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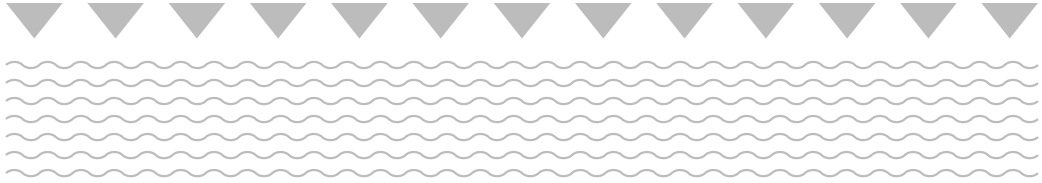
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Introduction

by Martha H. Patterson

On December 22, 1886, at the eighty-first annual celebration of the New England Society, sat three renowned white Americans symbolic of a nation divided. Generals William Tecumseh Sherman, famous for leading the Union Army's devastatingly effective 1864 March to the Sea campaign, and John Schofield would be guest speakers along with the first Southerner ever asked to address the Society, *Atlanta Constitution* editor Henry W. Grady.

Grady was visibly nervous. More than two hundred of the most powerful industrialists and cultural figures of the day had arrived at New York's Delmonico's restaurant, its banquet hall draped in American flags, to hear some of the nation's most distinguished men reflect on whether an illustrious Puritan past could reunite a country riven by the Civil War and the bitter resentment white Southerners sustained against Reconstruction.¹

After rousing remarks from the society president and from the presiding clergyman, the chairman introduced General Sherman, who, in recounting a conversation he had with a Georgian planter during his Savannah campaign, reminded his audience that Georgia was one of the original thirteen colonies, that Northern states wrote bonds that paid for slaves, and joked that, because of the Confederacy's hasty secession, they "will never get paid for these niggers."

With the audience laughing and primed for approval, Grady delivered his "New South" address. The fusing of the Southern "Cavalier" and the Northern "Puritan," Grady declared, had forged great Americans like Abraham Lincoln. After a jesting aside to General Sherman—"considered an able man in our parts though . . . kind of a careless man about fire"—Grady defined the New South as a phoenix risen "from the ashes left to us in 1864." Created anew as a "perfect democracy," the New South, according to Grady, offered a peaceable kingdom of white plantation owners and Black workers, an implicit stark contrast to the labor strife fomenting the Haymarket Square bombing in Chicago just a few months earlier: "No section shows a more prosperous laboring population than the negroes of the South, none in fuller sympathy with our employing and land-owning class. He shares our school fund, has the fullest protection of our laws and the friendship of our people. . . . The relations of the Southern people with the negro are close and cordial."² As Grady described them, formerly enslaved African Americans had been loyal retainers during the war and remained "humble," as well as "simple and sincere," relying on the guidance of Southern white people who, he claimed, knew best how to govern them.

Grady's speech concluded, the band played "Way Down South in Dixie," the crowd cheered, and the dominant vision of the South after Reconstruction crystallized in the American consciousness. Newspaper reports around the country celebrated the speech. The *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*

declared Grady a “National Santa Claus,” having given the country the Christmas gift of sectional reconciliation, while the *Chicago Daily Tribune* called his address “brilliant and eloquent . . . as earnest and sincere as it was manly.” The *Cincinnati Enquirer* announced that Grady’s speech helped “prove beyond question that the war is over.” The *New York Herald* went so far as to suggest that Grady be the vice presidential running mate for Grover Cleveland in his 1888 reelection campaign.³

Yet a few white journalists and most of the Black press denounced Grady’s calculated New South pastoral propaganda, which omitted the growing assault on Black civil rights by the so-called Redeemers abetted by the US Supreme Court. Southern white Democrats and white supremacists saw themselves as “redeeming” the South by using propaganda, trickery, and violence to reverse the gains made by African Americans during Reconstruction and to remove Republicans from power. In 1883, the US Supreme Court, for its part, had struck down the Civil Rights Act of 1875. Nonetheless, Black and white editors alike saw the extent to which the power of Grady’s New South moniker and the charisma of the “new,” was taking hold.⁴ To discard Grady’s rhetoric of transformation wholesale risked leaving African Americans out of narratives of national progress, consigning the tremendous gains made by Black people during Reconstruction to the Redeemers, like Grady, who sought to reverse them.

Almost immediately following Grady’s speech, journalists hailed as “New Negroes” those Black Americans who claimed economic, educational, or political power. Rather than a postwar South, it was postemancipation African Americans who represented the true phoenix, the genuinely “new.” Having suffered generations of enslavement and Reconstruction’s rollback, they had managed to seize whatever opportunities for advancement they could, deploying the figure of the New Negro to signal their resistance to the unfolding ruthlessness of a Jim Crow system that Grady and his fellow Redeemers helped to orchestrate.⁵

Inspired by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Gene Andrew Jarrett’s *The New Negro: Readings on Race, Representation, and African American Culture, 1892–1938* (2007), *The New Negro: A History in Documents, 1887–1937* offers readers a dramatically expanded collection of African American, Afro–Latin American, and African texts, some quite obscure, tracing the origins of the New Negro trope and seven of its major versions until 1937.⁶ That year marked the signing of a collective bargaining agreement between the Pullman Company and the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters and Maids, the first African American union to be recognized by a major US company; the decisive shift of African Americans away from the party of Lincoln and to the Democratic Party; and the bloody conclusion of fascist Italy’s merciless war on Ethiopia.⁷

Different variations of the New Negro figure largely emerged out of what Black intellectuals saw as moments of transformative possibility for a people theoretically, but not in practice, protected by the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, enduring assaults on their humanity even as they fought for respect. For Black writers and activists during this period, the transitional moment might be a groundbreaking address, political appointment, election victory, or publication; wartime military service; an especially horrific outburst of white supremacist violence; a decision to rally on behalf of civil rights, socialist, nationalist, internationalist, Pan-African, and/or anticolonial movements; a dramatic shift in social mores or economic opportunities; or the dawning of a local, national, or transnational Black network that offered collective hope. Within that moment, New Negro proponents responded by adopting sometimes contradictory ideologies: social Darwinism, Christianity, eugenics, New Thought, capitalism, consumerism, accommodationism, separatism, integration, feminism, antifeminism, imperialism, decolonization, socialism, communism, Black nationalism, fascism, and antifascism.⁸ Although the trope reinforced a Black/white binary and elided the often complex multiracial identities of those under its capacious umbrella, the New Negro was versatile enough to serve the needs of those holding vastly different artistic, social, political, and cultural allegiances.

Given the systemic and cumulative disadvantages faced by Black periodical publishers, publicizing the New Negro would be a formidable task requiring extraordinary initiative. Well before 1887, the monopoly-controlled telegraph industry had risen to become the dominant means of rapidly transmitting not only news events but also the white supremacist ideology that shaped how readers understood those events.⁹ In response, proponents of the New Negro used the Black press, distributed in part by Pullman porters over vast rail networks, to deliver a crucial rebuttal when Jim Crow strictures and violence increasingly blocked political participation in the South.¹⁰ When in 1919 Claude Barnett launched his alternative to the Associated Press (AP), the Associated Negro Press, “news-hungry” Black papers “virtually stood in line” to sign up. By the end of its first year, eighty out of approximately 350 Black papers had joined.¹¹

Indeed, with the rapid increase in Black literacy during and after Reconstruction, Black newspapers strove to meet the needs of an ever-expanding reading audience eager for news and opinions from a Black perspective. From 1880 to 1890, 504 African American newspapers were started. During the period from 1895 to 1915, 1,219 African American newspapers were founded, with a peak in 1902, coinciding with a pinnacle of Jim Crow white mob violence, when 101 Black newspapers were launched.¹² By 1921, wrote American sociologist Frederick Detweiler, “every Negro who can read does read a race paper.”¹³

Because Latin American governments encouraged, if not insisted on, a “deracialized consciousness” and pressured Black citizens to de-emphasize racial difference in the public sphere, significantly fewer Afro-Latin American papers arose during the same period. Usually they comprised no more than four pages and relied almost exclusively on a Black urban audience whose wages and literacy rates were higher than in the countryside. They rarely sold enough copies or garnered enough advertising to make them profitable;¹⁴ almost all Afro-Latin American papers lost money, and only a tiny fraction continued publishing beyond four or five years.¹⁵ Nevertheless, as Paulina Laura Alberto, George Reid Andres, and Jesse Hoffnung-Garskof note, the Afro-Latin American press served a vital political and social function. By the 1920s these Black newspapers were denouncing structural racism, class oppression, and colonial rule as they covered Black community events left unaddressed by the white Latin American press and unified Black citizens by emphasizing an Afro-diasporic consciousness.¹⁶

Like the Afro-Latin American press, the Black African press under colonialism was also almost always desperately underfunded. Incorporating less news reporting (especially early in this period) than its American counterparts, the Black African press built political communities through editorials, content reprinted from other papers, travel essays, poetry, and reflections from correspondents. As Derek Peterson and Emma Hunter write, however, even as the Black African press generally, but not exclusively, sought to inspire nationalist sentiment against colonial rule, some African journalists saw their mission as inspiring a Pan-African consciousness beyond national boundaries. Regardless, Black African editors usually had to be attuned to colonial authorities, and thus the Black African press was “never free.”¹⁷ After World War I, the South African and West African presses grew exponentially, but in South Africa the white press exerted increased control over Black newspapers as it sought to curb the power of the African National Congress, founded in 1912. Even though the readership measured by literacy rates may appear comparatively small—in 1921, roughly 10 percent of Black South Africans were literate—out-loud reading events likely extended the reach of newspaper content considerably. The English-language press in West Africa, meanwhile, was primarily controlled by African descendants of Black Americans who had emigrated to Liberia and freed Sierra Leoneans and saw its audience as an educated elite.¹⁸

As this discourse mobilized, unified, and inspired Black people around the globe, it also divided, casting some—especially educated young Black men and women—as racial representatives but relegating most others as seemingly outside the modern or respectable spheres. Even as a

number of New Negro writers we include pitched a wider New Negro tent as they challenged the “politics of respectability”—what Evelyn Higginbotham describes as the belief that “‘respectable’ behavior in public would earn . . . [African Americans] a measure of esteem from white America”—others did not.¹⁹ As my coeditor, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., has argued, the figure implied “a cause-and-effect relation”: the idea that if Black people could fashion new, self-empowered modern selves, they would defy the vicious, dehumanizing Old Negro stereotypes of Sambos, coons, brutes, mummies, and Jezebels.²⁰ That logic left those who did not appear to fit the modern image vulnerable, stuck within a paradigm that required by its very name demonstrable evidence of change.

Our guiding principle in compiling this anthology was to include only nonfiction articles (and a few pieces of autobiographical fiction) in which the concept of the New Negro, or some variation of the “new,” appears. Overall, we sought to include those voices that represented the full geographic, social, aesthetic, and political diversity of the trope, with only some regard to whether the authors were or are well known. We see then the textual recovery in this volume, in the words of Brigitte Fielder, “not [only as] hunts for missing treasure but a research practice[e] that must reimagine criteria for textual valuation as preconditions for recovery work.”²¹ At the same time, we had to be mindful that many Black women writers eschewed any explicit use of the New Negro Woman trope because the Black counterpart of the New (white) Woman, associated with sexual freedom and other traditional gender-role transgressions, triggered the Jezebel stereotype. To compensate, we have included a number of pieces by Black women employing broader “new” rhetoric responding to changing Black women’s roles. In total, the anthology reveals at least twelve variations of the New Negro characterized by historical period, a particular Black leader, or a new social movement: 1) the rise of Jim Crow, 2) the age of Washington, 3) the New Negro Woman, 4) the age of Du Bois, 5) the post–World War I Black Left, 6) the age of Garvey, 7) Alain Locke’s New Negro, 8) the “jazz-mad” flapper, 9) the New Negro Alliance, 10) the New Deal New Negro, 11) the antifascist New Negro, and 12) the fascist New Negro.

Deploying the trope of the New Negro was a considered, important decision, and, despite its capaciousness and flux, not all famous, talented, or successful Black people would have been considered New Negroes. Although it is tempting to call a boxing legend such as Jack Johnson or a blues icon such as Bessie Smith a New Negro, respectability’s tenacious hold on the trope precluded them from receiving such an accolade. Athleticism needed the imprimatur of education, so college athletes could wear the mantle. “Hot and dirty” jazz needed an unassailable reputation, along with extraordinary talent. Langston Hughes’s “bad new Negroes” certainly embraced the “sad, raggy tune[s]” and the “whirling cabaret,” yet only those jazz and blues performers who had garnered the artistic bona fides along with educational, oratorical, or respectability credentials were bestowed the title. “The great colored baritone” and two-time all-American athlete Paul Robeson graduated from Columbia Law School; the actress of “sterling character,” Florence Mills, earned the adulation of the prince of Wales; “father of the blues” W. C. Handy published *Blues: An Anthology* (1926), illustrated by the celebrity Harlem Renaissance caricaturist Miguel Covarrubias. While not an exclusive list, these poetic and musical figures, and in the case of Robeson, this renowned college athlete, stage actor, and Black activist had garnered enough respectability to represent the race as New Negroes.²²

Just as Black people traveled across continents, countries, and regions for a better life, the New Negro concept was on the move through wire transmission, word of mouth, the mail and rail services, films, phonograph records, and radio broadcasts.²³ Original content and reprints of American New Negro articles, both informally and through syndication, appeared in newspapers around the nation and the globe, offering a fascinating window into what content editors considered culturally relevant enough to claim. For leaders of the Négritude movement, the New Negro

became “le nègre nouveau”; for the Afro-Cuban Gustavo Urrutia, the figure was the “Nuevo Negro.”²⁴ We have sought to include those voices—regardless of whether they were well known—who represented the full geographic, social, aesthetic, and political diversity of the trope.

By including documents from the Black diaspora, we seek to tell a complex Afro-Atlantic story often forged by direct personal initiatives. Marcus Garvey, with substantial leadership assistance from his wives Amy Ashwood Garvey and later Amy Jacques Garvey, proved exceptionally adept at spreading his Pan-African Black nationalist version of the New Negro to workers’ rights movements in Central America and East, Southern, and West Africa.²⁵ From 1929 to 1940, Paulette Nardal and her sisters Andrée and Jeanne (Jane) hosted Aimé Césaire, Langston Hughes, Etienne Léro, Alain Locke, Claude McKay, and Léopold Senghor in their Clamart salon southwest of Paris.²⁶ In March 1930 Langston Hughes, during his second visit to Cuba, enjoyed dinner in Havana with Urrutia and the leading poet of the Afrocubanismo movement, Nicolás Guillén.²⁷

We also have included many New Negro images, not simply to augment the text but as interpretative documents themselves. These include illustrations from newspapers, magazines, and books; photographs from exhibits meant to dispel racist stereotypes; photographs of authors whose dress or demeanor suggests New Negro assertion; and photographs taken by Black and white artists to reflect New Negro ideals. We also include selections from white supremacist media outlets that sought to portray the New Negro as ridiculous, menacing, or criminal.

I. The New South and the New Negro, 1885–1894

Even before Henry Grady’s address, the eminent African American Episcopal minister Alexander Crummell, in “The Need of New Ideas and New Aims for a New Era,” heralded the “new” as a turn away from the trauma of enslavement. In his 1885 commencement address at the historically Black Storer College in Harpers Ferry, West Virginia, whose graduates would have been among the first generation to have no direct memory of slavery, Crummell enjoined his audience to meet the “urgent needs of the present” and the “fast-crowding and momentous interests of the future” rather than “dwell[ing] morbidly and absorbingly upon the servile past.” For Crummell, speaking to his audience of future race leaders, the “new” would elevate the Black family, improve the status of Black laborers, and lead a “moral revolution.”²⁸

Yet Crummell’s audience faced the prospect of seeking opportunities amid what Eric Foner has called the “twilight zone” after Reconstruction yet before the full implementation of Jim Crow.²⁹ By 1885, white supremacist Southern Democrats had put in place or tacitly condoned a slew of measures aimed at denying Black Americans their civil rights. In 1883 the US Supreme Court declared the 1875 Civil Rights Act unconstitutional. Even those Black passengers who had paid first-class railroad fares were forced into the crude and dirty accommodations of the smoking car; white land and shop owners had locked most rural Black Americans into perpetual debt due to a predatory credit lien system; Black women had almost no protection from the sexual predation of white men; Black voting rights were increasingly under attack through intimidation, violence, or deceit; white vigilantes increasingly lynched Black people with impunity as a means of social control through terrorism; Southern white journalists, in concert with business and political interests, increasingly worked to justify systemic anti-Black racism; and, by the end of the 1880s, at least ten thousand African American men had been forced into working as virtual slave laborers in the South through the convict lease system.³⁰ The supposed “new crime” of Black men raping white women became, according to Joel Williamson, “the subject of intense observation” in the late 1880s, roughly coterminous with Black writers’ first use of the trope of the New Negro in 1887.³¹

Within this context, the New Negro we see in the documents of this section reflect real progress that African Americans made as they fought against Reconstruction's complete rollback. On January 6, 1887, the white-owned *Independent*, a weekly New York newspaper, published a six-part series, "What Educated Colored People in the South Report concerning Their Material Condition."³² After the first installment, the white-owned *Hartford Daily Courant* published a summary of the *Independent's* findings in an article titled "The New Negro in the New South." Despite "very low wages" and an exploitive "store-credit system" that functioned as a "clog to progress, a millstone around the negro's neck," the *Courant* observed, African Americans were advancing. In Richmond County, North Carolina, the article reports, "they are fast accumulating property" and buying homes. Even though "few own farms of any considerable size," noted an interviewee from Arkansas, "a new spirit seems to have come over them in the last few years, and they are looking toward the ownership of larger farms."³³

The following month, the Black-edited *Washington Bee* republished an article from the Black *St. Louis Advance* that defined the New Negro as one who emerged in tandem with the New South, had been born after slavery, had gained higher education, and sought to "soften the asperities of race antagonism" through direct political involvement.³⁴

In other words, despite a sectional reconciliation forged on the conviction of a shared commitment to white supremacy—what David Blight calls "a soul-killing hydra worse than slavery itself"—the New Negro represented hope.³⁵ The New Negro, explained the *Washington Bee*, "is coming forth in platoons of ten thousand deep from the colleges and schools of the Nation, with reverence for the past, but with all his energies bent on the prospect of the future."³⁶ While the *Courant's* article may or may not be the first published usage of "New Negro"—too many gaps in the historical record remain—the New Negro as a "social media campaign" was born.³⁷

In the Black press, "New Negro" quickly became shorthand for Black men claiming race consciousness, education, and political power on behalf of full civil rights. The African American journalist and civil rights spokesman John Edward Bruce, who adopted the evocative pen name Bruce Grit [John Edward Bruce], deployed the New Negro in 1888 for the *New York Age* when he urged the Republican National Committee to hire the lawyer and former US ambassador to Liberia John H. Smythe as a campaign orator.³⁸ The Black-owned *Kansas Times-Observer* meanwhile hailed the "new Negro voter" who could not be bought: he was one "whose education and acquaintance with our political systems renders him a restless and an almost unknown factor in the political arena."³⁹ In Virginia, the "Fighting Negro Editor" of the *Richmond Planet*, John W. Mitchell Jr., took such a courageous stance against racial injustice and white mob violence that the Indianapolis *Freeman* called him "a man, who, conscious of his own strength of Manhood Dares to Hurl the Thunderbolts of Truth Into the Ranks of the Wicked—Injustice a Target for his Unerring Arrow."⁴⁰

A staunch Republican, Mitchell epitomized the New Negro as an erudite defender of the race who exposed racist capitalist exploitation, the hypocrisy of white supremacy, and the ruthless tactics white Democrats used to ensure domination. In his December 20, 1890, editorial in response to the local white supremacist L***, Mitchell recalled the savagery of white mobs who had recently lynched a man: "their sensitive stomachs [*sic*] possibly prevented them from proceeding with the act of mastication."⁴¹ Mitchell, having himself been threatened with lynching for his reporting, ended his editorial by extolling the many accomplishments in business, education, and politics of the New Negro while evoking a not-too-distant time past when Virginians made meaningful cross-racial alliances over economic and education issues.⁴²

Black women claimed the imagery of the "New Negro" to organize for greater respect, racial uplift, and a political voice. In *A Voice from the South* (1892), Anna Julia Cooper, who had lived with Alexander Crummell in Washington, DC, as a boarder just a few years prior, saw the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, the first mass organization of women committed to social, and, by

extension, political reform, as perhaps the most powerful example of this “new era” and a “woman’s place in it.”⁴³ Cooper insisted that this “new era” required Black women’s affective influence “to bring a heart power into this money getting, dollar-worshipping civilization . . . to stand for God and Home and Native Land *versus* gain and greed and grasping selfishness.”⁴⁴ That same year she helped to launch the Colored Women’s League, whose primary mission was to improve the lives of Black women, children, and the city’s poor. The following year she joined the prominent Chicago clubwoman and speaker Fannie Barrier Williams, who had joined the fight for Black representation at Chicago’s Columbian Exposition, to speak at the World’s Congress of Representative Women held at the exposition. Decrying stereotypes of Black female immorality, Williams celebrated the “new ideals of womanhood” in which a “new generation” of Black women claimed the privileges of “grace and delicacy” so long enjoyed by affluent white women.⁴⁵ Although initially committed to Frederick Douglass’s vision of “egalitarian protest ideology,” after Douglass’s death in 1895, Williams, like so many others, lauded the accommodationist philosophy of the era’s most prominent and well-funded Black industrial educational leader, Booker T. Washington.⁴⁶

II. The Booker T. Washington Era, 1895–1903

On a bright, warm afternoon in Atlanta in September 1895, thousands of Americans—among them regional dignitaries, Civil War veterans, Black people in carriages, and reporters from the nation’s major newspapers—came to witness the spectacular opening ceremonies of what would be the grandest testament thus far to the New South: the Cotton States and International Exposition. As one of a series of speakers introduced by the state’s Reconstruction-era, Republican former governor Rufus B. Bullock, Booker T. Washington, the founder and president of the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute in Alabama, alone gained national attention, captivating his audience with his promise of a loyal Black workforce that “cast down [its] bucket” and accepted segregation as the only reasonable course.⁴⁷ Two days later, in a letter to the *New York World*, Washington reiterated his deference to white leadership, insisting if the Negro would “cast his lot materially, civilly and morally with the South . . . cultivate the closest friendship with the Southern white man; [and] that when he can . . . vote for and with the Southern white man . . . there will be soon not only a new South but a new negro.”⁴⁸ Less than two weeks later, Chicago’s *Daily Inter Ocean* heralded Washington’s “practical plans for harmonizing all race differences,” providing the New South its basis for prosperity and embodying the era’s “new negro.”⁴⁹

Given the South’s increasingly brutal Jim Crow practices, Washington’s public accommodationist stance may have been the only pragmatic choice. By the mid-1890s, the Jim Crow system, designed to terrorize, subjugate, and control, had reached its apogee. White mobs murdered more than seven hundred mostly male African Americans from 1890 to 1900, often in ghastly spectacles of ritualized torture. Southern states disenfranchised Black voters, with Mississippi adopting a new state constitution in 1890 that instituted a poll tax and literacy test as a voting requirement; other states followed suit. State and local governments, particularly in the South, passed a torrent of laws segregating transportation and public facilities, with the 1896 Supreme Court decision upholding segregation, *Plessy v. Ferguson*, greenlighting the process. Throughout the country, Black people were usually relegated to the most menial labor and denied opportunities for advancement. Enduring the seemingly overwhelming obstacles of systemic racial and gender oppression and the ever-present threat of sexual violence, Black women faced an even more treacherous path.⁵⁰

Working in the South, where the majority of African Americans still lived, Margaret Murray Washington urged clubwomen, and particularly white clubwomen, to refocus their efforts where she felt the need was most dire—in the South. Although Washington delivered her address “Individual Work for Moral Elevation” at the First National Conference of Colored Women of America

in Boston almost two months before her husband's famous Atlanta Exposition speech in September 1895, it was not until October, during the ongoing exposition, that the Boston philanthropic monthly *Lend a Hand* printed and renamed the address "The New Negro Woman" for a predominantly Northern white progressive audience.

With its new title, Margaret Murray Washington's speech offered an implicit critique of what had become a dominant stereotype of (white) New Womanhood—selfishness. Although both white and Black New Woman advocates maintained that their "newness" benefited "the race," the dominant press frequently criticized (white) New Women's demands as at odds with their biological imperative to be mothers. In this view, campaigning for suffrage; pursuing higher education; and advocating for dress reform, sexual freedom, and artistic expression made women mannish, barren, or degenerate. Margaret Murray Washington, by contrast, positioned the dominant version of the New Negro Woman as selfless, committed to helping her less fortunate Southern Black sisters: "It is the lifting up as we climb which means growth to the race."⁵¹ Transforming the New Woman trope to invoke older (white) "true women's" ideals of domesticity, piety, and purity and applying them to Black women, especially in the club movement, Washington combated the degendering that Black women suffered during enslavement.⁵² At the same time, she shifted the New Woman's working location from the urban North to the rural South, where thousands of Black women, she maintained in a letter to the white reformer Ednah Dow Littlehale Cheney, "live a living death." Beginning in the home, this New Negro Woman instilled Christian faith and morality, the "responsibility of motherhood," cooking, cleaning, tidiness, "neatness of dress," and "wholesome habits."⁵³ Only after such work "helping our women," Washington argued, would "there be fewer thrusts at the immorality of the race," fewer lynchings, and the eventual interracial acknowledgment of the "brotherhood of man and the fatherhood of God."⁵⁴

At the same time, the ubiquitous popularized version of the (white) New Woman as Charles Dana Gibson's statuesque Gibson Girl presented a challenge to Black women. As the Gibson Girl luxuriated in her own beauty, drained her father's finances, juggled eager suitors, and engaged in the latest athletic sensation of golf, she represented a new feminine power at once appealing and dangerous for Black women to adopt. The prevailing racist and sexist stereotypes of Black women as Jezebels and viragos, coupled with the patriarchal imperatives of racial uplift, meant that the New Negro Woman's illustrators often drew her as having the Gibson Girl's stylishness but the modesty and deference of the "true woman." In other words, while adopting a Gibson Girl look—Margaret Murray Washington was, in fact, compared to a Gibson Girl by a white settlement house leader—the New Negro Woman eschewed the Gibson Girl narrative.⁵⁵ Committed to service rather than solipsism, "sacrifice" rather than self-indulgence, separate spheres rather than social mixing, and sisterly loyalty rather than cutthroat competition, the New Negro Woman sought to shift from the *I* of the Gibson Girl icon to the *we* of interracial sisterhood.⁵⁶ As white periodicals of the period portrayed New Negro Women as garish parodies of white Gibson Girls, Black writers and artists depicted them as reserved and accomplished Gibson Girl types.⁵⁷ Not until 1916 would a Black-owned magazine feature a female golfer on the cover as a sign of Black women's modernity.

Other Black women eschewed the trope entirely as irrelevant or counterproductive given systemic discrimination. The Black-owned *Leavenworth* (KS) *Herald* reprinted and endorsed an article by the white-owned *Tacoma* (WA) *Herald*, claiming that the "new woman" was so tied to middle-class privilege that it was inconceivable to apply it to African American women: "Being less independent than the young women who have and relish the opportunity to support themselves by money-making, the colored girl has no prospect in life except in matrimony. She . . . never gets a chance to know the significance of the term, 'the new woman.'" Pauline E. Hopkins appears to have eschewed the term because of its primary association with woman's suffrage. In 1900, she cautioned not only against the corrupting effects of the "political arena" but also about the increased power

the vote would give to southern white women: “If we are not the ‘moral lepers’ that the white women of Georgia accuse us of being, then we ought to hesitate before we affiliate too happily in any project that will give them greater power than they now possess to crush the weak and helpless.”⁵⁸

Perhaps because of her close ties to Booker T. Washington, Fannie Barrier Williams, by contrast, envisioned the New Negro Woman as the “happy refutation of the idle insinuations and common skepticism as to the womanly worth and promise of the whole race of women.”⁵⁹ As historian Brittney C. Cooper writes, Williams, like Anna Julia Cooper before her, went “beyond respectability,” powerfully “linking the fleshy precarity of Black life to the forward-looking possibilities of progressive social discourse.” To combat what Brittney Cooper calls Black women’s “civic unknowability,” Williams deployed the New Negro Woman trope to center the Black women’s club movement in a whole host of progressive causes crucial to the race: promoting early childhood education, ensuring employment opportunities for women, and protesting the convict lease system.⁶⁰

All the clamor about a New Woman only accelerated fascination with the New Negro, which a twenty-seven-year-old W. E. B. Du Bois proclaimed needed guiding principles. In December 1895, in a now lost issue of the *New York Age*, Du Bois published his “Creed for the ‘New Negro.’” At this point in his career, Du Bois, who was teaching at Wilberforce University, had not yet publicly voiced objections to Booker T. Washington’s worldview and, in fact, had congratulated Washington on his “phenomenal success at Atlanta—it was a word fitly spoken.”⁶¹

In its emphasis on moral purity, self-reliance, and “industrial training,” as well as its accedence to social segregation, Du Bois’s “Creed” reads like something Washington would endorse. Yet Du Bois, even this early in his career, distinguishes his position from Washington’s. In addition to industrial education, Du Bois emphasizes the need for “the cultivation of our best intellectual ability.” He calls for the “founding of a university of the negro” (which he would later describe as the unique curriculum based on each “race-soul”).⁶² In urging the “preservation of our best race characteristics and products” as expressed in Black music and folklore, he celebrates Black culture in itself rather than as measured by white achievement. Finally, Du Bois expresses a commitment to judicious political involvement that Washington, in Alabama, had publicly renounced. The order of Du Bois’s “Creed”—especially the fact that the “strictest moral purity” must be observed before the affirmation of Black culture—suggested the hazards of celebrating Black culture and higher education when most Southern white people associated Black men with criminality and Black women with sexual immorality.⁶³

Yet at this point in his career, Du Bois had neither the stature nor inclination to take on Washington, whose vision dominated the Black press. In 1902, Washington D.C.’s *Colored American* newspaper, with its banner prominently featuring the US capitol and various tools of learning, hailed Professor James B. Dudley as the president of the Agricultural and Mechanical College in Greensboro, North Carolina, and one of a series of New Negro “Men of the Hour.” Born enslaved, trained as a carpenter, and committed to “every kind of education,” Dudley embodied the Washington ideals of “thrift and economy,” “racial harmony,” and “sectional development.” Despite the 1898 Wilmington, North Carolina, massacre and coup d’état, when white supremacists overthrew a democratically elected Fusionist government of Black and white leaders, burned the offices of the city’s Black newspaper, and killed dozens of Black citizens (what the *Colored American* called the “unfortunate occurrences in Wilmington”), Dudley represented a commitment to public service and self-improvement that promised the cooperation of “white and black” as “full-fledged citizens” in the “New South.”⁶⁴

By 1900, in fact, Washington’s influence was so great that even white publishers capitalized on it to sell copy. In what Washington would call an “outrage[ou]s fraud,” the white American Publishing House president John Emmett MacBrady designed the book *A New Negro for a New Century*

(1900) to appear as if Washington had edited it, even though Washington contributed only one chapter, and that was ghostwritten by T. Thomas Fortune.⁶⁵ Known later for his marketing of beauty products to Black consumers, MacBrady arranged the book to showcase the celebrity power of Washington as the consummate New Negro.⁶⁶ Just five years after Booker T. Washington's "Atlanta Compromise" speech had launched him into national fame, MacBrady would use Washington's image to sell a more vigorous ideal of Christian New Negro manhood, one that highlighted to a primarily Black audience the contributions of prominent Black servicemen and newspaper editors.

While Washington's contribution, "Afro-American Education," describes the "marvelous work" of colleges educating Black Americans after slavery, and Fannie Barrier Williams's contribution, "The Club Movement among Colored Women of America,"⁶⁷ focuses on the racial uplift mission of the Black women's club movement, the heart of the book, as advertised on the title page, celebrates the "Superb Heroism and Daring Deeds of the Negro Soldier." In fact, seven of the anthology's eighteen chapters focus on Black military service, especially in US imperialist ventures, which Washington had publicly expressed ambivalence toward two years earlier.⁶⁸ Despite the fact that the US conquest and annexation of the Philippines, Puerto Rico, and Guam had its foundation in a conviction of white American racial superiority and that, as George P. Marks III writes, "the cardinal emphasis in the Black press" was on the hypocrisy of a war to liberate Black Cubans in the Spanish-American War while not protecting Black Americans in the South, the collection celebrated the Spanish-American War and Black soldiers serving in it.⁶⁹

The New Negro that emerges in the book hews to a line of racial uplift rooted in white bourgeois values—thrift, hard work, patriarchy, valor, Christianity, and patriotic imperialism—while also revealing its fault lines and contradictions. Evoking what historian Darlene Clark Hine termed a "culture of dissemblance"—Black women feigning candor while keeping their true feelings hidden—and later described by Kevin K. Gaines as both a Black means of survival and "part of the majority American culture's silence, evasion, or outright distortion on matters of race," the anthology reflects the incentive by both Black writers and white editors to present a carefully guarded New Negro.⁷⁰ The New Negro in MacBrady's collection points out white prejudice but does not mention the South's "Red Record" of lynching and its terroristic function within the systemic brutality of Jim Crow. This New Negro may demonstrate bravery in battle but must acknowledge and appease the psychological needs of white people for dominance and heroism; he may be a man in fellowship with other similarly accomplished men, but not in avowed partnership with Black women; and he may show evidence of exceptional "race progress" but, within the social Darwinist context of what historian Marlon Ross calls the "race of the races," must promote a pseudoscientific taxonomy that positions him above the supposed "wild Indians."⁷¹

Any assertion of "race progress" in MacBrady's volume, however, was up against syndicated white supremacist views that US imperialism only risked expanding the so-called Negro problem. J. M. Scanland's bitterly racist "Special New Orleans Letter, 'Some Reasons Why the Mixed Population of Porto [*sic*] Rico and the Philippines Should Not Be Granted Citizenship'" (1900), argues that the US acquisition of nations with "mixed populations" presented a deeply vexing problem. According to Scanland, Negroes of any nationality, whether they were "new niggers" or not, were incapable of self-government.⁷²

Whether the New Negro should strive to prove his mettle in service to his nation or shun such service because of Jim Crow would spur one Western Black writer to propose a radically different solution: colonization, led by a New Negro, of a portion of the United States. In 1899, the Baptist educator, pastor, novelist, newspaper founder, and editor Sutton E. Griggs, who grew up in Texas, self-published the fictional *Imperium in Imperio* (1899). Appearing one year after the Spanish-American War, Griggs's *Imperium* offers a New Negro remarkable for his commitment to direct action protest, the militancy of his response to imperialist conquest and Jim Crow atrocities, and

his embrace of emigration as a means of redress.⁷³ The New Negro protagonist, Belmont Piedmont, whose views mirror those of Griggs himself, describes the African American as a colonized person, “an unprotected foreigner in his own home.”⁷⁴ Within the safety of the New Negro’s clandestine imperium—a Black nation within the US nation—a fierce debate ensues. Despite the objections of the more temperate Piedmont, the New Negro antagonist, Bernard Belgrave, resolves to wrest control of the domestic imperialist project, launching an armed reconquest of land already long occupied by peoples also suffering colonization—Native Americans and Latinos: “We will demand the surrender of Texas and Louisiana to the Imperium. Texas, we will retain. Louisiana, we will cede to our foreign allies in return for their aid. Thus will the Negro have an empire of his own, fertile in soil, capable of sustaining a population of fifty million people.”⁷⁵ Even as Griggs clearly shows the influence of Du Bois’s and Washington’s conceptions of the New Negro in his commitment to racial uplift, women’s chastity, and voluntary social segregation, he comes closer to proposing a Black nationalist perspective than either race leader. Griggs’s New Negro novel finally issues an ultimatum: either the US returns to what Griggs sees as its fundamental Christian and democratic ideals or it risks a mass exodus of Black labor and violent secession. *Imperium* emphasizes both the irony and the potential catastrophic repercussions of a nation committed to imperialist missions abroad while failing to acknowledge how its internal conquest of Black people has undermined its national security.

Griggs was not alone in seeing the West as a more democratic geographical space, less consumed by the all-encompassing systemic brutality of Jim Crow and thus the best home for the New Negro.⁷⁶ Echoing the spirit of the post-Reconstruction Exodusters, when tens of thousands of Black people left the South to homestead in Kansas, Colorado, and Oklahoma, some Western Black newspapers maintained that the New Negro spirit could best be forged on lands west of the Mississippi.⁷⁷ In 1895, the *Leavenworth Herald*, edited by Blanche Ketene Bruce, nephew of Blanche Kelso Bruce, the first African American to serve a full term in the US Senate (from 1875 to 1881), maintained that “the West is noted for its free ideas, liberality of thought, and especially for the magnificent chances presented for young Afro-Americans to make ladies and gentlemen of themselves.”⁷⁸ In 1906, Horace Cayton Sr.’s Black weekly, the *Seattle Republican*, expressed a similar sentiment, declaring, “The solution of the so-called ‘race problem,’ in the United States, is the scattering of the blacks, like the whites, to every nook and corner of the country; yea, even to every nook and corner of the South and Central American republics. . . . Now, Mr. New Negro, go thou and do likewise.”⁷⁹

Yet, while Griggs elides any common cause with Native Americans or Hispanics, literary scholar Emily Lutenski charts a New Negro emerging from a multiethnic West and borderlands where Mexican Americans, Native Americans, and Asian Americans often lived and worked alongside African Americans.⁸⁰ Indeed, although the New Negro trope emphasizes a Black/white binary, in particularly racially and ethnically diverse cities such as Los Angeles in the early twentieth century, the New Negro appears, as Lutenski argues, “at the nexus of the borderlands and the Pacific world.”⁸¹ Coupled with this multiracial nexus, as Douglas Flamming writes, Black Americans “found in Los Angeles . . . an oddly half-free environment” where “the rules of the game and the hierarchies of power seemed always in flux.”⁸² In 1924, the Black-owned Los Angeles *California Eagle* extolled the Black contractor and businessman Charles S. Blodgett as one who embodied the “very practical decision of the New Negro . . . [who] by his unselfish devotion for his people . . . has lighted the path of progress for greater things than have ever been dreamed of before.” In the extraordinary photo of Blodgett in Los Angeles from 1909 that we include here, he kneels in a dark suit in front of his painting crew—likely ethnically diverse—to document a moment where Los Angeles’ own version of Jim Crow seems to have, at least partially, slipped.⁸³

Proponents of the New Negro, especially in the early 1900s, used the medium of photography to offer evidentiary proof of the existence of the New Negro. With its sixty-one photographs

including Black servicemen, journalists, educators, and women's club movement leaders, MacBrady's anthology served as a visual testament to race progress in much the same way as W. E. B. Du Bois's 363 photographs, two-thirds of which were portraits of Black middle-class southerners, for his American Negro Exhibit at the 1900 Paris Exhibition. Du Bois's collection of photographs—assembled while he served as professor of sociology at Atlanta University and designed to show “what the negro really is in the South,”—offered seemingly irrefutable evidence of Black accomplishment, dignity, and humanity. As Shawn Michelle Smith notes, the photographs Du Bois curated offered a “counterarchive that challenges a long legacy of racist taxonomy, intervening in turn-of-the-century ‘race science’ by offering competing visual evidence.”⁸⁴ It wasn't enough to describe the New Negro in words; one had to use a mimetic, modern technological medium to corroborate the New Negro's emergence—all the more remarkable in former slave states.

Regardless, the onslaught of anti-Black racist propaganda both justifying and spurring Jim Crow discrimination, exploitation, and violence only accelerated. In what must have seemed bitterly ironic to Booker T. Washington after his “Atlanta Compromise” concessions and his assurances to his largely white audience that Blacks were the “most patient, faithful, law-abiding, and unresentful people that the world has seen,” white Southerners unleashed not only a torrent of discriminatory laws and mob acts of terrorism directed against African Americans but also a deluge of anti-Black racist imagery to rationalize that brutal treatment.⁸⁵ As historian Rayford Logan writes, throughout the country Americans were bombarded with images of, “lazy, improvident, child-like, irresponsible, chicken-stealing, crap-shooting, policy-playing, razor-toting, immoral and criminal” Black people. As their status in American society degenerated, they became even more vulnerable to such attacks.⁸⁶

Increasingly nostalgic for the plantation “darkey” and fearful of any Black assertion of rights, Southern white people created an alternate narrative of the New Negro. In their version, according to Rev. S. A. Steel of Nashville, Tennessee, slavery had been a benign institution that “civilized” barbaric slaves, a “mild and humane system of bondage, almost misnamed slavery.” Reconstruction was a tragic folly that had created a “new negro” (the pejorative use of the trope is rarely capitalized) who, free from all restraint, acted on his singular urge (since sexual passions predominated in his race) for “social equality,” a drive manifesting itself as an overwhelming lust for white women. Untethered to slavery's Christian influence and corrupted by Northern opportunities, this “new negro” had devolved into a rapist deserving of incarceration and lynching.⁸⁷

For such prominent white Southern writers as Thomas Nelson Page, even Booker T. Washington as the representative New Negro could not be trusted. Despite his assurances that “in all things that are purely social we can be as separate as the five fingers,” in accepting President Theodore Roosevelt's invitation to the White House in 1901, Washington proved, according to Page, that “the most passionate aspiration of the new negro was for the bugbear of ‘social equality.’” Page followed a familiar pattern of white supremacist rhetoric of the time: despite the shallow appearances of change, the New Negro was hopelessly stuck in ineradicable racial barbarism. Roosevelt's invitation and Washington's acceptance had emboldened the New Negro's sense of race consciousness: “The new negro when he gets an education . . . becomes the ‘Afro-American’” (and, consequently, becomes even more desirous of “social equality”). The more the New Negro identifies as Afro-American, Page suggests, the more he reverts to his primitive “dark continent” self, making it only a matter of time before he adopts “sword and torch” to overthrow the white power structure and claim his real prize, white Southern womanhood.⁸⁸ In 1904, *Life* magazine depicted Washington as an ape in a cartoon titled, “Life's Presidential Impossibilities.” No need to fear, *Life* assured its white readers; the idea of a Black president was laughable.⁸⁹

III. The W. E. B. Du Bois Era, 1903–1916

From June 1903 to January 1904, the esteemed *Harper's Weekly* devoted a series of articles to the “new negro crime” of Black men’s alleged sexual assault of white women. Newspapers around the country reprinted it. The first article in the series maintains that Mississippi’s redrawn 1890 constitution disenfranchising Black voters prevented such assaults. Although “it is generally acknowledged . . . that the new negro at the South is less industrious, less thrifty, less trustworthy, and less self-controlled than was his father or his grandfather,” it was the right to vote that was the primary cause of his savage criminality. Americans, then, “may have cause to bless the refusal of the United States Supreme Court to enforce the Fifteenth Amendment” in the South and its protection of voting rights.⁹⁰ The second article in the series blames Reconstruction, as well as the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, as political developments all “favorable to amalgamation”—that is, interracial sex.⁹¹

In the final article in the series, the *Harper's* editorialist insists that “the average negro does not believe in the chastity of women,” leading the Black man not merely to misunderstand the concept of rape but to “condone” it. Since his “sexual desire [has] always been a controlling force,” with the “new teaching of social and political equality” it has become a “desire for the white woman.” The author wonders if Thomas Nelson Page’s proposed solution, the hiring of Black lawmen to patrol their own race, would be effectual or if, as Page fears, the “racial instincts” of “Black criminals” have “roots so deep . . . [that] . . . nothing can eradicate them.”⁹² And with that premise, any means of social control—be it through the justice system or the mob—can be justified. The New Negro in the white press had become overwritten as the Black male rapist.

For Southern social observers such as Eleanor Tayleur, writing for New York’s *Outlook* in January 1904, the New Negro Woman had been wrenched into newness by the violence of the Civil War and the folly of Reconstruction and now appeared as a “Frankenstein product of civilization,” ruled by her appetites and indifferent to whether they defied the bounds of marriage or law. For Tayleur the New Negro Woman was both a fright and an object of pity because with the “brain of a child and the passions of a woman,” she absurdly imitated white women’s dress but not their refined behavior. Characterized by “social and moral decadence,” the New Negro Woman stood “forsaken and deserted” at “the garden of free-loveism” crying out for rescue.⁹³

As the Jim Crow caste system and the vicious anti-Black propaganda sustaining it increasingly became embedded into virtually every sector of American life, and especially in the South, Washington’s public silence on Jim Crow discrimination and violence provoked rebellion among a number of Black leaders. Most famously, in 1903 W. E. B. Du Bois published his critique of Washington and celebration of a Black aesthetic, *The Souls of Black Folk*. Writing from the perspectives of two worlds—the Black and white, “within and without the Veil”—Du Bois reflected on Black Americans longing to “attain self-conscious manhood.”⁹⁴ Now it was the Southerner, Washington, who embodied the Old Negro, the “old attitude of adjustment and submission . . . a silent submission to civic inferiority such as is bound to sap the manhood of any race in the long run,” while Du Bois’s increasingly vocal civil rights protest constituted the new. For Du Bois, “so thoroughly did [Washington] learn the speech and thought of triumphant commercialism, and the ideals of material prosperity” that he had given up on the idea of “true manhood,” which lay in political power, civil rights, and higher education. It was Washington’s feminine “submission,” his spirit of “kindliness and reconciliation,” all designed “to sell” a debased form of Black manhood, that constituted a “civic death” for Black men. For Du Bois, that “true manhood” was more likely to be found in the North and required exercising the franchise.⁹⁵

Two years later, in July 1905, Du Bois collaborated with other Black intellectuals, including *Voice of the Negro* editors John Wesley Edward Bowen and Jesse Max Barber and *Guardian* editor

William Monroe Trotter, to launch the Niagara Movement, a precursor to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). In what must have seemed to Washington an audacious affront, the delegates promoted their ambitious platform committed to “full manhood” rights: the right to vote (for “with the right to vote goes everything”); equal access to all public facilities, including all means of transportation and education (“we want our children trained as intelligent human beings should be”); freedom of speech and assembly, and equal protection under the law (for “we are more often arrested, convicted, and mobbed”). Washington immediately tried to quell the attack on his own New Negro vision, but despite his best efforts, the civil rights organization had swelled its ranks to 150 members by the end of 1905.⁹⁶

Yet, even before the founding of the Niagara Movement, some Black writers, even in the New South’s iconic city of Atlanta, challenged Washington’s status as the nation’s preeminent New Negro. In March 1905, as a young Black art professor writing for the Atlanta-based *Voice of the Negro*, John H. Adams Jr. passed the New Negro torch from Booker T. Washington, the Virginia native who had been born into slavery, to W. E. B. Du Bois, the Massachusetts native born after the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment. In a biographical sketch of the thirty-seven-year-old civil rights leader, Adams maintained that “our ancestors” stories of enslavement—the “lash of the overseer, the midnight escape, the patrollers . . . the all night tramp through a black, muddy swamp”—only elicited anger. What the nation needed now was the “cool resolute and determinate” leadership of Du Bois, who, having graduated from Fisk and Harvard Universities and studied at the University of Berlin, represented “the strongest evidence of the capabilities and possibilities of his people.” Adams’s drawing of Du Bois in profile, his head bent in thought and occupying two-thirds of the page, epitomized his “intellectual strength.”⁹⁷

Even before inaugurating Du Bois’s reign as the *new* New Negro, Adams proclaimed himself as the era’s New Negro artist of record, drawing for the first time in the trope’s history multiple renditions of whom he saw as the era’s New Negro Women and Men. His New Negro Woman, once “fettered with the chains of caste” but now imbued with the “dignified countenance” of “college training,” exuded a beauty infused with meaning. Despite “Negro restrictive laws . . . and prejudices,” her “intellectual graces” and “moral stamina,” associated with “true womanhood,” shone. As such, she inspired men to be worthy of her and to rally to her defense. The caption for Adams’s “Eva,” who sits with her arms folded atop a desk, her gaze cast ahead in reflection, reads: “This is a death-knell to the dude and the well-dressed run-around.” Among the seven portraits in Adams’s essay, his last, and the only one in full-length, is “Gussie,” who stands arms akimbo, with corseted waist, upswept hair, and the Anglo-American features of the Gibson Girl. Yet unlike the sexually “dangerous” Gibson Girl, the statuesque “Gussie” is “a performer on the violin and the piano, a sweet singer, a writer . . . and home making girl.”⁹⁸

Adams’s essay on the New Negro Man in October 1904 begins with a photograph of Adams himself—an artist whom, the caption reads, “the Atlanta Constitution pronounces . . . nothing short of a genius . . . [who] may some day startle the world with his paintings”—and ends with a full page portrait of the *Voice of the Negro* managing editor reading a book: “Mr. Barber is a very close student of current, economic and sociological questions.” As if anticipating his own article on Du Bois the following year, Adams declared that the New Negro Man had learned to read the “ugly circumstances that surrounds him” through the lens of the “Veil” so “touchingly” rendered in *The Souls of Black Folk*.⁹⁹

In the years immediately preceding World War I, Black journalists overall employed less New Negro rhetoric, but when they did, it reflected both growing race consciousness due to segregation and Jim Crow violence and increasing anxiety about competition with immigrants—who, despite a rising pitch of nativist sentiment, seemed more quickly to reap the systemic advantages of whiteness. For Rev. S. Laing Williams of Chicago, a friend and ally of Booker T. Washington, the New

Negro had already proved his loyalty to the nation through service in every American military operation, campaigns essential to American sovereignty and westward expansion, and yet he was still deemed inferior to newly arrived Asian and European immigrants. The New Negro, according to Williams, was simply a man who “asks and fights for a chance.”¹⁰⁰

For the Afro-Caribbean / Brazilian journalist and educator José Clarana, the New Negro’s best hope lay in becoming a kind of cultural chameleon, adopting the characteristics of immigrant groups unfettered by the chains of Jim Crow. Clarana himself was a master of international self-reinvention. Born James Bertram Clarke in the British West Indies, he wrote under that name as a student at Cornell University, then adopted the Clarana pseudonym while teaching Spanish in the Brooklyn public schools; he then moved to Brazil in 1916 and returned to New York in 1919, where he adopted the pseudonym Jaime Clarana Gil.¹⁰¹ Writing for the NAACP’s *Crisis* magazine in 1913, the polyglot Clarana—fluent in Spanish, Portuguese, French, English, and Italian—urged readers to integrate themselves among the new immigrants: “The new Negro who wants to be faithful to himself as well as others must adapt himself to the character of his new neighbors—the Italian in the South, the cosmopolitan immigrant everywhere in the North. . . . He can best do this by going to school with them, using the same books they use, thinking the same thoughts they think.” Alluding to legacies of slavery, Jim Crow, internalized racism, and the hardening of housing segregation as Black people moved north, as well as the rapidity through which recent European immigrants were gaining the privileges of whiteness, Clarana contended that the New Negro’s greatest hope lay in leveraging the social adjustments waves of new immigrants necessitate: “Where the humanizing influence of this contact is denied to them, colored youth may still insist on equality of opportunity for the broadest and fullest education that their white fellows receive.”¹⁰²

In 1915, almost a year after the outbreak of World War I in Europe, Black Harvard graduate and educator Leslie Pinckney Hill insisted that rather than abandoning Christian and democratic ideals, compromised by the hypocrisy of anti-Black racism, the New Negro must eschew violence—“all the blood-letting of Europe and Asia is teaching him this lesson anew in the thunder of howitzers”—to claim “moral and spiritual victories.” As he rises to the occasion, the New Negro offers to the world a “new spiritual type” of moral honor even as endemic white bigotry threatens to unleash “a new colossal conflict.”¹⁰³

That same year, just as the migration of Southern Blacks to Northern cities accelerated, the racist New Negro narrative’s national dissemination reached a pinnacle. Based on the best-selling 1905 Thomas Dixon novel, *The Clansman*, which had been adapted into a hugely successful play of the same name, D. W. Griffith’s 1915 blockbuster film *The Birth of a Nation* not only celebrated the birth of the Ku Klux Klan but contributed to the Klan’s spectacular revival. According to one Black newspaper, the drama represented the New Negro not as he was, “intelligent, aggressive, manly, [and] independent,” but, in the spirit of demagoguery, as “having an unquenchable longing to join himself in marriage to his white contemporary.”¹⁰⁴ Within the juggernaut of early twentieth-century white supremacist media, virtually all civil rights roads led to interracial sexual union between white women and Black men.

A year later, William Pickens seized on World War I as the crucible for Black civil rights in his book *The New Negro: His Political, Civil and Mental Status and Related Essays*. The son of former slaves and one of the founding members of the NAACP, Pickens maintained that the New Negro was still loyal to the nation but that Jim Crow discrimination and brutality had severely tested that loyalty. Calling for a “new abolitionism” to fight Jim Crow, Pickens presciently envisioned the dramatic reform of society that would follow the Great War with a New Negro figure arising in its midst.¹⁰⁵

For a nation that faced the possibility of entering World War I, the treatment of the Negro under Jim Crow, Pickens argued, weakened its ability to fight. By disclaiming a hyphenated name

for the race, Pickens concluded his book by assuring his readers of the Negro's loyalty: "There is no hyphen in the short word *Negro*; he is every inch American; he is not even Afro-American." And as an American, the New Negro, "the patient, unquestioning . . . proud young man," is "resolved to fight, and live or die, on the side of God and the Eternal Verities."¹⁰⁶

IV. Red Summers and Black Radicalisms, 1917–1921

World War I and its immediate aftermath proved to be a crucible, but perhaps not in the way Pickens had envisioned. In July 1917, white mobs in East St. Louis, Illinois, killed, by one estimate, well over a hundred African Americans, and seven thousand terrorized Black residents fled across the Mississippi River to St. Louis. In response Marcus Garvey declared, "The . . . massacre of Monday 2nd, will go down in history as one of the bloodiest outrages against mankind for which any class of people could be held guilty."¹⁰⁷ If the East St. Louis Riot lit the fire forging the eighth version of the New Negro, World War I, the Russian Revolution, and the Red Summer of 1919 completed the casting process. At least twenty-six major race riots erupted in American cities in the summer of 1919, while the Tulsa race massacre of 1921 marked perhaps the "single worst incident of racial violence in American history." All the riots involved white mobs attacking Black individuals or an entire Black community for transgressing caste boundaries in acts of white racial terrorism often directly or indirectly assisted by law enforcement. Fueled by job and housing competition among veterans returning from the war, Blacks coming North as part of the Great Migration, Black veterans' demands for civil rights following the war, and the white press's race-baiting crime coverage, these riots occurred in the South and the North, the East and the West, and in urban areas and small towns.¹⁰⁸

The seemingly egalitarian promise of the 1917 Russian Revolution, which many on the left viewed as a triumph of progress toward economic equality; the violence of the long Red Summer, and the widespread postwar labor unrest catalyzed a New Negro determined to fight back. In the words of Afro-Caribbean socialist Hubert Harrison, this New Negro demanded "equal justice before the law" or else "'an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth,' and sometimes two eyes or a half dozen teeth for one."¹⁰⁹ Deployed to recruit members into actual movements, this New Negro repeatedly appeared in print and in speeches. Connoting the revolutionary potential of the socialist, labor, or communist movements, as well as the "new" collective empowerment of their adherents, many of whom were Caribbean immigrants unaccustomed to what historian Winston James calls the "crude kick-'em-in-the-teeth discipline of Jim Crow," this New Negro assailed the brutality of racial capitalism while rejecting more moderate civil rights organizations.¹¹⁰

Born in St. Croix in the Danish West Indies, Hubert Harrison arrived in the United States in 1900 and, with his brilliant intellectual and oratorial gifts, quickly became known as the "father of Harlem radicalism." After breaking with the Socialist Party in 1914, he adopted a "race first" program and in 1916 started speaking about a "New Negro manhood movement." In 1917, two days after the East St. Louis pogrom, frustrated by what he perceived as the NAACP's obsequiousness to white allies, Harrison founded the Liberty League and the league's organ, the short-lived but successful *The Voice: A Newspaper for the New Negro*, which urged violent resistance to the white mobs. "The first Negro journal of the new dispensation," the *Voice* almost immediately attracted a sizable Black audience, reaching a peak circulation of eleven thousand; the US Justice Department began monitoring the publication. After the Red Summer of 1919, Harrison began editing the monthly *New Negro* (formerly the *Clarion*), self-described as "an organ of the international consciousness of the darker races—especially of the Negro race," which would epitomize the newly militant New Negro. Far more than their more mainstream counterparts, Harrison's Black radical publications, like others that followed, would repeatedly deploy the trope of the New Negro to re-

cruit members. In January 1920, as Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) movement grew increasingly successful, Harrison accepted the position of associate editor of its newspaper, the *Negro World*.¹¹¹

Shortly after migrating from the South to Harlem, Chandler Owen and A. Philip Randolph joined the Socialist Party and in 1917 launched the *Messenger*, which they proclaimed offered readers "the only magazine of scientific radicalism in the world published by Negroes!" Even before founding the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters and Maids in 1925 and making the *Messenger* the union's official organ, Randolph used the idea of the New Negro repeatedly as a call to action.¹¹² Undeterred by Pullman Company intimidation, spying, and paternalism, the New Negro represented a leader "in this monster drive for economic freedom. He stands out as a liberator, a conqueror, one without fear," willing to stand up to the "enormous capital of the Pullman Company" to organize for a living wage and more humane working conditions. In 1928 Eugene Gordon encapsulated the *Messenger's* mission as "birth[ing] . . . the so-called new Negro," a "youth who . . . dared to state . . . a desire for complete social equality; an admiration for the Bolshevistic experiment in Russia; and contempt for all Negroes who were less radical than the writers themselves were."¹¹³ New Negro Women in the pages of the *Messenger*, accordingly, would "stand up and fight as the political, economic and social equals of their white sisters."¹¹⁴

Indeed, the *Messenger* cast out the previous era's New Negroes as old and unable to address the crisis of the Red Summer. In the September 1919 issue, the *Messenger* included a half-page satirical political cartoon, "Following the Advice of the 'Old Crowd' Negroes," that featured Du Bois, Robert Russa Moton (the successor to Booker T. Washington at the Tuskegee Institute after Washington died in 1915), and Emmett Jay Scott, secretary to Moton and a close adviser of Washington. On the left side of the cartoon, a white man in military uniform leads a jeering, torch-carrying mob, and wields a club to attack an already bloodied Black woman who struggles to raise herself from the ground. Another bloodied Black victim sits propped up at the base of the Statue of Liberty. On the night of July 18, 1919, in Washington, DC, over one hundred white servicemen, a "mob in uniform," wielded pipes, clubs, rocks in handkerchiefs, and pistols to attack Black people they saw on the street. The Black historian Carter G. Woodson, in fact, fled the mob on foot.¹¹⁵ In the cartoon, three august "Old Negroes" propose accommodationist responses to the violence. A seated Du Bois implores, "CLOSE RANKS LET US FORGET OUR GRIEVANCES," a reference to his famous *Crisis* editorial the previous year urging Black readers to support World War I. Beside him, with hands clasped, stands Moton, who urges, "BE MODEST AND UNASSUMING!" Scott, reaching back to Moton, says, "WHEN THEY SMITE THEE ON ONE CHEEK—TURN THE OTHER." On the next page, another cartoon, "The 'New Crowd Negro' Making America Safe for Himself," features a clearly younger New Negro veteran in a speeding roadster—labeled "THE NEW NEGRO," equipped with guns firing in the front and sides, and displaying a banner commemorating infamous 1919 sites of race riots, "Longview, Texas, Washington, D.C., Chicago, ILL.—?" As he fires at the fleeing white mob, a fallen member of which is in uniform, he declares, "SINCE THE GOVERNMENT WONT STOP MOB VIOLENCE ILL TAKE A HAND." In the clouds of smoke appears the caption "GIVING THE 'HUN' A DOSE OF HIS OWN MEDICINE." Running just above the cartoon, the editors quote Woodrow Wilson's April 1918 Great War rallying cry against Germany: "FORCE, FORCE TO THE UTMOST—FORCE WITHOUT STINT OR LIMIT!" Clearly, socialism, for Randolph, offered New Negroes the organizational fighting power Black people needed to fend off the most symbolically treacherous of all white mob attacks—those by US military servicemen in uniform.

As circulation of the socialist *Messenger* grew—reaching a peak in 1919 of twenty-six thousand, with a readership, according to the editors, that was two-thirds Black and one-third white—so did the US Justice Department's fears of its influence.¹¹⁶ What made it especially threatening in the eyes of federal officials was the supposed radicalism of the New Negro themes it espoused: calls

for armed self-defense against white rioters, demands for social equality and legalizing interracial marriage, and support for the Industrial Workers of the World, as well as for Bolshevism. Calling the *Messenger* “the most able and the most dangerous of all Negro publications,” Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer declared that “no amount of mere quotation could serve as a full estimate” of the magazine’s “evil scope” and initiated a crusade against it.¹¹⁷ J. Edgar Hoover, head of the US Bureau of Investigation’s new Radical Division, ramped up the campaign, adding what would become a communist-leaning *Crusader* as well as the Marcus Garvey movement as special targets. Under such government pressure, the *Crusader* ceased publication in 1922; the *Messenger* divested itself of most of its radical content by 1924, and Garvey’s newspaper, the *Negro World*, by then had largely retreated from socialism.¹¹⁸

Prompted by his opposition to World War I, the Nevis-born journalist Cyril Briggs, called a man “of great physical and moral courage” by the Black communist leader Harry Haywood, founded the short-lived *Crusader* in 1918, a month after Garvey’s *Negro World* appeared.¹¹⁹ Although Briggs would continue to support the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) in his magazine until their bitter falling out in the early 1920s, as the *Crusader* became more avowedly procommunist—in a 1919 editorial Briggs declared, “If to fight for one’s rights is to be Bolsheviks, then we are Bolsheviks”—they increasingly diverged politically. Formed during the brutal Red Summer of 1919 and under intense US government surveillance, Briggs launched his African Blood Brotherhood (ABB) as a secret society committed to self-defense, revolutionary Black socialism, and Black nationalism where “race-first” New Negroes were “willing to suffer martyrdom for the Cause.” Although never reaching beyond roughly three thousand members, it attracted many significant Black leaders in leftist causes—including Hubert Harrison and Claude McKay, as well as Grace Campbell, likely the first Black woman to join the Communist and Socialist Parties. By 1921, Briggs and most of the leadership of the ABB had joined the Communist Party, and in 1923, the ABB was absorbed into the organization.¹²⁰

No other Black political leader, however, used the trope more often as a rallying cry than Marcus Garvey. When Garvey launched the UNIA in Jamaica in 1914, he envisioned it as a nonpolitical organization based on the principles of fraternal cooperation, self-improvement, and Booker T. Washington-style industrial education. Yet, after Garvey arrived in New York two years later, and then, in the aftermath of the East St. Louis pogrom, the first of what would become a series of white mob rampages over the next five years, the brilliant orator and organizer soon insisted that the “new spirit of the new Negro does not seek industrial opportunity” but a “political voice.”¹²¹ For the first three years of Garvey’s career in the United States, that voice was avowedly socialist. Eventually, however, and under tremendous pressure from Bureau of Investigation agents, Garvey would disassociate his movement from any political party affiliation.¹²² In almost every issue of his weekly UNIA newspaper, the *Negro World*, Garvey hailed New Negroes as those who committed themselves to intellectual development, economic self-reliance, Black nationalism, the UNIA’s back-to-Africa vision, and his Black Star Line steamship corporation. Through the pages of the *Negro World*, with sections later printed in French and Spanish, Garvey and his staff spread his vision to tens of thousands of dues-paying members and millions of worldwide followers, who, in turn, adapted his philosophy to meet the particular needs of their respective communities.¹²³

Indeed, more than any other newspaper or periodical in the twenties, the *Negro World* explicitly hailed readers as New Negroes (by one count, the trope appears in the newspaper at least 665 times from 1921 to 1933), idolized Garvey as the supreme New Negro, and spread the UNIA’s message around the globe.¹²⁴ For Joseph Raphael Ralph Casimir of the small Caribbean island of Dominica, the UNIA’s New Negro fought for higher wages, better education, and lower rates of exchange. In a 1920 letter to the editor of the *Dominica Guardian*, Casimir declared, “Away with Crown Colony Rule, the time has come for the Negro to take a share in the Government of the country.

He is tired of being oppressed.” Garvey’s Black Star Line, meanwhile, not only promised safer passage than the native canoes relied on by most Afro-Dominicans but also transportation free of the discrimination so often endured on white-owned ships—“the cry everywhere is ‘When will a Black Star Liner come to Dominica!’”¹²⁵ For Clements Musa Kadalie, founder in 1919 of the first major South African trade union, the Industrial and Commercial Workers’ Union, and a year later its organ *The Black Man: A Journal Propagating the Interests of Workers throughout the African Continent*, the New Negro represented the Pan-African, transnational struggle for workers’ rights, which included the “immediate return of our brothers and sisters from the land of banishment to the land of their progenitors” to prevent a “White South Africa.”¹²⁶

Yet even after Garvey’s conviction for mail fraud in 1923, incarceration in 1925, and deportation in 1927, all while Alain Locke’s cultural New Negro took center stage among the Black and sympathetic white elite, Garvey’s legacy continued, in large part because his second wife, Amy Jacques Garvey, took charge of the movement. In fact, both his first wife, Amy Ashwood Garvey, and his second played crucial leadership roles in the UNIA and the *Negro World* and forged feminist elements within the movement’s patriarchal guiding principles. For Amy Jacques Garvey, the New Negro Woman emerged as part of a global movement of increasingly emancipated women who embodied the UNIA’s tenets and cultivated their minds while still publicly deferential to patriarchal norms, “wield[ing] the proper influence over” their husbands and ensuring their home’s domestic purity and commitment to race motherhood. From February 1924 to June 1927, Jacques Garvey not only served as associate editor for the *Negro World* but also edited the paper’s women’s page, “Our Women and What They Think,” which she had launched, and where her vision of New Negro Womanhood took shape.¹²⁷

For Chicago UNIA member Eunice Lewis, writing in 1924, the New Negro Woman’s “pure womanhood” and ability to “conquer the beastly side of man” meant that her influence should extend beyond the home; she desired “to work on par with men in the office as well as on the platform.” The same year, UNIA organizer Saydee Parham meanwhile extolled the New Negro Woman as “at last rising to a pinnacle of power and glory so great . . . that she has actually become the central figure of all modern civilization.”¹²⁸

V. The New Negro Renaissance: Part One, 1922–1926

The next two sections of the anthology—The New Negro Renaissance, Parts One and Two—take their dates from James Weldon Johnson’s prefaces to the first and second editions of his *Book of American Negro Poetry*, published in 1922 and 1931, respectively, and the publication of Sterling A. Brown’s book of poetry *Southern Road* in 1932. In 1922 Johnson had called the production of “great literature and art” essential to the fight against racism, while simultaneously denouncing the use of dialect in Black poetry as “mere mutilation of English spelling and pronunciation,” possessing but two stops, “humor and pathos.” After declaring in 1931 that “the passing of traditional dialect as poetry is almost complete,” Johnson would do an about-face just a year later in his 1932 preface to Brown’s *Southern Road*, heralding Brown’s poetic diction as the “common, racy, living speech of the Negro in certain phases of *real* life” and, as such, a “distinctive contribution to American poetry.”¹²⁹ Just two years later, in Nancy Cunard’s *Negro: An Anthology*, clearly a signifying riff on Alain Locke’s *The New Negro*, Locke himself celebrated Brown as the “New Negro folk-poet” whose work ushered in a “new era in Negro folk expression.”¹³⁰ The Harlem Renaissance was over.

While Cunard’s anthology includes nine writers whom Locke had included in *The New Negro*, it has a decidedly more insistent political thrust—Cunard writes in her foreword that “Langston Hughes is the revolutionary voice of liberation”—auguring the social realism that would predominate in the 1930s.¹³¹ Whereas Locke had advocated social change through artistic achievement per

se, Cunard advocated more explicit direct political engagement. As Henry Louis Gates, Jr. concludes, “Even a casual reading of its pages makes clear that a new discursive period in African American literary history had begun.”¹³²

The New Negro Renaissance evolved, in fact, via a series of literary events marking not only its emergence but also its ideological and gendered divisions. When the University of Chicago-trained sociologist and *Opportunity* magazine editor Charles S. Johnson organized a banquet on March 24, 1924, at New York City’s integrated Civic Club in downtown Manhattan, ostensibly to celebrate the publication of Jessie Fauset’s 1924 novel *There Is Confusion*, he envisioned an event where the white and mostly male literary establishment would applaud and publish the New Negro literary artists in their midst. As master of ceremonies, however, Alain Locke, with Charles Johnson’s approval, deftly turned attention away from the almost forty-two-year-old Fauset and what he saw as her “old” emphasis on the Black elite to younger voices more in keeping with his modernist vision. At the end of the evening, *Survey Graphic* editor Paul Kellogg invited Charles Johnson to devote an entire issue of the magazine to the evening’s theme. Johnson then asked Locke to edit what would become the famous March 1925 issue, which excluded Fauset’s work.¹³³ A decade later, Fauset, who had played a pivotal role in the movement as literary editor of the *Crisis* from 1919 to 1926, still winced at Locke’s *Opportunity* dinner slight and the wresting of power it signified. In a letter to the now New Negro icon, she recalled the “consummate cleverness with which you that night as toastmaster strove to keep speech and comment away from the person for whom the occasion was meant.”¹³⁴ Although Fauset had been among the first to publish some of the most important writers of the Harlem Renaissance—namely Jean Toomer and Langston Hughes—Alain Locke and Charles S. Johnson’s *Opportunity* would now take the lead.¹³⁵

On a warm Tuesday evening in August 1925, at more than a two-hour walk from the Civic Club but just fifteen minutes away from Garvey’s Liberty Hall, A. Philip Randolph hosted what New York City’s *Amsterdam News* called the “greatest labor mass meeting ever held” in the grand auditorium of the Imperial Lodge of the Elks. Almost five hundred porters, as well as a contingent of Pullman Company spies, assembled to hear the charismatic Randolph detail the “wrongs, insults and indignities inflicted upon the porters.” George Schuyler followed, offering “clever quips and jokes at the expense of the Pullman Company [that brought] gales of laughter.” Despite Pullman Company threats and intimidation, Randolph’s New Negroes signed the union application form in droves and that night officially organized the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters and Maids. For years afterward, in advertisements, cartoons and articles, Randolph recruited prospective members by portraying the Pullman Company bloated with profits and angling to dissuade prospective New Negroes from joining what the *Pittsburgh Courier* saw as among “the best traditions of militant labor unionism.” Under Randolph’s leadership, in 1937 the Brotherhood became the first Black labor union officially recognized by a major US corporation.¹³⁶

Four months after Randolph rallied labor activists in Harlem, Harvard-trained philosopher and “midwife” to the Harlem Renaissance Alain Locke published his signature opus, *The New Negro: An Interpretation*, a revision and expansion of his groundbreaking March 1925 special issue of the *Survey Graphic*, ushering in the most iconic variation of the figure. While Randolph and Locke both celebrated the New Negro to signal a change in consciousness, Locke rooted his panegyric to Black creative genius, cosmopolitanism, and culture rooted in an Afrocentric folk tradition.¹³⁷

Featuring bold Africanist designs by Aaron Douglas, European modernist illustrations by Winold Reiss, and a jazzy but cautious assemblage of many of the most acclaimed “younger generation” of New Negro writers evoking the cosmopolitan “great race-welding” that is Harlem, Locke’s anthology defiantly positioned the New Negro as culturally modern but careful to avoid offense. It includes few references to lynching, no references to A. Philip Randolph or the *Messenger*, scattered references almost exclusively disparaging to Marcus Garvey, and, while a number of the writ-

ers Locke included were gay or bisexual, no explicitly queer content. Ignoring earlier versions of the trope, Locke staked his claim in his introductory essay that the New Negro channeled all the positive energy of newness—the “new psychology,” “new spirit,” “new democracy,” “his new internationalism,” and despite Jim Crow, “a significant and satisfying new phase of group development, and with it a spiritual Coming of Age.”¹³⁸

Even as Locke briefly praised Garvey for making Pan-Africanism central to his movement, he clearly saw Garvey’s messianic theatricality as one of the “quixotic radicalisms” to be “cured” by his New Negro’s call for “argosies of cultural exchange and enlightenment” sharing the best of Black American art, literature, and music. While Garvey provoked outrage among the Black literary elite by his commitment to “race purity” and segregation—going so far as to meet the Klan’s grand wizard, Edward Young Clarke, in 1922—Locke’s New Negro sought to prove Black openness to a “new social understanding . . . tearing down the ‘spite-wall’ that the intellectuals built over the ‘color-line.’”¹³⁹

In the bitterest of ironies, in the same month that Locke published his anthology, over thirty thousand Ku Klux Klan members marched down Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington, DC, robed but unmasked in the August 1925 heat, in what the *Washington Post* reported as “one of the greatest demonstrations this city has ever known.”¹⁴⁰ Locke hardly needed such a visceral reminder that he had launched the New Negro amid the Klanification of America. Every week a sea of anti-Black Old Negro stereotypes sold tens of thousands of books, tickets, newspapers, and magazines. Indeed, even as Locke’s famous *Survey Graphic* issue presented its iconic cover of a realistic image of a Black male face poised not to please but in thought, marking a turning point in New Negro image making, the back cover of the same issue, Adam McKible points out, offered the Old Negro to perhaps an equally eager audience. An advertisement for R. Emmet Kennedy’s *Black Cameos*, with a silhouette of the uncle stereotype, promised readers the “true spirit of the Negro as he is still to be found away from the sophistication of town life.”¹⁴¹

The white and Black press around the globe celebrated Locke’s achievement, which helped to build the race consciousness at the core of the Négritude anticolonial literary movement. Writing in the Parisian newspaper *La dépêche africaine* in early 1928, the Martinican writer Jeanne (Jane) Nardal described Locke’s anthology as a “pioneer” in building the “race spirit” of Black internationalism: “that peculiar effect of the colonization: that of linking together, of unifying in a racial solidarity.”¹⁴² She would later write to Locke requesting permission to translate his collection into French, and he readily agreed.¹⁴³

VI. The New Negro Renaissance: Part Two, 1927–1932

The younger generation of American Black writers, however, chafed at Locke’s strictures against content that risked perpetuating anti-Black stereotypes or could be perceived as indecent or radical. Langston Hughes’s “Bad New Negroes” were at once more likely to offend, avant-garde, leftist, and, in Bruce Nugent’s case, flamboyantly gay. Unlike Locke’s *New Negro*, Wallace Thurman’s first and only issue of the magazine *Fire!!* (1926)—“the soul an inward flush of fire . . . flesh on fire—on fire in the furnace of life blazing”—eschewed uplift narratives. Instead, it unabashedly offered readers Nugent’s explicit homoerotic love scenes, Wallace Thurman’s depictions of prostitution, Zora Neale Hurston’s “dirty secret” of colorism, and Langston Hughes’s bitter, despondent elevator operator. In Thurman’s concluding essay, he defends perhaps the most inflammatory of any New Negro Jazz Age novel, the white author Carl Van Vechten’s bombshell *Nigger Heaven* (1926), whose title alone ensured its condemnation in almost every corner of the Black press. Even though Locke’s anthology would become the center of the New Negro Renaissance literary canon, the writing and ethos of these “Bad New Negroes” reflected the sexual and political edginess of a restless Black avant-garde.

By 1926, the flapper version of the New Negro Woman dominated the Black press—almost every issue of the nationally circulating *Pittsburgh Courier* featured some version of the flapper on its front page—but, still, most Black women writers eschewed New Negro Woman rhetoric. Instead, for civil rights activist Sadie T. M. Alexander, the New Negro Woman was the emancipated woman. For the civil rights activist, suffragist, and writer Alice Dunbar Nelson, she was a whirling dervish, whose transgressions evoked masculine excess: “All over this jazz-mad, radio-crazed hysteric nation,” she had claimed “masculine prerogatives . . . governors who are in danger of impeachment, . . . bandits, bank robbers, embezzlers, female Ponzis, high flyers in finance.” For Juanita Ellsworth, a graduate of the University of Southern California and founder of the Sigma Delta Theta chapter on that campus, she was the “woman of the West.” Writing in 1929 for the short-lived Black-owned Los Angeles magazine *Flash*, Ellsworth notes that Western women enjoy significantly more freedom—even the freedom to keep their names after marriage—than their sisters elsewhere: “Freedom of speech, dress, manners, customs, and business opportunities. . . . If a woman chooses to wear knickers or trousers or mannish suits and vests, collars and ties, tuxedos or Stetson hats, unless her fair sisters raise an objection, none is forthcoming.”¹⁴⁴

At least one Black newspaper, however, the *Philadelphia Tribune*, questioned whether Locke’s New Negro was perhaps too cultured, a “knight at the tea table” who had gone “flabby” thinking only of “layer cake” and “pink teas.” During the first Red Scare, “pink teas” connoted “weak” followers of Bolshevism who, because they “supposedly lacked the courage to become full ‘Reds,’” were therefore “sissy Bolsheviks.” The reading man, in turn, as historian Marlon Bryan Ross notes, “inadvertently amplifies the sissy-boy’s gender deviance.” The misogyny and red baiting of the “pink teas” satire was further compounded by the feminization of the Old Negro Uncle Tom racist stereotype, enshrined in academic circles when the “father” of sociology, Robert Ezra Park, declared that the “genial, sunny” Negro was “the lady among the races.”¹⁴⁵

The cartoon accompanying the article “Pink Teas” in the *Philadelphia Tribune* shows a light-skinned mustached dandy seated with a cigarette holder and teacup and surrounded by bobbed-hair women. His chair is labeled “THE NEW NEGRO (‘SELF-STYLED’),” and the cartoon’s larger caption reads “He Had Better Go to Work.” As the *Tribune*’s jest invoked the era’s pervasive homophobia—a charge particularly ironic given that, as Henry Louis Gates, Jr. writes, “the Harlem Renaissance was surely as gay as it was black”—it also reveals anxiety that Locke’s New Negro had strayed too far from the “hard practical things of life”—“business enterprises and political achievement.”¹⁴⁶ Even before the *Philadelphia Tribune*’s cartoon, in fact, Alice Dunbar Nelson had expressed similar sentiment. In 1926 she questioned whether Locke’s young urban New Negroes demonstrated the necessary grit and cautioned that the spirit of the New Negro existed not only in the “youthful poets and artists in the metropolis” who “age rather young” but perhaps more powerfully in elderly Black Southern farmers who, with “the indomitable will that conquers time,” had gone to school to learn to read and write.¹⁴⁷

In works directed at an interracial or predominantly white audience, some writers insisted that in tandem with the New Negro, a New White was striving for an antiracist consciousness. For the white pacifist and socialist Devere Allen, when the “new white” has achieved “victory over ignorance, superstition, greed, and fear,” the fingers of his hand, instead of a symbol of voluntary segregation in Booker T. Washington’s Atlanta Exposition address, “fall very naturally together” in fellowship with those of his brother, the New Negro.¹⁴⁸ For the Afro-Cuban journalist and public leader Gustavo Urrutia, the New White, like the New Negro, is not fooled by romantic notions of a supposedly raceless, equitable Cuban nation but instead acknowledges how Negroes have been “cheated out of their economic and social rights, left to starve to death, and dissolved in surrounding whiteness.” Together with the New Negro, Urrutia’s New White works on behalf of a “new liberating crusade for social and economic justice for all the inhabitants of our country.”¹⁴⁹

After the stock market crashed in October 1929 and the Great Depression took hold, Black people around the nation bore the brunt of the era's economic collapse. By 1930, 25 percent of the Harlem population was unemployed. "Last hired" and "first fired," African American residents in Harlem saw their median income in 1932 plunge to 43.6 percent of what it had been before the crash, while racial segregation continued to drive up already disproportionately high housing costs. As white men increasingly claimed semiskilled or unskilled jobs formerly held by African American men, Black men scrambled for whatever work they could get. As the Depression wore on, the desperation for work only worsened. As the National Urban League's industrial relations director T. Arnold Hill observed, "At no time in the history of the Negro since slavery has his economic and social outlook seemed so discouraging."¹⁵⁰

In December 1930, Ella Jo Baker and George Schuyler launched the Young Negroes' Co-operative League, which was dedicated to establishing a network of credit unions, wholesale cooperative housing ventures, and stores. Castigating the older generation of race leaders for promoting a disastrous "bourgeois ideology," Schuyler's 1932 organizational pamphlet, *Appeal to Young Negroes*, repeatedly denounced the failures of "old Negroes" and urged younger ones to claim their rightful "economic power" and join the "ultra democratic" and gender-egalitarian Co-operative League.¹⁵¹

VII. The Depression, the New Deal, and Ethiopia, 1932–1937

Although Baker and Schuyler's Co-operative League was short-lived—officially ending in 1933, the same year the newly elected president of the United States, Democrat Franklin Delano Roosevelt, launched the New Deal—it reflected another revolution in New Negro ideology. Even before the New Deal, Black voters were growing increasingly frustrated with Republican president Herbert Hoover's inability to alleviate Black suffering during the Depression. Writing for the *Crisis* in 1935, Ella Baker and Marvel Cooke recounted how female Black domestic workers were driven by poverty to sell their labor to unscrupulous "Mrs. Simon Legree" in the "Bronx slave market": "Under a rigid watch she is permitted to scrub floors on her bended knees, to hang precariously from window sills cleaning window after window, or to strain and sweat over heavy blankets, spreads, and furniture covers." If she was fortunate, she might be "rewarded" a dollar for her day's toil.¹⁵² Despite Zora Neale Hurston's 1937 masterpiece, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, and African American women's prominent activist roles during the 1930s—most notably those of Ella Baker, Mary McLeod Bethune, and Black nationalist Mittie Maude Lena Gordon—by the early 1930s, when the effects of the Depression hit hardest, New Woman and New Negro Woman rhetoric subsided. Given the dire financial situation, the flapper's devil-may-care jazz-age pleasures had lost at least some of their vogue.

Roosevelt's New Deal programs accelerated the shift to the Democratic Party, which Robert Vann, editor of one of the nation's leading Black newspapers, the *Pittsburgh Courier*, famously summarized: "I see millions of Negroes turning the picture of Abraham Lincoln to the wall."¹⁵³ Notwithstanding endemic discrimination in most New Deal agencies, the Public Works Administration, under the leadership of Harold L. Ickes, was considered a success; for many Black Americans, its abbreviation, PWA, stood for "Poppa's working again."¹⁵⁴ And even though Mississippi had one of the worst records of employing Black people in New Deal programs, Clister L. Johnson, the supreme lecturer of Yazoo, Mississippi's fraternal organization the Afro-American Sons and Daughters, declared, "The New Deal has given the New Negro a better chance to develop than any other administration." In the presidential election of 1936, the vast majority of African Americans voted for the Democratic Party, the first time a Democratic presidential candidate had won a majority of the Black vote.¹⁵⁵

Concomitant with this Black Democratic shift and embrace of New Deal work programs, Black writers increasingly depicted the New Negro as a grassroots, direct action organizer. In 1933, when the white-owned Hamburger Grill in Washington, DC, fired its three Black employees and hired three white people to replace them, recent college graduate John Davis organized a boycott. Together with Belford V. Lawson Jr. and M. Franklin Thorne, they formed the New Negro Alliance, which fought for employment equity and higher wages, eventually winning a Supreme Court victory against the Sanitary Grocery Company in 1938 that affirmed their right to picket the grocery chain for refusing to hire Black workers. Only their more militant strategy of picketing, boycotting (“Don’t Buy Where You Can’t Work”), and pursuing court victories promised change.¹⁵⁶

Meanwhile, for the Afro-Cuban intellectual and civic leader Gustavo Urrutia, socialism offered the best hope for greater economic opportunity for all Cubans, regardless of race. According to Urrutia, the New Negro had discovered that “even genuine liberal democracy would not be able to guarantee collective economic and social justice, because it is essentially individualistic and plutocratic. He has pointed himself toward the promotion of some form of socialism . . . compatible with our own character and our international relations.” Although he was not a Marxist, Urrutia promoted socialism, in the words of Anne Marie Guarnera, “as the ‘natural’ choice for those who have come to recognize their subaltern status within Cuban society.”¹⁵⁷

When on October 3, 1935, the Italian National Fascist Party dictator Benito Mussolini invaded Ethiopia, one of only two independent African nations, Black people around the world—and especially in the United States, where Ethiopia held special religious, political, and historical significance—suffered yet another blow. As Italian planes bombed villages and dropped poison gas, and as Ethiopian emperor Haile Selassie appealed in vain to the League of Nations for assistance, African Americans rallied to Ethiopia’s defense, raising money, lobbying, protesting, and training to aid in battle. Given its abiding principle of “Africa for the Africans,” Garvey’s UNIA stood at the forefront of campaigns to fortify Ethiopia’s defense.¹⁵⁸

In May 1936, when Ethiopia’s defeat seemed all but assured and after news reached Black US residents that Italy had conducted mass executions of Ethiopian patriots, hundreds of African Americans attacked Italian-owned Harlem businesses.¹⁵⁹ In the midst of this fervor, George Schuyler published two serialized New Negro novels in what had become the most popular Black newspaper in the United States, the *Pittsburgh Courier*, that seemed directly at odds not only with his own previous condemnations of fascism but with leading antifascist Black intellectual sentiment.¹⁶⁰ Writing for the *Courier* in August 1935, Schuyler declared that there was virtually no “difference between Fascist Germany or Fascist Italy and ‘Communist’ Russia. All three are ruthless dictatorships. All three brutally suppress all minorities. . . . All three are gigantic Ku Klux Klans triumphant.” Black socialist Frank Crosswaith agreed. The New Negro, he wrote in 1936, must fight the “march of Fascism, Hitlerism and other foes of civilized progress.”¹⁶¹

Yet, like his nemesis Marcus Garvey, Schuyler would, at least publicly, depict a New Negro as what Mark Christian Thompson calls a “generic fascist”: one who celebrates nationalism to unite a disenfranchised populace, charismatic authoritarian leadership, militarized mass mobilization, and violence and masculinity as domination.¹⁶² Even though in a private letter Schuyler called his writings “The Black Internationale: Story of Black Genius against the World” (November 1936–July 1937) and “Black Empire: An Imaginative Story of a Great New Civilization in Modern Africa” (October 1937–April 1938) “hokum and hack of the purest vein,” he later endorsed the New Negro vision within them.¹⁶³ In the serials, Schuyler’s New Negro dictator and leader of the Black Internationale, Dr. Belsidus, launches a “world-wide Negro revolutionary organization” to forge a “Great New Civilization in Modern Africa,” a “new religion . . . for suppressed colored people,” an “amazing new clinic and diet kitchen,” a “new electric steel plant,” “new stratosphere planes,” and a “new kind of [biological] warfare.” Early in the series, Belsidus declares, “Christians, Communists, Fascists and

Nazis were at first called crazy. Success made them sane.” Dr. Belsidus enjoins his recruit, “We must be hard. We must be cruel. We must be unrelenting, neither giving nor asking quarter, until either we or the white race is definitely subjugated or even exterminated.” Eventually the brilliant Belsidus deploys biological and chemical weapons to kill thousands of Europeans.¹⁶⁴

Readers loved the serials, with some asking if they could join the Black Internationale, and Schuyler seized the moment. Writing for the *Crisis* in August 1938, Schuyler defined the newest New Negro as one who “believes that to combat this White International of oppression a Black Internationale of liberation is necessary. . . . No longer ignorant, terrorized or lacking confidence, he waits, and schemes and plans. He is the Damoclean sword dangling over the white world.”¹⁶⁵

* * *

Appeals to the New Negro did not end in 1938—the trope would be repeatedly invoked until 1969, when the rise of the Black Power movement resulted in the jettisoning of “Negro” into the dustbin of all that was outdated and tainted by Jim Crow—but the New Black Man quickly took its place. When in October 1995 Minister Louis Farrakhan led tens of thousands of what he called New Black Men to Washington, DC, in the Million Man March, he lay claim to a myth-making “newness” that he knew would resonate.

As flags of “new” Black perspectives in the ongoing fight against systemic discrimination and state-sanctioned anti-Black violence, often validated and propelled by prominent voices in the media and online, the New Negro / Black Man still demands a response. In a consumerist age where the “new” is invariably used to sell products, this trope repudiates, warns, and rallies as it calls on audiences to critically remember the past and summon the resolve to build a better future.¹⁶⁶ Even as proponents of the New Negro commanded a hearing and offered hope for a more just society, the many versions and long history of the trope—more varied and deployed far longer than any other modern “new” trope I know of—suggest not only profound resilience—mantras of courage and unity—but also, in response to Fascist Italy’s brutal invasion of Ethiopia, a longing for lethal retribution.

As readers of our collection map their own interpretations of the trope, seeing echoes of previous versions in supposed new renditions and charting the figure’s changes through time and across distance, we hope they will read the anthology’s notes and author biographies to help better envision the people who authored these texts and the specificity of the historical moments from which they arose. The Black writers in this volume (and some of the white ones), to borrow Ta’Nehesi Coates’s words, know all too well that the West is a “house [that] is haunted, that there is blood in the bricks and ghosts in the attic.”¹⁶⁷ Our bitterly divided present reminds us that this house, too often garish in its wealth and brutal in its power, hails us all repeatedly with the promise of a greater future, free of an inconvenient past and its history of plunder.

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