

# AFRO-AMERICAN LITERATURE & CLASS STRUGGLE

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In an essay published in a prose and drama reader by William Morrow Publishers in the Fall of 1979, I put forward the idea that there is a revolutionary tradition in Afro-American literature.<sup>1</sup> I also implied, and to a certain extent discussed, the obvious capitulationist tradition<sup>2</sup> in that literature—obvious, because the dialectic would automatically suggest that if there were a revolutionary tradition, then its opposite would also be present. I think it should be added that probably the majority of Afro-American writers fall somewhere between those two poles, as “middle forces” that are swayed, guided, directed, or influenced, given their peculiar individual experiences, by one of those stances or the other. But the genuinely major Afro-American writers have been part of the revolutionary tradition, and there is a preponderance of patriots as opposed to copouts among Black writers.

It occurred to me that these traditions existed, very clearly, when I went to teach at Yale, and witnessed the teaching of Afro-American literature. The positive and negative could be shoveled together under the national rubric, and given the bias of the American superstructure, very little would get to the students about what these writers and their writing actually represented in the living, breathing, real world. Charles Davis, the head of the Afro-American Studies Department at Yale, pointed out that Jupiter Hammon and Phillis Wheatley were not really representative of the beginnings of Afro-American literature as a *genre*, that Black literature as a body of work precisely reflecting a particular people begins with the Slave Narratives. My recognition of this fact was positive enough, but it was accompanied by the further understanding that here was an obvious case of two *ideologically opposite* reflections of society emanating from the same people, or national group.

There are other extenuating circumstances here that should be noted. Wheatley and Hammon are 18th-Century Blacks, and privileged house-slaves. Writing by Blacks, or reading, was outlawed in the general U.S. society, so for these two to have written meant they were pets of the slaveholding society, and their generally favorable accounts of that society were reflective of pet-nigger house-servants isolated from the masses of Black people.

The 19th Century was a century of struggle in this

country which led to the end of slavery. The intensification of slavery in the early part of that century (which was the result of cotton becoming an international commodity and the Black slaves' condition being transformed so that they were not only tied to the land for life as patriarchal slaves, but had the “civilized horrors” of capitalism added to their humps, since they now had to produce cotton not just for a domestic market but an international one) led to an intensification of resistance, which culminated in the Civil War.

The Slave Narratives are an ideological and emotional reflection of the great majority of the Afro-American people as well as a stunningly incisive portrait of Slave America. They are the voice of the *majority* of Black people, as literally as that can be taken. They are also a *genre*, a distinctive *body* of work, that indicates a way of living and thinking in the society. They are anti-slavery: fierce indictments of U.S. slave society, the exact opposite of Wheatley-Hammon. When the various teachers of Afro-American literature scramble the Narratives and Wheatley-Hammon together, they scramble the history and the ideology (i.e., perception of reality) contained in each. What is hidden is just where these writers are coming from seen *in the context of real life*—who and what they really are; their *use*, finally, to the Afro-American people and to the society as a whole (and to the world)!

I know when I mention historical (and with that social, political, &c.) context, the structuralists and neo-New-Critic types get their dander up. Good! This essay is meant to jump all over them. “New Critics,” as Bruce Franklin points out in *The Victim as Artist and Criminal*—or one branch of “New Critics,” the Southern Agrarians (John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, Robert Penn Warren, &c.)—, actually upheld slavery, which they euphemized as a necessary “defect” in order to create the Great Southern Culture (as Allen Tate said, “a fine, elegant and lasting culture”). Ironically, when one looks for that Great Southern Culture, especially for what is “lasting,” one finds it is largely Afro-American, whether it is food, music, or literature! Compare Frederick Douglass with Stephen Longstreet and Gilmore Simms, or compare slave authors H. “Box” Brown, Linda Brent, the Crafts, and Henry Bibb, with Hugh Legaré, George Fitzhugh

(author of *Cannibals All!*), or the other hopeless justifiers and sentimentalizers of the slavemaster class.

The "New Criticism," with its stress on literature as self-contained artifact removed from real life, was actually part of the McCarthyism and reaction of the '50s. These reactionary writers—Tate's 1st book of criticism was called *Reactionary Essays*—wrote some of these backward ideas in the '30s, but the period was too progressive and they could not get much attention until the '50s. The '50s upsurge of reaction was aimed at removing all traces of '30s-'40s radicalism. It accompanied the overall cold war that U.S. imperialism was waging to try to take over a world market after World War II (during which it was forced to make a united front with the U.S.S.R. against fascism). The emphasis, necessarily, was on technique, on *how* something was said, not *what* was being said. The bourgeoisie must always emphasize formalism, form over content, because if people check out what's being said they will not give too much of a shit how; or they will at least reject what and try to learn from how, but not suck it in wholesale.

The most important personalities and trend-setters of the revolutionary tradition (which is anti-slave, anti-capitulationist, anti-imperialist, &c., given the particular epoch and conditions of its existence) are the Slave Narrators (e.g., Douglass, "Box" Brown, Bibb, Moses Roper, Brent, Austin Steward, among many others)—though these differ individually as to the degree of their consciousness, obviously . . . Frederick Douglass remaining perhaps the most moving, poignant, and revolutionary. These are the beginnings of Afro-American literature, as genre.

Then come the pre-Civil-War nationalists: David Walker, Henry Highland Garnet, C. H. Langston, and Charles Lenox Redmond are among the best. I would also include Nat Turner's "Confessions," as classic Black autobiography, and also psychological and mystical reportage as a matrix of the times. One can add William Wells Brown as the "transitional figure," showing the transition to come from the purely functional to "art." But all this revolutionary writing is artistic, and functional; its functionalism is anti-oppression, and the art is in how it lays it out. Mrs. Francis Watkins Harper should also be mentioned as a strong anti-slavery poet.

Du Bois is the great link between the 19th and 20th Centuries. His *Souls of Black Folk*, and indeed Du Bois's constant *forward movement* ideologically, from isolated democrat to Black capitalist and yea-sayer for the "talented tenth" and the emerging Black bourgeoisie (its militant national wing, as opposed to the comprador wing of Booker T. Washington) to Pan-Africanist and Socialist, and, finally, Marxist-Communist, is the underlying dynamic of our entire intellectual and political journey—but *Souls of Black Folk* is the connection to the Harlem Renaissance. Its multiple forms and omni-sensitivity, from music and cultural history and criticism to polemic ("Of Mr. Booker T. Washington & Others") to short fiction, prepares a whole artistic and ideological palate for the young urban intelligentsia of the Harlem Renaissance.

Langston Hughes's seminal "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain" is impossible without *Souls of Black Folk*, which essay not only defends the Black artist but identifies his truest sources, the Black masses, the souls of Black folk. And Hughes audaciously sets the lines for attacking the anti-Black intellectual reactionaries and compradors who deny the beauty and strength of the Black experience and thereby try to limit Black life itself.

(Interestingly enough, even today, 'cause that's where it all leads, and on past to tomorrow, there is a sector of the Black artist-intelligentsia that continues to identify with the objects of the ire of Du Bois's and Hughes's righteous patriotic national consciousness—i.e., B.T.W. and shrimps like George Schuyler—, but we will come back to them, as the objects of our own ire—update on de struggle!)

To continue the historical perspective, the Harlem Renaissance is the maturation of an urban Afro-American intelligentsia, symbolizing the movement of large numbers of the Black masses out of the Afro-American nation in the old Black Belt South into the rest of the United States, as an oppressed national minority; transforming from largely Southern, rural, and agricultural, a peasant people, to the present day when almost half of the Black masses live in the North, Midwest, and West, in urban centers, as part of an industrial working class (96% of the Black masses are part of that multi-national working class in the U.S.). The development of this intelligentsia identified with the Harlem Renaissance replicates parallel developments all over the Third (i.e., colonial) World, but the Harlem Renaissance was a leading and influential force on Black artists and intellectuals all over the world, whether it was the "Indigisme" of Haiti, the "Negrismo" of Puerto Rico and Cuba, or the "Négritude" of the African and West Indian intellectuals living in Paris, like Aimé Césaire, Léopold Senghor, and Léon Damas; they all claimed the Harlem Renaissance as their chief influence, especially writers Langston Hughes and Claude McKay.

Hughes and McKay stand out in my mind as the chief forces of that period, though for sure there were many others. (Technical innovators like Jean Toomer, with *Cane*, fell off into mysticism, even repudiation of Blackness, and Zora Neale Hurston ended up writing articles against voting rights for Blacks, the F.E.P.C., and integration of schools, among other things.) Hughes's early work is classic "Black is Beautiful"—"We are an African People" writing, which is the revolutionary nationalism of the oppressed people whose first utterances are defense against the cultural aggression of imperialism, which says those it oppresses are stupid, ugly, and have no history! The two McKay novels I've read, *Home to Harlem* and *Banjo*, are classics of a muscular, graphically descriptive, beautiful prose. His poetry, probably because of the irrelevant, stiff sonnet form he was wont to impose on himself, is much less interesting, though, for sure, its content makes it so strong it still fights through.

The '30s and '40s brought changes to Langston Hughes's work, and perhaps his strongest writing is

collected in the volume *Good Morning, Revolution*. Here we see a distinctive move into a militant internationalism, embracing the struggle of the majority of the world's peoples for liberation with a stirring and conscious anti-imperialism. Richard Wright, of course, is one of the most impressive Afro-American writers, one of the most important American writers of the period. *Uncle Tom's Children* is, for me, Wright's most powerful work: There is nothing else of his so sustained in its description of the oppression of the Afro-American nation in the Black Belt South as *Uncle Tom's Children*. *Black Boy* and *American Hunger*, taken together, as they were written, before the repression of *American Hunger* by Harper for thirty years, is a powerful work, a novel of ideas in the strongest sense of the term, an accomplishment of tremendous dimension. I am only touching highlights to make a case for these writers in the revolutionary tradition. (For further discussion, see my essay in the Morrow anthology.) Obviously, there is no monolithic anything; everything splits in half, must be looked at dialectically, separated into its positive and negative aspects, in order to be understood and learned from. Then we can pick up the good and run with it, discarding the negative.

Richard Wright was a creature of contradiction. It is obvious in his work that he never quite integrated himself with reality; his depictions of Black women are, frankly, usually demeaning or absent. Wright, in his own words, in *American Hunger*, lived in the unreal book world too much and never even really "got down" with Black people. But the hot sensitivity and resistance to the greater evil are clear in the books I mention and, to various degrees, in much of his work.

Wright's break with the Communist Party is wonderfully documented in *Hunger*, and honestly so. The petty bourgeois individualism he acquired with his reading and aspirant intellectualism was his undoing, though, for the record, the Communist Party USA was committing grave errors as well, and the two passed one another like trains in the night.

Another important writer of the late '30s and '40s is Theodore Ward, whose *Big White Fog* is one of the finest plays written in this country, with an ideological scope and precision that forced the powers that be to block the performances of *Fog* in the Federal Theater, and heap mountains of obscurity on Ward ever since. His later works like *Our Lan'* and *John Brown* have been equally neglected, but Ward is a giant!

Margaret Walker is another giant, abused by the vagaries of white racist "scholarship," white racist "criticism," and white racist paternalism and self-esteem. (Yale University Press has even let *For My People* go out of print!) Margaret Walker's form and content come straight out of the genuine roots of Afro-American life and speech. And as for her great work *Jubilee*, there is as much basis for her plagiarism suit against Alex Haley (*Roots*) as Harold Courlander's, but his publisher, Crown, joined in the suit; Walker's, Houghton Mifflin, would not, so it was only her lawyer-son vs. ABC and Doubleday.

As I pointed out, the '50s was a period of reaction,

not only in the sense of the cold war, the Korean War, McCarthyism, and the New Criticism, but also the once-revolutionary Communist Party USA began to come apart at the seams and, by 1957, declared that Socialism could be gained through the ballot, rather than by revolution, which is revisionist nonsense. For Blacks, the defection was visible earlier, as the white, chauvinist, opportunist element of the Party emerged more clearly as its leadership. By the '50s the CP USA had renounced its correct line of self-determination for the Afro-American nation in the Black Belt South and declared that Black people had already achieved self-determination under imperialism, which is a racist insult! If we have already achieved self-determination, it means that we are in charge of these slums and deathholes we are forced to live in as well as unemployment, substandard education, hospital closings, and police brutality, which is a flat-out lie! Certain Negro intellectuals began to talk about how the national aspect of Afro-American writing had to be cooled out, lessened; that Black writers wrote too much about Black people, which sounds like the straight-out bourgeoisie. Did anyone ever run that on O'Casey or Joyce, that they leaned on Irishmen too much, or get to Dostoevsky and his Russian self?

Ralph Ellison and James Baldwin arrive on the scene now putting down Richard Wright ("Richard's Blues," "Alas, Poor Richard," "Everybody's Protest Novel"), which was part of the McCarthy-type cleanup of all radical ideas and persons left from the turbulent '30s. Richard Wright had left the U.S. in 1947, just after the Communist Party USA had declared itself a "Political Association" dedicated to "20th-Century Americanism," like Paine, Jefferson, &c. In France Wright took up with Stein and Sartre and existentialism. (The whole of Wright's life is a metaphor for flight . . . from the South, from whites, from Blacks, from the Communist Party, and from the U.S., finally from reality, though obviously the last was mitigated by his ability to record his experience accurately.)

Fortunately for us all, Baldwin grew much wiser than those early essays and got involved with the civil rights movement. *The Fire Next Time* is an eloquent reflection of his involvement, but even more, when he wrote *Blues for Mr. Charlie*, he openly questioned non-violence. Once *Charlie* appeared, Baldwin was removed as the Black writer vis-à-vis the white bourgeois press, and Ellison was pumped up. A difficult job, since Bro. Ralph only has that one book, but it is touted up a storm by the academies and officialdom because of its content. Ellison puts down both nationalism and Marxism, and opts for individualism—which is, like they say, right on the money!

The Black Arts Movement of the '60s was certainly a rebellion against the bourgeoisie's and revisionists' '50s liquidation of the Afro-American national question, and the rise of conservative, reformist, capitulationist as well as comprador writing as "Negro Writing"—just as Malcolm X emerged to forcefully oppose the Black bourgeoisie's domination of the Black Liberation Movement, as well as the reformist and even outright comprador lines that dominated the Movement

in the '50s. The "Blackness" of the Black Arts Movement was the attempt to restore the national priorities of the Afro-American nation and oppressed nationality to the art of the Black artists. The art had to be an extension of the people themselves, involved with them, expressing their lives and minds with the collective fire of actual life committed to the necessary struggle and revolutionary transformation that we need in the real world!

The writing actually accompanied and reflected and exhorted rebellion. When the chump judge that sentenced me to three years without parole for alleged gun-carrying during the Newark rebellion read that sentence, he quoted my poetry(!) as one of the reasons he knew I was guilty. Askia M. Touré (Rolland Snellings), Larry Neal, Clarence Reed, Charles and William Patterson, Harold Cruse, Marvin X, Ed Bullins, Sonia Sanchez, Welton Smith, Mari Evans, David Henderson, Sun Ra, Carolyn Rogers, Clarence Franklin, Carol Freeman, Don L. Lee, Ted Wilson, Reginald Lockett, Ron Milner, Ben Caldwell (and Trane and Albert!) . . . and so many more put out strong Black art in the turbulent '60s, as part of the breadth and scope of that movement . . . not just in literature, but in all the arts, as part of the sweeping upsurge of the Black Liberation Movement itself! It was a broad united front of creativity and struggle.

The Black Arts Movement had an impact similar to the Harlem Renaissance; it influenced a whole generation of artists around the world. And not just Black and Third World artists, but European and Euro-American artists. The emphasis on a people shaped highly oral, intensely direct statements, in various media. The function of art was to reach and educate and move and unify and organize people, not to mystify them or offer dazzling support of the status quo! The mainstream of the Black Arts Movement was rooted in the revolutionary tradition of Afro-American literature and in the revolutionary traditions of the Afro-American people. It spoke to the Afro-American people because it was consciously aimed at them. As Mao Zedong in the "Yenan Forum on Literature and Art" pointed out, the artist's audience is one key shaper of the artist's work; i.e., who it is for helps make it what it is.

But, of course, at the same time the Black Arts Movement emerged nationally, its opposite already existed, and was developed to a certain extent as an answer to the BAM. In the '60s the literature of the capitulationists and the compradors was left in the dust by the roaring surge of what life itself was, and the struggle and unity of the BLM itself. The various capitulationists and compradors could only sit in the dust and bide their time (like the Southern Agrarians in the '30s), occasionally pipsqueaking something supportive of people's enemies. Rocky and the Fords began to toss around some bucks, as they had in the early part of the 20th Century when they saw a generation rise up to oppose Booker T.'s capitulationist and finally comprador philosophies. When Du Bois and Trotter organized the Niagara Movement, Carnegie coopted it with the N.A.A.C.P., to urge system-stifled

legal reform. It was the imperialist bourgeoisie consciously blocking struggle with treadmill reforms and turning potential strugglers into reform freaks rather than radicals, or outright agents.

But the '60s upsurge drew many of the middle forces and even some "conservatives" into positive motion. Artists, even Black ones, still predominantly come from the petty bourgeoisie. The intellectuals are, in the main, a sector of the petty bourgeoisie. The petty bourgeoisie ("middle class") is a vacillating, flip-flopping class, because that is where they are in capitalist society's production process—neither absolutely flattened underfoot by the bourgeoisie nor are they, despite the sickies who serve them and big-wish-it, the b's themselves. The petty bourgeoisie attach themselves to one class or the other, either the rulers or the ruled. They either serve the people or serve the owners.

In the rebellious '60s most of the Black artists and intellectuals aligned themselves with the people, drawn by the revolutionary upsurge. Even a writer like Calvin Hernton, who is often identified with the "conservative" sector of Afro-American literature and with people like Ishmael Reed, in the '60s could write violently anti-imperialist essays like "Dynamite Growing Out of Their Skulls" (in *Black Fire*). Yes, the tide was so strong that even some of the "conservatives" wrote work that took the people's side. (The metaphysical slide of the later BAM even allowed Reed to adopt a rebellious tone with his "Black power poem" and "Sermonette" in *catechism of d neoamerican hoodoo church*, 1970, in which he saw the struggle of Blacks against national oppression as a struggle between two churches: e.g., "may the best church win. shake hands now and come/out conjuring." But even during the heat and heart of the BAM, Reed would call that very upsurge and the BAM "a goon squad aesthetic" and say that the revolutionary writers were "fascists" or that the taking up of African culture by Black artists indicated such artists were "tribalists.")

The bourgeoisie opened Negro Ensembles as defense against Black Arts and opened up assorted colored cool-out canteens which would lessen the fire and divert the attack. They funded a Negro theater, a skin thing, so that what was hot and revolutionary would be overshadowed—an N.A.A.C.P. theater as opposed to a revolutionary nationalist theater. And even some of the folks who were associated with the BAM legitimately got caught up in a bogus "professionalism" which put Broadway *modus operandi* and a minute's worth of prosperity over the needs of the Black masses for revolution!

By the time the heat had cooled in the middle '70s, not because the source of the oppression or the resistance had disappeared, but only because of the very spontaneity of *any* mass people's movement unguided by a revolutionary party and a scientific ideology, the bourgeoisie had not only set up a whole series of counters to the heat of the BAM, but later on could even begin to dismiss and close down these counters because the heat was off for a minute! But there were enough middle-class Blacks who had gained from the '60s upsurge of the people—some with small gains,

some outright bribed—that it also offered a pimple of socio-economic “verticality” (to paraphrase Cabral in “The Weapon of Theory”) which could continuously lend praise to the reforms that the ’60s had brought about. Kenneth Gibson, in Newark, now functions as a straight-out comprador, agent, of the imperialists. His twofold task is to fake democracy, since he got into office in the rush of Black motion for political rights, and, at the same time, to carry out the grim bullshit white faces would cause immediate rebellions by doing.

This is also manifest in the arts, and for the same *political* reasons. The brief flurry of Black publishing by the major bourgeois presses in the ’60s cooled right out once the fire cooled. Like the Harlem Renaissance (its exotic and commercial aspect created by the bourgeoisie, in contra-distinction to the genuine emergence of an urban and national Black intelligentsia in the ’20s), it was simply *turned off*. This writer must struggle intensely to get the large presses to publish anything, after they blanked out for almost eight years between 1971 and ’78. Major magazines simply refuse to publish my work, and even pseudo-controversial sheets like the *Village Voice* try to edit and delay publishing Letters-to-the-Editor of mine!

What is being done in the late ’70s is to emphasize the conservatives, capitulationists, and outright compradors who lurked around the edges of the ’60s pipsqueaking opposition to the Black Liberation Movement’s mass upsurge as reflected in the arts. (Just like they attack ’60s-gained Affirmative Action with the Bakke decision!) People like Ishmael Reed and the rhythmless Michael Harper are at the one point of this. The bourgeoisie also raises up new voices whose content is not advanced or is confused, like Michelle Wallace (the former) and Ntozake Shange (the latter). What’s so grim is that they can push this group and others under the rubric of *Feminism*, and even distort the real questions: E.g., What is the cause of women’s oppression? Answer: Class society, and in this epoch that means monopoly capitalism. Question: What will end it? Answer: Socialist revolution, which destroys the material base of women’s oppression; i.e., no one can then make money off it, which is why it is around now, and thus the conditions will be set for eventually eradicating it. What is cool about the bourgeoisie is that they can push misinformation, division, and confusion as *radicalism*, obscuring the real nature of problems and the real solution, which is revolution, but still get over pretending to deal with mass questions like women’s oppression . . . Black national oppression in the ’60s!

The bourgeoisie makes Ralph Ellison the patron saint of these folk for obvious reasons: They can always use individualism and need a model of the “kept” intellectual individualizing off the mass pain. Once Jimmy Baldwin came out with *Blues for Mr. Charlie*, which questioned non-violence, he was finished with *The New York Times* and *The New York Review of Books* crowd, the bourgeoisie’s intellectuals.

Another outpost of this late ’70s *odeur* is the Ivy structuralists, as I mentioned, who with publications

like *The Massachusetts Review* (see 18, Nos. 3-4, “A Chant of Saints,” edited by Michael Harper and Robert B. Stepto) want to distort Afro-American literary history and Mandrake up a tradition of elegant (?) copout as the heavy mainstream of Afro-American literature! Their group runs from Ellison, with his embarrassingly corny “story” “Backwacking” and an interview continuing to patronize Richard Wright, to folks like James Alan McPherson, the recent Pulitzer-Prize winner, a Constitutional democrat who believes, so he said in an interview in *The Washington Post*, that all the bourgeoisie need do is implement the Constitution (goddamit implement the Constitution!); Robert Hayden, who has always been disturbed by the loudness and blood of conflict; and Derek Walcott, whose play *Remembrance* will send the hair on the back of your neck straight up as his hero mourns the passing of a white woman from his life and warns his son not to make the same mistake, as his backward Black wife lolls around in the background being West Indian! Ellison and Stepto talk about the “Black Aesthetic” crowd, though they both are comfortable enough apparently with the “white aesthetic” crowd. (Ellison quotes Burke, James, and Hawthorne, who are among the most backward writers extant.)

Critics like Stanley Crouch and Clifford Mason’s chains are rattled, and they dance fantastically for a few pennies. Crouch, in the *Village Voice*, makes a specialty of rendering Afro-American art as primitive posturing for the general delectation of the “white aesthetic” crowd who thought that all the time. Mason raises Joe Papp (Shange and Walcott’s mentor) as the *founder* of a New Black Theatre (*New York Times Magazine*, 22 July 1979) to do Shakespeare-with-the-Darks—which Papp needs in order that he receive the government grants that used to be reserved for Black folks, under the guise that he is the white officer for the charging Black volunteers. Papp keeps folks like Bullins around as in-residence, and does most Black and Latino plays as workshop presentations, but the big stuff, the regular productions, are reserved for the good stuff-white folks (you guessed it?)!

The “white aesthetic” is bourgeois art—like the “national interests” of the U.S. at this late date when the U.S. is an imperialist superpower. Ellison says of the “Black Aesthetic” crowd that they “buy the idea of total cultural separation between blacks and whites, suggesting that we’ve been left out of the mainstream. But when we examine American music and literature in terms of its themes, symbolism, rhythms, tonalities, idioms and images it is obvious that those rejected ‘Negroes’ have been a vital part of the mainstream and were from the beginning.” This is the N.A.A.C.P.’s argument. We know we have been exploited, Mr. Ralph, sir; what we’s arguing about is that we’s been exploited! To *use* us is the term of our stay in this joint, but left out of the mainstream means that Bird died of scag, Jellyroll had to play in a whorehouse, Duke played one-night stands till he died, the Beatles make millions and cite some Blood running an elevator in Jackson.

In terms of separation, there *is* an Afro-American

culture . . . impossible without the American experience, but it is a *specific* culture, used, like the Black people themselves, to make superprofits, mainly for the white bourgeoisie; but there *are* some Blacks who do get some big-sized crumbs—chairs, grants, fame, &c.—, some of whom think they are actually in that mainstream, and some of whom actually are (in the sense that they will defend what this means and is), for their bribe. It is the question of this use, the exploitation, the oppression, that we take issue with and, from the first batch of slaves, have sworn to annihilate. We take issue with the comfortable commentator used with his own permission who seeks no connection with the mass pain except to get rich and famous off it.

In *The Massachusetts Review* interview Ellison defends the book *Time on the Cross*, which implies that, ahhh, slavery wasn't as bad as y'all say. And he even pipes up his own little mitigator (a constant tone from the backward sector of the Black petty bourgeoisie) that it wasn't that bad; it's just you niggers that think so, you poor niggers, you working-class niggers, you dark niggers, you majority of niggers. Ellison says (in defending *Time on the Cross*) that "perhaps we have too damn much of a wound-worshipping investment in the notion that the slaves were brutalized beyond the point of exercising their human will to survive" and further, again *re Time on the Cross*, ". . . the slaves were not reduced to a gas-oven state of docility, a view that would see each and every slave master as a Hitler and American slavery as a preview of the Holocaust." Wow, we'll analyze that Bro. But even further Ellison says, "After all I did see my granddaddy and he was no beaten-down 'Sambo.' Rather he was a courageous, ingenious old guy who *owned property* [my emphasis], engaged in Reconstruction politics of South Carolina, and who stood up to a mob after they had lynched his best friend. . . . I also knew one of his friends who, after years of operating a printing business for a white man, came north and set up his own printing shop in Harlem."

Does this mean that everybody who didn't own property or become a small politician was "a beaten-down 'Sambo'"? Ishmael Reed and Stanley Crouch both make the same kind of rah-rah speeches for the Black middle class. Reed, in fact, says that those of us who uphold Black working people are backwards (see *Shrovetide in Old New Orleans*, pp. 136-37) or, as he says, "the field nigger got all the play in the 60's." Focus on the middle class, the property owners and music teachers, not the Black masses, Ellison tells us. This is the *Roots* crowd giving us a history of the BLM as a rags-to-riches, Horatio Alger tale in brownface, going off into the sunset and straight for Carter's Cabinet or the National Book Award. No, slavery was not as bad for house-Negroes, nor is national oppression as grim for the petty bourgeoisie—not bad at all for the tiny bribed element among us. But for most of us it is hell, and we want it destroyed! We even want to use our poetry and song as yet another means to effect the destruction of this national oppression and its material base, monopoly capitalism. The bourgeois

sie, and the intellectual sector that serves them, tells us we cannot. We say, Fuck you!

And, get to this, we do not think that slavery made Black people "beaten-down 'Sambo[es]'" ; it is the "white aesthetic" crowd that thinks that. There has been resistance ever since there was oppression. Ellison and the capitulationist wing of Afro-American literature are the ones who try to reduce the methods by which we can oppose it, who usually get paid well for opposing our resistance, albeit *aesthetically*! The slavemasters *were* our Hitlers. You think slavery is different in its essence from fascism? And even after slavery, after the destruction of the Reconstruction governments, that fascism was resumed, with peonage, sharecropping, the Black Codes, segregation, discrimination, Jim Crow, lynching, &c. (Check out Wright's *Uncle Tom's Children*, which is a far more accurate and powerful version of Black life in the South than Ellison has produced.)

Ellison's line repeatedly is, We are a part of this, we are a part of it and it ain't half bad! (Reed says, and I am not making this up, "Did you know that the woman who runs the computer controlling five or so missile carriers is black?" [*Shrovetide*, p. 136].) This is the cry of the N.A.A.C.P. leadership.

Where I differ with the bourgeois nationalists who are identified with the "Black Aesthetic" is illuminated by a statement of Addison Gayle's: "An aesthetic based upon economic and class determinism is one which has minimal value for Black people. For Black writers and critics the starting point must be the proposition that the history of Black people in America is the history of the struggle against racism" ("Blueprint for Black Criticism," *First World*, Jan.-Feb. 1977, p. 43). But what is the basis for racism; i.e., exploitation because of one's physical characteristics? Does it drop out of the sky? Is it, as Welsing and others suggest, some metaphysical racial archetype, the same way the white racists claim that "Black inferiority" is? Black people suffer from national oppression: We are an oppressed nation, a nation oppressed by U.S. imperialism. Racism is an even more demonic aspect of this national oppression, since the oppressed nationality is identifiable anywhere as that, *regardless* of class. But we know even racism is mitigated, cooled out somewhat, if someone is living in a Chicago condominium, or in some exclusive suburb, than it is, say, for a Black worker, or small farmer, or migrant worker, or unemployed worker.

The material base of racism, which allows it to exist as other than a "bad idea," is monopoly capitalism. Its material base before the Civil War was the slave system and developing capitalism. The destruction of monopoly capitalism will allow the conditions to exist in which we can begin to destroy racism and chauvinism, but no such conditions can ever exist under capitalism.

Our struggle against racism must be our struggle against national oppression, and the fundamental answer to that is the revolutionary struggle for self-determination! But against who and what must that struggle be waged? Who and what now have the power to keep us powerless? We see that ultimately it is

monopoly capitalism, the private ownership of the land, mineral wealth, machines, factories, transportation, communication—the means of production—by a white, racist, corporate class, itself comprising only 6/10ths of 1 percent of the U.S. population, that must be destroyed if Black people or the other people in this society are to be totally liberated!

I understand that Afro-American culture has absorbed all the elements it came in contact with, but it is still a specific entity in itself. It is particular, yet interrelated with the whole of U.S. culture. It is impossible without the overall U.S. culture, and likewise the overall U.S. culture, as it is, and has been for 300 years, is impossible without Afro-American culture. The “Black Aesthetic” is the form, content, style, history, and psychological development of a particular nationality, the Afro-American. There is, in the U.S., however, an Afro-American nation, in the Black Belt South . . . what Ellison mentions Richard Wright as upholding at one point . . . a historically-constituted, stable community of people based on a common language, land, economic life, and common psychological development manifest as a common culture. This is a paraphrase of Joseph Stalin’s scientific definition of nation. The Afro-American nation is an oppressed nation, born in the South after the destruction of the Reconstruction governments by the resurgent planter class in the South, but paid for and made possible by the big bourgeoisie on Wall Street, who after the Civil War completely dominated U.S. politics and economics, controlled the ex-planters, and turned them into their compradors.

It is a complicated picture . . . a nation within a nation, whose land base is the whole lower South, where even today 52% of the Afro-American people live, and where 8 out of 10 of us were born. (Get a U.S. Department of Commerce map and look at the concentration . . . outside of the Black Belt we exist in any numbers in about 20 cities!) But the point is that our basic demand must always be self-determination for the Afro-American nation in the Black Belt, and equal rights-democratic rights for the Black oppressed nationality everywhere else they be!

We are not denying that we are linked together with the overall U.S. political state (up under it, is more precise) and U.S. life in general, but Black people want *self-determination*, not just to be told that everything in the U.S. bears their mark. We know that. We know we helped build it, *free*. But in order to get self-determination, there is a revolutionary process that must be followed, and a tiny minority of Blacks living in kept elegance will not dissuade us from carrying this process out to the end.

I am focusing on Ellison’s most recent interview because he is the Godfather of the “anti-struggle crowd” that the bourgeoisie has tried to re-prop up as Afro-American literature. Ellison says, in the same interview, “After all, given a decade of emphasis upon ‘blackness’ and ‘militancy’ how many writers of Wright’s stature are there to conjure with.” One of the basic weapons imperialism uses is absorption, to absorb sections of the oppressed, usually bourgeoisie,

so that they uphold the oppressor culture, and therefore the ideas of the oppressor, a central one of which is that the oppressed need to be oppressed! The cries of “Blackness,” at their most revolutionary, were opposition to this absorption and agency. The metaphysics and narrowness of some of these cries (some of my own included) were lamentable, but the essence of them was resistance. (Shit, Ralph, Hawthorne was pro-slavery!)

Ellison says, “How many writers of Wright’s stature are there to conjure with?” Well, let’s begin with Frederick Douglass, William Wells Brown, David Walker, Henry Highland Garnet, W. E. B. Du Bois, Langston Hughes, Claude McKay, Margaret Walker, Theodore Ward, to drop a few names. One task that confronts us is that we must go beyond the stale “histories” and anthological chauvinism, especially those the would-be educated Blacks have been shaped by, and investigate Afro-American literature with a fresh eye, with an eye to discovering the hidden riches that are there. In an early and somewhat confused essay I wrote called “The Myth of a Negro Literature,” I dismissed Afro-American literature because I was put off by the whited-out Negro literature that was merely a brown imitation of the dull parts of Euro-American literature. Even white literature is distorted in this terrible capitalist land to hold up the conservatives, the backward, to trumpet the Henry Jameses and Hawthornes over the Melvilles and Mark Twains and Jack Londons and Theodore Dreisers and Mike Golds! And certainly in official U.S. literary history, they usually raise the most conservative, the backward, or so mix them with the progressives that the radical or revolutionary trend is obscured. And the Blacks, Latinos, Native Americans, Asians, and women are in distorted minority if they are represented at all.

Recently, the bourgeoisie has been pushing Ishmael Reed very hard, and to see why let’s look at his most recent book, *Shrovetide in Old New Orleans*. In essay after essay Reed stumps for individualism, and asserts ubiquitously that the leadership of Black folks is the Black middle class, rather than the working class, but it gets even farther out than that. Reed actually resurrects the old, whited-out “conservative” George Schuyler, the man who once wrote an essay (which Hughes blasted) called “The Negro Art Hokum,” in which, of course, he asserted that there was no such thing. There’s Irish literature, Spanish literature, Russian literature, French literature . . . but no, no Afro-American literature or painting. Schuyler, the man who supported Portuguese colonialism, and agreed that the Portuguese were doing a civilizing job over in Africa. Schuyler, the man who makes even some of the straight-out agents of the N.A.A.C.P. leadership look rational. Dig this conversation between Reed and Schuyler:

Reed: Why do you think the people who are more into the collectivist type of poetry and “for the people” have a bigger reputation than those who are independents?  
[Obviously he was talking about the ‘60s—AB]

Schuyler: Because they’ve been played up and built up.

Reed: Who builds them up?

Schuyler: Well, people who are interested in building

them up. It's a clique. Who would ever think of Malcolm X as a leader?

Cannon: Really.

Schuyler: Lead what?

Cannon: Every time we talk about that, we get shouted down.

Reed: You can't say that. He's a holiday now.

This is straight-out agency, and in certain circumstances could easily get these dudes iced. But this is the level of anti-Black the straight-out agents of the oppressor run with. In the '60s, obviously neither Reed nor Cannon would make such statements. But in the recent climate of celebration of capitulation and upholding of the compradors, the real garbage in the brains of these traitors comes out. And this is what their aesthetic is built on.

Reed also upholds the feudal-capitalist dictatorship of Baby Doc Duvalier in Haiti, which he and a woman-painter acquaintance describe as "clean poverty," unlike that in the rest of the Third World.

Like Jesse Jackson, poet Michael Harper went to racist South Africa and even wrote a poem about it, so disconnected is he from the international Black Power struggle. (Reed says in *Shrovetide*, "Black Power" might have begun from talk circulating at cocktail parties in Paris in the 1940's. Brian Gysin wrote a book about it called *The Process*." I would suggest this arsehole read C. H. Langston during the Negro Convention Movement of the 1840s and '50s.) This is from the minutes of the Cleveland Negro Convention, 1854: ". . . man cannot be independent without possessing the land on which he resides." And further, ". . . under no circumstances, let the consequences be as they may, will we ever submit to enslavement, let the power that attempt it, emanate from whatever source it will." But Harper, in his poem, seems most to lament that the white-supremacist South African authorities who arrested him momentarily did not differentiate him from the general, run-of-the-mill Blood in Azania-to-be.

Michele Wallace attacks the Black Liberation Movement with bourgeois Feminism. Her fundamental problem is that she wasn't there and doesn't know. She has some genuine frustration, and the issue of women's oppression is real: Third World women in this country suffer a triple oppression, if they are working women, as workers under capitalism—class oppression, national oppression, and oppression because of their sex. But because Wallace does not have a scientific method or analysis she can be used by the bourgeois Feminists at *MS. magazine*, who just want to get in on the oppression, not to smash the system that fosters it; and she is also used by the bourgeoisie not only to suggest that there was nothing of value in the rebellious '60s but that bourgeois Feminism can accurately sum up history, which it can't. She also drops the same old chauvinist line on Black women, while at it, suggesting that Black women were too backward to struggle against the male chauvinism of myself and others in the BLM, some of whom even made a *doctrine* of it. But to say, "The riots . . . , during the Black Movement days, were spontaneous and largely ineffective outbursts of rage that were

directed inward and hurt the ghetto dweller most," or to see Malcolm X as merely "patriarchal Black macho," or to say that the BLM was merely "a big Afro, a rifle, and a penis in good working order" is to take the side of our oppressors.

Shange deals in effects but not causes in *colored girls*. This is only one-sidedness and lack of information. But obviously if she raised the *cause* of women's oppression—class society, and in this epoch, monopoly capitalism-imperialism—, no such play would get on the Great White Way. Like they hurried up and bashed *Zoot Suit* because of its militancy, and even put the badmouth on the movie *Wiz*, 'cause it was much too hip. Shange must go deeper into her material and get to the root causes of things in the real world if she is truly to be honored by the masses in the long run. Removing parts of her plays offensive to white-racist critics and producers, as she did with the "anti-white woman" sequence in *spell no. 7*, is a motion toward the ocean, as a drownee sponsored by Imp. Productions, not toward communion with the people.

But have no fear, the fire is still bubbling and hot and ready to raise up ag'in. Poets like Askia M. Touré and Jayne Cortez are at the top of their number right now! I'm sure Touré's "John Wayne Poem" helped that worthy "book." Jayne Cortez's *Mouth on Paper* is dynamite, connecting up, as Mao indicated in the "Yenan Forum," that our works be aesthetically powerful and politically revolutionary! That is the combination we seek, the dialectical matrix that includes both form and content. We cannot be one-sided, though it must be obvious that *content is principal!* What you are *saying*. We must learn to say that content which unifies the people, identifies the enemy, that content that is in itself a form of struggle and is an aspect of victory as it tells us about the need for unity, struggle, victory; we must shape that content so powerfully, so beautifully, that its message, like our struggle itself, like the people themselves, is invincible!

The endless, acrobatic "avant-gardists" many times go through such rigamarole because they have *nothing* to say—except that they have *nothing* to say. Some of the *concrete* boredom makers, various miniscule-content typewriter freaks, and even more generally the various *formalists*, for whom form is principal or form is everything, generally uphold bourgeois aesthetics. We get offered nothing, really, except subjectivism, elitism, solipsism—the world-erasing, super "I" over everything. Bourgeois aesthetics are a reflection of a bourgeois ideology or world view, generally. A small class rules everything, benefits absolutely, while the rest of us go through horrible changes. So art is only for the sanctified few—who are so great because they are so hip because they are so sensitive, so sensitive, in fact, that they can bang out meaningless bullshit on typewriters while most of humanity is in pain.

Obviously we are not putting down legitimate scientific experiment. Scientific experiment plus the struggle for production and class struggle are the three fundamental struggles that push history forward, though ultimately the people are the makers of history!



But we want higher levels of understanding, from higher levels of communication; we want more information, more development—mass development, not less. And our scientific experiments should be so aimed.

Poets like Touré need new books. Their in-person work is very hot—like the music. Also, there're new poets about, like Pili (Michael L. Humphrey), whose yet unpublished work *Black Blood Runs Red* is a major contribution to the new wave of anti-imperialist poetry coming back clearly into view. Ditto *Songs for the Masses* by Sylvia Jones, grounded in the Black working class, and focused on revolution. These poets are carriers of the tradition of struggle of the BLM, though they will probably never be run up the flagpole of bourgeois celebration—they started talking bad about the capitalist hell too young, so the rulers and their colored and white henchpersons saw them coming. We must celebrate them and publish them, as we must shore up and put back into the field with a thousand times more strength older, proven warrior-poets and writers and artists, and rebuild a network of struggle-oriented art institutions— theater companies, magazines, mass organizations focused on arts and culture— because the more intense the struggle gets the less likely the bourgeoisie is to publish us. But we must always try to win those middle forces who are not opposed to art based on struggle.

Sonia Sanchez's new book, *I Been a Woman*, is a very solid and a welcome event because it demonstrates the genuinely strong and beautiful poetry poets like Sonia were making in the '60s, and have continued to make, and puts the lie to the brainwashed line that claims that the poetry of the '60s was somehow "technically deficient." The masses dug it, I suppose, because they were backward? Also, we need new works from Lance Jeffers,<sup>3</sup> David Henderson, Lorenzo Thomas, Larry Neal (whose play *The Glorious Monster in the Bell of the Horn* is, I hope, an announcement that he is back on the scene), Welton Smith. Dig Marvin X's beautiful and moving "Palestine" (*Black Scholar*, Nov.-Dec. '78). X, for all his weird Cleaver-related preaching activities, remains a dynamite poet. He needs a book.

The people published in the anthology *Black Fire* are all due new works—Lindsay Barrett, James T. Stewart, Dingane (Joe Goncalves), Keorapetse Kgositsile, Reggie Lockett, Sam Anderson, Clarence Franklin, Clarence Reed (one of the most lyrical singers and one of the most unsung of the BAM!). Some of these have never even had a first book, yet they are beautiful and strong, and we must see that they get into print to help struggle against imperialism and its intellectual lackies. Where is Yusef Rahman? Has Norman Jordan recovered? Poets like Gaston Neal have needed books for the last decade, and Ahmed Alhamisi and Rudy Bee Graham. What about Bad Bobb Hamilton and Charles Patterson or Ronald Drayton or Carol Freeman? What is Julia Fields doing or Jacques Wakefield? Yusef Iman's poetry is now at a much higher level, able to do so many more of the things that he could always do in person. And why no new poetry from Ted Wilson or Richard Thomas (who was focused on the working class

even back in *Black Fire*)? Are Al Haynes and Jimmy Garrett still ready to get in print on the heavy side? And Charlie Cobb and Charlie Fuller and Joe White or Jay Wright? What's their new work look like?

We know that poets like Mari Evans are still producing good work; and Carolyn Rodgers, although she has gone heavy into the church, and the obscurity that promotes, is still capable of stunning poetry. She was one of the truly underpublicized doers of the '60s. The whole generation of fighting Black artists did not disappear, was not assassinated or bought off. Most of us have not turned into Eldridge Cleaver or Nikki Giovanni (another South African traveler). June Jordan's work has gotten progressively stronger since the earliest volumes. Kalamu Ya Salaam shows signs of broadening past our '60s narrowness; if he could only drag his man Haki Madhubuti a little farther out in the open it would help us all. Certainly Haki's works were among the most popular of the BAM works among the masses.

Younger poets like Sekou Sundiata and B. J. Ashanti are new forces turned in the right direction. Aishah Rahman's play *Transcendental Blues* signaled she could write works of the necessary clarity. Let's hope Joe Papp don't do her too much damage in the meantime. Verta Mae Grosvenor's poetry and prose will be a real surprise to some; she has some valuable insights on the Black women's struggle. Quincy Troupe has a couple of strong poems in *Snake Back*, the "Up Sun . . ." and "Neruda." And, of course, Margaret Walker is very much with us, working away down in Jackson. Theodore Ward, another old master, remains in Chicago, until we can get ourselves together enough to produce his masterworks. James Baldwin's recent statements (in *The New York Times* and at San Diego State University) could portend a new breakthrough in the pattern of *The Fire Next Time* or *Blues for Mr. Charlie* as opposed to the other, less mass-oriented side of his works.

Nathan Heard's new prison novel will reveal a much more developed ideological stance. And there are strong playwrights like Oyamo, Ben Caldwell, Clay Goss, (Ron Milner's still doin' it), Martie Charles, Richard Wesley, Paul Carter Harrison, and so many others. All this work is generally focused against Black national oppression, to varying degrees, depending on the consciousness and skill of the writers, but the resistance is there, and so is the art.

Henry Dumas is one name many of the capitulationists try to conjure with because his work is so highly stylized and myth-conscious, as if, because of these things, Dumas were a capitulationist. But Dumas's works generally, and in the main, openly oppose national oppression. Great works like "Fon" and "Will the Circle Remain Unbroken" are not only beautiful, but *fighting* works aimed squarely into the sour hearts of our enemies. Dumas's book of poetry is called *Poetry for My People*. Toni Morrison is also hooked up with these capitulationists, they try to mislead us into believing, but *Sula* and especially *The Bluest Eye* give the lie to such b.s. (I have not read *Song of Solomon* yet.)

It is obvious that the bourgeoisie will push anti-struggle art over art based on and focused on the need for struggle. But straight-out racism will trim even a few of those anti-struggle people out of the select few and may even make their jaws tight enough to understand that the entire system must be destroyed and that being kept literary whatnots under the bell jar of some capitulationist aesthetic will only make them enemies of the majority (not only of Blacks but of everybody else). In the early '70s, to try to turn the tide of the BAM around, the bourgeoisie pushed projects like the Negro Ensemble Company and even gave out big prizes theretofore reserved strictly for white folks' works to its select because of their content, to say, "Hey y'all, later for that black stuff; here's what we want." And saying thus, gave a Pulitzer Prize in drama to Flash Gordone, who has trouble even writing a recognizable play, much less one of any merit. But because Gordone would openly kill off Black militancy once a night on the stage and come out in drag to drag us back to outright gay minstrelsy, he could cop.

In the '60s Clifford Mason had to hide his capitulationist rap under the cover of a play about Gabriel Prosser, militant cover but capitulationist essence. In the recent '70s he can come out and openly proclaim from the pages of *The New York Times* that Joe Papp and Shakespeare are New Black Theater. In the '60s we spoke up loud and clear about the need for independent Black institutions of every imaginable kind . . . a clear thrust for self-determination and democracy. In the '70s people flock around Joe Papp and the downtown-New York Lincoln Center or do the Broadway minstrelsy, or don't work too regularly. And the Black Theater Alliance squashes criticism of Lincoln Center for not appointing any Black director in its new junta of directors, in exchange for 3 or 4 thousand dollars to put on a "black theater festival" that was patently and openly anti-struggle.

The late '70s the bourgeoisie has tried to turn into open sell-out time. Economism is trying to rule the airwaves. Militant poets of the '60s show up really funny-haha in the '70s—flip and cute and slightly dadaistic, all for the bucks and to bump up the careers. Or they are just "influenced" by this trend instead of the militant one. This has affected not only Black artists but every other kind of artist as well. Strong poets like Pedro Pietri and José Angel Figueroa, for instance (see *Puerto Rican Obituary* and *East 110th Street*), wrote hot books aimed dead at setting imperialism's ass ablaze. But their recent works give the imps more slack by not being so focused on it. But Miguel Algarin's translation of Neruda's *Song of Protest* is dynamite, and Louis Reyes Rivera is really someone to watch, ditto Raoul Santiago, Sandi Esteves, Amina Muniz, Tato Laviera, Miguel Loparena, and Lucky Cienfuegos. Miguel Pinero, who is one of the most impressive of the Latin writers, is in Hollywood, so we must wait to see how this affects his work . . . though one *Barretta* story, in which he also played a lead, was *no bueno*.

We could go on and on, but the main line is that class struggle is as much a part of the arts as it is anyplace else. (And criticism especially, as Mao instructed us in

the "Yenan Forum," is one place where open class struggle always rages.) The struggle-oriented artists, the artists who consciously or in practice, see their works as "for the people," as weapons to help in transforming society, must regroup and, given the bloody experiences of the '60s and early '70s, raise the level of struggle on up even higher. We must try to get even clearer on the meaning of class stand, attitude, audience, and study, and their relationship to our work. E.g., what is our class stand; i.e., whose side are we on? What is our attitude toward various things? From one's attitude—whether we condemn a thing or praise it—can be told what our class stand is. Despite middle-class vacillation, one *cannot* be in the middle. Whether we say it or not, our practice, our acts objectively place us on one side or the other.

Who is our audience; for whom do we write? That is key. Who do we want to reach or impress? Are we educating or titillating? Audience is one large shaper of content, and content is principal. Finally, what is it we are saying?

Study, also, is a shaper of content. What we study, and what we do, shows very clearly in our work. We must study society carefully and with passionate interest, and history. As Mao said, we must study "the various classes in society, their mutual relations and respective conditions, their physiognomy and their psychology." But we must represent the working class, even as members of an oppressed nationality; 96% of the Afro-American people are members of the working class. And they are the most advanced force of the nation. We are members of an oppressed nationality representing the working class, because, at the same time, we struggle for alliance of the multi-national working class and the Black nation, for the alliance of the multi-national working class and all of the oppressed nationalities. Their mutual freedom can only be gained by the destruction of U.S. monopoly capitalism—the same enemy!

Our art—literature—must embody this; it must be as hot as fire and as relentless as history. People always say, "Well what's Baraka doing now? He keep on changing." I am a Marxist-Leninist, because that is the most scientific approach to making revolution. But for a long time most of y'all knew I wanted to be a revolutionary; I'm still committed to that. Most of us, regardless of what we call ourselves, are still committed to change, complete social change. We just got to get back on it.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> "The Revolutionary Tradition in Afro-American Literature," in *Selected Plays and Prose of Amiri Baraka/LeRoi Jones* (New York: Morrow, 1979), pp. 242-51.

<sup>2</sup> *Capitulationist* here equals general submission to the U.S. status quo of Black national oppression and racism; "Tom" would spell it out in classic Black cultural terms. I also use the scientific term *comprador*, which means literally an agent of the oppressor nation (in this case, a Black agent); "house nigger" we have traditionally called them, with some accuracy.

<sup>3</sup> Since writing this, I was sent two Jeffers books, *O Africa, Where I Baked My Bread!* and *Grandsire*, from Lotus Press. But, unfortunately, they enjoy very tiny distribution.