The Status of the Negro in American Drama

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THE STATUS OF THE NEGRO
in
AMERICAN DRAMA

by
Kathryn Frances Hogan

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I. THE FIRST APPEARANCE OF THE NEGRO AS A DRAMATIC CHARACTER.

CHAPTER II. THE NEGRO AS A MINSTREL AND AS A MEANS OF FURNISHING LOCAL COLOR IN THE DRAMA.

CHAPTER III. THE NEGRO AS A PROBLEM STUDY AND AS AN OBJECT OF OR THEME FOR PROPAGANDA.

CHAPTER IV. THE NEGRO AS A HUMAN BEING IN AMERICAN DRAMA.

CHAPTER V. THE STATUS OF THE NEGRO TODAY AS A DRAMATIC CHARACTER, AS A MUSICAL ENTERTAINER, AND AS A DRAMATIST, AND THE FUTURE POSSIBILITIES OF THE NEGRO IN AMERICAN DRAMA.
When one observes the negro actor in such artistic performances as *Green Pastures*, *Porgy and Bess*, and *Mamba's Daughters*, one is impressed with the finesse with which each character interprets his role. One is also impressed at the receptive audience. For the moment differences in race and caste have apparently disappeared leaving artistic ability to be judged according to its merit.

But this attitude toward negro actors is a comparatively modern one. To attain this position they have been doggedly patient. Throughout the years the negro had been forced to accept roles which portrayed him in unfavorable lights. Yet he struggled on hoping for the time when the social and economic conditions would arrive at the stage of harmony wherein he would be accorded the appreciation that is due an artist.

The Negro's insignificance as a dramatic character in the early American drama is indicated by the inferior roles assigned to him. But as the country progressed, the negro began to emerge from obscurity and gradually began to assume the more important roles on the stage as well as in life.

My purpose in this study is to show the relationship between what the negro has represented as a character in drama
and what society has conceded to him as an individual as a result of the conflicts and controversies that his cause has incited in American life.

K. F. H.
March, 1940.
CHAPTER I

THE FIRST APPEARANCE OF THE NEGRO as a DRAMATIC CHARACTER

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the negro had appeared as a central character in the drama in England and on the continent in such plays as Shakespeare's Othello and Southerne's adaptation of Aphra Behn's novel Oroonoko. But in America his rise to an important position on the stage was exceedingly slow. This condition was due in lesser part to the lack of an established theatre, to the prejudice against theatrical performances, to the scarcity of native drama, and to the dependence on foreign models. But in greater part it was due to the opprobrium directed against the negro because of his inferior social status. And as his social status changed so did his position in the drama, for the history of the negro's rise to prominence on the American stage is closely allied with the history of the country.

In the early Colonial Period, native Americans were so busy fighting Indians, establishing homes, and providing a

1. Benjamin Brawley, Negroes in Literature and Art, p. 57.
living for themselves and for their families that they found no time to devote to the development of the arts. In those days, life was a very serious matter. Almost every one was engaged in earning a livelihood. Literary culture was not widespread, and there was no inclination to promote theatrical performances. To the frontiersman, who every day confronted life in the raw, the stage portrayals seemed weak and ineffectual. Absorbed as each man was in the struggle for existence he spent his few "leisure hours in the cultivation of those forms of knowledge which would best serve the practical ends of life".2 Therefore, persons of special literary aptitudes did not flourish in this atmosphere as the times were not conducive to the fostering of literary genius.

Moreover, these settlers brought with them certain inhibitions about professional playmaking. They had seen the degradation of the stage in England, they had been the target for "the coarsest taunts and ridicule"3 of the dramatists, they had been offended at the moral defects and looseness of tone of the actors, and they had been scandalized at the disregard to law and religion as enunciated in the plays. Toward this exhibition of licentiousness they developed a hostile attitude and the influence of this hostility spread throughout

most of the colonies and "became a keystone of the civilization of the new continent". 4

This attitude toward the theatre continued throughout the eighteenth and into the nineteenth centuries. In 1824 Professor Dwight of Yale College declared in his Essay on the Stage that "to indulge a taste for playgoing means nothing more nor less than the loss of that most valuable treasure, the immortal soul". 5 And evidence of this hostility was still apparent in 1852, for in a letter from Mrs. Stowe replying to Asa Hutchinson's request for the dramatic rights to Uncle Tom's Cabin she says that her conscience forbade her to grant his request because "if the barrier which now keeps young people of Christian families from theatrical performances is once broken down by the introduction of respectable and moral plays, they will be open to all the temptations of those that are not such". 6

As a result of all this prejudice and distrust the drama received little encouragement in the Northern colonies in those early days. But encouragement did come from the South. The Virginia planters were royalists. They loved England and English institutions; and, to the Southerners, entertain-

ment was a necessary part of life. Unlike the Quaker and the Dutch burghers who opposed the theatre because of the expense; the Southerners, since their money came easily to them, were willing to pay for it and "saw no reason why the theatre was considered illegitimate". And so the first theatre was built in 1716 in Williamsburg, Virginia.

In 1752, The American Company under the direction of Lewis Hallam and sponsored by the Governor of Williamsburg toured most of the colonies and thus founded the American stage. The actors and the plays came from London "and bore the stamp of London's approval". Therefore, neither the audience nor the theatrical company lent much assistance to the encouragement of the native drama.

Then came the Revolution and the acts of the Continental Congress recommending the discontinuance of theatrical performances and penalizing government employees for attendance at such performances. These edicts caused the American Company to depart for the West Indies and the country was deprived of an amusement that had been steadily growing in popularity.

7. Arthur H. Quinn, History of the American Drama from the Beginning to the Civil War, p. 3.
10. Paul L. Ford, American Dramatic Literature, p. XII.
11. Ibid., p. 5.
But the lack of theatricals was not felt for any great length of time, for the withdrawal of the English actors gave the Americans an opportunity to try their skill at playwriting, and the resentment against England furnished them with an incentive. Since these were troublous times the dramatic pieces bore a distinctly political coloring. With the occupation of the principal theatrical cities by the British, the theatres fell into the hands of the British soldiers. The drama immediately became the closet drama and directed its satirical shafts against the prejudices of the Puritans, the crudeness of the colonists, and the impertinence of the military leaders. The colonists retaliated in kind. The American writers held up to scorn and contempt the English ministry and the British commanders from the time of the Battle of Lexington to the evacuation of Boston.

Of the eighteen plays which were written at this time only one, entitled the *Fall of British Tyranny* or *American Liberty Triumphant*, contained negro characters. The piece is a satire on the Tories and the members of the British army stationed in the colonies. It was written by John Leacock and performed in Philadelphia in 1766. It is the first play

in which negroes were used as dramatic characters. The play is based on an incident which caused great concern to the colonists. It seems that when Lord Dunmore, the royal governor of Virginia, was driven from his post he proclaimed freedom to all the negroes who would come to his support. "This dethroned colonial official tried to embody two negro regiments into the North Carolina troops without much success." Those negroes, according to Leacock, who joined the English army were kidnapped and of a low credulous type. He insinuates that these were the best that the English could get, for even the ordinary slave was intelligent enough to choose between masters.

In the play there are five acts and fifteen scenes. The negroes appear in Scene IV, Act IV. There is an attempt at realistic effect in the dialect, but the negroes are not native for they speak the Gullah dialect, which was the one used by the field workers of the Sea Islands and those living on the coast of South Carolina. All African negroes begin words with double consonants such as "ng", "nk" and "nd". They had no regard for the plurals of nouns, and had a strong tendency to end words with vowels. The following selection

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is an example of this type of dialect:

Lord Kidnapper - Well, my brave blacks, are you come to list?
Cudjo - Eas, massa Lord, you preazee.
Lord Kidnapper - How many are there of you?
Cudjo - Twenty-two massa.
Lord Kidnapper - Very well, did you all run away from your masters?
Cudjo - Eas, massa Lord, et 'vry one, me, too.
Lord Kidnapper - That's clever; they have no right to make you slaves. I wish all the negroes would do the same. I'll make 'em free - What part did you come from?
Cudjo - Disse brack man, disse one, disse one, disse one come from Hamton; disse one, disse one, disse one, disse one come from Nawfok, me come from Nawfok, too.
Lord Kidnapper - Very well, what was your master's name?
Cudjo - Me massa name Cunney Tomsee.
Lord Kidnapper - Colonel Thompson, eigh?
Cudjo - Eas, massa, Cunney Tomsee.
Lord Kidnapper - Well, then, I'll make you a Major - and what's your name?
Cudjo - Me massa cawra me Cudjo.
Lord Kidnapper - Cudjo - very good - was you ever christened Cudjo?
Cudjo - No massa, me no crissen.
Lord Kidnapper - Well, then. I'll christen you, you shall be called Major Cudjo Thompson and if you behave well, I'll soon make you a greater man than your master, and if I find the rest of you behave well, I'll make you all officers and after you have served Lord Paramount a while you shall have money in your pockets, good clothes on your backs and be as free as them white men there (Pointing forward to a parcel of Tories).
Cudjo - Tankee, massa, gaw bresse, massa Kidnap.
Lord Kidnapper - Tomorrow you shall have guns like them white men. Can you shoot some of them rebels, ashore, Major Cudjo?
Cudjo - Eas, massa, me try.
Lord Kidnapper - Would you shoot your old master, the Colonel, if you could see him?
Cudjo - Eas, massa, you terra me, me shoot him down dead.
Lord Kidnapper - That's a brave fellow - damn 'em - down with them all - shoot all the damn'd rebels.
But after the Revolution, the reorganized American Company returned from the West Indies and once again took possession of the stage. Through the efforts of cultured citizens the stigma against the drama gradually faded and theatres were built in all the large cities. 18

From 1787 to 1805 Wm. Dunlap was manager of the American Company. In his introduction to Ribbemont Dunlap says that "to combine rather to invent is the lot of modern dramatists", and he carries out this idea by introducing and popularizing foreign adaptations of Kotzebue and translations from the French. 19 Against this onslaught, native playwrights struggled but the competition was so keen that very few native plays appeared. It was not until 1792 in Yorker's Stratagem or Banana's Wedding that the negro was seen again on the stage. The play shows a New Yorker disguised as a comic Yankee marrying Priscilla, a West Indian mulatto. But as in The British Tyranny the negro characters are not native. 20

In 1795, The Triumph of Love or The Happy Reconciliation by J. Murdock was played at the Chestnut Street Theatre in Philadelphia. With the production of this play the first native negro character appeared on the stage; 21 and with this

18. Paul L. Ford, op. cit., p. IX.
characterization, one of the many stage negro types was born.\textsuperscript{22} By his dialect and penchant for big words, Sambo created a sense of the ludicrous, and by the knowledge gleaned from the observations of the arts, tricks, and prejudices of the people with whom he came in contact he was able to reflect in a very comical self important manner the foibles of the times.\textsuperscript{23} And this technique is as good today as it was in post colonial days as is proven by the radio popularity of "Amos and Andy".

The \textit{Triumph of Love} is also significant for establishing the stage relationship between master and slave attendants. Coupled with his subservience, the negro mingled a tendency to speak frankly and shrewdly upon all matters concerning his master; and the master, aware that the servant was well informed about his personal affairs, listened indulgently but none the less attentively. This intimate attitude between master and slave introduced the loyal element in slave characterization that became so popular in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

The next play in which negroes appeared was in \textit{The Politicians} written in 1798, a closet drama by J. Murdock. In this work the author uses three negro servants, Sambo,

\begin{quotation}
\textsuperscript{22} Sterling A. Brown, \textit{Negro Poetry and Drama}, p. 104.
\textsuperscript{23} John Bernard, \textit{Retrospections of the American Stage}, p. 28.
\end{quotation}
Fompey, and Sam belonging to different masters, as mouth-pieces to express the political views current at the time against the merits of France, England, and America. Here, again, the humor is furnished by means of the dialect and the self importance of the negro.

In 1798, Robert Mumford used several negro servants to wait on table in one of the scenes in The Candidates. This piece is a satire on the methods of conducting elections for seats in the House of Burgesses, and the negroes are used to lend an atmosphere of Southern hospitality. Unlike the negroes in The Candidates, Wm. Milns portrays the comic antics of a black wench in his All in a Bustle produced in 1798. Here, the clown element is introduced, an element which was capitalized by Mrs. Stowe in her creation of Topsy in Uncle Tom's Cabin.

With the beginning of the nineteenth century, the fate of the theatre took a decided upward trend. Even the newspapers showed an awakened curiosity toward theatrical productions; for in the season 1802-1803, through the efforts of the editors of the two leading newspapers, organized dramatic criticism was born in New York. This increased interest in the theatre was brought about by the rising economic condition of the country. After the Revolution,

the people were no longer absorbed with questions of rights and liberties to be demanded from the king. They turned their attention to their own welfare and found that the invention of the cotton gin in 1793 had changed the structure of the South. Cotton had become a profitable crop for the soil was fruitful, the man power cheap, and the markets eager for the produce. Manufacturing began to flourish in the North as production increased in the South. The great weight of financial stringency was being lifted and the country expanded and thrived.  

Slavery, as a factor in this movement, had become very popular, so much so that Congress, alarmed at the great influx of slaves, was forced to prohibit their importation in 1808. And the knowledge that slavery was becoming a menace, that, after all, slaves were human beings and should be treated as such, is reflected in the portrayal of the two slaves Harry and Phyllis in Love and Friendship or Yankee Notions by A. B. Lindsley in 1809. In this piece the author introduces the realistic specimen of a slave who is loyal to his master and family and, after a fashion, acts as his confidante and adviser. A recent example of this type is portrayed in the character Clementine in S. N.

Behrman's No Time for Comedy.

This treatment differs from the kind accorded to Caesar in Jonathan Postfree or The Honest Yankee written by L. Beach and produced in the same year as Love and Friendship. Here, the negro is the familiar talkative servant, the counterpart of Sambo in the Triumph of Love. He is acquainted with the secrets of the family and is obsessed with the idea of his own importance.

In 1815, The Battle of Lake Champlain by A. J. Allen, in 1823 The Tailor in Distress by Sol Smith, and in 1824 The Rifle by Solon Robinson introduced negroes in song and dance numbers. These plays did much toward popularizing minstrelsy, but did little in promoting the negro as a dramatic character except to keep him before the public eye. The same thing may be said of The Forest Rose, a musical farce by S. Woodworth produced in 1825. Here, "a broad farcical situation is introduced by Sally, a negro wench, who plays a trick upon both Jonathan and Bellamy".

From 1815 to 1830 there was a period of prosperity and national awakening. By 1825 improvements in transportation had brought the cities closer together, and revolutionized industry had forced to the front a group

26. Lawrence Hutton, Curiosities of the American Stage, p. 103.
of wealthy people who demanded enjoyment. At this time there were two native actors, Edwin Forrest and James H. Hackett, who did much to sponsor the native drama. And this growing interest in the theatre among the cultured public found its counterpart among the free educated negroes of the North. Dating from 1821, they made an organized effort in New York to establish a theatre for themselves with actors of their own race. Since negroes were not allowed in other theatres they established "The African Grove" on September 21, 1821. James Hewlett, their leader, played Richard III and was famous for his impersonations of great actors. His work attracted the attention of the whites who demanded admittance. Flattered by this notice a section of the theatre was partitioned off at the back for the accommodation of the whites. But this inroad led to disorder and mischief, and the theatre was closed again. As a result Hewlett left for London where he acquired much experience and acclaim.

In December 1825, he returned to the United States and performed on the stage of the Assembly Room, Military Gardens. His success was so outstanding that "The New York

29. A. H. Quinn, op. cit., p. 204.
30. Ibid., p. 205.
Star" of December 22, 1825, felt impelled to compliment him and to say that "his imitations of Kean, Matthews, Phillips, and others were recognized as correct and evincing a nice discrimination and tact . . . which ought to recommend him to persevere in the way his genius seemed to direct". 32

And so the derided player of a few years previous had returned to a more receptive assemblage. He was wise enough to take the offered advice and spent another year in study. On February 23, and September 28, 1826, he gave programs of imitations and was considered a great success at both. His popularity was progressing despite race prejudice and lasted until September 21, 1831, when he gave a farewell benefit at Columbian Hall. 33

In 1833, another talented negro actor, Ira Aldridge, attracted the attention of the great actor, Edmund Kean, who invited Aldridge to accompany him abroad to play Othello to his Iago. 34

In order to acquaint the more remote members of their race of their progress in New York, the negroes entered the newspaper field, and so in 1827 a group of educated negroes began the publication of The Freedman's Journal, the first negro newspaper in the United States. 35

33. Ibid., p. 293.
The year following the first appearance of this newspaper, Wm. Dunlap presented *A Trip to Niagara* or *Travellers in America* in which Job, the negro character asserts his rights as an individual. In this play, also, is the first mention of a gentleman of color, and the first note of indignation at the idea of class distinction. As one critic expresses it Job "has caught the spirit of independence, uses snuff, and pretends to be any man's equal and speaks of ladies and gentlemen of color". 36

In review of the plays up to 1830, I find that of about three hundred native American plays only fourteen of them represent negro characters, a commentary which shows the slight effect the negro had on dramatic consciousness. In these fourteen plays, the negro appears as a means to fetch and carry, as a means to provide information such as is disclosed by a letter or telephone conversation, or as a means to create humor by his dialect and comic antics.

From 1825 to 1845, however, the negro ceased to be merely a door-opener and announcer. He became a comedy actor as is shown in Cato, a servant of a late member of Congress who, having been in Washington, affects the deportment of a gentleman in *Whigs and Democrats* produced in

1839. He uses snuff and assumes the air of knowing more than he is willing to tell. This type is also portrayed in Fashion or Life in New York produced in 1845. This play is a comedy of manners and is presented in a spirit of burlesque. It deals with the trials and tribulations of social climbers, "and the conversation between Zeke, the colored servant, and Millinette, Mrs. Tiffany's French maid and social instructor reveals the family situation" and adds the element of humor to a rather serious play.

From 1845 to 1860 the dramatic scene changes. No longer are the negro characters used for humorous purposes; they become the dominant figures in a very desperate struggle. From the year 1830, the attitude against slavery was gradually becoming more intense. Garrison had founded the "Liberator" in that year, and anti-slavery societies were growing active. Then followed Nat Turner's insurrection in Virginia in 1831, the establishment of the Underground Railroad in 1840, the enactment of the Fugitive Slave Law in 1850, the Dred Scott Decision in 1857 and John Brown's Raid at Harper's Ferry in 1859. The results of all these incidents were reflected in the northern literature of the time and later dramatized for purposes of propaganda, for

37. A. H. Quinn, op. cit., p. 313.
the abolitionists despite all efforts to the contrary "were forcing the question of slavery upon the conscience of a nation".  

In the dramatized version of **Uncle Tom's Cabin** by Aiken, produced in 1852, the problem of the separation of families by slave sales is forced into the open. In this play there are five types of negro presented; the persecuted negro as represented by Uncle Tom, the comic child type as represented by Topsy, the mammy type as represented by Aunt Cloe, the educated self assertive type as represented by George Harris and Eliza. And around these five types is "built the first attempt to portray in vivid colors the social and institutional life of the South".  

**Uncle Tom's Cabin** ran for over three hundred performances. This unprecedented occurrence marked an era in New York theatricals as it helped to break down the barrier prohibiting negroes from theatres. The manager, succumbing after much pressure, provided space with separate entrance for colored patrons and thus established an entering wedge in their fight for social equality.

Based on the novel, **Uncle Tom's Cabin**, Mrs. Stowe, apparently overcoming her aversion to the theatre, dramatized

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this story especially for the readings of Miss Mary Webb and entitled her version The Christian Slave, which was produced in 1855. 41 This work differs from Aiken's dramatization in some of the characterizations, in many of the scenes and in much of the dialogue. Moreover it has not the sustained power of Aiken's play.

Following the theme of family separation by slave sale came the one of the tragedy of mixed blood as portrayed by Dred and Neighbor Jackwood. In both cases, the problem of fugitive slaves is treated. Dred, the outlaw runaway, Old Hundred, the educated coachman, and Lizette, the mulatto slave wife are featured in the play Dred, while Camille, the beautiful mulatto fugitive rescued by a Vermont Yankee is featured in Neighbor Jackwood.

Another play of this same theme, Octoroon, deals with the subject of slavery as affecting a beautiful girl with but a taint of negro blood in her veins and finding herself really in bondage. In this play there was a conscious attempt to avoid a propaganda piece, but the theme so popular at the time increased the antagonism of the northerners. 42

In this play the negro became the central figure around which all the others revolved, and the long slow struggle for

41. Margaret G. Mayorga, op. cit., p. 167.
recognition as a major dramatic character was won. The play was so popular that one critic remarked, "It seems strange that the negro type was not selected more often for dramatic expression but the danger of public disapproval was of course evident to the managers."43

Running simultaneously with heavily loaded propaganda plays were those of lesser importance. These contained negro characters in the minor roles, and in such plays as Romance and Reality, Paddy the Piper, Moll Pitcher, Major Jones' Courtship, Arnold, Flirtation and What Comes of It, Yankee Pedler, and The Boy Martyrs of 1812, the fetch and carry type of servant character is presented. In the plays Fashions and Follies, Ireland and America, Firemen, Life in New York or Tom and Jerry on a Visit, the lively rascal type is used. In Servants by Legacy, Pompey, the negro servant, and Pat, the Irish servant, act as foils and are comedy characters. In Saratoga, Gyp, the "culled gemmen" type, appears again; and in Under the Gaslight, Sam, the colored citizen who is ready for suffrage when it is ready for him is introduced. In the Legend of Norwood, The Pioneer Patriot, and Blanche of Brandywine, the loyal slave type who acts as confidante and dramatic raisonneur is portrayed.

43. A. H. Quinn, History of American Drama from Beginning to Civil War, p. 335.
Of the seven hundred plays prior to 1860\textsuperscript{44} plus fifty more in the next decade,\textsuperscript{45} thirty per cent are found to reflect American Life;\textsuperscript{46} and of this thirty per cent about forty plays contain negro characters. Up to 1830 the importance of the negro on the stage was almost negligible. But increasing significance in the social world focused attention on him and the stage became a platform for the negro and his problems. Because of this interest he rose to prominence on the stage and reached the heights in \textit{Octoroon}. Yet through all this tumult, the negro was never allowed to speak for himself. His problems were analyzed by white men, presented to white audiences by white actors. The prejudice against him was still too strong to allow closer social relationships. And so it is the negro as the white man's pawn that was portrayed from the beginnings of the drama in America up to the year 1870.

\textsuperscript{44} A. H. Quinn, "The Early Drama, 1756-1860", \textit{The Cambridge History of American Literature}, p. 223.


\textsuperscript{46} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 211.
CHAPTER II

THE NEGRO AS A MINSTREL
and
AS A MEANS OF FURNISHING LOCAL COLOR
IN THE DRAMA

If the negro's progress in the drama was slow and uncertain, his advance in the field of musical entertainment met with better success. Here, he was on a more familiar territory since his musical contributions were drawn from his daily experience. And these musical contributions took the form of the song and dance numbers he had learned under painful circumstances. For in the early days of his exploitations, the negro was compelled to sing at every available opportunity. 47 The slave traders, aware of the psychological reaction to music, used this device on the slave ship to prevent nostalgia, in the slave mart to offset tragic reactions, on the plantation to stimulate physical effort, and in the negro quarters to furnish amusement and recreation. From this continual practice, the negro became accustomed to insert song and dance interludes among his daily activities, 48

thereby developing a power of expression peculiar to his race and generation.

And it was upon this trait of the negro that the theatrical managers capitalized. As early as 1795, Sambo in The Triumph of Love sings as he goes about his work; and in 1807, Caesar in Jonathan Postfree hums a plantation melody and executes a few dance steps while attending his master. Thus "at the beginning of the American drama, the negro character became associated with minstrelsy". 49

Because the song and dance numbers were more suitable to vaudeville performances, the negro character began to appear frequently in this type of entertainment which was developing rapidly throughout the United States since it offered more theatrical freedom from the statutes prohibiting plays, and since it satisfied the demands of a growing and cosmopolitan population. 50 One of the early appearances of the negro character on the variety stage was that of Rastus in the Battle of Lake Champlain produced in 1815. Here, the following song, the first negro song introduced on the American stage, was sung:

I
Backside Albany stan' Lake Champlain,
Little pond half full of water.
Plat te burg dar too, close pon de main.
Town small, he grow big, dong hereafter.

49. A. H. Quinn, op. cit., p. 333.
50. Margaret Mayorga, op. cit., p. 119.
II

On Lake Champlain Uncle Sam set de boat
An' Massa Macdonough he sail 'em
While General Macomb make Platteburg he home
Wid de army whose courage neber fail 'em.51

In 1823, Edwin Forrest assumed the negro character, Ruban, in a local farce entitled The Tailor in Distress. The play was full of songs, dances, and fun. Ruban was a servant and his wife who had nothing to say was to appear and help. After Forrest had blackened himself he remembered there was no provision made for the wife. He appealed to the women of the theatre, but the ladies held negroes in such contempt that not one of them would demean herself to take the role. Forrest then sought his negro washerwoman who willingly complied. This performance marked the first "representation on the stage of the Southern plantation negro with all his peculiarities of dress, gait, accent, dialect and manner".52

The result was so successful that it led to many imitators, among them Edwin Booth, John S. Clarke, and Thomas D. Rice.53

The latter, by his introduction of the "Jim Crow Dance", was conceded to have been the founder of the Ethiopian minstrels and was responsible for its popularity on both sides of the Atlantic.54

53. A. H. Quinn, op. cit., p. 333.
54. Lawrence Hutton, op. cit., p. 103.
In order to portray the role of a Kentucky cornfield negro in a local drama, The Rifle, by Solon Robinson, Rice watched the movements of an old and decrepit slave named Jim Crow who was employed to do all sorts of jobs by the proprietor of a livery stable. As this negro worked, he sang; and at the end of each stanza, he made a peculiar limping step, "rockin' de heel", and finished with this refrain:

    Wheel about, turn about
    Do jis so.
    An' ebery time I wheel about
    I jump Jim Crow.55

Rice wrote down the words, changed the tempo of the melody, added new stanzas and presented his skit before a Louisville audience that vociferously applauded his efforts.56 The "Jim Crow Dance" sprang to fame "permeating the vaudeville stage on two continents"57 and returned fifty years later in Uncle Remus with his command to his young listener:

    Make a bow to de rabbit an' a bow to de crow
    Takes a limber-toed gemmun for to jump Jim Crow.58

Rice's success in this field is attributed to two causes: First, since the darkey is the "closest approximation to a type as old as history" - that of "folk figure of a somewhat rustic character, instinctively humorous, irrationally credulous, gifted in song and dance, interesting in spontaneous

55. Lawrence Hutton, op. cit., p. 117.
56. Ibid., p. 117.
57. Margaret Mayorga, op. cit., p. 123.
58. J. C. Harris, Uncle Remus, p. 147.
frolic, endowed with artless philosophy" he is "proverbially
dear to the masses" and more than any other type "combines
these qualities that have exercised immemorial charm". 59
Second, since Rice studied the negro realistically noting
specifically his idiosyncracies for "purposes of mimicry" 60 he
presented to the audience a character that was instantly rec-
nognizable and highly appreciated. By a combination of these
two elements Rice was placed in the "front ranks of African
delineators" and his international fame was established. 61

Following this success, Rice collected negro melodies
and wove them into such librettos as Bone Squash, Virginny
Cupids, and Long Island Juba and sang them to the accompani-
ment of the banjo and bones. He also originated the "dandy
darkey" stage type in his Dandy Jim of Caroline and Spruce
Pink. 62

Rice's popularity was a kind of economic revelation and
established minstrelsy as a "dramatic fact of first magnitude
from the box office point of view." 63 The individual singer
soon led to the organization of the negro minstrel troupe;
and from the year 1840, negro music began to spread beyond

59. F. P. Gaines, op. cit., p. 3.
60. Benjamin Brawley, op. cit., p. 38.
61. J. N. Ireland, Records of New York Stage from 1750-1860,
   Vol. II, p. 56.
the plantations. The negro dances and dance songs that the planters encouraged among their slaves were introduced on the stage and achieved widespread popularity.64

The melodies of Rice were succeeded by those of Dan Emmet, Stephen Foster, and others. The spell of those "plaintive plantation ditties, those lively dances, and that nimble wit was irresistitable" and caused minstrelsy to "remain popular for twenty-five or thirty years".65 The immense magnitude of minstrels, however, distorted many dramas of fundamentally serious nature, and the result was sometimes a queer combination of pathos and comedy. In Tom and Jerry or Life in New York, a scene from a Charleston slave mart was included, "not for its pathetic effect but as an opportunity to present much singing and dancing".66 Uncle Tom's Cabin, also, was heavily overladen with melodrama and minstrel comedy. In this form it no longer stirred righteous indignation but furnished an occasion for much amusement.67 Many other plays such as: In Mizzoura by A. Thomas, An Unwelcome Return by George A. Munson, A Woman's Vows by A. J. Duganne, Altoona by J. Kilpatrick, and Horshoe Robinson by Clifton Tayleure, introduce scenes into the play which have no direct bearing

64. N. I. White, op. cit., p. 99.
66. F. P. Gaines, op. cit., p. 98.
on the plot in order to cater to the popular taste for minstrelsy.

Among those actors instrumental in carrying the tradition down to the twentieth century, were Harrigan and Hart, P. T. Barnum, Lew Dockstader, McIntyre and Heath, and Frank Tinney. Sporadic attempts have been made during the last two decades by Al Jolson and Eddie Cantor to revive the institution but without any noteworthy results, since the "main strength of negro minstrelsy lay in its musical and picturesque extravaganza and not in its dramatic significance." 68 For had minstrelsy "been the result of negro initiative it would have been more important" but since in its "inception it was more burlesque rather than sincere imitation" 69 it left little of permanent value.

Yet, with all its imperfections, minstrelsy did serve the cause of the negro. It kept him before the nation's eye for almost a century, and it assisted in arousing the curiosity of a calloused public to the point where it decided to learn how the other half of the world lives. This interest resulted in a more critical attitude toward the "under dog" and in a desire to be concerned with his welfare. And so minstrelsy gave way before the plays dealing with

68. A. H. Quinn, op. cit., p. 334.
69. Ibid., p. 335.
negro social problems. 70

But minstrelsy was only one of the factors in the movement toward arousing interest in the conditions of the negro. Another one was the vogue for local color that swept the country during the eighties and nineties. During the Civil War, a number of Northern white men came into closer contact with the negro than heretofore and learned much of his customs and habits as he practiced them on his home territory. After the war, many Northern officers remained during the military occupations preceding the reestablishment of state government and had an opportunity to watch the negro in his daily routine and to speculate upon the relations between master and servant. 71

The result of this observation found expression in the Northern literature of the day and indicated a shift toward sentimentality in the Northern attitude regarding the South and its institutions. In these works "slavery was softened until whatever may have been evil was toned down and was considered as accidental". 72 This gesture was an acknowledgment "of the increasing kindliness of northern thought caused in part by a perception of the extremes to which Reconstruction leaders had gone". 73

70. N. I. White, op. cit., p. 10.
71. Ibid., p. 10.
73. Ibid., p. 64.
To further this attitude, the North graciously opened its doors to such Southern writers as Harte, Page, Hough, Aldrich, Harris, Lanier, Russel, Mark Twain, Mary Johnston, F. Hopkinson Smith, and others. These writers gave a different interpretation to negro character from the one commonly held by the Northerners. As a result of minstrelsy their concept of the negro was of a lazy, shiftless, happy-go-lucky fellow addicted to shooting craps, to eating water melon, to wielding a razor, and to wearing flashy colors. He was a ne'er-do-well who gave vent to his religion in a noisy fashion, who liked to spend his time in singing, dancing, and drinking gin. On the stage he was "presented as lying easily, using big words he did not understand, drinking gin, stealing chickens, and otherwise living up to the joke book tradition".74

But the Southern writers gave the other side of the picture. Harris showed a winsome figure of an old darkey surrounded by "associations of his personality and anecdotes of an old regime"75 in his Uncle Remus stories; Lanier portrayed the negro's power of prayer in his First Steamboat up Alabama; Page stressed the loyal negro type, faithful unto death to his master and his master's family in his In Ole

74. F. P. Gaines, op. cit., p. 63.
75. Ibid., p. 74.
Virginia; Russell showed a perfect grasp of the negro humor and philosophy in his Christmas in the Quarters.

All these works opened new doors to literary values. Harris, in his Uncle Remus, recorded with "unusual accuracy of feeling a unique dialect"; and by his combination of folk rhymes that "caught the syncopation and the idiom of negro speech",76 he brought to the Northerners a better understanding of the negro temperament. From his accounts of the good times of rural life he gave an insight into a past regime.77

The other writers of this period made noteworthy contributions to literature by setting the scene of their works in a certain section of the South, by featuring the characters peculiar to that section, and by introducing situations familiar to the characters and to the community. Previous to this time, the various character types were portrayed by being introduced into an atmosphere that was foreign to them; and, by their reaction to the unusual, they became significant in contrast to the other characters portrayed.78 This was especially true in the drama, The Forest Rose, in which the Yankee type, Jonathan Ploughboy, was introduced into a New York setting in the Indian Princess in which the Indian type was surrounded by white people, in Love and Friendship in which a Northern

76. S. I. Brown, op. cit., p. 90.
77. Benjamin Brawley, op. cit., p. 115.
78. Margaret Mayorga, op. cit., p. 175.
lover, a sailor, a Yankee, and a college fop were brought together in a Charleston home, and in Ireland and America in which the Irishman is featured as a newcomer in a strange land.

Taking the idea from the novels of the period, the drama adopted the plan of portraying distinctive phases of national life. The plantation theme was rich in romantic value. Its tradition appealed strongly to the innate American love of feudalism, for no matter how much Americans stress their belief in political equality, "their imaginative interests are keenly appreciative of social gradations" and their romantic hunger is "satisfied by some allegory of aristocracy".79 This is true to some extent in actual life as may be proved by the attitude of many of America's best citizens toward royalty and recently toward the visit of King George and Queen Elizabeth of England.

Now the plantation theme satisfied this craving for a system of caste. "The ante-bellum Southern estate is rich in both pageantry and the psychology of feudalism."80 It offered a display of a highly privileged class with the scale of living that belonged to it. In contrast it offered the display of a low class, subservient to its masters, uncomplain-

79. F. P. Gaines, op. cit., p. 3.
80. Ibid., p. 3.
ing, unambitious, ignorant and superstitious. On the one hand, were "rich modes of life and a hereditary authority, exercised with the graciousness of condescending mercy," on the other hand, were "a comic inferiority and a devoted concurrence in the scheme of government."81 And the fusion of these elements (for the one could not exist without the other) brought about a "kind of American embodiment of a golden age".82

Since it is the custom of the imagination to dwell upon the past, to sigh for the times that used to be, to glorify the incidents of long ago in order to escape the realities of everyday existence, the theatre aimed to revive that past and to recreate the glories of a bygone age. To portray the plantation in such a way as to give it the illusion of antiquity, to surround it with glamor and romance, to slacken its movement to a peaceful, unhurried tempo, to depict a scene in which there was no mention of struggle for material gain, where every-one lived in plenty and had no fear for the future was the difficult task of the theatrical managers.83

They accomplished it, however, by presenting musical comedies and spectacles in which the lordly master of the plantation walked about among his serfs smiling benignly upon

81. F. P. Gaines, op. cit., p. 4.
82. Ibid., p. 4.
83. Ibid., p. 8.
them. But in addition to these pieces, there were some serious dramas in which the negro problems of the day were touched upon. One such play was Frank Mayo's dramatization of *Pudd'n Head Wilson* written by Mark Twain. In this piece the tragedy of the mulatto is again discussed but from a different angle from the one commonly used by the romanticists. Here, the author touches upon the problem of heredity, emphasizing the fact that environment does not alter racial traits, but it may influence conduct. To illustrate his point, Twain uses the theme of mistaken identity. The scene is laid in Dawson's Landing where Roxy is the personal maid to Mrs. Driscoll. It happens that both of these women give birth to boys on the same day. The Driscoll son is named Thomas, and Roxy's son is named Chambers. Unfortunately, after a week's illness, Mrs. Driscoll dies leaving the care of her son to Roxy. Some weeks later, in a moment of gratitude toward Roxy, Mr. Driscoll sets Roxy free.

As the children grow older, their resemblance toward each other becomes startling. To the casual observer the chief difference between them lies in their clothing - the Driscoll child wears a dainty white dress while Roxy's child is clothed in a tow line shirt.

One evening when the children were six or seven months old, Mr. Driscoll, in a fit of anger against some of his
slaves, sold four of them down the river. This incident so terrified Roxy that she determined a similar fate would not befall upon her son, and so she places Chambers in the white baby's cradle and claims the white child as her own. Now Chambers becomes Tom Driscoll and the real Tom Driscoll becomes Chambers.

Throughout their lives, each child indicates a contrasting nature. Chambers is the faithful slave type that Page made famous in his stories, and Tom is the irresponsible type devoid of honor and loyalty. He is expelled from school, he is accused of forgery, he gambles and drinks to excess. His uncle, Pudd'n Head Wilson, (who had become his guardian after his father's death) is so incensed at his ward's behavior that he threatens to disinherit him. In order to save her son from this disgrace, Roxy informs him of his real status and agrees to allow him to sell her into slavery provided he does not sell her down the river. In this way she feels that he can get enough money to pay his debts and restore himself in his guardian's esteem.

But instead of following her wishes, Tom sells her down the river for six hundred dollars. Several months later, she escapes to St. Louis and there meets Tom. She pleads for assistance, but Tom, knowing that she is the only one who is aware of the deception, plans to dispose of her by inform-
ing the authorities of her whereabouts.

When Roxy learns of this act of ingratitude, she goes to Pudd'n Head Wilson, reveals Tom's identity, asks forgiveness, and is once more established in the Wilson household while her son is sent to jail, and the real Tom Driscoll is restored to his birthright.

In this work Mark Twain did not attempt "to expound the laws of heredity, he merely portrayed life as he saw it in its peculiar aspects where the eccentricities and tragedies of racial intermixture had become prominent".84 If on the one hand "Tom's small part of negro blood made him the monster that he was, his mother's greater part of negro blood did not overcome the high intellectual qualities attributed to the white race".

Pudd'n Head Wilson is all tragedy, and not the "least of its tragic aspects is that the real Tom Driscoll could never overcome the inferiority complex he had acquired during his slave days; and that Roxy, with all her intelligence, could never transcend her limitations".85 In his delineation of his characters, Twain showed a keen understanding of negro characters. He is able to pierce beneath the skin of the black man and reveal what he sees there. In the clash between the personalities of Tom Driscoll and Chambers, there is interesting contrast. Chambers is not always subservient

84. F. P. Gaines, op. cit., p. 88
85. Ibid., p. 88
in his dealings with Tom. There are occasions (especially those concerning Rowena, the niece of Pudd'n Head Wilson) when he steps out of the slave role and becomes the aggressor. On these occasions, Chambers is not a foil for Tom; he is a real person. And his "attitude toward the lady shows that nice discrimination which is expected of a loyal servant and prepares the way for a love story when Chambers' real identity is disclosed, and thus enhances the dramatic value of the play". 86

Another play of this type is The White Slave by Campbell. Here, the mixed blood theme is treated somewhat like that in The Octoroon by Boucicault. But unlike Zoë in The Octoroon, Eliza has been aware of her parentage from early childhood. Yet for many years this knowledge has not made any great impression upon her consciousness, for she has never been treated as a slave. She has been accorded great privileges and has enjoyed educational advantages. Then a day comes as it did in Zoë's life when the full realization of her status is clearly understood. She sees that the gulf between the two races is impassible and that any attempt on her part to bridge this gap is folly. In her agony, she does not resort to suicide as Zoë does nor to the intrigue of Tom Driscoll. Rather, she voices her despair and the despair of all

86. F. P. Gaines, op. cit., p. 89.
other octoroons in crying out against the injustice of racial persecution in the following complaint to her mother:

You took advantage of a good kind master who reared me as his own and gave me the education of a lady. Why did you not let me remain among my own race? I would rather be ignorant than what I am, ashamed of my own degradation.

The same theme is treated in still another manner in Under Southern Skies by David Higgins. This work differs from the other plays dealing with the theme of mixed blood in that the element of racial consciousness is emphasized. The piece does not discuss the agony of the octoroon who is unable to find her place in the sun; rather, it treats of the attitude of the full blooded negroes toward those of their race that boast of mixed blood. In this play two full blooded negroes, Doshey and Lelia, are discussing their antagonism against the "yaller nigger" who because of his portion of white blood is granted special privileges, while those of pure negro blood are condemned to drudgery. And because these "yaller negroes" are not yet ready to hold such positions of trust, they lose their balance and commit indiscretions, thereby causing condemnation to fall upon the whole race. This feeling is voiced in the following selection:

Doshey - Did you ever see dat nigger preacher what calls hisself Reverend Archibald Perkins?
Lilia - No, but I've heard daddy talk about him.
Doshey - Everybody talks about him. Dat nigger belonged to de Pickenses in Georgy an' ole Mars Pickens
Doshey - he send him up norf and have him edicated, and
den he come down hyer to start a Baptis' church
for de niggers. Dat nigger could certainly talk.
He talk and he pray till he got fo' thousand dol-
lars to build a church. Den he stop preachin'
and prayin' and he skedaddled with the money and
no one ain't heerd of him no more.

Another popular theme of the day was the steadfast de-
votion of the faithful slave toward his master and his family.
In J. B. Dennison's Under the Laurels, the negro stands as a
kind of local providence for the bewildered whites. Their
desperate poverty is met only through the resourcefulness of
the faithful servant who, recognizing no freedom, strives to
protect his "missis" from the hardships of her reduced status.
Zeke is a close relation to the faithful type created by Page
and also shows a distant kinship to Uncle Tom; for in both of
these characters, the stubborn loyalty of the slave is the
most predominant characteristic. Zeke, the manager of af-
fairs in Under the Laurels, differs from Uncle Tom in that he
does not suffer from a scrupulous conscience. He is quite
willing to resort to any means, either foul or fair, that will
assist his mistress, Miss Rose; and the following excerpt shows
the indignation of the servant toward anyone who would molest
this Southern lady:

Zeke - I golly, dis is de blightin'est shame I ever seen.
It's a disgrace onto de country to take ebery
dollar Miss Rose ebber had an' den put her into de
kitchen 'long wid de niggers and de poor white
trash dat ain't fit to black her shoes; no dey
hain't fit to black a black's shoes.
Miss Rose - Never mind that now, Zeke. It was according to law and I suppose it is right.

Zeke - 'Taint right, if it is law. De law is worser'n de small pox. Dah's Massa Frank. He's gwine away dis evenin' without gettin' his own. Whar's de law in dat? He's desperit blue about it. Whar's de law or de jestiss - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - -

Zeke - I jis slipped de knives and de forks in de wood shed and polished 'em up. Missa Rose won't do no skyowerin' while Zeke is around.

The problem of the conscientious slave owner whose slaves, when they are set free, do not know what to do with their freedom is discussed in The Reverend Griffith Davenport by James A. Herne. The first scene shows a plantation on which a number of negroes are quarreling, expressing the contempt of the happy slaves for the despised free negroes and mentioning the differences of opinion on slavery in the family. The father is against the "inhuman traffic" while the mother is in favor of the "peculiar institution". The second scene introduces a contrast between the happy life of the Davenport negroes and the cruel experiences of a runaway slave. To complicate the situation, a slave pleads with Davenport to buy her husband lest his master sell him down the river, and her plea is so compelling that Davenport deviates from his policy and buys the slave to save one woman's happiness. In the next act all the Davenport slaves are freed and it is interesting to note the reaction of the slaves to this announcement. Some of the negroes are indignant at being
forced to be free "niggers", some are indifferent at the idea. One asks his mistress to take care of his manumission papers for him; another thinks that freedom means sleeping in the morning. In the third act, the attitude of the neighboring plantations is aroused by the carrying out of the Davenport ideals and the plantation owners are infuriated and chase Davenport out of the country.87

But for the greater part, the plantation plays at this time dealt with the allegiance of the black servants to their masters during the ante bellum era or during the devastated years after the war. In these plays, there were three types of loyalty shown. First, the faithful slave who is willing to die for his master, is exemplified by Eph in May Blossom. As the servant to Richard Ashcroft, Eph risks his life several times by getting news through the Union lines to the Confederate headquarters. This type is also found in Mammy Lou in Barbara Frietchie by Clyde Fitch; in Jonas, servant to General Randolph, in Secret Service by Gillette.

The second type illustrates the black who declined his freedom and worked for his master without thought of wages. This type is best exemplified by Uncle Joshaway and Aunt Doshey in Under the Laurels, for these two servants act as a

shield against the economic storm that is raging around their masters.

The third type of loyalty is that expressed by the blacks when the master is in trouble. Pete in *The Octoroon* is a fine example of this kind of allegiance for he insists upon the slaves appearing on the auction block in their best style so that they will bring the highest price for their master. And by his frequent reappearance in such plays as have been mentioned, the loyal negro servant type became a fixed convention in American drama. 88

Since the vogue for local color was so predominant in the country, the negro conceived the idea that he might exploit his own songs to the advantage of the negro race. Not the humorous type that was popular in minstrelsy, but the religious and work songs that gave an insight into his spiritual life. At any rate the idea was broached in 1872 at Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee, a negro college then under white control. There were some misgivings on the part of the educated negro for he felt that the white audiences would not fully understand the import of the songs. For to the negro it is the music and not the words that is important. Words are "more apt to be mere accidents or ornaments rather than instruments in precise meaning". 89 Therefore the negro

resorts "to nonsense and triviality to supply the words and the sentiments to the song". 90

Because the college needed money, objections were overruled and a choir of Jubilee Singers was formed that toured the United States and Europe. These tours were successful in several ways. They introduced to the world a new type of folk song, they freed a negro college from white control, and they accelerated the movement of assisting the under privileged that was slowly getting under way. 91

Near the turn of the century there was a trend toward light musical comedy based upon the minstrel pattern. These pieces, however, differed from the minstrels in the zest and abandon given to the songs and dances. There was a decided suggestion of the tom-tom in the rhythm and the lack of convention in the spirit of the music. 92

In 1890 The Creole Show, the first to glorify the colored girl, appeared. This was followed by Octoroons in 1895, and by 1898 the negroes began to enter the managerial field and produced Bob Cole's A Trip to Coontown, the first show to be organized, produced, and managed by negroes. 93 Will Marion Cook and Paul Dunbar presented Clarindy in which the "Cake Walk" was originated. In 1909, Jes Lik White Folks,

91. S. I. Brown, op. cit., p. 245.
92. N. I. White, op. cit., p. 89.
93. Benjamin Brawley, op. cit., p. 129.
Policy Players, Sons of Ham, In Dahomey, Bandana Land, A Lode of Coal, Shoefly, Regiment, Rufus Rastus were presented by the leading colored comedians, Bert Williams and Elder Eatmore, who were so adept in using folk satire that the audience could not mistake the real meaning. Florence Mills, also, became one of the foremost colored singers in such plays as Shuffle Along, Runnin' Wild and Black-Birds.94

Thus at the beginning of the twentieth century after more than a century of hard work, the negro had at last gained recognition for himself on the American stage. But it was the negro in his lighter moments, the negro of the song and dance moods that captivated the audiences. Of the serious aspect of his nature, the country as a whole was not concerned, for since the Civil War days, the negro's welfare was considered a sectional matter. But toward the turn of the century, an element of realism was introduced into the plays dramatized from Mark Twain's novels where the negro was dealt with sympathetically and where an unusual discernment into the character of the slave was shown. Dixon in the Clansman, also shows penetrating insight into the hidden recesses of negro character as it responds to the stimuli offered by the newly acquired freedom. Gradually, the more serious portrayals appeared and more attention began to be focused on

94. Benjamin Brawley, op. cit., p. 129.
the plight of this ill adjusted group. And these productions realistically conceived, led to the presentation of the various problems of the negro in dramatic form.
CHAPTER III

THE NEGRO AS A PROBLEM STUDY

and

AS AN OBJECT OF OR THEME FOR PROPAGANDA

From his inception into American life, the negro has been a disturbing element to the internal peace of the country, and his cause has furnished more material for controversial discussions than any other major topic of national importance. First, the moral implications of his social status interested the abolitionists, and this concern led to the Civil War. Then the difficulties of adjusting an alien group to a new environment attracted throughout the years one coterie of reformers after another, many of these reformers masking some private gain under the guise of concern for the negro's welfare.95

For it is obvious "that every significant development in negro life has come about in order that some larger benefit might accrue to someone else".96 Rescuing him from bondage satisfied the conscience of a nation, establishing him as a citizen offered a virgin field of exploration to political

95. Earnest Seiver Cox, White America, p. 254.
96. Arnold Hill, Economic Reconstructions, p. 68.
promoters, and exploiting him as an individual became the role of a number of philanthropists.

For the Emancipation Proclamation had two far flung results. It ruined the planting class and "it threw into turbulent forces of democracy a strange and distracting element". After the first bewildering experience as a freedman, "the negro was in turn the object of mob violence, of the wardship of the federal government, and of feverish attempts at higher education". The vote of the negro in the South became the "tool of corrupt politicians, and discrimination rose as a result".

By 1890, the South had embarked upon a new era in industry and the reaction from Reconstruction was complete. "Moral issues were no longer uppermost and the negro had to find in the new scheme such a place as he could." It was then that Booker T. Washington came forth and offered a solution. He advised the negroes to yield to disenfranchisement and caste and wait for greater economic strength and general efficiency before demanding full rights as an American citizen. This plan of action, however, was counteracted by

99. Ibid., p. 117.
the DuBois movement organized in 1905. No longer were the negroes to appear apologetic, no longer were they to surrender weakly to the decisions of the white people. Rather, they were to assert themselves and "cease to depend upon the favors grudgingly wrested from the white man" and begin "to rely on their own resources". 102

But as it is impossible for any group to become economically independent in a short time, what chance had the negro to carry out this assertion? He is not strong enough to withdraw and become self supporting. His need for the white man's good will weighs heavily in the balance. And so, he has to content himself with whatever concessions he can get. Occasionally, some ground is gained when the politicians realize the strength of the negro vote. Again, some ground is lost when the negro attempts to thrust himself too forcibly into competitive industry. And so the controversy rages on.

Naturally, reflections of these lines of thought found their way into the literature of the day and caused far reaching results. On the one hand, they brought before the public eye all the evils of slavery and its aftermath and thereby stimulated reform; on the other hand, they showed what a wide and impassible gap existed between the white and the black races and thereby established the negro as the lowest member

102. Benjamin Brawley, op. cit., p. 231.
of the caste system.

Even as early as 1776, the emancipation idea became apparent in the drama, *The Fall of British Tyranny*, when Lord Kidnap, in approving of the action of the runaway slaves, says:

That's clever; they have no right to make you slaves. I wish all the negroes would do the same as you. I'll make 'em all free . . . free as any white man.

Some twenty five years later, the idea had expanded to such an extent that Sambo in *The Triumph of Love* expresses the fears and the conjectures of the religious zealots, who had formerly been so eager to gather more members into their fold, when he says:

Sambo tink, he berry often tink why he slave to white man. Why black folk sold like cow or horse? Sometimes he tink dis way. He got bess massa in e world. He gib him fine clothes for dress. He gib him plenty money for pend; and for a little while he tink himself very happy. Afterward he tink anoder way. He pose massa George die, den he sold to some oder massa. Maybe he no use him well. When Sambo tink so, 't mose broke his heart.

After listening to this recital, Massa George shows his Christian charity by setting Sambo free and thus sets in motion the movement which was to bring about freedom for all negroes.

The purpose of the abolitionist was not to present the negro realistically, but to awaken for the slave a moving pity, and to arouse a sense of justice toward him. In order to do this the abolitionists "erred in differentiating too
little between the negro and the white man". They presented the negro as intelligent and capable as his master. They claimed that "Africans were merely white men with black skin". Slaves were made to appear "noble, brave, capable of great sacrifice and displaying great depth of feeling".

The general plan of attack was to focus on the individual instance and to show by means of contrast the injustices perpetrated on a defenceless human being. "To brighten the light of the planter's life the shadows of slave existence must be deepened", and the helpless pious black was therefore "placed side by side with the haughty and sometimes dissipat-ed ruling class" that lived in splendor while the negroes existed in misery.

In Uncle Tom's Cabin the motive was to excite public indignation by presenting a type of good man, a man of sterling piety who was subjected to bitter bondage and maltreatment. The play is more or less symbolical. Uncle Tom, himself, serves as the personification of the "slave in noble protest against degradation and, as such, exhibits most of humanity's virtues and none of its vices". His moral responsibility

104. Ibid., p. 87.
105. Ibid., p. 87.
106. F. F. Gaines, op. cit., p. 50.
toward his master and his devotion to him are expressed in the following selection when Tom refuses Eliza's plan for escape:

No, no - I ain't going. Let Eliza go - it's her right. I wouldn't be the one to say No - 'tain't in natur for her to stay; but you heard what she said? If I must be sold, or all the people on the place, and everything go to rack, why, let me be sold. I s'pose I can bear it as well as anyone. 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 I 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 you and the poor little 'uns.

Later, in rebelling against Legree's command to beat Emmeline, Tom voices the sentiment of the whole country against the brutality of slavery when he pleads:

Mas'r, I'm willing to work night and day, and work while there's life and breath in me; but this yer thing I can't feel right to do, and, Mas'r I never shall do it, never.

George Harris, on the other hand, is the exact antithesis to Uncle Tom. He is not the slave submissive; he is the slave defiant. His character was built on fact, not sentiment. He represents the outraged human being fighting against a pernicious system:

My master. And who made him my master? That's what I think! What right has he to me? I'm as much a man as he is! What right has he to make a drayhorse of me? - to take me from things I can do better than he can, and put me to work that any horse can do? He tries to do it; he says he'll bring me down and humble me, and he puts me to just the hardest, meanest, and dirtiest work, on purpose.
To complete the allegory, Simon Legree represents the evil of slavery and Topsy illustrates the belief that there is "no slave however irresponsible and frivolous who cannot be redeemed through love". This idea is embodied in Topsy's thoughts as she reviews her life with Ophelia:

... By golly! she's been dre'ful kind to me ever since I come away from de South; and I loves her. I does, 'cause she takes such car' on me and gives me dese fine clothes. I tries to be good, too, and I' se getting 'long 'mazin' fast. I' se not so wicked as I used to was.

These evident appeals to the sentimental tendencies of the audience gained their objective; for the performance of Uncle Tom's Cabin made numerous converts to the abolition doctrine, as many persons, who had never examined the subject and knew nothing of its merits, went abolition after seeing the play.

In their zeal to further the cause the reformers decided to expose many of those evils which were outgrowths of the system. And the most widely discussed was the one of miscegenation. Neighbor Jackwood by Trowbridge, Dred by Brougham, and The Octoroon by Boucicault dealt with this theme. Because The Octoroon made the greatest appeal to chivalry it became the most popular. The entire problem of the play is summed up when Zoë, with a gesture of hope-

lessness, confesses her birth:

George, do you see that hand you hold? Look at these fingers; do you see the nails are a bluish tinge? . . . . That is the ineffaceable curse of Cain. Of the blood that feeds my heart, one drop in eight is black—bright red as the rest may be, that one drop poisons all the blood.

And with a cry of despair, she expresses the condemnation of the law as well as of society upon persons of her race:

Will your mother see you wedded to the child of her husband's slave? No, she would revolt from it, as all but you would.

In this play the dialogue and the characters seemed to favor the South, but the action proclaimed against slavery and called loudly for its abolition. According to Joseph Jefferson who played the role of Salem Scudder, the Yankee overseer, the play was noncommittal for:

When the old negro, just before the slave sale, calls his culled bredrin around him and tells them they must look their best so as to bring a good price for the 'missis', and then falling on his knees asks a blessing on the family that had been so kind to them, the language drew further sympathy for the loving hearts of the South; but when they felt by the action of the play that the old darky that had made them weep, was a slave, they became abolitionists to a man. When Zoe, the loving octoroon, is offered to the highest bidder, and a warm hearted Southern girl offers all her fortune to buy Zoe and release her from bondage . . . . the audience cheered for the South; but when again the action revealed that she could be bartered for, and bought and sold, they cheered for the North as plainly as though they had said, 'Down with slavery'.

But if The Octoroon showed non-partisan indications, Neighbor Jackwood and Dred did not. The former expressed

the Northern protest against the Fugitive Slave Law, for Camille, an octoroon slave from Louisiana, is protected by a Vermont farmer and freed. Dred was a warning to whites that holding a people in bondage may not always be safe, that all captives are not Uncle Toms. "Uncle Tom had made the sentimental appeal of the Christian murdered by a cruel master, while Dred made the more austere appeal of the intelligent bondsman aroused to righteous anger." 111 Dred was the antagonist against the law and as such he personified the soul of a race in protest against slavery.

In the abolition controversy, the negro became a victim, a man of sorrows, a fugitive chased by bloodhounds, a beautiful octoroon grossly mistreated, a crucified Uncle Tom. But after the Civil War, interest in the negro gradually waned. He was no longer a slave; he was a freed man. The Christians had done their duty and must turn their attention to other matters. Then came the period of Reconstruction and its aftermath. Suddenly the black man became either a faithful old "before de war" darkey worshipping lordly white folk, a rollicking ape, a villain, a sullen scoundrel, a low thief, or a subnormal. 112 The vogue for local color spread throughout the country, and the plantation theme was used

extensively.

Many Southern writers, in contributing material for the stage, stressed the point that only in rare instances were slaves mistreated, that on the whole the plantation regime promoted a joyous life for both races, the "gaiety of the whites", however, being subordinated "to a stern sense of responsibility for the welfare of the blacks". Likewise, tender feelings existed between master and slave; for the happiness of the slave was considered vitally important.

In the drama, The Reverend Griffith Davenport, Herne showed that slaves were a contented lot and that when they were offered their manumission papers they were outraged because they did not wish to be considered belonging to the degraded class of "free niggers" that were thrown upon the public bounty. In A Fair Rebel, Mawson presents a very childish, contented slave, who, when offered his freedom, cordially refuses it:

Massa, dis hayr pooh ole nigger hain't got to clar out kos dis hayr proplamation says he's free, is he Massa? I'se born hayr an' de ole house an' de faces ob you an' Missy Claire is all pooh ole Nelse has got ter lub now. I'se an old man, Massa, but I kin be young nuff ter work fo' you.

And the benevolent master replies:

Nelse, we won't turn you away . . . Here, you live as long as life lasts, but we have no money to pay you wages.

113. F. P. Gaines, op. cit., p. 47.
But the faithful slave, with a gesture of disdain, refuses to discuss the question of money:

Wages? Me wo'k fo' money? No, indeed, sah. I'se mooh abspect fo' myself. Why den, Massa I'se no better dan de white trash what's loafin' 'bout de public house in de town . . . No sah, ole Nelse takes no money from the Monteith family.

In Horshoe Robinson, Tayleure has Steve, the slave, advance a unique argument to the English soldiers in favor of slavery:

Look yer, soldier man, don't come yer to 'buse me; I'm a native nigger; but I am susceptible to de strongest kind of proof dat I ain't no more slave than you chaps wot's got to do just as your ossifers tell you. If I disobey's massa, he larrups me - if you disobey your ossifer - dat's your massa - he shoots you. I tink I'se a d'yon sight de bes' of de two.

From these excerpts it is obvious that the Southern writers considered "slavery a blessed state",114 and that the North suffered under an erroneous impression. How astonished the abolitionists must have felt when they saw that love's labor was lost; when they realized they had driven inhabitants from Paradise! But if the Southern writers painted the lives of the negroes in glowing colors, they did it with the attitude of a benevolent despot. In his place, the negro served a need; and for this was to be commended. He must not transgress his privileges, however, for he did not

114. F. P. Gaines, op. cit., p. 47.
belong to the same social class; he was an inferior.

And this idea associated with the theme of mixed blood makes Pudd'n Head Wilson an outstanding play. This piece did not aim to arouse pity for the victim as those of the abolition period, but to prove that "black's black, an' white's white. If yo' not one, yo' the othah". Therefore, Tom Driscoll's small part of negro blood made him the monster that he was. From youth he was devoid of affection and took much delight in wounding all those with whom he came in contact. When Roxy heard that her son had refused to fight a man that had insulted him she said:

En you refuse to fight a man dat kicked you 'stid o' jumpin' at de chance ... Bah, it makes me sick. It's de nigger in you, dat's what it is. Thirty-one parts of you is white an' on'y one part nigger, 'en dat po' little one part is yo' soul. 'Tain't wuth savin', 'tain't wuth totin' out on a shovel en throwin' in de gutter. Yo' has disgraced yo' birth.

Yet, even though Tom Driscoll is a good-for-nothing, Pudd'n Head Wilson expresses the attitude of the community toward negroes who assault white men, no matter whether the cause be just or otherwise:

We must keep Chambers out of the way, for if it becomes generally known that he has laid violent hands upon even such a contemptible specimen of the white race as Tom Driscoll - well it might be hard with him.

Aside from the problems that stemmed from slavery were

the ones caused by throwing an illiterate, inexperienced group upon a country that was not prepared to receive it. Since slavery was the almost absolute denial of initiative and responsibility, the negro felt he had the right to be supported by the whites, and if he did not receive this support he did not hesitate to steal. He became aggressive and obnoxious under the carpet bag regime, and antagonized the white people to such an extent that racial prejudice began to spread rapidly. Dixon in The Clansman shows this attitude in the conversation between two minor officials:

Alex to Dick - You can fling your sass at white folks, but youse tempting death to fool wid me.
Dick to Alex - I is a dark skinned white man and is as good as anybody.

The author points out in this play as in The Birth of a Nation the justification for maintenance of white supremacy since the carpet baggers had completely demoralized the negroes. The Birth of a Nation is the story of Reconstruction rule in the South showing the manner in which the negroes and carpet baggers persecuted the Southerners in such a way "as to excite the deepest revulsion" and proving the fact that the negro belongs to an inferior race with little hope for the future.

Now and then, there were sporadic attempts to champion

the cause of the negro, but these were ineffectual against the onslaught of Southern antagonism. In *For Fair Virginia*, Whytat has Steve, a northern business man, announce his broad-mindedness toward negroes in this fashion:

That's the first time I ever shook hands with a negro. I'm proud to do it.

In *An Unwelcome Return*, Munson portrays Julius Jones, a negro dancer, as Mrs. Gump's dancing instructor for she has "found no one who dances as well as he". In *Aunt Dinah's Pledge*, Miss Marsh, the teacher, shows her humanitarian attitude in this reply to Aunt Dinah's request:

Well, Aunt Dinah, I have no prejudice on account of color, having been taught by my dear parents that we should look upon every child of Adam as a brother or sister of the earth, each depending upon the Universal Father who is in Heaven, and therefore I will undertake the task of teaching your son.

But this favorable attitude toward the negro cause was offset by such pieces as *Cumberland 61*, in which Dirk, a cadet at West Point who has claimed to be a half breed Indian, is accused of being a half breed negro and is punished by being socially isolated; by *Pudd'n Head Wilson*, in which Wilson expresses disapproval to his friend who has asked to be presented to a mulatto:

But I don't think you would care to know that young man in a social way. He's a nigger fast enough. Thirty-one parts are white, one black. Quite enough to place him at a disadvantage with a white man in these parts.
The antagonism is further demonstrated in such pieces that deal with political tampering. In *A Texas Steer*, the negro, Fishback, talks loudly about his chances for getting jobs from politicians; and in *The New South*, Sampson who expects to be the first colored postmaster, approaches Jeff, a white candidate for the office of United States senator, and offers to swing the negro vote in his favor for the sum of one thousand dollars. With outraged dignity, Jeff replies:

Not if the entire negro vote of the entire South could be bought. The Northern army is here for no other purpose than to count in the opposition by main force. If I never get to Congress, I shall not subscribe to your knavery.

As a result of proslavery and antislavery arguments, the negro character fell a victim to attacks and counter attacks of both factions. The Anti-slavery group pictures the negro as a noble, honest, ambitious person completely crushed or brutalized by his life. The pro-slavery group pictured the slave as too contented or too inexperienced to look out for himself, and therefore he was in need of a master. Yet these two factions glorified the negro's submissiveness while at the same time they fostered the error that the mixed blood characters, merely because they were nearer white, were "more intelligent and militant and therefore more tragic in
And this attitude caused the full blooded negro to suffer from feelings of inferiority, and encouraged the mixed breed to clamor for equality with the whites, an action which caused their social isolation by both races. Even Topsy in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* felt the implication and voiced her protest against this discrimination when Eva rebuked her for her behavior toward Jane, a mulatto:

> She called me a little black imp, and turned up her nose at me 'cause she is whiter than I am . . . I despise dem what sets up for fine ladies when dey ain't nothing but cream colored niggers.

With the advent of the *Uncle Remus* stories by Harris and the darky ballads of Lanier and Russell, a new post war interest in the negro originated. By his effective use of dialect, Harris portrayed the negro in his "whimsical, pathetic mood, convincingly true to nature". But this characterization, charming as it was, could not counteract the powerful racial feelings that were gradually taking root. The negro, having gained his economic freedom, was forced to concern himself toward the end of the century "with the salvation of his personality" from the dangers that beset him in the social set-up of the times, and from the "prejudices and stupidities which prevent a full and free expression of

118. Benjamin Brawley, *op. cit.*, p. 73.
119. John Herbert Nelson, *op. cit.*, p. 120.
each human soul".120

To rescue the negro from this intense antagonism of the white people Booker T. Washington changed the emphasis in Southern negro education from preparation for professions to training for agriculture and industrial life.121 This plan met the approval of the whites for it outlined a procedure by which the blacks could be kept in a subservient position. Some fifteen years later, however, the negroes under DuBois began to rebel against the silent forces of race prejudice which molded conduct and attitude and which placed them in a social environment entirely apart from their neighbor. They began to insist upon a liberal education in order to understand social relationships.122

Then came the World War which temporarily checked immigration in the United States. Hordes of negroes came North and furnished the cheap labor formerly supplied by the European immigrants. In this movement from agricultural pursuits to those of an industrial trend, the negro found himself confronted by a wider range of occupation, a condition which created unlimited opportunities and gave rise to the desire for higher educational standards.123 As the war

121. Ernest Sevier Cox, op. cit., p. 126.
122. R. Murray and T. Flynn, op. cit., p. 121.
123. Arnold Hill, op. cit., p. 36.
lifted the living level of the negroes, their outlook on life changed; for competition in the industrial North offered advantages for bettering their social status. 124

But after the World War, many difficulties arose. Fear that the negro would underbid him and lower the white man's wages caused racial feeling to run high. Therefore, in industry as well as in trade and commerce, the negro was assigned to the menial tasks; and this long habit of subservience has led to an inward feeling of servility and inferiority. 125 For from early childhood, American culture constantly forces upon the negro the idea that he is inferior to the white man. He learns that he can avoid painful conflict only by accepting a position of inferiority. 126

As a result of this attitude the drama, today, concerns itself with the modes of negro thought rather than with his romantic background. In the Abolition and Reconstruction controversy, the propaganda was obvious and overweighted; but in the modern drama it is subtle and suggestive, a touch that makes for more artistic effect. The themes in most of the plays dealing with negro life, however, are those that have grown out of the plantation evils, but they are treated in a modern fashion. For instance, the theme of miscegena-

125. R. Murray and T. Flynn, op. cit., p. 121.
126. Willis D. Weatherford, op. cit., p. 345.
tion has a keener sense of tragedy in *White Dresses* than it has in *The Octoroon*. Mary McLean is not the martyr that Zoë is. Rather, she loves Hugh Morgan and wants to marry him and rebels against the social laws that forbid her happiness. But she is caught in the web of circumstance and must submit to the inevitable. What a powerful significance the appearance of the two white dresses has upon an audience! How poignant are Mary's sufferings as she realizes her position! Truly, she cannot marry her father's son, and in utter despair she cries out against life. And Granny McLean, from the bitterness of her experience, utters tragically:

*I knows yo' feelings chile, but you's gut to smother 'em in, you's gut to smother 'em in.*

The theme of the agony of mixed blood, too, has undergone changes. The cry of the mulatto is due to the disharmony of the inherited traits. He is depressed and resentful merely because he is socially proscribed. Instead of suffering silently under the weight of a handicap, hoping to elicit pity and sympathy for one's condition as Zoë in *The Octoroon* and Camille in *Neighbor Jackwood*, the modern mulatto is more aggressive. He tries to overcome his birth and attempts to bring about a higher level of living among his own people. *The Nigger* by Edward Sheldon gives an excellent

example of this trait. Phil Morrow, the governor of the state, has just discovered he is a negro and instead of seeking oblivion he plans to work for the betterment of his race. He discusses his problem with the girl he had hoped to marry and he outlines his future course to her when he says:

Senatoh Long showed me the way . . . It's the only one that's open to me - I couldn't take any othah if I wanted. I've got to wo'k fo' the niggahs - shouldah to shouldah - b'cause I'm a niggar myself, an' b'cause they need me awful bad.

Paul Green in Abraham's Bosom treats of the same problem in a different light for he shows two sets of racial impulses warring against each other. And this condition is the subject of the following conversation among three field hands who envy Abraham and yet are contemptuous of his aspirations:

Lije - Nigger keep mouf shet, let white man do talking, he safe den -
Puny - Nigger's place down de bottom - white man on top.
Bud - White and black make bad mixtry.
Lije - Do dat.(Thumping on chest) Nigger down heah.
(Thumping his head) White mens up heah. Heart say do one thing, head say 'nudder. Bad, bad.
Puny - De white blood in him coming to de top. Dat make him wanta climb up and he sump'n. Nigger gwine hol' him down dough. Part of him lak de Colonel, part lak his mah, 'vision and misery inside.

The colored feel that they are looked upon as an inferior and despised race and that no matter to what degree of excellence they may attain they cannot gain the respect and recognition which they merit.128 This is the basic

idea of Stevedore in which the economic and spiritual struggle of the black laboring man is presented. Because Lonnie is more intelligent and more aggressive than the other negroes, he tried to teach them to fight for their rights. But racial prejudice is such a powerful force that these negroes feel it is useless to attempt to combat it and express their fears in the following manner:


Lonnie - Ain't no peace fo' de black man, preacher, ain't never gwine be, till he fight to get it. Jim Veal say you try to organize and you run smack into trouble. Sho' you run into trouble. Why? We try to organize to get ourselves a decent living. And what happens? Dey beat us up, dey arrest us, dey shoot us, burn down our houses. Why? Why? Why dey do dat? Because dey just plain mean? Because dey want to give us pain? Because dey like to see you dangling from a tree? No. Dat ain't de reason. De reason is dey want to keep the black man down.

The distrust of the negro and the consequent injustices that fall upon him are well exemplified in Judge Lynch by J. W. Rogers, Jr. Because a negro lived in the neighborhood, he was blamed for any crime that occurred. And Mrs. Joplin acting as a mouthpiece for most of the white people of America says:
Mrs. Joplin - When the niggers were brought from that there African wilderness they brung something along with them that folks didn't know was coming. Something that belongs to the wilderness, that ain't got no place in a white man's land, and never will. Niggers has got used to Christian clothes, they don't put rings in their noses no more, and some of them's ironed most of the kink out of their hair. But they ain't never got rid of that other thing, and civilization and laws ain't no good for it. Mostly it's asleep now, but you can't never tell when it's going to wake up - when it's going to lie waiting for you like one of them African animals they has in cages at the circus world. When it is awake, it don't know any language except what them animals knows. That's why no white woman dares go down a lonely road, or cross a field after dark. That's why Ed don't like to ride at night without his gun. It's fighting that wild thing, men are, when they lynched that nigger today.

A similar example of this theme is discussed by Paul Green in Sam Tucker. Muh Tuck, a member of the older generation, is trying to impress a member of the younger generation as to the inevitability of the negro status in society. With much bitterness she says:

Muh Tuck - Time youse learning dat white is white and black is black and God made de white to allus be bedder'n de black. It was so intended from de beginning

Wiley Boy - No it ain't much to lie in de jug, is it? You do it and you ain't never gwine have no mo' peace. De cops is allus watching you. Dey tried to 'rest me yestiday in Lillington and I hadn't done nothing. And de old man was knowing of it too. But I'se learnt what he'll never learn and it's dis - dat we belongs down wid de pick and de heavy things -
Wiley Boy - at de bottom doing de dirty work for de white man, dat's it. And he ain't gwine stand for us to be educated outen it nuther. He's gwine keep us dere. It pays him to. I sees it. And adder all dese years pap keeps on trying to teach dat men is men.

Another problem that offers much food for thought is the result of the black man's contact with the white man. Just how much of the white man's culture will the black assimilate? What effect will these new ideas have upon his behavior? For it has been noted that, when a very backward race is placed in close association with a race of high culture, it becomes aware of its inferiority and makes drastic attempts to imitate the actions of the superior race. "And this desire to imitate the people of high culture often results in the assimilation of its vices".129 What a commentary on the people of the United States may be made by observing the behavior of Emperor Jones! Of all the qualities the negro might have imitated, he selected those which made the most romantic appeal; the love for color, for grandeur, for ostentation, for wealth. It made no difference how these qualities were obtained. The cold blooded methods of the business man had taught him not to be squeamish over trifles, and in the following selection, Jones exultingly relates how he took a leaf from the white man's book:

129. Willis D. Weatherford, op. cit., p. 125.
Jones - For de little stealin' dey gits you in jail soon or late. For de big stealin' dey makes you Emperor and puts you in de Hall O' Fame when you croaks. If dey's one thing I learns in ten years on de Pullman ca's listenin' to de white quality talk, it's dat same fact. And when I gits a chance to use it I winds up Emperor in two years.

By means of these modern plays, the authors delineate the inner life of their characters with increasing fidelity to actual conditions. By their vigorous treatment of social problems they present the negro not as a captain of his soul but as a poor bedeviled animal, a victim of environment and of heredity. They center the attention on the spirituality of the man and plead for less patronage and more understanding. This newer negro is a more striking and disquieting figure than the appealing one of Uncle Remus. He is stern and more enigmatic and therefore loses that delightful naivete and happy buoyancy of spirit that so characterized the negro of Russell and Harris. Yet these plays provoke thought and are strong arguments against racial discrimination, for the realism of the play is subordinated to the purpose of pleading for greater harmony between the two races.
CHAPTER IV

THE NEGRO AS A HUMAN BEING
in
AMERICAN DRAMA

If the early American drama did not consider the negro character of any particular importance, it did feel that he was too conspicuous a figure to be omitted entirely. At first, he was used to supply the comedy effects or to lend an atmosphere of Southern plantation life. But, later, as the anti-slavery and pro-slavery controversies raged he became a prominent figure in the drama.

In the delineation of his character the reformers on both sides of the controversy, not being sufficiently detached to gain a proper perspective, presented figures that were strained and overdrawn. And because of the constant repetition of these distorted characterizations, they became stage conventions. Therefore, at the end of the nineteenth century the country believed the negro either a buffoon, a degenerate beast, or a subservient lackey.130

To counteract this concept of the negro character, the

leaders of the DuBois movement decided to follow the example of the Irish Theatre in its sympathetic and understanding treatment of folk life. And this treatment, based on the negro's social experience, would present the reality of the true negro peasant and, they hoped, would efface the artificial stage figure. Harris, in his *Uncle Remus Stories*, pointed the way by developing a rich mass of negro folk lore that had been transplanted from Africa. He had listened to the animal and bird legends handed down from the African ancestors and beloved by every plantation negro. Weaving environmental changes into this material, Harris projected the negro not as a long suffering martyr but as a talkative old man given to gossiping about his master and his master's family and to interspersing his gossip with shrewd comments on the activities of the day. By his effectual use of dialect and theme, Harris raised a much abused subject from the minstrel stage to literature.\footnote{Irvin Russell, too, saw the possibilities of the negro character; for he was the first to discover the happy, carefree, humorous negro. And Paul Lawrence Dunbar, by his faithful delineation of the negro in his humble and picturesque setting, by his fine touches of humor and pathos, and \textit{W. E. B. DuBois, op. cit.}, p. 306.}
by his artful use of dialect presented a character that merited more than ordinary attention.

All of these writers emphasized the human qualities of the negro: his humor, his idiosyncracies, his religious beliefs, his happy disposition, his homespun philosophy, and his childlike reaction to emotion. They succeeded in portraying the folk figure, a type, naïve and simple and appreciated throughout the world.

Yet this characterization did not please the negro. It was not so much the crude expressions of the peasant characters that contributed to his dislike, but rather the repelling atmosphere and the psychology of the inferior that was suggested. The treatment usually accorded to the negro made him think meanly of himself instead of seeing his own worth. As a matter of fact only "backward niggers" were ever caught singing spirituals between the 1880's and the second half of the twentieth century as the more "progressive and aggressive elements in the race frowned upon the spirituals as a reminder of slavery and ignorance". 132

Soon, however, the teachings of Booker T. Washington began to bear fruit as he showed the negro that by a new kind of education he could attain to an economic condition that would enable him to preserve his identity, free his soul, and

132. N. I. White, op. cit., p. 3.
make himself an important factor in American life. This stimulus gained impetus from the works of Dunbar who revealed "the virgin field" which the negro's own talents and conditions of life offered "for creating new forms of beauty". Since Dunbar was a full blooded negro, his ability did much to eradicate the theory that negroes are mentally inferior to white people or to the mixed breeds.

To establish his race pride on a firm basis, the negro had to determine certain facts. And one of the most forceful in the campaign was the announcement to the public of a list of contributions made by members of their race to their adopted countries. To ascertain the extent of these patriotic efforts it was necessary to study the history of the activities of the negroes. And in rediscovering and reinterpreting their past, the negroes became interested in their ancestry and this interest drew them to a more distant source. "Beyond the confines of America, loomed up Africa with all its secrets as to their cultural past." And as these secrets were "slowly unfolded", the negro found "ample scope for experiencing pride" as he began to "appreciate the qualities of his race that were expressed hundreds of years ago". As a result of this research and of a new attitude

134. Sterling I. Brown, op. cit., p. 35.
toward life, the race gradually became self conscious; and pride of race began to supplant the bitter wail of unjust persecution.136

As the general tendency on the stage at this time was toward the treatment of actual American life, the American drama began to be concerned with the individual against some opposing force, and the dramatist began to develop this theme by showing the growth of spiritual life through evolution of character.137 This approach to the drama demanded a careful study of social experience, and one of the outstanding examples of this type of treatment is found in The Nigger by Sheldon, for it marks the first sincere effort to sound the depths of racial experience for modern drama. The piece is a serious treatment of the theme that character may be ennobled by suffering, and it is the first attempt to allot to a negro a role conspicuous and important.138

In this play, Governor Philip Morrow, an aristocrat who has been elected to the office because of his unfavorable political attitude toward negroes, learns that he is the grandson of a negro slave. His reaction to this disclosure, his unwillingness to release his fiancee, and her temporary revulsion toward him are moments of intense emotion. But

136. Alain Locke, op. cit., p. 22.
Morrow's despair is lightened somewhat by the hope of redemption for his race expressed by Senator Long, and he determines to play fair, to refuse his financee's suggestion to marry abroad since the law forbids members of the white and black races to intermarry, to expose his status to the crowd that has come to cheer him, and to devote the rest of his life to the welfare of his race. To play the game honorably demands self-sacrifice, but it also promotes self respect, and this should be the goal, Morrow felt, toward which all negroes should strive.

With these two new streams of thought dominating the theatre: the treatment of folk life with sympathy and understanding as influenced by the Irish school and the careful study of racial experience as advocated by the school of realism, a group of plays appeared that delineated negro characters so skillfully that each one became an individual, a person who might step forth and say as Irwin Cobb's hero in _Poindexter Colored_ says of himself:

I ain't no problem, I'se a pusson, I craves to be so regarded.

And each character is so deftly drawn that it becomes a portrait of a human being readily identified in negro life. Each portrait contributes an interesting insight into negro character and furnishes a clue to the understanding of the race. Just as the pieces of a jig-saw puzzle seem a collec-
tion of ill assorted pieces of material until fitted into their proper places, so the studies of the many phases of negro character in juxtaposition to each other bring about a clearer perception of the nature of a people.

Among those who specialized in delineating the hitherto dramatically inarticulate negro folk whose real qualities had been camouflaged by minstrel treatment was Ridgely Torrence. In his Three Plays for a Negro Theatre produced in 1917, two characters are especially worthy of notice. One of these is Granny Maumee, the leading figure in a play of the same title. She is a superstitious old woman who bears an intense hatred against white people because a mob had lynched her son. And since she is also fanatical on the subject of mixed blood, she is proud of her untainted "royal black" ancestry and will discourse at length on this subject to any one who will listen to her. She illustrates the type of full blooded negro that resents the implication of the mental inferiority of the black race.

The other outstanding Torrence character is Madison Sparrow in The Rider of Dreams. In this characterization of the negro and his guitar, Torrence seemed at times on the verge of reverting to the minstrel type, but his insight into the nature of the man struck deeper than the minstrel copy ever intended. For Torrence shows in this piece that the
strain of shiftlessness in negroes is caused by their resentment to discipline, a state of mind which causes them to drift from one occupation to another without specializing in any. Now, this Madison Sparrow is a dreamer and a wastrel. He allows his wife to do the work, support the household, and save the surplus money, if any. Suddenly he decides to become the responsible head of the family. He is induced to go into business with a white man; but he needs money. He forges his wife's signature and withdraws the savings from the bank. As a token of good will he receives from the white man a guitar stolen from the landlord. He loses the money and anxiously awaits results which take place almost immediately. The protests of the landlord and of Madison's wife are so loud and long that Madison decides to seek refuge in apparent repentance. And with the skillful tactics of the ne'er-do-well, he gets a job, poses as a reformed sinner, and like a braggart chants another dream:

Yassah, I did, and Gawd he up an' gimme de go-by, too. What he bin doin' fo' me? Nuthin'. Now I goin' spit on my han's and whu'l in an' trus' myse'f. An' I feel lots betteh. I can feel conferdence wukin' all oveh me. I casts 'em all off. I'm lookin' out fo' myself. M-m-m- It took me long time to get heah, but now I'm heah let 'em look out for me . . .

Paul Green is another dramatist who wrote of negro folk life. Seeing the great emotional possibilities of a race that lives by feeling, he decided to give dramatic expression
to their every day activities. In his No Count Boy, Green offers a charming portrait of a vagabond, a musical dreamer who talks of far away places in such glowing terms that Pheelie, his girl friend, is more than willing to accompany him to his wonderland. But as in all such dreams, reality lurks in the offing, and disillusion and bitterness follow in its wake. What chagrin and regret Pheelie must have experienced as she saw the Old Woman taking away by force her No Count Boy!

The Hot Iron, however, is a piece written in a serious vein. Here, Green illustrates the theme that even the lowly worm will turn upon its oppressor if goaded too much. He presents Tilsy McNeil as a hard working good-natured drudge who is driven to desperation by the demands of her shiftless husband. In a moment of exasperation she hitshim with a hot iron and kills him. Assuring herself that he is dead, she does not experience remorse, but she does express a fear of the law and an apprehension for the future welfare of her children.

Another play by Green, Sam Tucker, deals with the relationship between the white and black races. An optimistic old negro preacher, Sam Tucker, believes that man's injustice to man is based on a question of misunderstanding, and just as soon as the white man understands the negro, all diffi-
culties between the two races will disappear. But his son, Wiley Boy, shows a keener grasp of the situation and a deeper insight into the causes of racial prejudice as he pessimistically comments on his father's philosophy.

The dominant figure in Green's White Dresses is Granny McLean, a kindly old lady who wishes to see her granddaughter happy. She can become militant, however, if the occasion warrants it. When her granddaughter's welfare becomes jeopardized, she fights for decency and respectability, subdues the rebellion, and sets the stage for a new but none-the-less cheerless deal. In her advice to Mary McLean she embodies all the bitterness that the soul of the negro has experienced at the hands of the white people.

For Abraham's Bosom, Green needed a knowledge of the negro's soul to its uttermost depths in order to procure the material for his wide range of character. This play tends toward the symbolical as each figure represents a quality or trait of negro character. Abe McCranie illustrates ambition without sufficient power to warrant favorable reward. Goldie McCranie typifies the passionate nature of the negro and introduces the deterring element in Abe's struggle for success. Muh Mack, Abe's aunt personifies the old unprogressive negro, and Douglas, Abe's son, is a striking example of an individual in revolt from authority. With four such
characters residing in close quarters, each attempting to maintain his individuality yet grudgingly submitting to the will of Abe, the result is bound to bring about a state of chaos. Ambition handicapped by a passionate nature, by unprogressiveness, by mutiny, by a lack of proper preparation for a career, and by an unsympathetic environment, would ultimately, by means of greater strength in opposition, meet defeat. Yet, in spite of all obstacles, Abe, spurred on by the vision of his ideal, refuses to acknowledge failure until the jealousy and the race prejudice of the white people gained the ascendancy. These being stronger and bearing a deeper significance cause Abe to bow to the inevitable and he falls by the bullets of the avengers of his white half brother who was his evil genius and whom he murdered. Because of his own limitations, Abe failed as thousands of other do for the same reason in real life. Yet Abe's frustration seems more terrible by contrast since the fate of the whole race is being weighed in the balance.

By his delineations of character, of which the above examples are representative, Green has contributed many interesting portraits to the gallery of negro folk figures, each differentiated from the other by his individual personality and each worthy of taking his place beside his counterpart on the stage of life.
Various other writers contributed to this gallery, also. The dramatization of *Porgy* by Dorothy and DuBose Heyward portrayed life among the negro fisher folk of Catfish Row in Charleston, South Carolina, and brought two unique figures into prominence. The central character, the crippled beggar of Charleston streets, proves by his understanding and solicitude that an outcast need not be a liability to a community but may be an asset if care is taken in the management of the problem. The theme bears resemblances to the Topsy-reformed-by-love idea embodied in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, but the Heyward's treatment is less sentimental, much more realistic, and decidedly more convincing than that of Harriet Beecher Stowe. As a cripple, Porgy realizes the handicaps of life and is more tolerant of weaknesses than normal people. As a beggar, he finds a livelihood by conveying himself to a busy corner in an upturned soap box drawn by a very dirty goat, and there he asks for alms from the passers-by. With him Bess seeks refuge, and the power of his love and consideration for her causes a spiritual transformation in Bess.

The other folk characters in the group scenes, especially at the wake in Serena's room over her murdered husband, inject something of the grimness of Southern life into the play, and the religious frenzy of the mob rises to moments of intense emotional power.
Mamba's Daughters, another play by the DuBose Heywards is similar to Porgy in that it treats of the inner life of a retarded group. Porgy deals with the power of love over a social outcast, while Mamba's Daughters depicts the strength of mother love. The scene takes place on a plantation near Charleston, and here, four outstanding characters work out their destinies. Hagar, Mamba, and Gilly Bluton are concerned about the welfare of Lissa, Hagar's daughter. Lissa is the idol of her mother and grandmother and the source of revenue for Gilly Bluton. Throughout the play, Mamba exerts a restraining influence upon her daughter, Hagar, who is the product of her passionate nature and frequently finds herself in difficulties. She is also responsible for the atmosphere of respectability surrounding Lissa for she felt that a correct background would eliminate handicaps in later life. Lissa, the girl with the lovely voice, has just been acclaimed a great singer by the radio audiences of New York; and Gilly Bluton is a malicious ne'er-do-well who thrives upon the mistakes of others but miscalculates the strength of his opponent when he goads Hagar to desperation. The deadly fury with which she murders Gilly Bluton is transformed into pleased surprise and pride when Hagar hears her daughter's voice attributing all the credit of her success to her mother. This expression fades into a rueful smile and is followed by a look
of grim determination when she realizes that the only way she
can save her daughter's reputation is by making the final
sacrifice, and this she does without a murmur of protest.

In a piece such as this where the emotions become ele-
mental, the play has a gripping intensity. Ethel Waters in
the role of Hagar and Georgia Burke in that of Mamba portray
the characters so well that Hagar and Mamba become personalities
and, like all other human beings, react to their environment
according to their natures.

Negro dramatists, too, attempted to present the folk-
life of their people. One of these playwrights, Frank Wilson,
an actor of talent, wrote Sugar Cane which, although it is
melodramatic in spots, has good observation of folk types and
strikes the realistic note when Paul replies to his son about
the lack of opportunity for the negro in the South:

As long as I can fool dese white folks outer dere
cash, by lettin' 'em feel dat dey's better
dan I am, dat's wot Ahm goin' ter do. Lissen, son -
I got money an! I got property. I could buy an'
sell some o' dese white folks 'roun' hyer - but I
ain't goin' ter let dem know it. I could fix dis
shack up and live in grand style if I wanted to -
But de minnit I did dot dese folks would git curious,
and wanter say dat I didn't know ma place, and dat I
was tryin' ter act lak white folks - fust thing yo' know I'd have a lot ob trouble on my han's - an' I
couldn't stay hyer, - So I fools 'em. Ah banks ma
money, keeps ma mouth shut, an' makes believe Ahm a
poor ole nigger, and dat day's de cooc o' de walk.
An' I kin get dere shirt. I know 'em. An' I
didn't learn dat in no school neither ... Yo' all
talk 'bout race pride, you'd better get a li'l race
sense.
From this excerpt it is readily seen that Paul is not the militant type but, rather, the shrewd old Uncle Remus who knows his adversary better than his adversary knows him.

A vivid resume of folk types and folk experiences is found in Marc Connelly's *The Green Pastures*. In the preface, Mr. Connelly describes the play as "an attempt to present certain aspects of a living religion in terms of its believers. The religion is that of thousands of negroes in the deep South". But it really is a "statement in simple terms of the relationship of anyone with his God". The piece consists in a series of events surrounding the lives of the naive simple folk in the bayou country of the deep South. To these uneducated but religious folk, heaven was a place where everything one wanted could be had without cost. The Reverend Mr. Deshee's Sunday School, the fishfry, Noah's wish for the second "kag", young gamblers starting with "frozen" dice, magicians, city scoffers, the innocent, the sinful - all are portrayed in a realistic manner and furnish excellent additions to the folk type gallery of portraits begun by Ridgely Torrence.

Likewise, the realistic and problem dramas have contributed some noteworthy portraits to the gallery. One of the finest is Abe, the dreamy kid, in a play by the same title. This play suggests the damage that life can do to a character.

In his early youth Abe had been a dreamer and a lovable child. Now, he is a hardened criminal and a fugitive from justice. Beloved by his grandmother, he returns to pay her a last visit before she dies. Trapped by his superstitious fear of his grandmother as well as by his love for her, he is prevented from making his escape from the police, and as the curtain falls he is shown like a beast at bay awaiting the approach of the enemy.

But the finest of all negro characters is Emperor Brutus Jones, a bold, crafty, and arrogant man who had learned from observation and experience the ruthless methods of accumulating a fortune. As long as he is successful he is a swaggering egotist; but as soon as reverses begin, his tyrannical attitude like an oversized garment slips from him revealing a cringing creature caught by panic fear. At the incessant beating of the tom-tom his fear increases until all the veneer of civilization is torn away and he becomes a primitive man overcome by superstition and terror and finally meets his death by means of a silver bullet, the symbol of his power as well as of his weakness.

This characterization marks a high note in the artistic portrayal of character, for Brutus Jones is a very modern negro. It indicates the great progress made since the days of the comic servant or the faithful slave types. It
estabishes a step in the treatment of the negro character in drama. The negro is no longer "comic relief or a pathetic victim; he is a man presented as of powerful dramatic interest in his own right".\textsuperscript{140} His resentment against Smither's contemptuous remarks show no sign of an inferiority complex but find an outlet in this uncivil warning:

\begin{quote}
Talk polite, white man, talk polite, is you forgetting?
\end{quote}

\textit{Goat Alley} is another play which treats of negro life in a serious manner. In this piece, Lucy Belle is conspicuous for her outlook on life. Not yet having reached the level where a woman strives to be true to herself as the white woman does, Lucy Belle struggles to remain true to the man she loves. She valiantly fights the obstacles that beset her path; but poverty, ignorance, and loneliness force her from one unwilling infidelity to another. At last in despair she drowns the child that bars her passage to happiness only to receive death from the hand of the man she loved so well.

Georgia Douglas Johnson's \textit{Plumes}, also, strikes a grim tone. Here, there is a choice bit of realism illustrating the superstition and the love of grand funerals among poor negroes. The cost of an operation as compared to the cost of a fine funeral is the topic of a conversation between

\textsuperscript{140}Sterling I. Brown, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 125.
Tildy and Charity. If the operation performed on the child is unsuccessful, there will be no money for the funeral; but if there is no guarantee for the success of the operation, why spend the money? During their perplexity over the problem, the child dies; and the mother is able to provide plumes for the horses' heads at the funeral. Truly, Tildy and Charity deserve space in the gallery of types since in every group there are those who strike the vulgar note.

In *Stevedore* by Paul Peters and George Sklar, there are a number of memorable figures. Binnie, the owner of the lunchroom, knows how to keep her patrons in order. By her caustic remarks and independent spirit she rules supreme. Jean Veal, the subservient straw boss, is always willing to acknowledge the white man's superiority. Blacksnake, one of the dock hands, seemingly supports Lonnie whole heartedly. The central figure is Lonnie Thompson, a militant negro who has awakened to the idea that the trouble between the blacks and the whites is not so much a problem of race distinction as it is of class distinction. For, when the white boss calls him "a bad nigger", Lonnie replies, "You mean I'm a nigger you can't cheat." In his exasperation at the shortcomings of his own people, he jeers at their passivity and then urges them to strike for recognition in the keynote speech of the play:
Every time de white boss crack de whip you turn and run. You let him beat you, you let him hound you, you let him work you to death. When you gwine to put a stop to it, black man? When you gwine turn on 'em? When you gwine say, 'You can't do dat. I'm a man. I got de rights of a man. I'm gwine fight like a man'... Ain't no peace fo' de black man, Ain't never gwine be, 'till he fight to get it.

In their realistic approach to character, the modern dramatist attempts to mirror the inner life of his figures with artistic conscientiousness. By the increasing fidelity to actual conditions as shown in the folk plays of Paul Green, Torrence, and the Heywards, attention is centered on the spirituality of the man, rather than on the situation involved. As these plays deal with manifestations of negro psychology, they possess human interest and make a universal appeal.

Eugene O'Neill's plays, on the other hand, are a study of the individual through temperament. By means of his use of expressionism and symbolism he reveals what is locked in the innermost recesses of the unformed mind and presents upon the stage spiritual depths not sounded before.

In the realm of the problem drama, the vigorous treatment used by Sheldon in The Negro sets up a standard of values which caused a quickened receptivity in the theatrical world that encouraged further growth in this direction. And from the date of this presentation there followed a long line of negro problem plays of which Stevedore by Peters and Sklar is
considered one of the most outstanding.

Since the greatest number of dramas dealing with negro life have been written by white men, the achievement shows that negro characters can be interesting and colorful material for drama, worthy of respect from dramatists as well as audiences.\textsuperscript{141} And this attitude is gratifying to the negro as the status of a group is determined not alone by what one group thinks of itself, but also by what others think of it. Through this confidence in ability the negro is able to develop his race pride, his self respect, and his respect for race.

\textsuperscript{141} Willis D. Weatherford, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 550.
CHAPTER V

THE STATUS OF THE NEGRO TODAY AS A DRAMATIC CHARACTER,
as a MUSICAL ENTERTAINER,
and as a DRAMATIST,
and
THE FUTURE POSSIBILITIES OF THE NEGRO
IN AMERICAN DRAMA

All these plays featuring the negro character are realistic evaluations of American Life in terms of freshly applied social, political, and moral standards. They deal with sociological realism and folklore or partake of both and are marked by a close sympathetic study of the negro. Since literary criticism is concerned with life, there is a definite search for the real things of life. And this is felt in the folk plays of Green, Torrence, and Heyward, who affected by the standards of accuracy established by Russell and Harris, portray their characters in a more artistic manner. As a result, the Muh Mac of Paul Green is more lifelike than the Aunt Cloe of Mrs. Stowe; and the Clementine of S. N. Behrman is more convincing than the Zeke of Mrs. Mowatt.

In like manner the depiction of the negro character has
advanced from the background type to the foreground figure. The nineteenth century dramatist subordinated the importance of the negro to other interests, but the modern playwright portrays the negro characters in terms of their own significant lives, and, as such, often sees them as heroic figures. This is the case in Mamba's Daughters where the selfless devotion of Mamba and Hagar towards Lissa transcends the usual characterization of the negro. Here, Mamba is the "sly, ironic, and ambitious mammy" who strives to promote the welfare of the members of her family; and Hagar is an "illiterate and grotesque Amazon who attains nobility in her fierce laboring and fighting for her daughter". Lissa, who "owes her career as a singer to Mamba's generalship, does not reach the stature of these; but she is nevertheless a new figure in the gallery of negro characters".142

Eugene O'Neill's status as a social critic, on the other hand, lies in the fact that he emphasizes the psychological aspect of the modern social order rather than the economic or sociological. His plays are searching studies of the innermost depths of man. And in order to give expression to these depths, O'Neill effectively employs the use of expressionism. This is especially true in All God's Chillun Got 142. Jerome Dowd, The Negro in American Life, p. 323.
Wings and in Emperor Jones. In the stage directions to the former play, the dimensions of the living room in each successive act become smaller: the ceiling is lowered and the side walls are pushed forward. And this closing in of the material world is a translation in artistic terms of the reactions of a mind that is finding the limitations of life too great to be borne. To Ella Downey and Jim Harris life has become unbearable, for they find themselves driven to desperation by the social pressure of society that cannot overcome race prejudice. As a negro, Jim Harris attempted to establish himself on a firmer basis in society by marrying the white girl, Ella Downey. But they soon find themselves restricted on all sides, and it is against the injustice of this system that they rebel so fiercely and meet their tragic end.

In Emperor Jones, O'Neill uses the beating of the native tom-tom to create fear in the heart of Brutus Jones and to convey that fear from the heart of Jones to the minds of the audience. In this play, O'Neill has made a case history of Jones. As long as he was the dominant figure, Jones reigned supreme. But when a sinister note is introduced, he seeks security in escape. It is only when he enters the dark forest that his past begins to assert itself. Then, the grim shadows of his past come to haunt him. All the associa-
tions of his life return to plague him and are "transmuted into the beatings of his heart by the native tom-tom as it echoed in the forest". With perfect regularity "these forces of heredity and environment crowd in upon his consciousness and he loses the aspect of the emperor and becomes the negro criminal tortured by the dark".\textsuperscript{143}

With this type of negro characterization, the modern dramatist has reached the peak in skill and technique. In less than two hundred years the American theatre has seen the negro character develop from a comedy character, from an over-sentimentalized character to promote propaganda and local coloring into an individual, artistically and realistically treated. As this handling of negro character is based on a greater reliance in the study of actual conditions, in the treatment of character, and in the intricacies of human relationships, it brought about an authenticity of portrayal which was instrumental in placing the negro into the mainstream of American realism.

Yet it was not until the presentation of Torrence's \textit{Three Plays for a Negro Theatre} that the possibilities of the negro as a dramatic character became assured, and the tradition regarding the negro's lack of histrionic power was broken. These three plays offered the negro performers a wide

gamut for their ability as the Rider of Dreams called for humorous characterization, Granny Maumee for dramatic power, and Simon the Cyrenian for expert technique. This presentation of negro actors in negro plays was so astounding and of such superior quality that it commanded the attention of the critics, the general press, and the public. For their ability in these productions, Opal Cooper and Inez Clough received special notice. 144

Four years later, Emperor Jones appeared with Charles Gilpin in the title role. His interpretation was so enthusiastically acclaimed that he was nominated by the Drama League in 1921 as one of the ten persons who had contributed most to the American Theatre during that year. 145 Later, Paul Robeson assumed the role and his performance as Brutus Jones fixed him as a dramatic actor as his performance in Show Boat some years afterwards established him as a singing actor.

Having reached a high water mark in the presentation of Emperor Jones, the negro actor now seeks opportunities to excell this rating. But his power is limited since he is confined to portray only members of his own race on the stage. This restriction is the result of a curious factor in problems

144. James Weldon Johnson, Black Manhattan, pp. 176-177.
of race which condone representations of black persons by white actors but consider it a violation of some inner code for a negro to represent a white person. 146

Yet, within his province, the negro actor has established himself in the serious drama by means of such dramatic characters as Abe McCrannie, a harassed mulatto, struggling to overcome racial and social difficulties; as Porgy and Bess, two human beings thrown against the colorful background of Catfish Row, trying to solve life's perplexing problems; as Lonnie Thompson, a man of independent spirit fighting for his rights, as Mamba and Hagar, two naive women, unfolding their hopes and prayers for their beloved Lissa; and as John Henry, the legendary giant negro worker, refusing to submit to the inroads of the mechanistic trend.

Because the negro possesses the childlike faculty of imagination, his mind is given to form concrete images. And the more the mind of any individual is filled with concrete images, the more intense is the strength of his emotions. Therefore, the negro actor responding to these emotions lends himself to the atmosphere of the piece and becomes an integral part of it. Moreover, negroes memorize easily because they sense the part rather than learn their lines. The colored are good mimics, and with utter abandon and lack of self

consciousness they live their roles rather than act them. 147

And that is the reason why negroes are successful in serious drama. In the production of In Abraham's Bosom, there were ten colored and two white characters. The preponderance of colored roles focused attention on the colored actors, who interpreted with skill and understanding this play which probed deeper into negro life than any other drama of the kind that has yet been produced. Of the twenty-four principal characters in Porgy, nineteen were colored. This performance revealed the fact that it was more than an achievement of one or two exceptional individuals; it was an achievement of a group, each member of the group contributing to the excellence of the whole.

Another group performance was Green Pastures, a play in which the line between the sublime and the ridiculous is so fine that the slightest error in technique would ruin the whole effect. Yet the negro proved conclusively that his ability was skillful enough to get the utmost subtleties across the footlights and brilliant enough to create an atmosphere in which the mystical became the practical.

The most recent all colored play, John Henry, contains a negro character in the title role who is portrayed as a legendary giant negro worker who can "outwork, outfight, and

147. Lillian Voorhess, "Drama in Colleges for Negroes", Drama 16:224.
outlove any natural man. As a giant, John Henry pits "muscle and bone against steam and steel and works himself to death in the battle". He "could be killed but he couldn't be stopped" for he was "the best".\footnote{Roark Bradford, "Paul Robeson is John Henry", \textit{Collier's Magazine}, January 13, 1940.} As interpreted by Paul Robeson, John Henry becomes the symbol of man's courage and determination which, rather than bend to the dictates of modern trends and submit to defeat, refuses to sacrifice ideals and consequently breaks under the strain.

During the last ten years great strides have been made by negro actors. There has been a noticeable growth in the list of names in connection with the theatre. Among the outstanding are: Charles Gilpin, Paul Robeson, Jules Bledsoe, Frank Wilson, Daniel Haynes, Wesley Hill, Charles H. Moore, Richard B. Harrison, Florence Mills, Rose McClendon, Evelyn Ellis, Evelyn Preer, Rex Ingram, and Ethel Waters. Although these actors and actresses have acquired renown for their ability, they are not satisfied. They prefer to try their skill in plays having nothing to do with race. They desire to interpret, without restriction, the lives of human beings.\footnote{Sterling A. Brown, \textit{Negro Poetry and Drama}, p. 139.}

The field of music, however, offers no such barriers. Yet, oddly enough, the negro has specialized in that type of music which best serves his personality. When he noticed
that the white man had become converted to the beauty of the spiritual, he decided to use these old songs more often in his church services. And when he became aware of the fact that his work songs and "blue" songs had also become popular, he was convinced that his songs had made a universal appeal. Capitalizing on this fact, the negro, having learned from the white man the money value of his songs, used them to build colleges and later employed them for propaganda of racial self respect. Negro singers like Roland Hayes and Paul Robeson have made the singing of negro folk songs popular on the concert stage as well as in the churches.150

The courage of being natural brought out the spirituals, and the reception of the spirituals encouraged the negro to exploit his "blue" songs. The "blues" denote an individual reaction, usually one of depression or of humorous acceptance of the inevitable. These songs are the result of introspection and self pity and express a lament over some personal misfortune, the spirit of which may be seen from the following:

All day long I'm worried,
All day long I'm blue;
I'm so awfully lonesome
I doan know what to do.

So I ask you, doctor
See if you can fin'
Something in yo' satchel
To pacify my min'.

Doctor! Doctor!
Write me a prescription
Fo' duh Blues
De mean ole Blues. 151

In his account of the rendering of this song by Clara Smith, Mr. Van Vechten says that her tones "uncannily took on the color of the saxophone, again of the clarinet". Her voice was "powerful or melancholy by turns", and it could "tear the blood from one's heart". Any listener could learn from this singing that the "negroes' cry to a cruel cupid was as moving and as elemental as his cry to God as expressed in the spirituals. 152

The "blues" became so popular that they spread to France and to England. In America such vaudeville and cabaret singers as Alice Carter, Gilda Gray, and Clara Smith had an immense vogue. Indeed, the "blues" are as essentially folk songs as the spirituals. In the one, the negro expresses his religious reactions to his hopes for peace and happiness in the life to come; in the other, he expresses his worldly reactions to the trials and tribulations of his life on earth. In the spiritual, it is the "exultant shout or sorrow laden cry of the group"; in the "blues", it is always "the plaint of the individual". 153

But it is against the nature of the negro to be depressed for any great length of time, and he soon took refuge in a kind of music which resolved itself into an explosive attempt to cast off the "blues". This strident form of music originating in the negro slums is called jazz and is defined as a "joyous revolt from conventions, custom, authority, boredom, even sorrow"; from anything in fact that would "confine the soul of man and hinder its riding free on air".  

And today, modern music is being influenced by this strident element as introduced by the negro, for several American composers have turned their attention to the form. One result of this interest occurred in 1925 when Albert Chiofferelli produced a symphony in New York founded on two "blue" tunes. Another instance occurred in 1934 when William Levi Dawson wrote a negro folk symphony played by the Philadelphia Symphony Orchestra under the direction of Leopold Stokowski.

Jazz has a barbaric rhythm and exuberance. In order to express this absence of restraint, the early negro players, because of their poverty, were compelled to use such improvised instruments as bones, tambourine, tin can, and hollow wood effects. Today, this same type of instrument is used not as a necessity but as a musical novelty. And when a band of expert negro musicians are playing jazz music, each musician

156. Sterling A. Brown, op. cit., p. 120.
plays with such abandon that the very atmosphere becomes charged with strong and emotional response. It is as if his spirit of revolt from worldly cares has reached such a state of hysteria that the very nature of his thoughts transfers itself to his instrument and finds expression in this message:

Shake to the loud music of life playing to the primeval round of life...Play that thing! One movement of the thousand movements of the eternal life flow. Shake that thing! In the face of the Shadow of Death...Death over there! Life over here! Shake down death and forget his commerce, his purpose, his haunting presence in a great shaking orgy. Dance down the Death of these ways in shaking that thing...Sweet dancing thing of primitive joy...savage, barbaric, refined, eternal rhythm of the mysterious, magical, magnificent, the dance devine of life...157

With the introduction of the spirituals, the "blues", and jazz, the negro contributed much to the musical entertainment of America. In Deep River, Showboat, Forgy and Bess, Mamba's Daughters, and John Henry there are, also, some "blue" songs. Such singers as Roland Hayes, Jules Bledsoe, Marion Anderson, Paul Robeson, and Ethel Waters made these songs famous.

Jazz music, however, called for a special kind of dancing. And in 1923, Runnin' Wild introduced the Charleston, a negro dance which up to that time had been known only to negroes.

When Miller and Lyle introduced the dance in their show they did not depend wholly upon their jazz band for accompaniment, they "went straight back to primitive negro music" and had the "major part of the chorus supplement the band" by beating time with their hands and feet. 158

The fame of the Charleston went round the world to be followed by the Black Bottom, the Big Apple, the Lambeth Walk, and many others. Today, an adaptation of Gilbert and Sullivan's Mikado is attracting thousands of spectators. In this presentation the negro has not attempted to imitate the artistic finish of the D'oyly Carte Company. Rather he has taken the theme, changed its scene, and adjusted the tempo of the music to suit the atmosphere of the new interpretation. Using the theme as a background for the exotic and unusual, the negro inserts the strident note, syncopates the rhythm of the melodies, and introduces the latest negro dances. Such composers as Will Marion Cook, Hall Johnson, and Rosamund Johnson are responsible for the popularity of this type of music.

Perhaps, one reason for the success of the Swing Mikado is that the white man, submitting to the call of revolt suggested by the music, shuffles off his dignity like an outworn garment, and in spirit joins the revelry on the stage, a revelry produced by an aggregation of excellent singers and

Among the latter is Bill Robinson, reputed to be the greatest tap dancer in the world. As a result of his love of song and dance the negro gives himself to most intense living and ranks high in the field of musical entertainment, today.

The negro actor in his struggle for recognition has gained ground in experience and technique and has raised his position on the stage to great heights. But as a writer for the stage, he has not kept the pace. In the theatre he is more important as a created character than as a creative playwright. And this condition is due to several causes. First, the feeling of despair or hopelessness the negro experiences when he realizes the wide gulf between the white culture and the black culture results in the suppression of the impulse to create. Second, having no leisure class of his own, the negro is forced to depend upon the good will of the white people for appreciation and understanding. Third, lacking a theatre, the negro playwright is forced to write in the "idiom of the alien group" rather than give expression in his own native manner. And finally, the upper class negroes resent any picturing of negro folk life. Too many negro critics believe that well educated negroes are all that is necessary for great drama, and that any play not dealing with this minority is

Because of this opposition, the negro playwrights are sorely handicapped. To offset the feeling of inferiority, the negro author sought a means to establish his race price. He turned to Africa and his African ancestors as a source of race achievement. He used negro heroes and heroic episodes from American history as a proof of his national patriotism. He treated the negro masses with more understanding and less apology, and he incorporated into his works a franker and deeper revelation of self. He even went so far as to seek racial escape into a situation in which he could develop a life and culture of his own. The imaginary vista of Africa for Africans promised by Marcus Garvey offered to the negroes a haven of deliverance where racial prejudice could not exist, and where their own culture would have an opportunity to flourish. That this dream did not materialize only added to the depression already experienced by negro students. 162

The Little Theatre movement, however, helped the negro playwright to solve some of these difficulties. The Pekin Stock Company of Chicago which consisted of forty members was instrumental in furnishing such an outstanding actor as John Gilpin. The determined efforts of Mrs. Emily Hapgood to initiate a negro theatre was interrupted by the World War but

161. Sterling A. Brown, op. cit., p. 139.
162. Willis D. Weatherford, op. cit., p. 549.
again found encouragement some years later in the establishment of the Ethiopian Players in Chicago, an organization which disbanded for lack of support. The Shadows Art Theatre which was later founded in Chicago by Francis L. Holmes was a much more ambitious project than any other that had preceded it. Knowing that no group was so bitterly thwarted as the negro because of cultural dependence on others and realizing that those artists of note that arose from the ranks were such as met the approval of the white audiences, Mr. Holmes decided to establish a theatre where performances of plays by negro playwrights could be presented before a friendly audience without the censoring pressure of white opinion. In this way he hoped to develop in the negro audience an appreciation and a recognition of the inherent abilities in the members of the colored race. This philanthropist also planned to give opportunities to untried playwrights whose work otherwise might never have found expression. 163

The inception of Frederick Koch's plan in playwriting at the University of North Carolina called attention to the use of provincial types and uncommon situations found in backwoods life. This plan met with such favorable response in Howard University that negro drama with negro instructors, a negro theme, and negro players began to be developed.

The widespread enthusiasm for native dramatic expression has brought forth several negro dramatists. In 1927 Em Jo Basshe's *Earth* was produced by an all colored cast. Here, religion and superstition conflict with each other, and each seeks to be victorious. In 1929, a collaboration between a negro writer, Wallace Thurman, and a white author, Jourdan White, resulted in the production of *Harlem*, a portrayal of life in a Harlem railroad flat in which a family recently transplanted from the South struggle to adjust their lives to the tenor of a busy city. *Run Little Chillun* by Hall Johnson is a fusion of music and drama and is the "most ambitious and accomplished drama by an American negro".164 Jean Toomer's *Balo*, Frank Wilson's *Sugar Cane*, Meek Moses, and *Walk Together* *Chillun* show a knowledge of folk life. Langston Hughes' *Mulatto* deals with racial problems, and Ira D. Reed's *John Henry* is a treatment of a mixture of folk lore and modern realism. Randolph Edmund's *Six Plays for a Negro Theatre* are sentimental and melodramatic, and his *Negro History in Thirteen Plays* are attempts to recount the negro's patriotism. Both of these works are appreciated by negro audiences.

Such efforts in playwriting as have been mentioned are worthy of praise. Yet none of these playwrights show the structural skill of a Marc Connelly or of a Paul Green.

164. Sterling A. Brown, op. cit., p. 121.
Perhaps, the negro playwrights neglected this form since serious drama of negro lives was not wanted nor understood either by negroes or white people. To most negroes the theatre is an escape from drudgery and discrimination and when he goes there he expects to be amused and entertained, not instructed. Therefore, the musical negro comedy has flourished for years, and it is only within the last decade that serious drama written by negroes was received with any great show of enthusiasm. 165

In addition to the movement for the sponsoring of native drama within each negro college, there is another organization which advocates the stimulation of competitive effort among the colleges. This organization, called the Negro Intercollegiate Dramatic Association, offers prizes for the best dramatic work of the year written by a negro. The organization believes that if the negro is to make a genuine contribution to the drama in America, he must study standard dramatists so that he will acquire structural skill. For material, he must look into his own life in order to delineate the lives of his people. He must shake off the tendency to slavishly imitate the white authors and depend upon his own resources. If the negro can accomplish these tasks, the Negro Intercollegiate Dramatic Association feels that he will fulfill Eugene

O'Neill's prophecy that "the gifts the negro can and will bring to our native drama are invaluable ones". 166

The proudest boast of the modern negro author is that he writes of humans not negroes. His literary ideals do not turn backward to the African folk tales but look forward to the trends of modern life, to the "vivid expressionistic style of the day". 167 For the new type of negro blends thought with feeling. He seeks to be a writer, not a "negro writer". 168 And so the negro theatre today directs its attention toward a more comprehensive viewpoint. It plans to deal with plays written by negroes having nothing to do with race, with plays of negro life written by negroes. In this way it hopes to develop an appreciative audience.

But the negro song and dance theatrical tradition is still very strong and certain critics, among them Max Reinhardt, see "great possibilities in combining the swiftness and vitality of the musical comedy" 169 with the sustained action and dialogue of the drama. These critics prophesy a new dramatic form but as yet there has been no progress in this direction. 170

During the depression when all prospects of a negro theatre began to wane, the Federal Theatre Project proved of great

166. Alain Locke, editor, Plays of Negro Life, Intro. ii.
168. Ibid., p. 356.
169. Sterling A. Brown, op. cit., p. 140.
170. Ibid., p. 141.
value. It not only employed hundreds of actors and technicians, but it also extended help to negro playwrights to write "unhackneyed social drama".\footnote{171} It offered opportunities for these dramatists to express their ideas before the footlights, and it encouraged a negro audience to attend the theatre.\footnote{172} Once a negro audience is established, the prospects of a negro theatre may not be very far behind.

In the radio field, the negro broadcasts from most of the important stations in New York; but the radio, although it is direct is impersonal. There is no audience situation and no permanent record of his work, and therefore the negro's gains in racial prestige are slight. In moving pictures, he has been acquiring recognition through the efforts of Ethel Waters and Paul Robeson in such pictures as \textit{Imitation of Life} and \textit{In Old Kentucky}. But as the moving picture industry is built on the "greatest common denominator of public opinion and public sentiment"\footnote{173} the negro's rise to prominence and popularity in this field holds very little promise.

Since the latest phases in the development of the negro in the theatre occur in Harlem; and since Harlem is within close range of New York, the center from which all the main forces and activities of the American theatre radiate, it

\footnotesize{\begin{itemize}
  \item \footnote{171} James Weldon Johnson, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 198.
  \item \footnote{172} Ibid., p. 199.
  \item \footnote{173} Sterling A. Brown, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 137.
\end{itemize}}
follows that any movement worthy of notice will be recognized and given a hearing in the theatres of that metropolis. Thus, tested for his dramatic skill, he hopes to be rated according to his merit, a goal toward which the negro has been striving for over one hundred years.
Plays which are not extant are indicated by an asterisk. (*)

Plays which are not available are indicated by a plus sign. (+)

The first date and place of performance (if any) of each play are listed after the author's name.


All God's Chillun Got Wings. Eugene O'Neil. Provincetown, 1924.


Captain Kyd, or, The Wizard of the Sea. J. S. Jones, Boston, 1830.


Fall of British Tyranny, The; or, American Liberty Triumphant. John Leacock. Philadelphia, 1776.


Forest Rose, The; or, American Farmers. Samuel Woodworth, New York, 1825.


In Alabama. Augustus Thomas. New York, 1892.


Legend of Norwood, A. Augustus Daly. New York, 1867.


Love and Friendship; or, Yankee Notions. A. B. Lindsley. New York, 1807.


Mock Trial; or, Breach of Promise. C. A. Doremus. New York, n.d.


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Saratoga; or, Pistols for Seven. Bronson Howard. New York, 1870.


Supper in Dixie, A. James Triplet. New York, 1865.


Texas Steer, A. Charles Hoyt. New York, 1890.


Trip to Niagara, A; or, Travellers in America. Wm. Dunlap. New York, 1830.


Uncle Tom's Cabin; or, Life Among the Lowly. G. L. Aiken. Troy, 1852.


Whigs and Democrats; or, Love of No Politics. J. E. Heath. Richmond, 1839.


Woman's Vows; or, Mason's Oaths. A. J. Duganne. New York, 1875.


Zion. B. W. Hollenbeck. New York, 1847.
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SECONDARY SOURCES

Continued


SECONDARY SOURCES Continued


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The thesis, "The Status of the Negro in American Drama", written by Kathryn F. Hogan, has been accepted by the Graduate School with reference to form, and by the readers whose names appear below, with reference to content. It is, therefore, accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

Morton D. Zabel, Ph.D. March 14, 1940
Samuel M. Steward, Ph.D. March 12, 1940