audiences who excluded Negroes from the theatres entirely. Later still, colored theatres were set apart for Negro audiences.

Later came the Georgia Minstrels, the Hicks and Sawyer Minstrels, the Richard and Pringle, the McCabe and Young, and finally Callender's Minstrels, which gave Gustave, Charles, and Daniel Frohman their start in things theatrical.

The demand for Negro talent brought the Negro actor into direct competition with the white. Discrimination against him was the rule with white theatre managers, who refused to do business with Negro managers. The Negroes hurdled this wall by employing white managers to transact their business.

A typical troupe were the Lucca family, father, mother, and four sons, all of them extraordinarily talented. Their first big recognition came at the Broadway Tabernacle in New York, where, on the anniversary of the Anti-Slave Society, in 1853 they were received "with the wildest enthusiasm." They later toured the country, giving concerts of Negro songs, sketches and dances, playing in halls, plantation barns, tobacco sheds, and being paid in chickens, hams, honey or whatever they could get.

THE first successful departure of the Negro from the strict minstrel form did not come until 1890. Then Sam Jack, a white burlesque theatre owner, decided to "glorify" the colored girl. He assembled the pick of male Negro actors—Sam Lucas, Fred Piper, Billy Jackson—and a chorus of sixteen beautiful light colored girls. This selection of an all-light chorus was forced by the white man's prejudice and has militated against darker girls in show business to this day. This Creole show had none of the features of plantation days, but it was cast in the regular minstrel pattern: it differed in that the girls were in the center of the circle with a girl interlocutor, and the men at the ends. The show played the season at the Chicago World's Fair, and created a sensation at the old Standard Theatre in Greely Square in New York, playing five seasons in all.

*Oriental America* was the first colored show to play Broadway proper. John W. Isham took it to Wallack's Theatre (then Palmer's Theatre) in 1895. He had had a success with *Octoroons*, which replaced the burlesque, specialties, cakewalk, hoe-down and walk-around finale with a medley of operatic selections. At the same time Worth's Museum, at Sixth Avenue and Thirteenth Street, was becoming a Negro stock theatre. Bob Cole, a member of the cast of *Creole Show* directed the company of fifteen, acted, wrote for them, and composed music.

The concert was another field in the Negro's struggle for a place in the theatre. Among the most popular of the women singers was Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield, "The Black Swan," who was known on two continents. Best known of all was "The Black Patti," Sisseiretta Jones, who returned from a triumphant European tour to join *Black Patti's Troubadours*, and sing with them in a run of several years at Proctor's Fifty-eighth Street in New York.

Bob Cole, author and composer of her show revolted against the miserable compensation he received for his work from the white managers, Voelckel and Nolan. Complaints gained him nothing, so he gathered up his music and walked out. The managers caused his arrest. In court Bob Cole fearlessly declared: "These men have amassed a fortune from the product of my brain, and now they call me a thief. I won't give them my music." But it was a rul-





Typical Minstrel Show Billposter of 1863

*From an old print*

ing class court, and Bob Cole lost. The loss of his courageous but futile one-man strike led Cole to another effort: he united other Negroes to produce a show under their own management. Their *A Trip to Coontown* was the first complete departure from the minstrel pattern. It had continuity and plot: it was the first Negro musical comedy.

1898 marked another step forward: Will Marion Cooke composed music to lyrics by Paul Lawrence Dunbar and their joint effort, *Clorinda, the Origin of the Cake Walk* was produced by George W. Lederer and ran the entire season.

By the turn of the century many flourishing Negro theatricals gave promise of emancipation on the stage. Williams and Walker, performers extraordinary of the Cake-Walk, came out of the West singing a lilting catchy tune, "Dora Dean," inspired by one of the beauties of the *Creole Show*. Next they were seen in *The Gold Bug*; then in *A Senegambian Carnival*, *The Policy Players*, *The Sons of Ham* and *In Dahomey*. The last played a command performance at Buckingham Palace.

During the run of *The Sons of Ham* came the race riots of 1900 in New York, provoked by police brutality. Crazy mobs ran through the theatre district shouting "Get Ernest Hogan! Get Williams and Walker!" Hogan, who was playing at the Winter Garden was kept for safety all night in the theatre. Walker had a narrow escape on the streets.

A recurring wave of Jim-Crowism about 1906—the result of a new crop of white comedians in black-face—drove the Negro from the Broadway area again. Some productions took to the road, others retreated to Harlem, and a few individual actors found places in white musicals. At the same time, in Chicago, the Pekin Stock Company was being formed. They specialized in original Negro musical comedies, encouraging and developing Negro writers and composers, and performed versions of plays like *My Lady's Garter* and *Voice in the Dark*. Original scripts were *Captain Rufus*, *Who's Stealing* and *The Mayor of Jintown* (revived as *Shuffle Along*). Prominent in the company was Charles Gilpin. In 1909, Susie Sutton made a hit in *The Return of Eve*. In 1912, Evelyn Ellis was the lead in the production of *Goat's Alley* in Philadelphia. Chicago continued its dramatic lead up to 1916 when the stock company presented Desmond and Bishop in *Parlor, Bedroom, and Bath*, and Shirlette Freeman in *The Brute*. A year later, Bishop was instrumental in starting a dramatic company at the Howard Theatre in Washington, D. C., which opened with *The Servant in the House*.

**I**N 1917, when the theatre as a whole was experiencing a revival, Anita Bush gathered some of the best Negro talent from all over the country to form a Harlem company. After a bril-

liant start dissension arose, and Charles Gilpin left to found the now famous Lafayette Players. From their ranks came many of those now famous in the acting profession: Abbie Mitchell, Laura Bowman, Hayes Pryor, Lionel Monogas, Clarence Muse, Cleo Desmond, Ida Anderson, Barrington Carter, Evelyn Ellis, Charles Olden, "Babe" Townsend, A. B. DeComatherie, Jack Carter and Edna Carter. They produced such plays as *Madame X*, *The Love of Chu Chin*, *Within the Law*, and they sponsored performances of *Othello* with Sterling Wright who had been acclaimed for his performance of the leading role in Boston.

At the same time a company of less known actors was assembled by Mrs. Emily Hapgood—with such compelling result that Robert Edmond Jones staged three one-act plays by Ridgely Torrence for them at the Garrick. The plays were highly praised by the critics, and for his work in *Rider of Dreams*, Opal Cooper was given seventh place in the

list of most distinguished acting performances of the season. Among actresses, Inez Clough was given ninth place for her work in *Simon the Cyrenian*.

There were four hundred Negro theatres in America at that time, most of them alternating between musical and dramatic stock. Eighty of them comprised a sort of vaudeville chain known as T. O. B. A., or "Toba"—Theatre Owners Booking Association. The Negro vaudevillians interpreted the initials as "Tough On Black Actors." . . .

Now Negroes began to appear frequently in parts in white plays. The best remembered performances are Gilpin in *Abraham Lincoln* and *Emperor Jones*, Abbie Mitchell in *Coquette* and *Porgy*; Rose McClendon in *Porgy*, *In Abraham's Bosom*, *Earth*, and *Never No More*. Gilpin's *Emperor Jones* was the outstanding performance of the season and brought him the vote of the Drama League as one of the ten persons who had contributed most to the American



Charles Gilpin as Emperor Brutus Jones

Photo by Brugiere



Charles Gilpin as Emperor Brutus Jones

*Photo by Brugiere*



# A Negro Community Theatre

By ROWENA WOODHAM JELIFFE

theatre that year. The Drama League, as was its custom, gave a dinner for those selected—and the chauvinists of press and stage set up a howl to have Gilpin's invitation withdrawn. Failing in this, they tried to coerce him into staying away. He attended the dinner.

An even more flagrant provocation against the Negro people occurred during the rehearsals of *All God's Chillun Got Wings*. This time it was those contemptible twins of reaction, Hearst and McFadden, who led the howl for blood. We quote an editorial in the Hearst's *American*:

"The failure of the audience to scrap the play and mutilate the players would be regarded as a token of public anemia."

The southern ruling class feeling was neatly voiced by a founder of the Daughters of the Confederacy, Mrs. J. Arnold:

"The scene in which Miss Blair is called upon to kiss and fondle a Negro's hand is going too far even for the stage. The play may be produced above the Mason-Dixon Line, but Mr. O'Neill will not get the friendly reception he had when he sent *Emperor Jones*, his other colored play into the South."

That the southern ruling class approved of *Emperor Jones* is significant commentary on Mr. O'Neill's most famous treatment of a Negro.

In recent years all-Negro musicals have grown common. *Shuffle Along*, whose music altered the American mode of popular music, launched the incomparable Florence Mills. *Dixie to Broadway* gave Paul Robeson his chance. *Chocolate Dandies*, by and with Sissle and Blake, introduced Josephine Baker, and was the most lavish Negro musical ever produced. *Africana* was a failure, but it introduced Ethel Waters.

The Ethiopian Art Players of Chicago, who included many of the old Lafayette company, came to New York with *Salome*, *The Comedy of Errors*, and *The Chip Woman's Fortune*. The critics approved of the last, but like their predecessors of 1821, they could not stand the idea of Negroes playing classics—no matter how well they performed them.

*They Shall Not Die*, quickly followed by *Stevedore*, were a clean break with tradition: the first presentations of straight-forward realistic plays dealing with the continued economic enslavement of the American Negroes. These plays have been discussed elsewhere in full, but the slavery which they describe will have to be destroyed before the Negro can take the place on the stage which his talents—displayed through two centuries of appalling obstacles—prove he is entitled to. The new theatres of social protest, as many Negro actors are beginning to find, offer them the only stages on which they can play without caricature the real stories and characters of their race.

THE Gilpin Players had their beginning in 1920 when a small group of Cleveland's young Negro men and women decided that it might be a pleasant thing to experiment with playmaking. There was little then to make this group believe that the Negro could be taken seriously as a part of the American Theatre. On the stage, the Negro was portrayed only as a clown, or as a servile *Uncle Tom*. Eugene O'Neill had not written *Emperor Jones*, and Charles Gilpin had not played the title role. With the exception of *Plays for a Negro Theatre* by Ridgely Torrence (1917), there were no Negro plays to do. Apparently it had occurred to no one else that the real life of the Negro is the rich material from which fine drama can be drawn. Moreover, had there been plays dealing with Negro problems, our group might not have been willing to play them. Too many Negroes, in 1920, were trying to forget that they were Negroes, feeling somehow that to be silent or to whisper very softly of the ills surrounding their race would solve these ills.

The newly formed group set to work reading plays, and learning the difference between good and bad plays by doing both. Generally we did them badly, because the available plays weren't suitable. When we tried writing our own, we found that we were unable to deal directly and convincingly with race or class material. The main things which the first three years of experimenting gained for us were a certain amount of critical ability, a substantial audience and a pleasant time.

In 1923, when Charles Gilpin came to Cleveland in *The Emperor Jones*, he came to see us rehearse; his visit proved to be an inspiring milestone on our way. A group of us began to see the Negro play in a new light, as an artistic opportunity rather than a pleasant hobby, and as a means of making a definite contribution to the American Theatre. Shortly after Gilpin's visit, we did our first Negro play. Immediately, the Negro middle class elements began to withdraw from our audience. And from that time, to the present, this group has been increasingly unsympathetic with our presentation of plays of Negro life.

All this time, the Gilpin Players were playing in school auditoriums in the neighborhood, where there could be no freedom for real work. As this arrangement proved increasingly unsatisfactory, we hired an old beer hall where we played until February, 1926. Then we converted an old abandoned pool room into the Karamu Theatre, our home theatre at the present time. The pool-room building was the property of the

Playhouse Settlement with which the Gilpin Players have been connected from the beginning. The name "Karamu" meaning "the place of feasting and enjoyment" was chosen from the Swahilli language, the most widely used language in Africa.

Acquiring this permanent home meant not only increased solidarity in our group, but, through the availability of our equipment, the introduction of many other children and adult groups to the experience of playmaking. From this, a community has arisen that is highly play conscious. The neighborhood participates as an appreciative audience, as actors, and as members of various kind of stage craft groups. The women and girls work on costumes; the men and boys build and paint sets, do the necessary construction and lighting and handle the switchboard. In a sense, the Gilpin Players are a community school. Not that we are concentrating on formal classes in the technical phases of playmaking, but because we have made "learning by theatre" a very live issue in the community.

The Karamu Theatre itself is small and intimate. There is therefore a very definite exchange between actor and audience. Having a "participating audience" has molded our manner of playing and has cast the present form of our theatre. The audience enjoys the plays we like best—plays built upon that which is deeply human and vitally stirring emotionally and intellectually. They have responded warmly to a variety of plays including Michael Gold's *Hoboken Blues*, Paul Green's *In Abraham's Bosom* and Paul Peter's and George Sklar's *Stevedore*.

THE Negro middle class audience which we lost has been replaced. We have secured increasing support both from Negro and white intellectuals and workers and from the theatregoing public of Cleveland. This audience is the sole support of the Gilpin Players, for we are unsubsidized. No players, technicians, nor directors are paid for their services. With the door receipts, the Gilpin Players, in addition to maintaining their theatre, have established a scholarship at the Cleveland School of Art for the use of Negro students and have given a fine collection of African art objects to the Cleveland Museum.

In 1923, the Gilpin Players had to face objections against the presentation of Negro plays. Now it has to meet prejudice against the class play. Plays of social protest have met with deep approval from the majority of our audience, but they have encountered violent opposition as well. Witness our recent performance of *Stevedore*.

(Continued on page 32)

# Scenes From "John Henry" By HERBERT KLINE

A CONSTRUCTION site on the C. & O. Railroad in West Virginia, where the Freyn Construction Company is drilling a tunnel through the Big Bend Mountain. John Henry and Joe are employed as steel-drivers on this project.

The tunnel entrance is at the right; a well at the extreme left. Running parallel with the service track up front is a great cut in a bank of hard clay that forms two-thirds of the height of the background. A rough board fence about four feet high borders the top of the embankment. A man stands there, leaning over the fence watching the workers below. The slope of the Big Bend Mountain rises from slightly to the left of the base of the tunnel-entrance till it is lost out of sight in its rise to the right. The bank of clay is divided from the mountain slope by a rough stairway which permits descent to the tunnel-entrance from the height of the bank.

The whole scene is bathed in bright sunlight which casts beams of light into the tunnel entrance, where a gang of Negro laborers are working steadily hammering at the rock that obstructs the tunnel passage. They work smoothly, timing the strokes to their singing. The sun shines on the sweating bodies of the workers, whose broad backs flash like blades of oars above dark water. Up-down, up-down go backs, hammers, voices in a perfect rhythm, except for one worker who lags behind. (A sharp "hunh" is emitted with each blow, more a hiss of breath than an exclamation—an interval of 12 to 14 seconds between.)

ALL SING:

"Swing dat hammer —hunh  
Steady bo'  
Swing dat hammer —hunh  
Ain' no rush, bebbly —hunh  
Long ways to go.

"Burner tore his —hunh  
Black heart away —hunh  
Burner tore his —hunh  
Black heart away.  
Got me life, bebbly —hunh  
An' a day.

"My ol' man died —hunh  
Cussin' me.  
My ol' man died —hunh  
Cussin' me.  
Ol' lady rocks, bebbly—hunh  
Huh misery."<sup>1</sup>

FOREMAN: (*enters right*) Snap her up there, Sam.

SAM: Yassuh, boss.

FOREMAN: Better keep up the pace, Sam, if you want to keep your job.

SAM: Yassuh, boss.

(*Foreman walks off to right, stops, shades his eyes with his hands, and looks up at a man who is leaning over the fence above. He scratches his head as if puzzled as he leaves.*)

JOHN HENRY: (*takes up the singing—all joining.*)

"Dis ol' hammer  
Rings like silver —hunh  
Dis ol' hammer  
Rings like silver —hunh  
Dis ol' hammer  
Rings like silver —hunh  
Shines like gol', boys  
Shines like gol'<sup>2</sup> —hunh

(*The whistle blows.*) SAM: (*Throws his hammer down.*) Whew, dat whistle come jes' in time fo' me.

JOHN HENRY: What's troublin' you, Sam, you sick or tired?

SAM: I'm *both* sick an' tired. Think everybody big steel-driven man like you?

SNUBS: (*a tall slim Negro*) Dat's a killin' pace you's settin', man.

JOE: He don' know his own stren'.

SAM: (*as all walk toward the well where their lunchboxes lie*) Cain' you ease up a bit? De mountain'll wait—what's yo' hurry?

JOHN HENRY: (*laughing*) Suah—I kin slow up a bit—I jes' fo'gits an' let's go all I's got.

SAM: What fo'?

JOHN HENRY: Dunno. Guess I jes' feels like workin' an' singin' my hardest.

SNUBS: I know; done felt dat way myself when I first come up Norf'.

JOHN HENRY: Well, dat's de way I feels.

JOE: Me, too.

SNUBS: Don' get you nothin'.

SAM: (*as they sit down on the pump platform to open their lunchboxes*) Ain' no hurry. De work won't run away.

JOHN HENRY: Ain' no hurry for nothin' 'ceptin' dese here vittels.

SAM: (*sighing*) Man, I don' know whether I'd rather eat or jes' set.

JOE: Well, you's doin' both, ain' you? So why fret?

OTHERS: Dat's tellin' him, Joe. Suah nuff. Quit yo' whinin, Sam. You ain' de only one.

JOHN HENRY: Man, am I hungry? Cain' wait to get my belly full. I could swaller a whole box of grub. (*looks in box and pulls out a sandwich, then another, a little apple, then fumbles around for more*) Well I'll be God-damned! (*to Joe*) Do you see what I see?

JOE: Uhhuh. Ain' 'nuf vittels here to satisfy my big toe, let alone my belly.

JOHN HENRY: What's de matter wid dem womans nohow?

SNUBS: (*grabbing a piece of paper that falls out of John Henry's box when he shakes it upside down in disgust, as if trying to squeeze out more food*) Here—don't you want dis?

JOHN HENRY: (*looking at it*) It's a note—but I cain' read it.

SAM: Give it here, I kin read. (*he takes the note—reads*) "Henderson's General Store. John Henry, 317 East 9th St. No more credit until next pay day. Balance, \$7.00. A. J. Henderson."

JOHN HENRY: Why Goddamnit, I gives mos' ev'rything I earn to dat man. I cain' owe him dat much. He must be cheatin'.

JOE: Oughta tell Mist' Freyn, dat' Hend'sons' doin' us in.

SAM: Oughta tell Mist' Freyn. Ha-ha. Dat's good. He's Mist' Freyn's brother-in-law.

JOE: Suah nuff?

SAM: Suah.

JOHN HENRY: Has his whole fam'ly gittin' rich off'n us.

JOE: Payday two days off. Our fam'ly's won't have 'nuf to eat till then.

OTHERS: Dats de truf. Suah nuff.

JOHN HENRY: Goddam 'em anyway. Here we is, all of us come up Norf' so we'd get on better an' workin' fo' nex' to nothin' like we did down Souf'. Cain' live on a dollar half a day an' pay out dat Hend'son's high prices.

SAM: What good talkin' do? Swaller yo' vittels an' fo'git it.

JOHN HENRY: Dat's de spirit, black man. Swaller an' fo'git it. Swaller an' fo'git it. What you-all come up Norf' fo' anyway? To keep on bein' 'fraid of yo' own shadder? I ain' gwine fo'git nothin'.

SAM: Better not talk so biggity, ain' gittin' you nowheres. Ain' puttin' no mo' grub in dat food box of yours.

OTHERS: Dat's right—eat up—fo'git it.

SAM: Only way to keep de white folks respectin' you is not to make trouble fo' dem.

JOHN HENRY: Suah—den he call you good nigger, 'cause you do what he want. Some day some black man gwine do somethin' so big he make dem respec' all of us.

SNUBS, SAM, OTHERS: Yeh?

1. From Sterling Brown's *Southern Road*—Harcourt, Brace & Co.

2. From Johnson's *John Henry*.

JOHN HENRY: Yeh.

SAM: Mebbe you?

JOHN HENRY: Yeh, mebbe me.

SAM: De rock dere'll melt 'fo dat day come.

JOHN HENRY: Some day . . .

JOE: (*interrupts—hands brimful cup of water to John Henry*) Here, have a drink, and quit arguin'.

JOHN HENRY: (*rises to take it*) All right, thankee. (*sees the foreman and Mr. Freyn approaching*) Dar's de boss now.

JOE: (*in a low voice*) Look at de fat belly on Mist' Freyn. Looks like a frog. (*imitates a frog's croak—all suppress their laughter*)

SNUBS: Better hush up an' look tired or dey'll be cuttin' our time short, seein' we's feelin' so perky.

SAM: Man, if I kin look as tired as I feel, I'll rest here till Judgment Day.

FOREMAN: (*enters right with Mr. Freyn. They examine the tunnel entrance*) Aren't they swinging right into it, Mister Freyn? Ever since I hired those two new drivers the work has been going great. They've put some speed into the gang—keep the fastest pace I ever seen, swear they do.

FREYN: That one fellow is a giant, isn't he?

FOREMAN: You bet. Say, Mr. Freyn—see that man up there? (*points up to the fence*)

FREYN: (*shading his eyes from the sun*) Yes, why?

FOREMAN: He's been hanging around since early morning waiting for you.

FREYN: Is that so? Well, call him down here.

FOREMAN: Hey there! C'mon down if you want to see Mr. Freyn.

MAN: (*as he starts down*) All right—I'll be right down, thank you.

FREYN: Probably selling something. If a man's got a dollar saved up in this world everybody's trying to take

it away from him, isn't that so, Bill?

FOREMAN: (*laughing dutifully*) Ha-ha . . . that's true, Mr. Freyn, that's true.

MAN: (*tipping his hat*) Pardon me, but you are Mr. Freyn, I take it.

FREYN: I am.

MAN: I'm mighty glad to meet you, Mr. Freyn. My name's Akin, Mr. R. J. Akin.

FREYN: (*they shake hands*) How do you do. This is my foreman, Bill Reilly, Mr. Akin.

AKIN: Glad to meet you, Bill.

FOREMAN: Hello.

AKIN: I've been watching your men work for some time, Mr. Freyn.

FREYN: (*sharply*) Yes, there are people who never get tired of watching others work.

AKIN: (*laughing*) That's true enough. You're something of a wit, Mr. Freyn. But I'm more interested in the slowness of their work than in the work itself.

FREYN-FOREMAN (*together*) Slowness?

FOREMAN: Why they're the fastest gang you ever saw.

AKIN: It's slow going nevertheless.

FREYN: Mr. Akin, this tunnel will be finished in less than ten months.

AKIN: Ten months eh—well, if I know anything about building tunnels I'd say it should be finished in five or six months at the most.

FOREMAN: You're crazy.

FREYN: So you're a tunnel expert, are you?

AKIN (*smiling*) Oh, don't take me wrong. I can see you're doing as well as you can with the tools you have.

FREYN: With the tools we have? I like that. We have the finest tempered drills money can buy, and Bill here, was just praising this gang as the fastest we ever had.

FOREMAN: If you'd see that one big nigger drive that steel down, you'd . . .

AKIN: I saw him. But I've got a steel-driver that makes him look sick.

FOREMAN: (*with a laugh*) You sure talk big, stranger.

AKIN: Don't laugh until you give me a chance to prove what I say.

FOREMAN: Show me a man that can outhammer John Henry, and I'll eat my hat.

AKIN: I can't do that, but I can show you a steam-driven steel-drill, a brand new invention that can drill faster than any man who ever lived.

FOREMAN: (*with a wink to Freyn*) Where've you got it, in your back pocket?

AKIN: No, but close by. Have you ever seen one, Mr. Freyn?

FREYN: Nope, and I don't care if I never do. I've heard of these new-fangled contraptions—they're just like horseless buggies. They won't work.

AKIN: Mr. Freyn, I represent the Pennsylvania Machinery Corporation. We've been testing our new steam-driven steel-drilling machines for over a year. We have a new drill that is really the most economical workman you can buy. It's never sick, it never

gets tired, it never talks back, and it's guaranteed never to ask for a raise, or for an eight hour day like troublesome workers these days.

FREYN (*laughing*) Ha-ha, that's rich. You're something of a joker yourself, aren't you, Mr. Akin? You know that's just the kind of worker I can make money on—if it works.

FOREMAN: It won't work.

AKIN: I say it will drive more steel than any man who ever lived.

FOREMAN: I've got \$30 saved up—I'll bet the whole roll that John Henry can drive more steel in a day than your new-fangled machine.

AKIN: Taken—I'll match my machine against your man anyday. But Mr. Freyn, I want you to witness the contest, and consider re-placing these steel-drivers with machines if I win.

FREYN: If you win—but you haven't got a chance. Your machine will break down if it ever does get started.

AKIN: Would you like to make a bet on that too?

FREYN: Well now, I'm not a betting man, Mr. Akin, but I've got enough sporting blood in me not to back down. I'll add \$100 to Bill's bet that your machine loses.

AKIN: Taken, and after the contest is over, I'll write your orders for some Penn'sy Steam Drills too.

FREYN: Say—where is that new-fangled machine of yours—in your back-pocket, like Bill said?

AKIN: (*laughing*) No, but close by. I've had my men waiting nearby with steam up since early morning to give you a demonstration. (*Whistles sharply through his fingers—three times.*) That'll fetch my men, how about yours?

FREYN: (*Accompanied by answering whistle from Akin's men*) Will John Henry do it, Bill?

FOREMAN: Sure, the big nigger'll be glad to get a chance to show off his strength.

FREYN: We'll start as soon as you're ready, Mr. Akin. But we'd better set the closing time now.

AKIN: Run it till sundown for all I care.

FREYN: All right (*looks towards the Negroes*) Listen to them laugh.

FOREMAN: They're always laughing.

AKIN: Ain't they though?

FREYN: They haven't any responsibility, or any worries, why shouldn't they laugh? Say Bill—You'd better call John Henry over here.

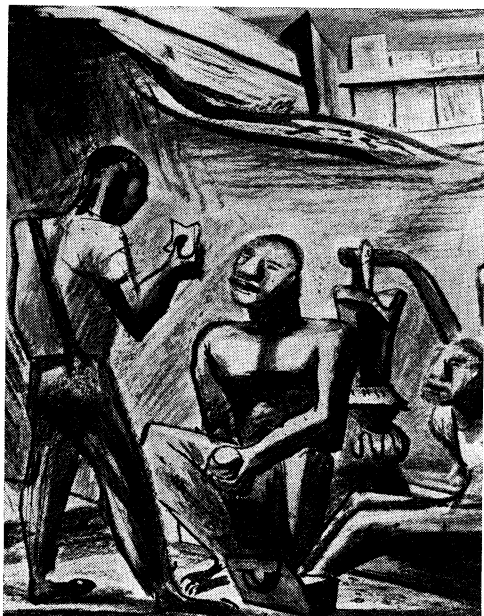
FOREMAN: Hey, John Henry, c' mere. Mr. Freyn wants to see you.

JOHN HENRY: (*approaching quickly*) Com'in up, Cap'n. (*a moment later*) You wants me, Mr. Freyn?

FREYN: How do you feel, John Henry, pretty strong today?

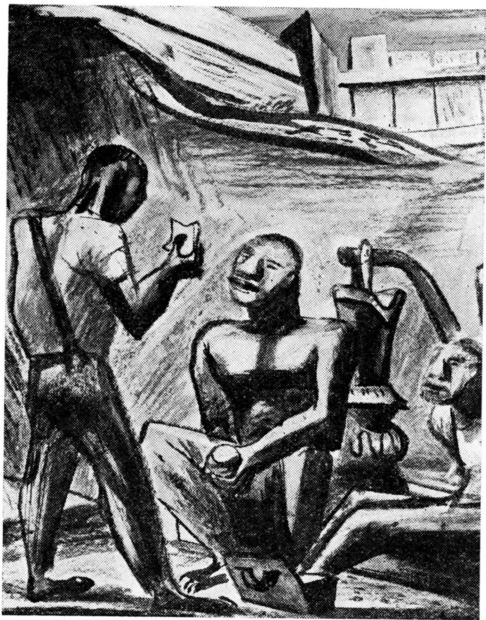
JOHN HENRY: Never felt stronger in my life, why?

FREYN: I just bet Mr. Akin here one hundred dollars, and Bill here bet him thirty dollars that you're a better steel-driver than any he can produce, that you can win in a contest against his steel-driver.



Anton Refregier





*Anton Refregier*

JOHN HENRY: (*proudly*) Your bet's safe. I never saw no man what could out-hammer John Henry.

FREYN: This is a steam-drill, a machine, not a man, John Henry.

JOHN HENRY: Makes no dif-rence to me, Cap'n. A man ain't nothin but a man. Befo' I let dat steam-drill beat me down, I'd die wid my hammer in my hand.

FREYN: You will compete in a contest with the machine, then?

JOHN HENRY: Suah.

FREYN: It's a mighty big order.

JOHN HENRY: And I'm a mighty big man.

FOREMAN: That's the spirit; you'll beat it too.

JOHN HENRY: Suah I will. When dis here contest start?

AKIN: The machine will be here any minute.

JOHN HENRY: Bring her on—I'm rarin' to go.

FREYN: That's the spirit, John Henry. You begin any minute now, and keep on your regular workday 'till sundown. (*John Henry nods eagerly*) And if it's all right with you Mr. Akin, I'm going to offer John Henry a generous prize for winning. (*Akin nods assent*) I'm going to give you \$10 and a brand-new suit of clothes if you win, John Henry.

JOHN HENRY: Dats fine wid me, Cap'n. Don't you go worrin' none 'bout yo' bets—I needs dat money bad. I'll beat dat machine easy.

AKIN: What makes you so sure you'll win?

JOHN HENRY: Cause dis here is a big man's job, an' I'm John Henry—mo' dan six feet tall and don't even know my own strenk cause I ain't never really been tested yet.

AKIN: You're a pretty big talker too, aren't you?

JOHN HENRY: Bring on yo' machine, white man. I'm gwine git so far ahead of it, it never even git close to catchin' up wid me.

FREYN: That's the spirit. Look, there's your men coming already.

AKIN: Sure, they've been ready to give a demonstration for hours just like I said.

FOREMAN: I'd better have our gang help.

AKIN: If you will.

FOREMAN: (*to the Negroes*) Hey there. Get a move on. Help them bring that machine over near the tunnel entrance.

JOHN HENRY: (*hitching up his belt*) Yeh, c'mon boys, help h'ist dat machine over to where I'm gwine beat it.

JOE: (*helping others move the machine*) What's all dis about, nohow?

JOHN HENRY: (*Seeing trouble that the men are having carrying the machine*) Here, lemme help you.

FREYN: Better save your strength for the contest, John Henry.

JOHN HENRY: (*Laughing and helping the men—with strength that makes the machine seem lighter*) Don' worry 'bout dat. . . .

NEGRO WORKERS: (*putting the machine in place, boiler and all*) Whew—c'mon—man dis heavy, etc.

STEVENS: (*one of Akin's men*) All right now, let her be. (*Akin walks over and talks to him. Stevens nods confidently.*)

JOE: What's dis 'bout contest, John Henry?

JOHN HENRY: We's gwine have big contest. Dis man here bet Mist' Freyn here \$100 an fo'man here \$30, dis machine kin beat me steel-drivin' and I say it cain'.

WORKERS: (*excited*) You gwine fit 'gainst it, John Henry? You gwine take it on?

JOHN HENRY: Anybody want to bet I won't?

NEGRO WORKERS: Bet against you, nuh-uh. I say not. Hell no—we's pull-in for you, boy.

SNUBS: Kin we watch contest, Mist' Freyn?

FREYN: (*to Foreman*) Seeing there can't be no blasting while the contest is on, why not?

FOREMAN: Sure—let 'em see it.

FREYN: Sure, you can root for John Henry to win the \$10 and new suit I'm giving him if he wins.

SAM: New suit—\$10. You's gittin on, if you don't lose.

JOHN HENRY: Dis is de big thing—an I cain' lose.

STEVENS: No? Well, we're ready to go, How about you?

JOHN HENRY: (*Grabbing his hammer*) C'mon Joe, you be my "shaker." (*Joe jumps into place to "Shake down" i.e. to hold and turn the drill for John Henry.*)

STEVENS: (*turning on the steam—the whirr of the drill begins*) All set here.

FREYN: Exactly 12:30. All set, John Henry?

JOHN HENRY: Let her go.

AKIN: Let her go.

STEVENS: Let her go.

(*He turns the steel-drill into the rock. John Henry crashes down with his hammer—An awful din begins, with the sharp clash of John Henry's blows cutting into the whirring ring of the steel-drill.*)

JOE: (*others—chant rising above the sound of machine and hammer.*)

"Swing dat hammer

Steady bo'

Swing dat hammer

Steady bo'

Swing 'er high

Swing 'er low."

SAM: What you gwine, Snubs?

SNUBS: Home—to git de folks to see de doin's.

JOHN HENRY: (*Yells over his shoulder*) Git Julie Anne, and Lily too. Git ev'ybody. Dey'll all want to see John Henry beat dis iron man down.

(*The curtain comes down, but the chant and hammer-blows and whirr of the drill continue.*)

A T curtain rise it is near sundown. A crowd surrounds the tunnel entrance; others watch from the fence above. The whites stand about in groups separate from the Negroes. John Henry's wife, Julie Anne, his sister, Lily and several other Negro women and girls are in the crowd. They are dressed up in their best and brightest clothes and call encouragement to John Henry in excited cries. Mr. Freyn, the Foreman, and Mr. Akin are standing in a group directly in front center. The steady whirring of the steam-drill has increased in intensity, in sharp contrast with the periodic "wham" of John Henry's hammer. John Henry swings alternately from left and right shoulders. Joe is still his "shaker."

SNUBS: Show dem how, John Henry, show dem how.

OTHERS: (*chanting along with Joe*) Swing dat hammer—swing it high—swing it low.

LILY: Figger he'll win, Julie?

JULIE: (*proudly*) Suah—nothin kin beat John Henry.

LILY: I hope so. C'mon, John Henry.

(*John Henry hammers steadily on*)

WHITE WORKER: (*a newcomer—to Stevens*) Whatsa matter with your drill—is it like after teh honeymoon?

STEVENS: (*angrily*) I don't know what you mean, wise-guy.

TESS: (*shrieking*) I know what he means, big boy. (*Goes off in a peal of laughter*)

SNUBS: How you fin' out, gal—you ain't never been married?

TESS: Ask me no questions an I tell you no lies. (*Everyone laughs*)

SNUBS: (*sidling up to her*) Yeh—say lissen to me. How 'bout you an me. . .

TESS: Run 'long boy—don't start messin wid me now. I's here to see de contest, so run 'long wid you.

SNUBS: Oh, all right (*turns and yells*) C'mon boys, le's give three cheers fo' John Henry, best steel-drivin man in de land. (*He leads three cheers.*)

FREYN: He sure is a giant. . . don't see how he keeps it up.

AIKEN: I don't either. There's not another man living who could stand up against our drill like that. But he's up against something he can't beat for long.

FOREMAN: (*looking at the waning sun*) The hell he can't beat it! Why look! He's done almost twenty feet to the drill's nineteen. . . and he's only got a little while to go. (*yells*) Hey, John Henry, keep it up, it's most sundown now.

(*At this the Negroes whistle, yell and cheer their champion on—then from the midst of their great joy comes a cry of despair—John Henry falters as if torn by an unbearable pain in his side. He stops but the machine drill whizzes steadily on and on.*)



Drawing by Anton Refregier

JULIE ANNE: (*screams*) Oh, John Henry, is you hurt?

SNUBS: John Henry told de Cap'n man ain't nothin' but a man an befo' he let dat steel drill beat him down he'd die wid his hammer in his hand.

WOMAN: Looks like he might, too.

SNUBS: (*Pleading*) Only a minute or two mo', John Henry, c'mon.

LILY: C'mon, John Henry, c'mon.

JOE: It's de big thing you was talkin' bout. C'mon, John Henry, show dem black men is men too. (He begins the chant again.)

(*At this John Henry lifts his hammer with a great effort.*)

ALL: (*Chant*)

"Raise her high, (*the hammer rises*)  
Swing her low." (*John Henry swings it down with great force*)

"Raise her high, (*up goes the hammer*)

Swing her low" (*down comes the hammer again with great force*)

(*This continues*)

AKIN: (*shouting*) He'll never make it now. He'll drop dead. Better stop it.

FREYN: (*grimly*) let him go on.

FOREMAN: (*As the sun approaches the horizon*) The hell he won't make it. Look! it's 'most sundown now.

AKIN: (*As John Henry falters again*)

He's through, I tell you. He's through.

FOREMAN: (*As John Henry's tired muscles pick up with the rising "Swing her high" chant*) Like hell he is! Look at that!

(*As the chant "Swing her high, swing her low" rises, the Foreman without thinking, enters into it and is soon shouting as loudly as the rest. This keeps up for a few minutes, with John Henry keeping pace desperately until . . .*)

FREYN: (*yells*) Look! That's sunset for sure.

FOREMAN: WE WIN! WE WIN! Time's up, John Henry. (*To Akin*) I guess we showed you, all right.

AKIN: (*ruefully*) You sure did.

(*With John Henry's victory, the Negroes go wild with happiness—they shout, whistle, stomp, and Snubs does an impromptu jig—John Henry looks very ill, and resists when Negroes want to carry him on their shoulders.*)

JOHN HENRY: Leave me be, boys. I won, but I feel like my inside's all busted out. (*He leans heavily on Joe and Julie Anne.*)

FREYN: Here's your ten dollars, John Henry (*pats his back*). Good boy, you sure showed nerve to pull through with your side hurting like that.

JOHN HENRY: (*gasping*) I's all right—jes' needs a li'l rest, dat's all.

FREYN: (*kindly*) Take Friday and Saturday off with pay—there's enough blasting ready for days now, anyhow.

JOHN HENRY: Thankee.

(*The Negroes make a rush for John Henry and pick him up—they carry him out on their shoulders with Snubs leading the singing until Julie Anne catches the words and her voice rings out exultantly above the rest.*)

"John Henry said to his Cap'n

Man ain't nothin' but a man  
Befo' I let dat steam-drill beat me  
down

I'd die wid my hammer in my hand  
Yes, I'd die wid my hammer in my  
hand."

FREYN: Isn't that just like niggers. He said those words to me a few hours ago and they've gone and made a song out of it already.

AKIN: Looked for a minute like he would die "wid his hammer in his han'" but I lost my bet anyway (*paying up*) so, here's your \$100 and here's your \$30.

FREYN: Thank you, Mr. Akin. That's the fastest I made \$100 since President Cleveland got in. (*all three laugh*).

FOREMAN: Thanks—I'll sure have a good time with this \$30. Change my



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Drawing by Anton Refregier

luck, maybe, with a part of it.

(All laugh again).

AKIN: I can't help admiring the pluck of that fellow, even if he did cost me \$130.

FREYN: We were lucky to win—I sure thought he would give in.

FOREMAN: He's proud. Didn't want to give in with his own folks looking on—I know niggers.

FREYN: Yes, they're all alike.

FOREMAN: Give me niggers anytime on a building job.

FREYN: Yes, they're seldom trouble-makers like white workers these days. Its lucky the agitators leave them alone. (pause) What was that you were saying about these machines, Mr. Akin. Never . . . never . . .

AKIN: (laughing) The most economical workman you can buy, it never gets sick, never gets tired, it never talks back, and it's guaranteed. . . .

FREYN AND AKIN: (together) Never to ask for an eight hour day.

FREYN: Believe me, that's some sales argument these days, Mr. Akin. Let's have supper together at the Hotel tonight and talk things over.

AKIN: Thanks Mr. Freyn. I'm glad to see you won't let the results of this contest blind you to the advantage of steam-drills over . . .

FOREMAN: (interrupting) You aren't thinking of putting in machines, are you Mr. Freyn?

FREYN: I might consider it . . . why not? You never can tell when the niggers might start raising hell and walk out on us like that white gang did . . . besides, you got to keep your eyes and mind open to new ideas if you want to be a success in this world, Bill.

AKIN: (in a typical sales-talk manner) Why yes. Three of these steam-drills will do the work of thirty men over a period of time and besides . . .

FREYN: (interrupting) Hadn't you better save that sales talk for supper tonight, Mr. Akin?

AKIN: (with an embarrassed laugh) You're right. Thank you for both the hint and the invitation, Mr. Freyn.

FREYN: (waving the \$100) Not at all—thank you.

(they laugh as the curtain comes down)

EARLY the following Monday morning. Stevens and a group of white laborers are unloading a number of steam drills; the foreman is watching them work.

FOREMAN: That John Henry sure took you down, Stevens.

STEVENS: That don't worry me none, big boy. We got the order just the same.

FOREMAN: They won't last long here.

STEVENS: Oh no? Want to bet on it?

FOREMAN: They'll break down all right.

STEVENS: Like hell! Say, what's the matter? Sore 'cause you won't have a bunch of shines to bully around?

REILLY: (a stocky red head) B'gorra, I believe the man feels bad about having us here.

STEVENS: Cheer up, fellow, you'll get a kick out of running one of these yourself.

FOREMAN: Like hell I will. Catch me running one of these contraptions.

STEVENS: Like hell you won't. I bet old Freyn puts him to work, eh Red?

REILLY: Sure.

OTHERS: Yeh. Sure. You'll learn to like it, too, etc.

FOREMAN: Yeh?

STEVENS: (emphatically) Yeh—he's too cheap to let you stand around when there ain't no dinges to boss.

FOREMAN: You'll never see me playing nurse to one of those things.

STEVENS: Would you like to bet another thirty bucks on it?

FOREMAN: Can't, I spent it already.

STEVENS: (persistently) How about that thirty you got left in the bank, Carnegie?

FOREMAN: (walking away) Aw stow it. Who d'you think you're kidding anyway?

STEVENS: Look—there comes the boss.

REILLY: Fat bugger, ain't he?

FARRELL: Yeh, plenty of belly.

STEVENS: Yeh—plenty of saw-bucks, too.

REILLY: Hangs on to 'em too, I bet.

FOREMAN: (as Freyn approaches) Good morning, Mr. Freyn—up bright and early this morning, aren't you?

FREYN: Yes, I came down to see if the drills really came in today like Akin promised . . . but let that be, now that they're here . . . say, why aren't you helping set the machines up, Bill?

FOREMAN: You see, I . . .

FREYN: Never mind excuses—get to work learning how they run—they cost me a lot of money, and I'm not going to have you or anyone else standing around doing nothing but yell at them like you do at the niggers. You'll have to learn how to run one yourself, think I'm going to pay you for standing around?

FOREMAN: But I . . .

FREYN: But nothing—who do you think you are anyway, Buffalo Bill or somebody? Think you're getting paid for shooting the bull or something?

(Stevens begins to laugh, but covers it up, and begins to whistle furiously—"Oh my darling Nellie Gray.")

FOREMAN: Say, Mr. Freyn.

FREYN: (Who has started off to the right) What now?

FOREMAN: There comes the gang now. What'll I tell them?

FREYN: Tell them—Oh hell, I'll stay to tell you what to tell them. Say Stevens, how many helpers did you say you'll need?

STEVENS: Two husky fellows to cart away the rock will be enough.

FREYN: All right. You tell them, Ellis. Tell them, since we're paid up in full Saturday, they haven't anything

coming for today. Better keep John Henry and Joe, they're the best two workers.

FOREMAN: (as John Henry and rest approach) All right. (pause) How do you feel today, John Henry?

JOHN HENRY: Oh, I'm right perky now. All I needed was a li'l rest. Say—what's goin' in here anyway? (he stares wonderingly at the drills)

FOREMAN: I'm afraid I've got bad news for most of you boys. We've got to lay you all off excepting two men. That'll be John Henry and Joe. . . .

Since the rest of you haven't started to work yet, you're all paid up to date. That'll be all now. Of course you'll return your tools to commissary.

(the Negroes stare at the foreman as if they don't believe he is really firing them)

JOHN HENRY: You mean you's laying off all dese boys on de start of de day widout notice or anything?

JOE, SNUBS, SAM, OTHERS: Yeh? How come? What's dis anyway?

FOREMAN: We hate to see you lose your jobs. But there's nothing can be done about it.

JOHN HENRY: De tunnel won't be done fo' months yet. Who's gwine finish it?

NEGROES: (staring angrily at Stevens and other newcomers) Yeh, who's gwine take our jobs? Dey pushin' us out? What's de idea? How come? etc.

JOHN HENRY: (to Freyn) Who you givin' all dese jobs to, anyway?

FREYN: I don't know why you should ask—we're keeping you and Joe, you know. But I've bought eight new steel-drill machines and of course I've hired some experts to run the machines. You and Joe will be their helpers.

SNUBS AND OTHERS: (all speaking at once) Not even give us a chance. Or a day's notice. Dis ain' fair—no 'tain't—What we do now? Dunno!

FOREMAN: I'm sorry, boys. But we can only keep John Henry and Joe.

JOHN HENRY (to Freyn) Will dey learn us drivers how to run de machines?

FREYN: You're the helpers. You work right with them, carting the stone away.

JOHN HENRY: (insistently) Will dey learn us how to run de machines?

FREYN: No, dammit. We got to have white men for skilled work like that.

JOE: John Henry beat de steel drill down.

OTHERS: (speaking simultaneously) Suah he did. He proved we's better dan steel-drill at drivin'. Why we get laid off so sudden like? We's slaved ourselves to death on dis job. Suah did.

FOREMAN: Listen boys. We're sorry about this. But talking won't do any good. This is final.

JOHN HENRY: (to Freyn) You say Joe and I can have de jobs workin' behin' de machines—shovelin' out de stone an' cartin' it away?

FREYN: Yes, we're keeping you two like Bill said.

# Dancing in Church

By LAURENCE GELLERT

JOHN HENRY: But we cain' learn to run de machines—'cause dat's skilled work fo' white men only?

FREYN: That's right, John Henry.

JOHN HENRY: No, 'tain't either right! It's wrong! An' I reckon I was damn fool to nigh break my back an' most bust my insides out in de contest 'gainst that machine. (to Negroes) I figgered I was doin' somethin' so Big I'd make dem respec' us, and dey ain't white man on earl' good 'nuff to stan' up 'gainst dat machine like I did. . .

NEGRO WORKERS: (interrupting) Dat's de truf. Suah nuff. Dat's so.

JOHN HENRY: Yet I ain't good 'nuf to learn to run dem machines jes' 'cause I's black. Well den, if'n I ain't good 'nuff to run dem machines, I's too damn good to run an' clean after dem.

FREYN: (angrily as John Henry slams down his hammer, and the rest follow suit, Sam only after receiving a helpful, hinting poke from Joe) What do you mean nigger?

JOHN HENRY: Don't you call me Nigger, or I'll slap you right down. I mean—Mr. Great God White Man—dat I'm quittin' dis here job right now and Joe too. C'mon boys, we'll go right 'long now (he grabs Sam, who is about to ask for a job) Git on skunk if'n you know what's good for you. (to white workers) And someday we'll be workin' right 'long side you at de machines. Dey cain' tell de dif'rence betwixt a white man an' a black man nohow. Dey won't Jim Crow us.

NEGRO WORKERS: No dey won't. Dat's tellin' 'em, John Henry. Damn betcha' they won't. No sub, etc. (they follow John Henry out, all singing:)

"Goin' fin' me a place,  
It cuts no figger;  
You get yo' due,  
Don' let 'em call you nigger,  
Oh my kitty co co.

"Goin' fin' me a place,  
White folks ain' inchin';  
An' black man's belly,  
Ain' allus pinchin',  
Oh my kitty co co."

REILLY: (to Stevens) Sure got spunk, ain't they?

FREYN: (overhearing this) That's enough out of you. You're paid to run that drill, not to shoot off at the mouth. (as Reilly just stares at him) Well—what are you standing there dawdling about? Get to work.

STEVENS: (as Reilly just stands there, staring back at Freyn) All right, boss. We were just watching the show.

FREYN: Well—get going now.

STEVENS: All right boss, all right.

REILLY: (as Freyn walks out—right) Didn't that big fellow tell him where to get off at though?

STEVENS: I say, thought he was going to smack him in the jaw.

REILLY: (spitting on his fist) Say now, that's an idea.

CURTAIN

THE "Praise House" is approached across the bottoms—a stretch of dank, dismal swampland densely overgrown with broom straw. Zig-zag and roundabout, the abrupt halt, frequent change of pace, the hop, skip and jump all figure if the "Jack-ma-lantern" (fire-fly) lighted route is to be even partially an overland one.

The one room barnlike structure—a ramshackle of decayed planks, broken glass and peeling tar paper, is crowded with Negroes from the surrounding country-side. Men, women and children, some bare-footed, bedraggled most, but all with shiny fresh washed faces are gathered for the usual Sunday night "xperience pra-ar meetin'," "Lawd's 'zaminashuns" or "what-cher-calluns."

On the table at one end of the room, a battered kerosene lamp flickers uncertainly, casting on the wall a huge grotesque shadow like a gigantic bat in flight, of the preacher who stands gesticulating, exhorting the congregation in a monotonous sing-song, "Trust in Him, Oh Brethren. Oh Sistren. He will help. He is the Wonderful One. He is the Lawd Jesus Christ. Oh yes. . ."

But the Sistren and Brethren pay him "no min'." Children whoop and yell, rush hither and thither wildly—at play. The adults sit on the long, rough-hewn, back-less benches "joree-jawin'," swapping Community news and gossip, back slapping, elbowing one another, in a festive mood:

"When white folks go to Church,  
Dey neber crack no smile;  
When nigger go to Church, Lor',  
You cain' heah 'em lauh a mile."

It's the shank of the evening. The "Lawd" can wait.

More Negroes arrive. The noise and heat mount by degrees. Mosquitoes zoom about disconcertingly.

The exhorter pitches his voice to a treble. Others, too, old folks mostly, break through the din to "bear up" the Preacher with scattering responses of "Hallelujah," "Amen" and "Glory Be" shaped in musical phrases. The expressed fervor of the devout mingles strangely with the guffawing loud talk of the uninspired. Minutes pass. Long minutes of terrific din—bedlam. Out of it—barely audible at first—swelling into a melodious torrent—engulfing everything in it:

"Star in de Eas'—Star in de Wes',  
Wish ah haid dat star in mah breas',  
Church ah knows yo' gonta miss me when  
ahm gone.

When ahm gone, gone, gone,  
When ahm gone, gone, gone,  
Church ah knows yo' gonta miss me when  
ahm gone."

Bodies sway, fingers snap, hands clap or beat against the thigh, feet pat—all

in perfect unison with the chanting voices:

"Yo' gonta miss me by mah walk,  
Yo' gonta miss me by mah talk,  
Church ah knows yo' gonta miss me when  
ahm gone."

One after another rises, until the whole congregation is on its feet for greater freedom of movement to the compulsive "snap" rhythm:

"When ahm gone, gone, gone,  
When ahm gone, gone, gone,  
Church ah knows yo' gonta miss me when  
ahm gone."

The Preacher begins to exhort once more but his voice is drowned out in a chorus of shouts. As the din dies down, but before the Preacher can resume, a woman steps out in a shuffling march that takes her completely around the room, with another song in quick march tempo on her lips.

Others follow her lead singing as benches are hastily kicked or pushed out of the line of march:

"Dis train is boun' fo' Glory, dis train,  
Oh Hallelujah;  
Dis train is boun' fo' Glory, dis train,  
Oh Hallelujah;  
Dis train is boun' fo' Glory,  
Ef you ride no need to fret or worry,  
Dis train, Oh Hallelujah. Dis train."

One imitates the whistle of a train—another the labored chug-chug of an engine getting up steam—faster, faster—the train gathers momentum, the clapping hands, shuffling feet (rarely off the ground) and syncopated chanting echo to the rafters the rat-tat-tat rhythm of grinding wheels on a railroad track or the rumbling beat of the African tom tom. As more of the congregation couple on, some switch on to another track forming an outer ring and start rolling in the opposite direction from the "Main Line Southern," then everybody:

"Dis train don' carry no gambler, dis train,  
Oh Hallelujah;  
Dis train don' carry no gambler, dis train,  
Oh Hallelujah;  
Dis train don' carry no gambler,  
No fo' day creeper or midnight rambler,  
Dis train, Oh Hallelujah. Dis train."

And so on in the next verses substituting "Dis train don' carry no Master, No Bossman, No Chain Gang"—listing all the unpleasant things known in the life of the Southern Negro. A girl jumps into the center of the ring. "The hot spot." She flings her arms up wildly, begins to twirl with the grace and speed of a spinning top. A boy jumps in after her. He moves with a wriggling body movement, head jerking to and fro with the neck held perfectly rigid. When he is just within arms length of the girl, she dodges around him and glides back.

Three, maybe four couples perform in succession, filling the "hot spot" for hours, without let-up, twirling, wriggling, leaping, bobbing—love, hate, despair, anger—the whole gamut of human emotions are depicted—a thousand improvisations—a thousand variations—mostly shifting too rapidly for classification or study. The circles throughout continue moving about in opposite directions. Even the very young mimic and imitate their elders. There are no wall flowers—everyone participates.

ANY Sunday night—often week nights as well, in a thousand outlying points in the Black Belt, this scene is re-enacted. True, the dance, all dancing in fact, is taboo in Negro churches of all denominations. The older and pious of the race deem dancing "Debil's brew" and "ah jes' as soon eat de Debil hissef as drink his broth." But the "Rock-Jubilee," the "Shout" or "Disheville" as it is variously known, that's different. It has Bible warrant. "De good book Machew done say 'bout it." It is no dance at all. Two distinguishing features—the use of the Sper'chule in accompaniment, and the rule that the feet must never be crossed as in "sinful dancin'," to "fiddle sings," "jig reels," or "Debil chunes."

However, "Rock" or dance, sanctified or Debil's broth, crossed feet or cross-eyes, the rapid twirling, weaving, spinning, bobbing, coupled with the encircling accompaniment, every portion of the body utilized to beat out the "snap" or primitive march rhythm of the tom tom, stamps unmistakably the African heritage. Undoubtedly we find here many of the tribal dances imported to the New World with early slave cargoes—the Bamboula, Cata, Calinda, Congo, Yuca, Guiuba and others, martial, lascivious and ceremonial. Paradoxically enough, we are indebted for the perpetuation of the "Heathen superstition and Devil's pastime" to the very agency most zealous in exorcizing them—the Church.

If folk song and folk dance are not actually twin creations, they are certainly intimate and close kin-folks. Particularly is this evident in the African song with its highly complicated compulsive rhythm. And while African travelers would have us believe that nothing ever happens there without festival and general carousing ("All Africa dances night and day"), we will certainly make no mistake if we assume that every native tribe had its ceremonial, ritual and social dances—and exercised them on occasions. But endless difficulties were placed in the way of transplanting this field of culture into the New World. The slaves came from places often thousands of miles removed from each other, bringing with them no common language, no common nationality, no common cultural background. Besides, it was early the practice to deliberately shuffle members of the various

tribes so as to lessen the danger of concerted action for freedom. When we consider that the degree of cultural and physical differentiation amongst the slaves enmeshed in the slavers' nets from first to last was greater than amongst our immigrants from Europe, we have some idea of the heterogeneous confusion in the Negro's early American background.

The early slave was tagged "tail-less monkey" merely a higher species of orang-utang, a "Negah." Education and Christianity were alike deemed wasted on him since he was unmindful of past or future and had no soul either to save or to lose. But far from becoming a tractable beast of burden, the slave from the very beginning chafed under the yoke, and lost no opportunity to strike for his freedom. Torture, disfigurement, mutilation, public execution by rope and faggot, wholesale massacres, the destruction of thousands of dollars worth of Black Stock—availed the Masters nothing. And then came—"the light" of the Church. The Gospels were hastily rushed into the breach for the safeguard of the Masters' sacred property rights.

By the turn of the 19th Century, the thunderous roll of the "Sper'chule" was heard from a thousand indoor congregations throughout the slave domains—all endowed and supported by the Masters—with Negro Preachers preaching at the Masters' bidding: that his Master's authority over him and property in him to the full extent of the Law is recognized by God Himself; that his Master is God's overseer; that he owes him an unconditional blind, unlimited submission; that he must not allow himself to grumble or fret or murmur at anything in his Master's conduct; that such murmuring is not against the Master but against God. Vivid descriptions of Hell with eternal torments was dangled before his eyes as a penalty for insubordination.

LITTLE wonder then that the slave concluded that "Preachin' man he do wit' his mouff jes' same lak Debil Driber doin' wit' his whip." We find Religious Instruction of the Slave in Liberty County, Ga., about this period, reporting:

"... I was preaching to a large congregation of the Epistle to Philemon and when I insisted upon fidelity and obedience as Christian virtues in servants and upon authority of Paul condemned the practice of running away, one half of my audience deliberately walked out. And those that remained looked anything but pleased with either the Preacher or his doctrine..."

Yet Church membership grew by leaps and bounds. And with it, the waves of insurrection! Led by Gabriel in Richmond, 1800; led by Denmark Vesey, Charleston, 1822; and Nat Turner, Southampton, Va., 1831—led the revolt in scope and magnitude unparalleled in American slave annals. And Nat Turner was a PREACHER! Not a pot-belly hireling of the Masters, to be sure. But a "deacon"—lay preacher—a natural born leader. Every plantation had one: the counterpart of the tribal chiefs in Africa. The slave would sit through the "Preachments" of the Master's preacher, but he followed the lead of his own. Nat Turner in a frock coat, packing a rifle at the van of the insurgents and countless others like him furnish us with the lost key to the Bible Scriptures of the slave.

From its inception the Negro Church was never simply a place of worship, if at all. Recreational opportunities for the slave were nil and the church naturally filled this need in his life. It became the playground, singing and dance hall and forum—all rolled into one.

The Negro had known the community song in Africa—the church chorus became its New World counterpart. His first Bible lessons were learned from oaths shouted at him by the overseers and "Debil Dribbers." Later rather than accept the colorless, stereotyped hymns, superimposed, he chose to exercise his own song-creating faculties. And choice mouthfilling scriptural passages fazed him not at all.

Nat Turner and others used "Gospel Preachments" to incite rebellion. "Spirituals" had hidden allegorical significance behind the religious symbolism. Is it not perfectly logical to assume that the "Rock" or "Shout," equally important in the slave Church rituals, also served to make those "pious," "inspired" (by the whites) pra-ar meetin's actually the assemblies at which were organized the very revolts they were calculated to allay and discourage?

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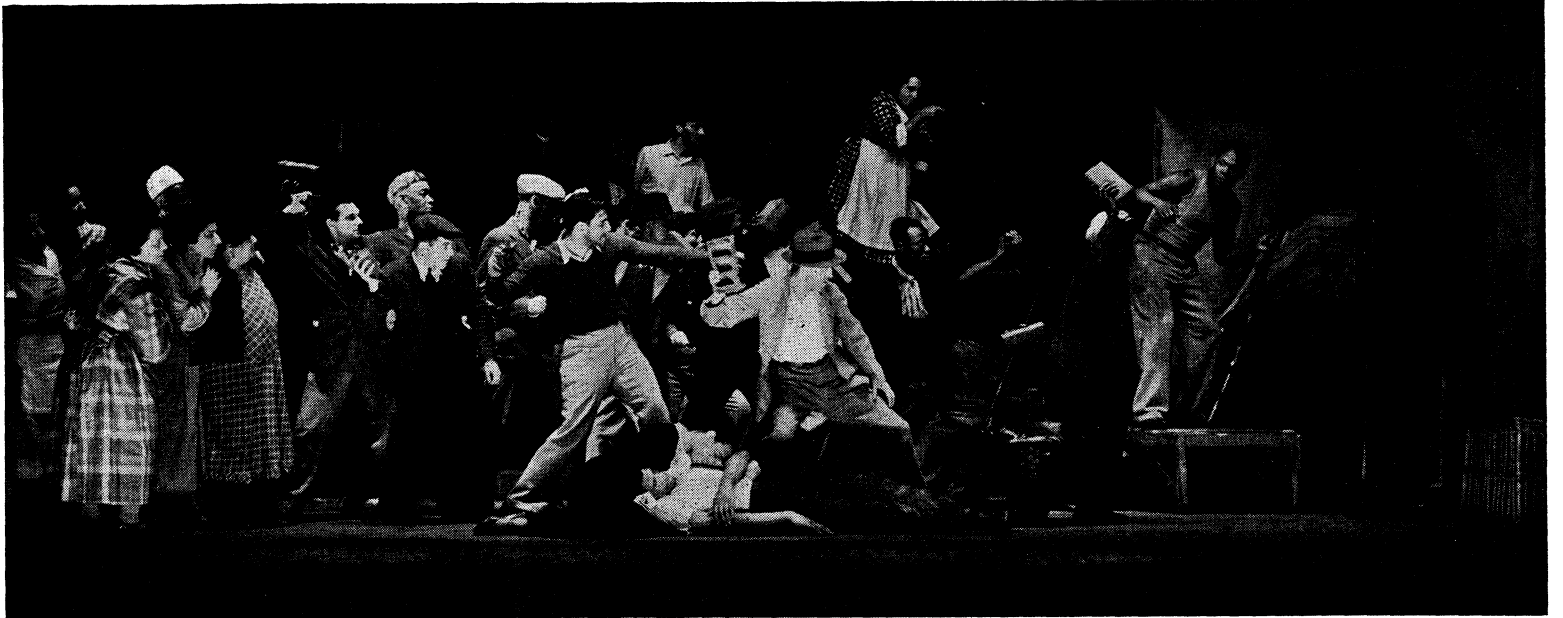
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Paul Robeson in London Production of *Stevedore*, Directed by Andre von Gyseghem

## From "Uncle Tom's Cabin" to "Stevedore"

By EUGENE GORDON

EVER since the night Uncle Tom first shuffled upon the stage, American drama has emphasized the ruling class concept of the Negro's place in this social order. It makes no difference that Uncle Tom and other "Negroes" often were whites smirking under burnt cork and groveling under kinky wigs; the idea of the Negro's place was so emphatically implied that succeeding generations of colored actors have naturally assumed the stereotype.

The ruling class decreed the Negro's place to be down below, in the spheres both of economics and of art, and permitted none but white men to personate the ruling class concept of the black man. Society cut the pattern for black-white relationship, slave-plantation mode of production, plotting the outline with blacks on the lowest level. Since men habituate themselves in all relationships according to their peculiar roles, enacting their parts automatically, the roles of master and slave bore a constant relation to each other.

*Uncle Tom's Cabin* reflected ruling class opinion of the Negro's place in bourgeois American life, although neither Harriet Beecher Stowe, who wrote the novel, nor Charles Townsend, who adapted the play, purposed it. The points of view of the South and the North were fundamentally identical: the Negro was definitely a being *psychologically* doomed to slavery forever. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* reflected this viewpoint. For instance:

"ELIZA: Yes, down the river where they work you to death. Uncle Tom, I'm going to run away, and take Harry with me. Won't you come too? You have a pass to come and go at any time.

TOM: No, no—I can't leave Mars Shelby dat way. But I won't say no to you're goin'. But if sellin' me can get mas'r outer trouble, why den let me be sold. I s'pose I can bar it as well as any one. Mas'r always found me on the spot . . . he always will. I never have broken trust, nor used my pass no ways contrary to my word, and never will. It's better for me to go alone, than to break up the place and sell all. Mas'r ain't to blame, and he'll take care of my wife and little 'uns!"

Harriet Beecher Stowe's plan of attack on slavery was gradually to destroy it so that the ensuing hardships to the master would not be too great: reduce his property by removing a slave here and there, now and then, until all are freed. Uncle Tom falls in with the plan: better for him to go alone "than to break up the place and sell all." "Mas'r ain't to blame," so be tender with him. It is the fault of the system. Mas'r is, in a way, as much a slave as Uncle Tom. This sentiment is implicit in that one passage. The whole play implies more.

Loyalty and devotion in general are the essence of nobility: a slave is noble if loyal and devoted. This is the lesson of Christianity. It is ruling class ideology; it is the message of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The author commends Uncle Tom for remaining with Mar's Shelby. Speaking through the playwright, the ruling class commends all Negroes who are loyal and devoted to the white master class.

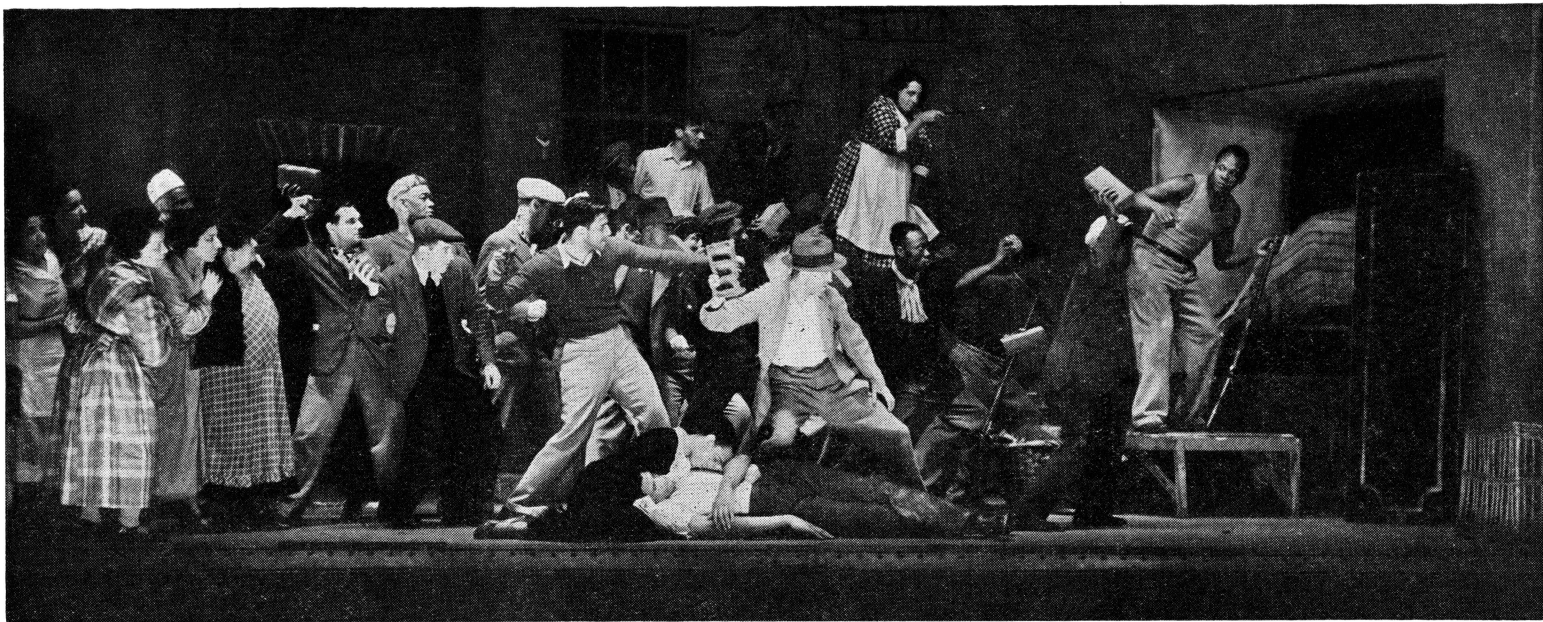
Tom was neither loyal nor devoted to his last owner, Legree. Why? Because Legree was not of the master

class. He was an upstart, villainous poor white, deserving and receiving contempt. Slaves were taught loyalty and devotion to those God ordained to rule; this doctrine implied scorn for those hired to rule.

*Uncle Tom's Cabin* reflects ruling class ideology from another angle. Tom's second owner, St. Clare, is speaking to Maria, St. Clare's wife: "I've brought you a coachman, at last, to order. I tell you he is a regular hearse for blackness and sobriety," and so on. The audience has already met George Harris and Eliza. Harris is a "pretty good-looking chap," for he is "kind of tall," has "brown hair" and "dark eyes"; in other words, George Harris is an octroon. His wife, Eliza, is also "as white as you are," Shelby tells Haley, the slave trader.

DOES all this detail about the physical appearance of Tom, Harris, and Eliza serve no purpose than to heighten dramatic interest? Hardly; but dramatic interest is heightened not only by showing that slavery's leprous hands often fell on "whites," but that "white" Negroes were given less than blacks to mumbling nonsense about loyalty and devotion. The "fullblooded" Negro, implies the author, is inferior to the Negro with "white" blood. Mixed bloods are portrayed as impatient of restraint, as if slave psychology is foreign to them alone.

*Uncle Tom's Cabin* was the artistic expression of the industrial bourgeoisie on slavery. It was also the expression of the ruling class as a whole: roughly, the capitalists in the North and slaveholders in the South. It was the con-



Paul Robeson in London Production of *Stevedore*, Directed by Andre von Gyseghem

viction of this class that it had a god-ordained right to be. The fundamental "right," therefore, of one class to rule another was not the question at issue. The question was how to reconcile differences between the non-slaveholders and the slaveholders so as to unite the ruling class. Was Uncle Tom more effectively exploited by the wage slavery of the North or by the chattel slavery of the South? That was the question reconciliators must consider. The author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, however, was as unaware of her role of reconciliator as Paul Green or Eugene O'Neill is unaware today of assuming a traditional attitude toward, and repeating traditional slurs about, the Negro. The man who dramatized her novel similarly played his role.

*Uncle Tom's Cabin* was one of the first instances "where an attempt is made to present to the American public in a realistic manner the authentic life of the Negro," asserts Montgomery Gregory in his introduction to the plays in *The New Negro*. The other drama, he says, was Dion Boucicault's *Octoroon*. Gregory thinks these plays "served to rationalize somewhat the stage conception of the Negro," which, until now, had been the "darkey" of minstrelsy, "and accustomed the theatre-going public to the experience of seeing a number of Negro characters in other than the conventional 'darkey' roles."

Gregory's saying that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* "served to rationalize somewhat the stage conception of the Negro" is correct. It was "somewhat," in a most limited sense. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *Octoroon* no more presented "in a realistic manner the authentic life of the Negro" than the earlier minstrels had done. In minstrelsy, the slave was an irresponsible happy-go-lucky; in "serious" drama, he was a saint who had only to die to join the "authentic" angels. To the playwright whose interest lay with the South, the black man belonged forever in slavery; to the playwright whose interests were one with the rising bourgeoisie, the Negro was capable of development as a free man. These playwrights agreed that in neither case should the black man be a member of the ruling class.

"The minstrel tradition continued until the middle nineties, when John W. Isham organized a musical show, *The Octoroons*," declares Gregory. There followed a succession of musical comedies, the casts of which were completely Negro. The minstrel tradition did not end with the Negro's writing and producing musical comedy, but continued in a more refined form. When the Negro produced for the first time in his own theatre he recognized and adhered to the stereotype—with trifling variations—that the ruling class tradition had cast on the psychology of Americans.

The dialectical development of American drama dealing with the Negro reveals itself clearly. *Uncle Tom's Cabin*,



Leigh Whipper in Theatre Union Production of *Stevadore*

despite its capitalist bias, was anti-slave. To that extent it was an advance over all earlier plays concerning the Negro. Bringing the Negro on the stage with whites in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *Octoroon* was a part of the general sympathetic treatment Negroes were to expect from liberals.

WE can appraise these various plays correctly only by taking each of them in relation both to its period and to American drama as a whole. When we look at American drama in this way we discover the significant position the Negro has held in it.

Used from the first as the cheapest possible labor and, later, after emancipation, as a threat to white labor whenever it rebelled against exploitation, the Negro, with his peculiar racial characteristics, has been a godsend to the ruling class. His racial characteristics are the identifying marks by which the "inferior" is distinguished from the "superior." Therefore, they must be preserved. Jim Crow laws, laws forbidding intermarriage, slums to which Negro workers are confined, separate Christian churches—these are some of the means of preserving the Negro's identifying marks. The theatre is an especially valuable art form to the ruling class, due to the drama's power to illustrate graphically the differences between whites and blacks.

The tradition of Negro inferiority and white superiority penetrates even such recent "realistic" plays as Ridgley Torrence's *Granny Maumee*, *The Rider of Dreams*, and *Simon the Cyrenian*, Eugene O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones* and *All God's Chillun Got Wings*, Paul Green's *In Abraham's Bosom*, *The No*



Rose McClendon, now with the Negro Peoples' Theatre

*'Count Boy*, and *Roll, Sweet Chariot*, Du Bose Heywood's *Porgy*, and Ernest Howard Culbertson's *Goat Alley*.

Negro workers who know the "stark realism" of, say, O'Neill's, Green's and Heywood's plays look upon it not as the kind of realism the black man actually encounters, but as just another and a more "civilized" method of attack. It is only the upper class Negroes who accept the false fatalism of *All God's Chillun Got Wings*, *Roll, Sweet Chariot*, and *The Emperor Jones* as true to Negro life. These people do not accept it because they believe it is "authentic," but because, accepting the present social order as defender and preserver of their prerogatives of helping to exploit the black workers, they must defend the capitalist culture.

O'Neill's, Green's, and all other "liberal" writers' plays about the Negro serve the capitalist class better than the old minstrels, while the older dramas—for instance, Thomas Dixon's *The Clansman* (from which the film, *The Birth of a Nation* was made)—with their uncompromising depiction of the Negro as sub-human, were crude in their elemental hatred beside the plays of today's "friendly" playwrights. The very openness of *The Clansman's* assault blunted its point, but the subtle calumny in *All God's Chillun Got Wings*, and others in this category, makes these plays the more dangerous since their deadly influence is often fatal before it is observed. In *All God's Chillun Got Wings*, O'Neill rears the white girl, Ella, and the Negro boy, Jim, together through childhood, rather



**Leigh Whipper in Theatre Union Production  
of Stevedore**



**Rose McClendon, now with the  
Negro Peoples' Theatre**



honestly portraying their reactions to a hostile environment. They finally get married, but, instead of showing how a black man and his white wife may fight and win, the author prefers to show them in defeat. He even shows the Negro failing in his law examinations—as if seeking further to prove his “natural” inferiority.

O'Neill must make Ella insane in order to keep her Jim's wife, and O'Neill must add, when the white wife kisses her black husband's hand (his *hand*, mind you!) “. . . as a child might, tenderly and gratefully.” Why should she not kiss him as a woman might, possessively and with passion? Because the Negro's place is that of an inferior, especially in social relations, most emphatically inferior when a Negro *man* and white *woman* are socially involved. Even so, Ella must be made crazy before she kisses her man, so that the audience will realize her ignorance of what she is doing. *All God's Chillun Got Wings*, *The Emperor Jones*, *Roll, Sweet Chariot*, *Porgy*,—all these “serious” plays of Negro life succeed in doing what Gregory praised *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *Octoroon* for doing: “rationalize somewhat the stage conception of the Negro” and accustom “the theatre-going public to the experience of seeing a number of Negro characters in other than the conventional ‘darkey’ roles,” but they do not change the basic attitude toward the Negro.

Ruling class conception of the Negro worker is a “darkey,” regardless of his playing the minstrel Jim Crow or the tragic Emperor Jones. Although *In Abraham's Bosom* is sympathetic, in *Roll, Sweet Chariot*, Paul Green refurbishes the *Uncle Tom's Cabin* theme. John Henry, being black, cannot find “redemption” except through suffering on the chain gang. Happiness comes in heaven: it is reached only by way of the grave.

O'Neill's treatment of the Negro is no better than Green's, although O'Neill is a better artist. Ruling class tradition has so warped both their judgments that what they are doing is a sort of automatic writing, the hoary shade of Uncle Tom being the spirit which guides their hands. Brutus Jones achieves “great” heights, yet his pinnacle but touches the soles of Smither's muddy and broken shoes. At the crest of Jones' glory he is still inferior, at least in the social scale, to the cockney out-cast. Look at the last lines of *The Emperor Jones*:

LEM: (*calmly*) Dey come bring him now. (*The soldiers come out of the forest, carrying Jones' limp body. He is dead. They carry him to Lem, who examines his body with great satisfaction.*)

SMITHERS: (*leans over his shoulder—in a tone of frightened awe.*) Well, they did for yer right enough, Jonesey, me lad! Dead as a 'erring! (*Mockingly*) Where's yer 'igh an' mighty airs now, yer bloomin' Majesty? (*Then with a grin*) Silver bullet! Gawd blimey, but yer died in the 'eight o' style, any'ow!

Radical drama comes closest to being

a dialectical representation of life because it shows the relation of black workers to the means of production, to class-conscious white workers, to the ruling class, to the upper class of their own race, and to all the other elements of society. John Wexley's *They Shall Not Die* and Paul Peters' and George Sklar's *Stevedore* are the first clean breaks from tradition. These authors bring the Negro upon the stage as a genuine human being, showing him in his actual relation both to the productive forces and to the whites of his class. Their portrayals mark the difference between distortion gleaned from without and perception gained from within.

Alliances once unthinkable, alliances between white workers and black workers, have evolved from the changed relationships as shown in these plays. The dramas fall short of “socialist realism” to the extent that they fail to integrate these various relationships. Both *They Shall Not Die* and *Stevedore* are less than first rate plays simply because they do not truthfully show the interplay of all the elements these dramas represent. *They Shall Not Die*, for instance, is untruthful in slurring over the potency of mass pressure upon the courts of so-called justice. The defence lawyer becomes the “hero,” whereas the real “hero” is nothing less than the international proletariat, with its weapon of

organized mass pressure.

*Stevedore* is better than *They Shall Not Die* because it is dialectically better constructed. It is truer to the life of workers today, when whites and blacks are coming to recognize their common interests, when they are seeing that they all are oppressed by the identical forces of capitalist society in decay and that the oppressors—the various agencies of decaying capitalism—are the common enemy of black and white workers.

*Stevedore's* conspicuous departure from “socialist realism” occurs in the staging of Scene I, Act III. Negroes do not sing hymns around their dead at a wake. One feels that this scene is meant to catch the fancy of the upper class, which “adores” the Negro's spirituals. It seems like another form of bowing to tradition; another way of linking the Negro actor of today with the Uncle Tom tradition.

The interval between *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *Stevedore* marks the difference between a Negro who servilely bowed himself into his place *beneath* the whites and the one who militantly takes his place *beside* his white fellow worker. Plays like *They Shall Not Die* and *Stevedore* are effective weapons against those innumerable economic and cultural differences which will persist for the black man until we destroy the last vestige of slavery.

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# Negro Players in Southern Theatres

By J. O. BAILEY

NOT many years ago the Negro scholar, Benjamin Brawley, in writing *The Negro in Literature and Art*, was compelled to write that "In no other field have Negroes with artistic aspirations found the road so hard as in that of the legitimate drama." He was right, in spite of the widespread opinion that Negroes as a race are "natural-born actors," who dramatize their religion, act out their tales in the telling, and break into song-and-dance on any street corner of a Saturday evening. The white man exploited the Negro's dramatic instincts in minstrel and vaudeville, and there was the end of it. Negroes themselves, groping toward artistic expression, sought to escape their sombre realities in song and in imitations of the white man's art.

Now Negro playwrights themselves have begun to write of their realities, and Negro actors to act their plays in a growing Negro theatre, "where," says Randolph Edmonds in his preface to *Six Plays for a Negro Theatre*, "there has been for many years a great need for plays of Negro life written by Negroes." The Negro writer and teacher, Mr. Randolph Edmonds, first sought to express himself in art through highly imaginative writing, to escape from the background he knew best. Then, he confesses, he read Paul Green's *Lonesome Road*, and his eyes were opened. His *Six Plays*, published in 1934, are the result, and the volume is, says Professor Koch in an introductory foreword, "so far as I know, the first volume of its kind," the first volume of folk plays written by a Negro for production in Negro little theatres.

Mr. Edmonds outlines in his preface the four elements needed in Negro folk plays, and evident in his work. They are worth-while themes, usually of protest; sharply drawn conflict; central characters with courage and conviction; and melodramatic plots to make the plays easily understood by the "average audience."

Most of the plays produced in the Negro schools and colleges of North Carolina (practically the only Negro theatres in the state) have been not Negro folk plays, but plays written by white men about white people. Directors and students have shown a singular hesitancy in producing Negro folk plays, first because the early stages of the educational process stimulate the desire to imitate white literature, second because few such plays have been available, and third, because until recently the Negro has regarded the theatre as a means of escape. He wanted romance, show, forgetfulness of his life on the stage rather than interpretation of it. A director of a Negro college group tells of actual

struggle to get her students to perform plays of Negro life. They looked for something as far removed as possible—they wanted, for instance, to produce a comedy of English aristocratic life. But, wherever produced, Negro folk plays have been received by Negro audiences with enthusiasm.

To Paul Green must go the credit for the first Southern Negro folk drama—and that, in the South, is the essential drama of the race, a drama of social protest. Paul Green's early Negro plays treat the Negro realistically, not from a paternalistic point of view, looking down, but out of the oppressed Negro's tragic experience, and they treat the Negro in both sunshine and shadow. They include *In Abraham's Bosom*, Pulitzer Prize play of Negro aspiration and defeat; *In Aunt Mahaly's Cabin*, a tragedy of superstition; *The No 'Count Boy*, a comedy of the Negro's happy-go-lucky ways; and *White Dresses*, a tragedy of miscegenation.

Important as these plays are, one of their chief values is that they have stimulated an authentic Negro-written drama of the people. The writing of Negro folk drama has been aided by the encouragement that Professor Koch and the Carolina Playmakers of the University of North Carolina have offered Negro little theatres. Professor Koch taught playwriting at Columbia University in the summer of 1930, and one of his Negro students there, Miss May Miller, wrote *Riding the Goat*, a Negro folk play. Professor Koch therefore disregarded all precedent and prejudice and in 1931 invited the St. Augustine College for Negroes to present the play in a "guest performance" during the Annual Dramatic Festival at the University. Negroes often perform on Southern white stages for a white audience—but seldom with white groups. There was a good deal of doubt as to how the white audience would react. When the play was produced, the expected reverberations of protest turned out to be thunderous applause. Since that time, Negro groups have annually taken a part in the Playmakers' Dramatic Festival as guest performers. St. Augustine College produced *The Bishop's Candlesticks* at the Festival in 1932, and *Granny Maumee* by Ridgeley Torrence in 1933. In 1934 an entire evening was devoted to drama by Negro groups: Shaw University produced Paul Green's *The Man Who Died at Twelve O'Clock*; Bennett College produced *The Broken Banjo* by a Negro playwright, Willis Richardson; and St. Augustine produced Paul Green's *White Dresses*. It is indicative of progress made that, though Paul Green wrote his *White Dresses* expressly for

the Playmakers' stage about ten years ago, the Playmakers did not dare produce this tragedy of miscegenation at that time, and the production by St. Augustine was actually its first production on the stage for which it was written. This spring, the North Carolina College for Negroes produced Eugene O'Neill's *The Dreamy Kid* at the Festival.

NEGROES and whites are carefully segregated in Southern theatres. When Negro college groups began to perform in the Playmakers' theatre, the problem arose of where Negroes in the audience should be seated. For the first three years they sat, of their own accord, at the rear of the theatre. The fourth year they were seated by chance in the front of the theatre, and the rest of the audience made no objection. This year, Negro guests in the theatre sat wherever they chose—the only instance of the sort I have observed in a Southern theatre.

With some outside encouragement, but largely through their own efforts the Negro schools and colleges of North Carolina are awakening their students to create a theatre of their own, not only to develop their talents as actors but

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also to write what they produce. In spite of meager appropriations and practically no facilities, stirring drama is being produced in Negro high schools and colleges in widely separate sections of the state. A statewide high school dramatic tournament at which twenty-nine schools presented plays, was held this spring at Shaw University. The three hundred representatives assembled there formed a permanent Negro High School Dramatic Association. Colleges are similarly active. The Second Annual Negro College Dramatic Tournament this year involved eight colleges, a group of some sixty-five directors and students.

The types of plays presented in both school and college contests offer an interesting study. Of the twenty-nine school plays, about one-third were folk plays of Negro life, and the rest ranged from O'Neill and Synge to the run of the play catalogues. The acting was of high quality and some of the individual performances were remarkable. In the college contest two were folk plays—one a Negro and one a mid-western farm play—and one was a Negro propaganda play. The judges gave little mention to any but these folk plays: First place to the North Carolina College for Negroes for *Sod*, and second to Livingston College for *The No 'Count Boy*. Although the groups were encouraged to offer original plays, in the whole number of thirty-seven plays produced in the contests not one was original. But in the discussions all the directors expressed deep interest in original Negro plays.

Although a good many Negro plays exist today in manuscript, they are difficult to obtain. Publishers hold the manuscripts, and if a director knows of a play's existence and whereabouts, he may order it. But once he gets outside a few well-known anthologies he will not find his search for Negro plays easy. Since the directors find little in the catalogues suited to their needs many of them write their own plays and pageants. Among those who have such plays are Mr. Walter Smith of Bennett College; Mr. N. L. Cannaday of Clayton; Mr. Johnson of Washington H. S., Raleigh; Mr. C. L. Blake of the Second Ward H. S., Charlotte. It is hopeful to learn that the Repertory Department of the New Theatre League is making an effort to collect plays of Negro life and serve as a distributing point for them.

In the South, few Negro plays are produced by Negroes outside the schools and colleges, and the drama of social protest is still vaguely heard of as a dubious form of art and considered with mistrust by most teachers. Yet there is growing in the Negro schools a knowledge that the stage is the Negro's medium, his weapon for protest—that he must build his own stage, set his actors on it, and write the message that they speak.

# Nuthin' But Brass

By EDWIN ROLFE

(for Cab Calloway)

"Please, Mr. Orchestra,  
play us another tune."

Let the old broken hag die on the street;  
the D.S.C. will haul the hulk away,  
clean up the mess. Let the dinkey rattle  
under the L all night, all day;  
nobody'll notice. The sky will go  
purple or red or cloudy over us—  
*My St. Louis Woman* and *Minnie the Moocher*  
will sprinkle the star dust and cover us.

The last magenta light is dimmed in the dome,  
the Academy heaven goes black as any night,  
save for the spotlight tinkling the glass  
of the imitation-crystal chandelier.

Music floats up from the pit or maybe  
the pipes in the wall are grinding  
through the hall.  
The pink-and-gold curtain rises like an angel,  
the balcony lights an enormous cigaret.

An' there ain't nuthin' left in the hall  
but brass:  
three saxophones, three cornets, a huge  
bass drum,  
a lone bass viol—and cigaret smoke  
weaving metallic patterns in the spot-  
light.

He is a reed walking out on the stage  
with a thinner reed in his hand. Each  
body  
strains forward in its seat, each body  
sways  
before his body answers to the low  
moan swoon.

Swooping down through him from the  
balcony,  
from Harlem 'round the corner, from  
14th street,  
from Soho and gaslit Left bank rooms,  
from bodies sensed in beds in a million  
rooms. . . .

O the brass is alive, his voice is brass!  
His voice is a drum and a flute and low,  
silvery saxophone zaaming in the night,  
his body a cushion for all love and lust.

A million Minnies dreaming of the  
King of Sweden,  
(wishing you were dead, you bastard,  
YOU!)  
counting a million dollars in nickels  
and dimes,  
a million, billion, quadrillion times!

Baby, the world grows smaller than a  
rose,  
smaller than a room, a single bed,  
where two warm bodies with space to  
spare  
are attenuated reeds of reciprocal play.

Baby, the world ain't a thing to us now,  
an' we doan' need no gin an' no  
cigarets,  
an' no spot on a dance floor smaller 'n  
a dime,  
to congeal you an' me in the bumps  
baby.

All of it is true. No promissory note  
is needed to insure the reality of  
dreaming,  
the wail and the moaning, the break  
in the voice:  
"Will you take this man?" "I do, I do!"

The song is wilder now, his voice is  
drowned  
in waves of muscatel wine from the  
mouths  
of the muted cornets and the derbied  
saxophones,  
and the pianist jiggling on the key-  
boards.

They all suddenly rise and discard the  
derbies—  
Awake, you little sleeping fools in the  
dome!  
This is not wine, it's synthetic gin,  
it's rasping tobacco, it's fragmentary  
love

and lust, and the voice you surrendered  
to  
is now but a grinning mouth, and the  
cool  
clean million is spent, you profligates!  
an' there ain't nuthin' left in the hall  
but brass.

Curtain. He's still grinning, but the  
smile  
sags at the corners, at it's soft beginning.  
Put on your coats. The Academy  
splurges  
a last time in light before it goes to  
sleep.

**YOSL CUTLER**, puppetmaster, writer,  
and staff artist of the *Jewish Morning Freiheit*, was killed in an automobile  
accident in town on June 12th while on  
a national tour for the *Freiheit*.

A pioneer in puppetry in America,  
Yosl Cutler was well known and admired  
in the profession. The lovable charac-  
ter and personality of this puppetmaster  
made his work known and loved by  
working class audiences throughout America.



The Graham Concert Group

Vandamm

## Martha Graham - Dances in Two Worlds By EDNA OCKO

**I**N times like these, when revolutionary art is the banner for a class marching into power, the artist must work against time. He must wrest from incipient Fascist censors whatever he realizes is valuable for the perpetuation of his art, and his works must be rich in content since he speaks for and to a rising social class, and realizes that he must be the crystallizer and organizer of their feelings. This places an enormous responsibility upon him, particularly when the field in which he works is limited, since he must constantly guard and proclaim the interests of the class he champions.

In the modern dance, the task is less simple than one at first believes. There are so few great dancers in the world today that the temptation to make a mechanical and arbitrary division between revolutionary and bourgeois dancer is difficult to avoid. And it is to skirt this danger that one considers Martha Graham not only as the high point of the bourgeois dance, but also as an artist whose work, while still encircled, is drawing closer and closer to the belief in and expression of a new social order.

At the close of the dance season of 1935, Martha Graham stands almost unquestionably as the greatest dancer America has produced since Isadora Duncan, and as one of the outstanding exponents of the modern dance in the world. We must determine then, the philosophy by which she creates and through which she interprets social phenomena, since, in her position as leader, she is a determining influence upon a vast number of disciples.

As a performer, her sincerity and integrity is unquestioned. She has never

consciously catered to Philistine art-lovers, nor casually succumbed to the blandishments of a financially tantalizing Broadway. As a technician, she has, Picasso-like, shifted styles. This year, however, her efforts have crystallized. Hers is the closest approach to a *system* of dance technic which is basic, transferable, and capable of infinite variation. She has developed a science of modern dance movement which seems remarkably suited to make the body a fit instrument for expression. And this rigorous training presents itself to me, at least, as an admirable technic for the revolutionary dance. It has, above all, strength and endurance; it permits of amazing gradations in dynamics; it embodies dramatic elements of militance and courage. Its most delicate moments are fraught with latent power. When the body stands, it seems immovable. The body in motion is belligerent and defiant. It seems almost impossible to do meaningless dances with this equipment. In training, the pupil is told to be strong, "strong enough to destroy barriers," that her body must surmount all physical difficulties, must be "energy on the move," creating and recreating strength and change within itself. This technic has produced dancers definitely aligned to the militant working-class movement whose merits as directors, teachers, and soloists, cannot be gainsaid. Anna Sokolow, and her Dance Unit in *Anti-War Cycle*, and *Strange American Funeral*, Lily Mehlman, Sophie Maslow,—all show to advantage the results of this training. The Graham Concert Group has reached a high technical standard, and its presence on a stage literally surcharges the air with energy and militance. There is no ques-

tion that Martha Graham has succeeded in founding a school of the dance that is a major influence throughout America.

It would be absurd at this time to assume that Miss Graham, as a creator, is concerned with the expression of personal vagaries, that her thinking is haphazard, wilful, uncharted. Tracing the course of Miss Graham's dances would be charting an *Odyssey*. At times she drew close to a welcoming realistic shore, then the tenuous siren songs of mysticism, abstraction, purism, drew her out of her path into strange, unfrequented waters. We assume that this pilgrimage is ended, that she has dropped anchor in the rich harbor of social realism. What are her dances, then, of social content?

**I**N 1929, the year of the stock crash, of the collapse of bourgeois security, the following dances comprised, among others, Miss Graham's program: *Vision of the Apocalypse*, in which a figure views the suffering and miseries of an enslaved humanity; *Sketches of the People*, which, according to a reviewer at that time, proclaimed "social revolution"; *Immigrant*, composed of *Steerage* and *Strike*; *Heretic*; *Poems of 1917* in two parts; *Song behind the Lines*; *Dance of Death*, the latter anti-war dances. These were presented at a time when most performers were doing isolated sketches on a variety of unrelated, superficial topics.

There was, in the years following, a definite tangent shot away from this realistic direction. The works of Martha Graham became mystic, Mexican, Hellenic, Medieval (*Ave, Salve, Cere-*





**The Graham Concert Group**

*Vandamm*

monials, *Tragic Patterns*, *Ekstasis*, *Dithyrambic*, *Bacchanale*, *Integrales*). Then, last year, came *Frenetic Rhythms* and *Theatre Pieces*. In the third *Frenetic Rhythm*, and in *Sarabande*, from *Theatre Pieces*, a fissure was growing, separating these period-cycles from a new approach to contemporary material.

We find her today on a border line which she has not yet had the determination to cross. Her programs show the result of this indecision; some of the dances have social correlatives, others remain unalterably abstract. Her recent works have been the dynamic *Celebration*, a group dance for which the subtitle suggested by Miss Graham was "May Day"; *American Provincials*, composed of *Act of Piety* and *Act of Judgment*, using the New England locale for an exposé of Puritan hypocrisy; *Course*, a thrilling extended opus, with the group chorus interspersed with trios and duets each have its purposeful symbolism, *Perspective* in two parts, *Frontier* and *Marching Song*, *Three Casual Developments*, and *Study in Four Parts*.

Martha Graham, in conversation, grants specific social content to the interested interpreter of her dances. The two Figures in Red in *Course*, for instance, danced by Lily Mehlman and Anna Sokolow, were definitely symbols of Communism. Miss Graham sincerely believes herself a revolutionary artist, a believer in a new social order based on the strength and convictions of the working class. As a creative artist, however, she feels she must remain isolated from the roaring current of the revolutionary movement. This artificial separation leads to great differences between her subjective sympathy with the working class, and her actual presentation of that sympathy in dance form.

The dance *Strike*, composed in 1929, was the second of a suite called *Immigrant*, which entertained the erroneous intimation that foreigners, "immigrants," fomented strikes.

Today that dance would be inimical to the best interests of militant American workers. In dances like *Heretic*, *American Provincials*, the solo figure is the rebel, the mass reactionary; the mass, unsympathetically conceived as brutal and unyielding, condemns or destroys the revolting individual. This concept, a romantic acceptance of the ignorance of the mass opposed to the prophetic Byronic "artist," is unsound. Dances like *Dance in Four Parts*, *Three Casual Developments*, lingering on the current programs of Miss Graham, remain technical *tours de force*, with a minimum of rational communicability to the audience. Involved at first in the need for developing a form, she has remained too inextricably bound up with that concentration to work unhampered and clearly with material. The worker is mystified, irked by non-comprehension.

Although *Perspective* is an unfinished work, if it continues as an historic survey of America, it must avoid the dangerous shoals of nationalism. John Strachey in his discussion of Archibald Macleish, written before the appearance of *Panic*, says: ". . . I would be the last man to object to the expression in poetry or anywhere else of a man's natural love of his own country. We must, and should, all of us, have deep roots in that particular part of the earth upon which we were born. . . . Love of country, however, is not incompatible with love of the future instead of love of the past." This concern with the past is clearly apparent in *American Provincials* and *Perspective*.

MISS GRAHAM still makes her affirmation of the future in such abstract terms that the average audience must create, out of good faith in the artist, the ideational background for this future. If she will make of her dance, as she describes it, "a social document," Martha Graham must decide for whom, for which society she speaks. Is it for a nation? Is it for a class of people? If so, when will she reach out to that class of people and dance for them? Whatever confusions exist in the work of Martha Graham, this much is true: her technic has elements which make it ideal for depiction of militant evaluations of society, her dances more and more approach realistic social documentation, and her verbal sympathies are avowedly one with the revolutionary dance. Will she openly assume leadership in the vanguard of revolutionary art, or will she be the last stronghold of a departing social order, and let her disciples champion new causes? This she must decide for herself.

There are millions of workers over the country who will support her, as they have supported all artists allied with them. But she must clarify not only her stand, but her approach; only by dancing for this audience can she learn which of her creations speak for them. That process in itself is probably the greatest educative and critical

process any artist can undergo. Perhaps the coming year will bring Martha Graham to her potential audience. One cannot dance forever in two worlds!

## Correspondence

TO NEW THEATRE:

I would like to call to your attention an editorial by Miss Ruth Eleanor Howard published in the June issue of the *American Dancer* magazine entitled "The Need for Self Respect." She begins by stating:

"There is a tendency on the part of a few dancing teachers in each community to flaunt their poverty in the face of all the world—to boast of it and even to wallow in it! These teachers, in their lack of self-respect, attempt to have the entire profession branded as improvident and unsuccessful."

It seems that self-respect in Miss Howard's terms is secure to the dancing teacher who, rather than have the world know of the poverty which she may be suffering due to no fault of her own, will shut herself away in her studio to starve quietly and peacefully and "respectably."

Miss Howard seems to go into a state of hysterical frenzy at the faint suggestion that the dance profession may suffer as have all the other professions in these times of stress, though many dancers have been forced into the position of being "objects of charity," which Miss Howard so condemns, on the nation's relief rolls.

I am interested in the optimistic statement that "dancing teachers have an average income of \$84.73 per week and that 78% of them spend their summers in pleasant travel," but observation over a period of years does not lead me to believe it. Miss Howard would have us believe that dance teachers whose income do not reach this percentage are a peculiar species of "improvident creative artists" who love to wallow in filthy unventilated studios and delight in "starving for their art." Despite Miss Howard's speculation on the lives of creative artists, most dance teachers and dancers realize that we have a common tie in the struggle for existence and for the advancement of the profession as a whole.

This is the function of the Dancers' Union which came into existence to meet just these urgent economic needs of dance teachers and dancers. The Union has been such in the true sense of the word—struggling for project jobs for the unemployed dancers in all categories, protecting the interests of the employed; as for instance in organizing the fight against the Sullivan licensing bill. It is through active participation in an organization of this kind that members of the dance profession will be able to fight the evils of unemployment and to prevent further lowering of the standards of living.

Sincerely,

Nancy Ingraham, N. Y. C.

TO NEW THEATRE:

The Dancers Union found it necessary to take up in a decisive way the economic problems of dancers and dance groups. The Union pressed the expansion of the CWA projects, it endorsed and supported HR2827, a genuine unemployment insurance bill. It established a committee to mobilize the existing demand for dance instruction in the community and settlement houses. An indication of the strength of the Union was its prompt and successful action in defeating the Sullivan Bill, a licensing measure which would have had serious effects on the development of the dance. We cannot resist comparing the action of the Dancers Union with that of Chorus Equity. Equity has done nothing for its unemployed membership since 1919. This situation should not be allowed to continue. The concert and theatrical dancer both have economic problems. How long must we wait for a united dance front which can depend on one union to solve its problems?

CHORUS EQUITY MEMBER, N. Y. C.



Martha Graham



**Martha Graham**

# Boycott Hearst Films

By LOUIS NORDEN

FROM his hundred-thousand acre estate at San Simeon, California, William Randolph Hearst dispatches hourly telegrams to all parts of his vast feudal domain. And, in the last few months, those telegrams have become so violent in their effects upon the working masses of America that it becomes desperately important that more words be added to the many already written, this time to tell of a new phase of Mr. Hearst's lordly activities—his control of the motion pictures.

Hearst realizes what is happening throughout the world. He sees the growth of the dread menace of militant action by American workers. And, during the past few years, he has also seen the growth of two new media for the dissemination of propaganda to stop this growing militancy. The first of these, the motion pictures, has already shown its effectiveness during the First World War when it was in its infancy. The other, the radio, had not been born at that time. Into these two fields of "entertainment," Hearst has just purchased his way, and the odor of his subversive propaganda is already beginning to flood America.

His radio chain already comprises six stations in carefully selected locations. They are WINS in New York, WSIN in Milwaukee, WBAL in Baltimore, WCAE in Pittsburgh, KYA in San Francisco and KELM in Los Angeles. Hearst is also purchasing time on WOR in New York and on a dozen other stations as well.

Hearst's interest in motion pictures is not new. He has been producing under the name of Cosmopolitan Productions for years, releasing through Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, to satisfy the demands of Marion Davies. Hearst's Metrotone Newsreel is also released by that company through the Loew's chain of theatres which control it.

If you believe the recent rumor that Hearst broke away from Metro because Marion Davies wanted to play the lead in *The Barretts of Wimpole Street*, a role which Norma Shearer also wanted—and got because she was the wife of Metro's production chief, Irving Thalberg, you're a great deal more gullible than I believe you to be.

The break between Hearst and Metro undoubtedly came when the chiefs of that company objected to their colleague's blatant propaganda methods in the films. This corporation, a great deal more subtle than the raucous Willie, was forced, however, to keep Hearst's name on the Metrotone Newsreel because of a contract, because they had just spent thousands of dollars advertising the Hearst tie-up on their new product schedule, and it was too late and too costly to change.

No longer because of Marion Davies, but because Hearst himself realizes that

the motion pictures are the most important propaganda medium of modern times, he began scouting around for another company. Fox was in the hands of Chase National; Radio Pictures was owned by Rockefeller; Paramount was the object of a three-cornered fight between Kuhn, Loeb & Company, Lazard Freres, and the Atlas Investment Trust backed by the Fortington group of London. Hearst picked on Warner Brothers, who have been losing more money, year after year, than all of the other majors put together. He was their saviour; they were easy pickings for him.

Another telegram hit all of the city desks in the Hearst chain of newspapers. "Give Warners 65% of all motion picture publicity space," it said in substance, "all other companies 35%." The other companies are raising hell, and not getting any place. Warners get three times the blurb space of their nearest competitor; their salesmen boast of the Hearst tie-up to exhibitors, and the other companies are demanding action from their publicity counsels. Metro, Radio, Fox, Paramount, United Artists and Columbia will probably spend fortunes in extra advertising in all Hearst publications to get back some of their precious publicity space.

THIS deal with Warners is only months old. When the papers were signed, Marion Davies' bungalow was moved from the Metro lot to the Warner Brothers studio. Its decorative scheme necessitated the redecoration of all other bungalows on the Warner lot.

The first picture from the combination was *Devil Dogs of the Air*, already in production when Cosmopolitan arrived at the Warner Brothers' studio, but Hearst took over its completion. Then came *Flirtation Walk* with Dick Powell, another screen recruiting poster; *Dinky*, with Jackie Cooper, which tried to build up the flag-waving spirit in the young; the viciously anti-labor *Black Fury*; *G-Men*, and this month, two more specials hit the screen, *Oil for the Lamps of China* with Pat O'Brien and Josephine Hutchinson and *Stranded* with Kay Francis and George Brent.

I had fully expected *Oil for the Lamps of China* to be a gross distortion of the novel. Just prior to its release, two Hollywood trade papers had carried stories revealing Hearst's insistence that Warner Brothers add scenes to take the sting out of the story's condemnation of American corporation methods. But who might have suspected that the title *Stranded* concealed the most violent anti-labor picture of the year, one that makes *Black Fury* sympathetic by comparison. Again stressing Hearst's contention that all labor troubles are caused by "outside agitators," *Stranded* further recommends that workers use violence against their militant fellows.

The boss, in the picture, very clearly enunciates what amounts to Hearst's wish-fulfillment, when appearing at a strike meeting, collaring the militants.

"I will not turn them over to the police," he says. "I turn them over to you as a reception committee. You know what to do with them."

And, like a herd of wild animals, the workers rush forward to beat hell out of the trouble-makers. If this isn't inciting to riot, I don't know what is. To come back for the moment to *Oil for the Lamps of China*, the first picture on our list. The book dealt with a young man's disillusionment with the great oil corporation for which he worked, showed him finally beaten, thrown out of his job after years of loyal slavery. The picture twists this story until we get a happy ending, the corporation fulfilling its promise to "take care of its own," giving Stephen Crane the big job to which his work has entitled him. Hearst had it changed to prove that corporations are human after all, that profits are subordinate to "dispelling the darkness of centuries with the light of a new era," that any man who gives his boss a full day's work will never want for a job.

The picture portrays the Chinese people as jabbering idiots, comedy foils for the superior white race, shows the Communists ruthlessly shooting down gentle, old Chinese. It falls to pieces finally in its efforts to find a happy ending for a story that might have been one of the most important of the year.

*Stranded* is more evidence of Mr. Hearst's betrayal of everything American. It tells the story of Lynn Palmer (Kay Francis), a "social worker" with the Traveler's Aid Society who has no conception of the economic factors that created the problems of those she helps with her "sweetness and light" treatment. In love with her is Mack Hale (George Brent), boss of construction on the Golden Gate bridge. To Hale, the unemployed are bums, misfits, flawed human material which should be discarded.

The picture shows how racketeers plant these "outside agitators" on the job in order to foment trouble among the men, thus forcing the boss to pay them monthly protection money. The thugs get the workers drunk; then fired by Hale, their grievances are nursed by the sympathetic "agitators" who seize the opportunity to issue a strike call. The racketeer, Sharkey, is shown at immigration headquarters paying the bonds for several wicked-looking aliens. Hale, a good American, sees the danger in these aliens, but Lynn, only a woman, doesn't know that aliens are agitators, believes that Sharkey is being a friend to some of his countrymen.

When Hale sees an old employee of his in a bread-line, he upbraids him for falling to such depths. After giving him money and a job, he says:

"What are you, a steel man, doing with these no-good cast-offs? If I ever see you hanging around with these bums again, I'll thrash you within an inch of your life."



When the men walk out on Hale, their wives come to Lynn Palmer, begging her to appeal to Hale to stop the strike. Afraid of the terrors of strike starvation, she begs for aid, briefly reviews, for middle class audiences, what Mr. Hearst hopes will prove a deterrent.

The walk-out meeting is an amazing conglomeration of lies. The agitators have been planted in the hall to get the men drunk so that they will vote to strike. The women are outside the hall praying that their husbands will not "walk out on Hale." Brave little Lynn Palmer, bless her Hearstian soul, bravely pushes her way through the brawling, drunken workers, mounts the rostrum, delivers a speech in which she tries to tell the "truth." The workers are ready to tear her limb from limb when Hale appears, trussed-up Sharkey in tow, and gives the workers the evidence against the "agitators." Then Hale urges the workers to take the matter into their own hands, and the workers proceed with the righteous American thumping which Mr. Hearst is so anxious that his workers give to all of their militant leaders.

Hale and Lynn Palmer leave the hall, pass between the ranks of thankful workers' wives and see a police patrol dash up to the curb loaded with cops whose only job will doubtless be to see that the workers don't mete out too drastic a punishment.

**P**ICTURE after picture, released through Warner Brothers-First National, each playing a new and more vicious role in building up the Nazi national philosophy which Hearst is attempting to force down the throats of American workers under the guise of Americanism! Picture after picture building up propaganda for a new imperialist war . . . libelous indictments of the laboring class to stop the wave of strike action that is our class' only economic and political protection. Picture after picture to split our ranks, traducing the aliens who have given their lives to build America, slandering the Jews, libeling the Negroes.

This must be stopped. Hearst's Metrotone News, distributor of subversive propaganda under the guise of fact, has already been withdrawn from Loew's theatres in several places in America through militant working-class action. In Amherst and Williams Colleges, students have forced its withdrawal from the screen. Action has been started at Princeton and elsewhere.

The month of July is the most effective month of the year in which to start an action to ban and boycott Warner Brothers' pictures. It is the month when the contracts between exhibitors and producers expire, when new contracts are signed. All workers, through factory and mass organizations, can hit Warners and Hearst by immediately pe-

tioning managers of local theatres to withdraw the Warner Brothers product, to refuse to renew their contracts. Every theatre showing one of their pictures should be continuously picketed. Leaflets should be distributed everywhere to build mass action.

Hearst, today, is the representative of the workers' enemies. He has taken upon himself, through newspapers, magazines, radio and motion pictures, the task of the fascisization of America. He can be stopped from achieving his ends by the very militant action which he most fears. Boycott Hearst and Warner Brothers now—before it is too late.

# 4

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# "The Young Go First"

WHEN the curtain came down on *The Young Go First*, the first full-length production of the Theatre of Action, everyone who had followed this group throughout its early Workers Laboratory Theatre days realized that something like a miracle had happened. In less than four months time this pioneering "agit-prop" group with its highly stylized method of acting had been transformed into a skilled professional company, worthy of taking its place beside the Group Theatre and the Theatre Union in the vanguard of the American theatre movement.

*The Young Go First* tells the story of a bunch of "typical" fun-and-trouble loving New York City boys who are forced to join the C.C.C. camps because they are unemployed and their parents are on relief. How they are stripped of their illusions about President Roosevelt's camps for "building men" and how they finally revolt against their officers in protest against unendurable living and working conditions, makes a colorful though episodic play. *The Young Go First* is a hard-hitting, straightforward exposé based on the actual experiences of George Scudder, a C.C.C. "graduate" who wrote the play together with Peter Martin and Charles Friedman of the Theatre of Action. The authors take us on a "muck-raking" expedition to a typical C.C.C. camp. They prove convincingly, in terms of human character, lively dialogue and exciting and often humorous situations that the food is bad, the working conditions exhausting and dangerous, and the officers completely indifferent to the needs of young boys for some sort of entertainment outside of drilling after hours in the "camp guard." The quality of the writing in *The Young Go First* sets a new high for plays written collectively by beginning playwrights in new theatre groups. It is fresh, vigorous, original and succeeds in capturing both the speech and the spirit of the boys, and without caricaturing them, the manners and attitudes of their superiors. But the play is weakened both structurally and politically by the failure of the playwrights to stick to their main theme, *the need for struggle against the whole militaristic set up behind these C.C.C. camps that now have 600,000 men and boys all neatly listed and conveniently situated for overnight mobilization in event of the outbreak of war!*\*

\* If any NEW THEATRE reader is still naive enough to doubt the military nature of the C. C. C. let him consider the boast of General MacArthur that, in the ninety days after the C. C. C. was authorized, the army enrolled 270,000 boys and transported 55,000 of them to camps throughout the country, while, in the ninety days after the U.S. declared war on Germany in 1917 only 181,000 men were mobilized and only 16,000 transported to France.

In their eagerness to convince their potential audiences that these C.C.C. boys are "typical Americans," the playwrights handicapped themselves by creating a whole barracks full of boys whose complete ignorance in this the sixth year of the crisis is both unrealistic and incredible. Granting that there are many boys who are familiar with Dizzy Dean's or James J. Braddock's latest exploits, but know little of economics or political matters, is it reasonable to ask an audience to believe that not one of a group of New York City boys would have any idea of what it's all about? Most of these boys have seen huge relief protests, unemployment marches and May Day demonstrations. Many of them have met courageous and argumentative young Socialists, Communists and Student Leaguers, and all of them must have seen at least one demonstration against the wars in which "the young go first." The authors of this play live with the militant, class-conscious young worker-actors who make up the Theatre of Action. It seems ironical that they did not include at least one youth of the type they associate with every day. Such a character might have been used to hold the play to its main theme. In order to get their message across more "subtly" than by the speech and action of such a character, the playwrights introduced the Stedmans, a neighboring family, and used them as a peg on which to hang their militant arguments which could not be put into the mouths of their "typical" boys. Unfortunately, though the Stedmans were brought into the play to strengthen it, they diffused the plot because they were not bound into it dramatically. Because of this unclear structure, the play's anti-war lesson was blunted, and it took on a "reformist" character. At first it was not clear whether the actors thought the C.C.C. camps would be all right if the boys succeeded in getting the officials to improve the food and working conditions and to provide them with satisfactory recreation. By careful rewriting, in the third week of the run, the anti-war line of *The Young Go First* was brought out more clearly, though the looseness of the play's structure still prevailed.

What the script lacked was unity of conception of the quality attained by the directors and by the masterful settings designed by Mordecai Gorelik.

Under the sure and imaginative direction of Alfred Saxe and Elia Kazan, within Gorelik's dramatic and suggestive settings, the young Theatre of Action actors gave performances so stirring and real that it would be unfair, in a cast in which every individual did his job so well, to single out a few actors for special mention. They played this

"comedy" of the C.C.C. for all each rich part was worth. The ensemble acting, except for the confusing simultaneous action of the opening scene when the boys first enter the C.C.C. camp, was always in tone with the development of the play and reached its height in effectiveness in the unforgettable "huddle" (football signal-calling style) with which the rebellious boys confronted the officers who were seeking to discover and oust their leaders. The feeling of solidarity achieved graphically by this "huddle" was maintained to the very end when the boys, who were being separated because of their rebellion and sent off to different camps, vowed to carry to others the lessons of unity and struggle they had finally learned. No one who has seen *The Young Go First* can ever forget such a powerful symbol of working class solidarity as this "huddle." Even Burns Mantle wrote a column wondering what the American people would think about and do if they should get together in such huddles everywhere. The answer to the militarists should be obvious as we struggle to keep our young from their wars.

—HERBERT KLINE

## NATIONAL THEATRE WEEK

ELEVEN new theatre groups participated in this year's National Theatre Week. Though progress was noticeable in many groups, there were no productions with the freshness, impact and integrity of last year's prize winning *Newsboy*. First prize was shared between the New Theatre Players' *One of the Bravest* by E. V. Abeles and the Dance Players' *Protest*. *One of the Bravest*, a dramatization of the same material used by Odets in *Till the Day I Die*, introduced a talented playwright in Abeles and the production showed a remarkable advance over previous work by the New Theatre Players. The Dance Players' *Protest*, which made effective use of dance movements, pantomime, dialogue and sound accompaniment, proved the most exciting and creative of all entries.

Second place went to *So Leben Mir*, the German Neue Theatre Gruppe's fine the maximum time limit of the com-review, which did not show up well in the abbreviated version made to fit into petitions. An effective and entertaining musical satire on their officials and meetings, by the I. W. O. Youth Branch proved very enjoyable to the audience.

Since full treatment of the competitions will appear in NEW THEATRE in August, because of space limitations in this special Negro issue, critical discussion of the contributions of all the groups must wait until then.

The general level of the performances was disappointing, and revealed the need of most of the competing groups for professional artistic aid and guidance that must be supplied from the more advanced groups.

# "Bring 'em In On Stretchers!"

"AREN'T you interested in cultural activity in Newark, Mayor Ellenstein?"

Members of the Newark Collective Theatre were demanding to know why a permit to use the town Art School granted them in April was being revoked late in May, just before the performance date. The program: *Waiting for Lefty*, *Laid Off*, and the trial scene from *They Shall Not Die*. The Mayor had an answer for that one.

"Sure I'm interested in culture. I'll show you how interested in culture I am." He produced his card of membership in the New York Theatre Guild.

"Your Honor . . ." one of the actors explained gently, "The Theatre Guild produced *They Shall Not Die* . . ."

"I don't believe it," said His Honor, conclusively. "Red" Harris, Newark's one-man Red Squad, filled the awkward pause by slipping his chief a confidential document. The Mayor heartened, took the offensive, "You've got Communists in your organization," he said heavily.

"Two per cent," the group answered, also explaining that the Communist party is a legal one, that membership in it has yet to prevent a person from being an actor, that the actors were of varying political beliefs, that it so happened that 80% of the members of the theatre were born in Newark and the remainder are all citizens of the state, and that a good number of Newark citizens had already expressed their desire to see the plays in question by buying tickets for them.

Jersey justice ran its course. The Mayor ruled that "in times like these we cannot have plays that incite." (He had previously sanctioned the city council's grant of \$1000. to promote a "Sangerfest" led by recognized Nazi elements.) The Collective, denied the use of a municipal building, rented a private hall and advertised "BANNED PLAYS!" (A procedure which all censored theatres could follow with profit.) Ticket sales mounted. Four hours before performance time the police, who are also up on their tactics, condemned the second hall "because the seats were not fastened to the floor." The actors promptly rented Ukrainian Hall and posted watchers in front of the first theatre to direct the audience to the new location. Four hundred people assembled in the Ukrainian Hall to see the plays, while the police, arriving with clubs, revolvers and gas bombs, kept others outside and set about protecting the citizens from these plays about the taxi strike, factory speed-up and the Scottsboro frame-up. They began by turning off every light in the house and nearly precipitated a panic in the audience. The actors calmed the audience, offered to refund admission money to

anyone who wanted to leave, and to read the play in the dark to those who wanted to hear it. The audience clamoured to hear the play. The police cleared the house. They roughed up and jostled many members of the audience into a new attitude toward their paid "protectors," and arrested two of them along with six members of the cast and an invited speaker who had had no chance to speak. Three hundred outraged members of the audience hurried to the police station to protest the violation of their constitutional rights. For satisfaction they heard the Deputy Police Commissioner suggest to his henchmen that they "Bring 'em in on stretchers next time."

The nine were held thirty-six hours without privilege of release on bail—a procedure customary only with murder suspects.

The National Committee against Censorship in the Theatre Arts and the New Theatre League helped the Collective to channel the protest which arose spontaneously. News of the case was mailed to theatres all over the United States and the police and city officials of Newark received telegrams and petitions of protest from theatre groups, critics, liberals, church leaders, among them Stark Young, Brooks Atkinson, Robert Garland, Herman Shumlin, Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, Joseph Wood Krutch. A protest meeting in the Universalist Church drew a crowd of citizens and the following list of speakers: Rabbi Newman, Clifford Odets, Richard B. Moore of the I. L. D., Attorney Isserman who handles Civil Liberties Union cases, John W. Gassner of the Theatre Guild, Joe Gilbert, fiery leader of the Taxi-Drivers Union of New York, representatives of the Communist Party, National Youth Congress, Essex County Central Labor Council, and other mass organizations.

The Newark authorities have backed down. The Collective is free to use the Art School or any other house in town. The audience is free to see the plays it wants to see. The trial of the nine charged with "running a play without a permit" has been postponed; bail money has been refunded and the arrested nine have been released on their own cognizance. When the trial comes up it will really be a trial of the police department to determine if they have the authority to issue and deny permits in this fashion and to terrorize audiences who prefer plays of social protest to Hollywood drivel.

MEANWHILE in Hollywood you can't tear a picture of Hitler from the wall even if the stage directions call for it—that is you can't if the Friends of New Germany can help it. Will Ghere, member of Actors Equity,

director of the Hollywood Group Theatre executed this business in Odets' *Till the Day I Die*. He was threatened and finally kidnapped from in front of the theatre, taken to the lonely hills back of Hollywood, and beaten so badly that he had to be taken to the Hollywood Receiving Hospital. A nationwide protest followed the press story of this attack, which reminded Americans sharply that vigilantes are prepared to kidnap and torture here as their prototypes did in Germany. The Author's League, the Actors Forum, the Baltimore Little Theatre, the Group Theatre of New York joined the demand that California authorities investigate and take action against Ghere's abductors. The San Francisco authorities have let a year go by without taking action in the case of Peter Maccharini of the Blue Blouse Theatre whose skull was fractured by vigilantes. It is up to every citizen to see that the Hollywood "public servants" do not get away with the same kind of behaviour.

Gangsters and police, with the tacit approval of civic authorities, continue to lay violent hands on the new theatres of social protest, but the struggle against censorship has spread from one coast to the other. The question no longer has to do with "morality" or "blasphemy." Censorship has become a weapon against the statement of economic and political truths. Every honest theatre person and supporter of good drama is becoming involved in the fight. Success has been won in Newark, Philadelphia, Cleveland, Chelsea, New Haven, and Bridgeport, Conn. The Hollywood case remains to be fought and one outstanding defeat remains in the Boston situation where the theatre-owners have been so intimidated that they will not rent a house to the *Lefty* company.

Genuine free speech can be maintained only by eternal vigilance and determined struggle. There is a tactic for success in this fight and it must be learned. To meet the demand an attractive pamphlet entitled *Censored!* has just been issued. Every reader of *New Theatre*, every friend of the drama must see that it is widely distributed. It may be ordered singly or in quantities from the Committee Against Censorship, 114 West 14th St., N. Y. C. Help win the fight for a free stage!

—MARK MARVIN

## CENSORED

An illustrated pamphlet by Richard Pack and Mark Marvin on the recent wave of censorship in the theatre, film and radio.

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MEN and women from the silk mills of Paterson were an enthusiastic audience for a program presented by the New Jersey Section of the New Theatre League, sponsored by the American Federation of Silk Workers on June 15th. Four plays dealing with trade union problems, and the fight against war, were presented by the Newark Collective Theatre, the Paterson New Art Group, and the Bayonne Theatre Against War and Fascism. The high points of the evening were reached with *Union Label*, a play about the struggle for unionization in a sweat shop, and *Waiting for Lefty*.

This program marks the establishment of a New Jersey section of the New Theatre League, whose five member groups held a Conference in Paterson the following day, with a number of trade union representatives also present. At the evening session, J. Edward Bromberg of the Group Theatre spoke to the Conference on Problems of Artistic Development, and in the course of discussion after this talk, members of the American Federation of Silk Workers announced their determination to build a theatre group within their own union. Thus through the meeting of trade unionists and theatre workers, a synthesis was reached which will begin the development of New Theatre groups within the locals of the American Federation of Labor.

## A NEGRO COMMUNITY THEATRE

(Continued on page 13)

On the afternoon of the opening date, Police Inspector Costello walked upon the stage of the Karamu Theatre and announced that if the Gilpin Players gave the play we would be arrested. "Lewd, blasphemous, and obscene language" was the reason he gave for his proposed action. When Prosecutor Picciano, in a hearing which followed, decided that the play violated no ordinance and was not "pornographic," Harry Smith, editor of the local Negro newspaper took up the cry. Without having read or seen the play, he objected to the use of the word "nigger" and aroused a number of the Negro Baptist ministry in protest. They preached against the "vile and vicious play" from their pulpits. Then the police, on order of the Mayor, ordered the deletion of words they found objectionable. We refused to delete anything and issued a statement saying that "deletions suggested by the Police Department would destroy the power, purposes and intent of the play in honestly portraying the roots out of which race friction and lynching grow." Immediately the Fire Warden arrived and condemned the Karamu Theatre which had been passed on as satisfactory for nine years. We secured an injunction on the basis of Prosecutor Picciano's ruling and went ahead for a sell-out run of fourteen days.

# Two Prize Play Contests

Offering \$300 To The Prize Winning Playwrights

A \$50 prize for the best play on Angelo Herndon, working-class hero, and a \$50 prize for the best other play dealing with Negro life, are the inducements offered American dramatists by the second Play Contest conducted by the New Theatre League in conjunction with the National Committee for the Defense of Political Prisoners. The internationally famous incident of Herndon leading a protest demonstration of Negro and white workers for increased relief funds is to be the central theme, or the dramatic climax of the first prize-winning play. The use of this incident need not, of course, be absolutely literal. But the general material of Herndon's actions, and their enormous significance—both in the neutralization of artificial race antagonisms and as the sheer drama of our time—should be the heart of the play. Any aspect of Negro life and the struggle for Negro liberation in its many different forms, may be treated in the second play. The main requirement here is for authentic social treatment of the rich dramatic material inherent in the problems of the Negro people.

The contest opens July 1st and will close October 1st. It is sponsored by Opportunity Magazine and the Negro Liberator. Judges of the contest will be Angelo Herndon, Elmer Carter, editor of Opportunity Magazine, John Wexley, author of *They Shall Not Die*, Philip Barber, of the Repertory Department of the New Theatre League, and Alfred Hirsch of the National Committee for the Defense of Political Prisoners. The winning plays will be published in New Theatre, and performed early in November by New Theatre groups, under the joint auspices of New Theatre League and the National Committee for the Defense of Political Prisoners. At approximately this time the Supreme Court will decide whether or not it will re-hear the case of Angelo Herndon. Material on the case of Angelo Herndon, and similar examples of discrimination against Negroes, can be obtained from the National Committee for the Defense of Political Prisoners.

Rules for this contest (printed below) are the same as rules for the Anti-War and Anti-Fascist Play Contest announced in last month's New Theatre, for which \$200 in prizes is offered. Judges for this contest, sponsored by the New Theatre League and the American League Against War and Fascism are John W. Gassner of the Theatre Guild, Liston Oak, editor of *Fight*, Herbert Kline, editor of *New Theatre*, Paul Sifton, co-author of *1931* and *The Belt*, and Paul Peters, co-author of *Stevedore*. Prizes of \$125, \$50, and \$25 are offered for plays dealing with all aspects of the struggle against war and fascism. The winning plays will be announced in the November issue of *Fight* and *New Theatre*, as this contest also closes on October 1st, 1935. In response to the desperate need for plays on the part of hundreds of amateur and professional theatres throughout the country, many of them affiliated with the New Theatre League, these two Prize Contests are being held over the same period of time. Together it is hoped they will bring forward several one-act plays of the high standard set by *Waiting for Lefty*, winner of the first play contest sponsored by the New Theatre in conjunction with the New Masses.

**RULES:** Plays are to be thirty minutes to one hour in length, with any scene arrangement and any theatrical form acceptable (no full length plays will be considered). *The author's name and address are not to be on the manuscript*, but should be enclosed, accompanied by return postage, in a sealed envelope with the name of the play on the outside. All plays should be sent to the Repertory Department, New Theatre League, 114 West 14th Street, New York City. Manuscripts will be registered, and those rejected will be returned with careful criticism. A playwright may submit any number of scripts. The New Theatre League reserves all rights, including publication and performance of prize-winning plays and 50% of all royalty returns. We also reserve the right not to award prizes if the judges decide that the material submitted is not up to the necessary standards.

Three of the local Negro newspapers supported *Stevedore* throughout the controversy, and we feel that the whole affair has brought us great prestige among the Negro community and the community at large. It made a great many people clear up their thinking and take sides. The great majority lined up with *Stevedore*.

The Gilpin Players will continue to present the most significant plays available. We are not afraid of making mistakes, but we will not toy with our theatre. We know that the art of the theatre is that which is between actors,

not incorporated in the actor himself. It is too, the same thing projected to include the audience. And increasingly, we see our theatre as a means to further the cause of the oppressed Negro people.

### KENNETH FEARING'S POEMS

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# The Dance Festival

THE audience at amateur dance competitions need not have an arcane interest in dance-forms, and need not come away haunted by ranks of over-developed muscles in frantic attitudes. The audience at the afternoon program of the Dance Festival was pleased all the way through—sometimes by art, and sometimes by earnestness, to be sure, but genuinely stimulated. The variety of the groups, who had themselves determined on which program they would appear, included the range from the children of the Junior Red Dancers, appealing and unstudied, to the imaginative mass work and montage technique of Bill Matons' Experimental Group. The Nature Friends, fairly elementary but desperately earnest, and Blanche Evans' Group, which won the afternoon competition with its *Unite Against War and Fascism* set the anti-war, anti-fascist tone which supplied the basic program for these groups. The State Unit of Dance, Music and Drama presented a double picture in black and lavender, contrasting the mock mourning of *Funeral Dance* with the mood of grief of *Lamentation*, a contrast which was not quite evident enough, since neither mood was resolved, but which held some broad burlesque. The most ambitious work was that of Bill Matons' Experimental Group, which derives a great many of its ideas from Kreutzberg and Jooss, but has the largest scope, the most creative imagination, and the highest technical development of any group appearing on the program. Its weakness, and its most important flaw, is the lack of clarity and definition—in *Lynch*, the group work was excellent, but the central figure was never defined and the conflict was never brought into the open; in *Ivory Tower*, the bourgeois conception of the artist as a "queerie" and with a sub-human attitude towards society was danced; in *Dance of Death*, an impressive and startling anti-war dance, the brilliant symbols, the advance of the troops head-on toward the audience (as on the screen), the aimless attacks and drills and savagery, a great deal was lost because of vagueness. The lieutenants were at home with their women, we were told, the soldiers would turn on the officers, roaring to finish war and stupidity—but none of this turning was motivated or developed. In this group we have all the material—fine dancers, including José Limon, vivid pictures conceived, excellent detail but very little clarity of point of view and purpose.

In the evening performance Tamiris and her Group repeated two solos and three group dances from programs earlier in the season. Here, again, the grace and finish of Tamiris' conception is apparent. Her group, in *Individual and the Mass*, is a foil to her Here, and in the solos, *Flight* and *Escape*, she dances the individual as a repudiating force, while the group dances the coming of unity, order, and revolution. The individual, alone in affirmation, is relatively unimportant, while the group in affirmation is historic. The individual, alone in denial or flight or escape, is dramatic, and the mood created is sharp on the stage. If Tamiris had taken the easier way and danced a beautiful but vague mood of conviction, she might have escaped many of the problems that she faces, but she would have sacrificed the integrity and art that she now has.

THE Dance Unit illustrated such group unity in the most important event of the evening, the first performance of *Strank American Funeral*, danced to Michael Gold's poem and Elie Siegmeister's music. The solid steel block of dancers, locked at the elbows, coming heavily downstage, fixed the meaning of the dance. Breaking and shifting to dance the steel-puddler, Jan Clepak, who is buried in his trough, and resolving again to steel, breaking

to dance spring in Pennsylvania and the resolution made at Clepak's grave, and becoming steel again, they contributed an effective and popular success.

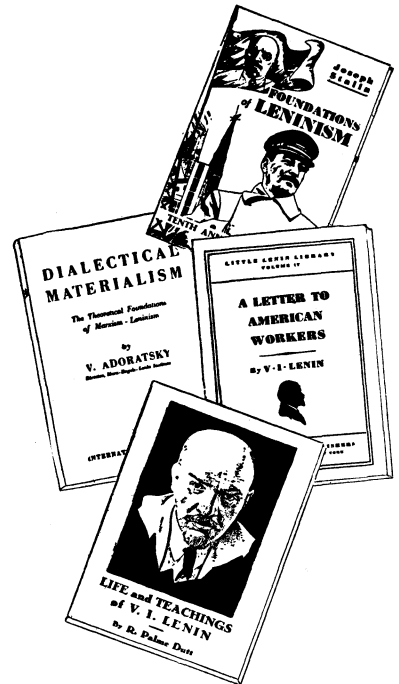
The repetition of *Unite against War and Fascism* as the prize-winner followed. The group, again, was handled effectively, and the development was clear and strong, but the impersonal grotesque that was the War-symbol introduced an element of untruth and stylization that was a false note in the dance. Ruth Allerhand's Group presented *Strike*, whose third movement, by far the best, was finely organized. The New Dance Group was excellently received with its satire, *Ah Peace*, whose sick White Lady was abandoned by the red-white-and-blues for a tank mouldy with swastikas. Their *We Remember*, like *Strike* found by far its highest moments in the third movement of unity and resolution, which can come through in dances more strongly, perhaps, and with a greater sense of relief, than in any other group art. Charles Weidman, José Limon, and Bill Matons danced *Traditions*, a complete cycle of change in which the new active conceptions become as deeply rooted as the older and more polite customs—as good an argument as any for Jefferson's proposed revolution every twenty years. Charles Weidman's Group also presented *Studies in Conflict*, a tremendously strenuous, melodramatic production, thoroughly masculine and terrific in its vigor.

From the freshness of the amateur performance and the development of idea and mood of the evening, the large Festival audience could sum up the scene of the dance movement, and judge for itself what a brilliant growth it is witnessing.

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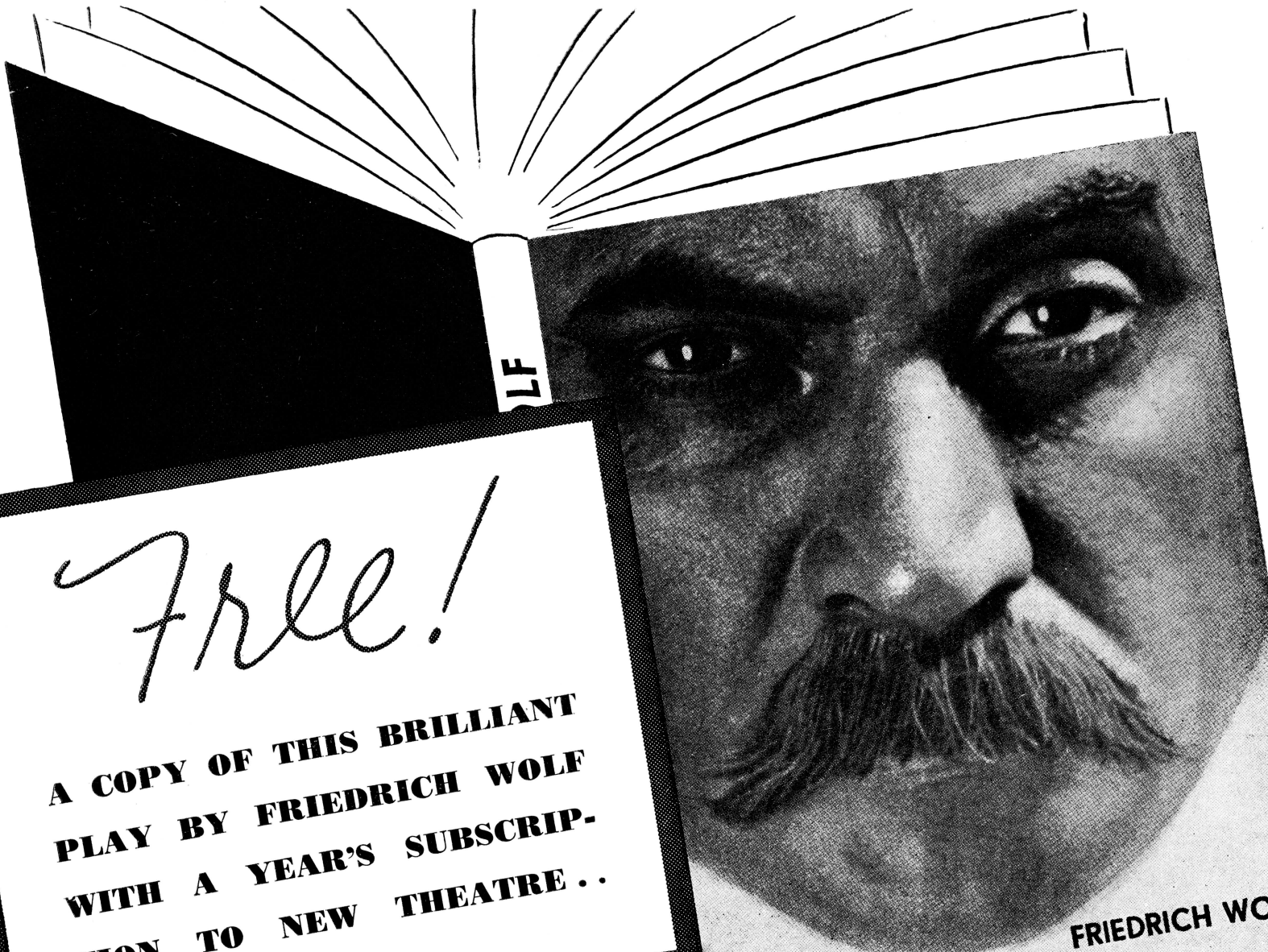
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