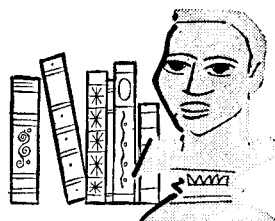


Our Debt to the Negro



"The Negro in American Culture," by Margaret Just Butcher (Alfred A. Knopf, 294 pp. \$4.50), based upon materials originally collected by Alain Locke, traces the folk and formal contributions of the American Negro to American culture. Our reviewer, Rayford W. Logan, is author of *"The Negro and the Postwar World."*

By Rayford W. Logan

ALAIN LOCKE, the only Negro-American Rhodes Scholar (1907-1910), wrote his doctoral dissertation at Harvard in 1918, on "The Problems of Classification in Theory of Value." Except for visiting lectureships he taught philosophy at Howard University from 1912 and served as head of the department from 1917 to his retirement in 1953. But predilection and sensitivity to discrimination against Negroes diverted his major concern during more than forty years to the Negro in American culture, to race and culture contacts. His best-known work, "The New Negro: An Interpretation" (1925), a symposium which he edited and to which he contributed two articles, is a classic of the "Negro Renaissance."

During several years prior to his death in 1954 Locke collected voluminous materials for a *magnum opus*. Realizing that he would not be able to complete it he asked Dr. Margaret Just Butcher, associate professor of English at Howard University, to edit and bring up to date these voluminous materials. Her devotion to him, her precise knowledge of his aims, and her own competence in fiction, poetry, and drama have notably achieved the goal of tracing "in historical sequence—but topical fashion—both the folk and the formal contributions of the American Negro to American culture." The verve of her style makes "The Negro in American Culture" a fascinating book.

Although the historical analysis strikes me as being sound, on the whole I am disinclined to accept the statement that there has been a "slow, consistently steady rise of the Negro's status since emancipation in 1863." Especially from 1877 to the turn of the century and to some degree since then the "slow, tortuous journey" has followed a zig-zag course. Nor do I go as

far as does the author in accepting the thesis of "the great cultural divide between the Anglo-Saxon and the Latin cultures in the matter of race relations." In Latin America economic rather than Jim-Crow laws continue to keep most Negroes at the bottom of the social, political, and cultural ladder. "The Negro in American Culture" is itself an adequate rejoinder to the "cultural divide" thesis until a comparable comprehensive volume analyzes the contributions of Latin American Negroes to Latin American culture.

The folk contributions of American Negroes have been more significant until recently than the formal; moreover, "American culture is most indebted, above all other folk sources, to this lowly but distinctive level of Negro peasant experiences." This is true probably because Negroes are the only Americans who drew upon the rich folk life of their original home, enforced immigration, the horrors of the Middle Passage, and slavery, which at best meant a paternalistic condescension. Black-face minstrelsy, which grew out of plantation jiggling, dancing, and singing, has largely disappeared. Spirituals and work songs

have an honored place on the programs of world-renowned singers and in private collections and the Library of Congress. But Professor Sterling Brown of Howard University has correctly observed that "Uncle Remus," the narrator of Joel Chandler Harris's folk tales, is "a walking apologist for slavery."

LESS well known are the Negro poets, writers, and orators of the slave period who struck sometimes mighty blows for freedom. When Negroes seemed resigned at the close of the century to what is today called second-class citizenship Will Marion Cook, John Isham, W. C. Handy, Madame Sissieretta Jones, and others startled Broadway with a new brand of "Negro" music, the forerunner of ragtime and of jazz. Henry O. Tanner's "Resurrection of Lazarus" was a sensation in Paris; other Negroes would follow in his footsteps by gaining recognition abroad before being acknowledged in their native land. In 1903 W. E. B. Du Bois wrote "The Souls of Black Folk," the classic literary call to arms of "The Talented Tenth." Some of them—Countee Cullen, Claude McKay, Jean Toomer, and



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Langston Hughes—answered the call during the “Negro Renaissance.” Today a host of established poets, writers, and artists are judged not as “exceptional” Negroes but as Americans. This is what Locke above all strove for and this is what Mrs. Butcher has convincingly narrated.

CIVIL WAR GUERRILLAS: “He made his name a Cain’s mark. . . . Because of him widows wailed, orphans cried, maidens wept, as they lifted the lifeless forms of loved ones from bloody fields and bore them reeking to untimely graves.” This passage concludes the first chapter and sets the tone of William Elsey Connelley’s “*Quantrill and the Border Wars*” (Pageant, \$7.50). The book, first published in 1910 and now offered again to “*aficionados of Civil War history*,” describes in sensational detail the exploits both real and legendary of William Clarke Quantrill, the guerrilla chieftain who fought for the Confederacy in Kansas and Missouri.

As history Connelley’s narrative belongs to a bygone school of theatrical antiquarianism, and the oldtime flavor is borne out in the book’s format, with its footnotes that crowd out the text and its inset pen-and-ink drawings, including three “Bones of Quantrill’s Right Arm now in Collection of Author.” Homer Croy, in a rather extravagant introduction to the book, characterizes it as crime history. The reader who accepts it on this basis

may find its crackle of Sharp’s rifles a welcome change from the roar of sawed-off shotguns. —HAL BRIDGES.

CONSTITUTIONAL FREEDOM VS. NATIONAL SECURITY: The efforts of the Federalist Party in 1798-1800 to suppress all criticism of John Adams’s Administration by the Jefferson Republicans is given detailed, scholarly examination in James Morton Smith’s “*Freedom’s Fetters: The Alien and Sedition Laws and American Civil Liberties*” (Cornell University Press, \$5). The nation at the time was embroiled in a half-war with France, and the Federalist excuse for violating the Constitutional freedoms of speech and press was national security. The modern parallels, which the author tries not to belabor, are obvious; then as now American citizens fell victim to faceless informers and presumptive guilt. John Marshall, the only Federalist who in any way opposed the Sedition Law, criticized it not as unconstitutional but as unwise. Nor did Hamilton, contrary to what numerous biographers have written, disapprove of the Federalist measures; rather, he “became a leading advocate of their enforcement.” In the end the Federalists failed to silence criticism, and the American people in electing Jefferson President in 1800 voted against repression. Yet, one might ask, how well do modern Americans know this lesson of the past, since so many in recent years have seemed willing once more to subordinate Constitutional freedoms to national security.

—H. B.

THE AMERICAN DREAM: Six lectures which explore the popular views that successive generations of Americans, from the eighteenth to the twentieth century, have held in regard to the motives and guiding principles of the founders of the thirteen colonies and the leaders of the American Revolution are collected in “*The Legend of the Founding Fathers*,” by Professor Wesley Frank Craven (New York University Press, \$4.50). Abandoning the main traveled roads of the national historians for the leisurely side-paths of local history and patriotic literature, the author traces a legend that has been ever changing yet in its essentials remarkably enduring, even under the onslaughts of debunking historians of the 1920s. And what is the legend? In simplest terms it is the American dream of men who sought freedom under God in a new land that was destined to be a light to the world. With how closely the dream conforms to reality Professor Craven is not much concerned. He is content to seek out what Americans have believed, without trying to correct them.

—H. B.

Personal History

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link between life and death. The poet has no jurisdiction over this region and his only responsibility is to explore it. . . . It means going down into myself, into my night. . . . it means taking the poetic state by surprise.

The core of his creed is renewal and “one cannot renew oneself without living dangerously and attracting slander.” He also believes in surprise danger, liberty, and the value of poetry for its own sake. “Poetry, *la lux spirituel* . . . the only thing in the world that makes existence worthwhile in a materialistic age . . . the richest life of the spirit.”

The pages of Miss Crosland’s carefully documented, shrewd, understanding biography are filled with the names of famous men and women in their relation to each phase of Cocteau’s work: Satie, Picasso, the Six—there are too many to begin to mention them all here. Yet to the reader who knows his work only in part, has seen perhaps, “*La Belle et la Bête*” but has not read “*Le Potomak*” or “*Le Grand Ecart*,” a discussion of the value of his work as a whole is more to the point than a list of personalities, however glittering. The ballet was the predominant influence in his life which is why he refers to himself as a choreographer. “The impact of his work is theatrical and its buoyancy grace, and fluidity are perpetually close to dancing.”

It was Diaghilev who in 1911 first made Cocteau, up to then a precocious and popular but slightly brash young man, begin to discover himself, with the famous dictum “*Etonne-moi*.” Cocteau took the injunction for a devise, and has astonished his world ever since, “running faster than beauty,” never doing the same thing twice, in “an unending, compelling, closely disciplined dance.” Miss Crosland shifts her metaphors to predict that “during the next fifty years his reputation will have the ups and downs of a roller coaster and the sharp turns of a *corniche* road.”

One thing is sure: No dancing partner or sharer of the ride—including his fellow members of the Académie Française, into which he was inducted last year after a campaign delighting all Paris—is likely to find himself bored. In an age when individualism becomes rarer every day, even in France, Cocteau, the creative artist, “must expect to be noticed.” Miss Crosland’s excellent and sympathetic biography serves as a good introduction to anyone who may have overlooked him.

FRASER YOUNG’S

LITERARY CRYPT NO. 691

A cryptogram is writing in cipher. Every letter is part of a code that remains constant throughout the puzzle. Answer No. 691 will be found in the next issue

ZY XWXXRV AB BY

AOAEVBDVZN YO URYCNB

RYZTVO NFCZ NFCN XRYMZ

XK NFV BWDDVBBUWR

NVCDFVO.

—BAO MARRACQ YBRVO.

Answer to Literary Crypt No. 690

Doubt is brother-devil to
Despair.

—JOHN O’REILLY.