

# The Richard Wright Newsletter

## Letter From the Editors

We are pleased to bring notice to a number of significant developments. With increasing frequency, Wright has been the subject of conferences, symposia and regular sessions at annual meetings of professional associations. Selected abstracts from the 1992 international conference on *African Americans and Europe* begin in this issue and will continue in the next. We have also included reports on conferences at Washington University and the special session at the 1993 CLA Convention.

Of special interest is the report on the world premier of *The Man Who Lived Underground*, the stage adaptation of Wright's novella by the veteran actor Don Marshall, which opened at the City Theatre in Pittsburgh and ran from May 26 through June 20. Marshall's interest in Wright has led him to consider other productions, especially from *Eight Men*. The response to the play was quite good, and we include quotations from reviews and remarks by local newspapers. We have also printed an interview with

Marshall. The *Circle* is encouraging Marshall to consider a tour of his play. Local sponsors will be needed to support such an effort. We ask members of the *Circle* to write to us if they are interested in working with this project.

Our most exciting news concerns an extraordinary find -- the discovery of an unpublished manuscript written by Richard Wright. Located among the material in the Wright archives at Beinecke, *Rite of Passage* represents a most important scholarly development. To kick off the discussion of *Rite of Passage* which is still in the pre-publication stage, we share with our readers comments by Julia Wright who is responsible for the discovery.

Finally, we thank Keneth Kinnamon, the RWC bibliographer, for providing the second *Richard Wright Bibliography Supplement*. These supplements will be a regular feature of our forthcoming issues. Δ

Maryemma Graham and Jerry W. Ward, Jr.

## *Rite of Passage* comes out of the shadows by Julia Wright

It is often said that an author's published work is only the tip of the iceberg of his creativity. It was one thing to know this intellectually and another thing altogether to realize how much it applied in vivid, idiosyncratic ways to my father, Richard Wright, and to his works. And as I researched the hidden part of the iceberg of my father's writings taking the plane across the Atlantic each time I needed to consult his unpublished papers at Yale University - the eeriness of the hidden profile of Richard Wright's creativity began to haunt me. What do we know of an author except the tip-of-the-iceberg aspects a given society at a given moment of its cultural, racial and political development - allows us to know? What do we generally read from the pen of a given author except what this man exposed to a given society at a given point in time feels free not to repress? What part of the total creativity of an author (or an artist) is allowed to see the light of day - and what part lies underground, unexposed and untapped, like a wealth of intriguing negatives, blurred parts of the figure in his carpet? And can we really claim to understand an author or an artist if we don't give at least as much attention to "the man" in him "who lived underground"? And what if that dark and subterranean flip side was able to illuminate key areas of creativity which the brightest spotlights of academic criticism trained on the published fragments had failed to reveal?

Spring of 1989, I had travelled yet again from Paris to Beinecke Library and sat in the Rare Archives Reading Room sifting through unpublished works and preliminary drafts - many of which I had not even known existed. This is how I came upon *Rite of Passage* - the complete and revised version my father sent to Reynolds, his literary agent, in 1960, with the suggestion that it be

included in *Eight Men* with perhaps another story so that the title would have been *Ten Men*. Reynolds was non-committal, asked for a few revisions. My father already ill and weak - months away from death - did not feel up to doing any more work on it just then and *Eight Men* came out without *Rite of Passage*. So when I read the novella for the first time, right there in the Library, during that steamy, muggy Spring of 1989 just weeks after the "Central Park jogger episode," I had a strange feeling of double sight on Richard Wright's part as if his imagination had reached half a century across the years - he first started the story in 1945 while awaiting the publication of *Black Boy* - and had sketched a tragic dress rehearsal for the 1989 Central Park incident. The eeriness which emanated from this time warp quality was reinforced by the presence of a ghostly woman character hovering almost timelessly in Johnny Gibbs' thoughts and imagination as the story comes to a close. The rational part of us understands of course that fourteen-year-old Johnny Gibbs trapped into the first hours of gang-leadership and into his first, reluctant mugging, is yearning for his mother to find him out and lead him back into childhood. But intuitively, we also understand the symbolic, dreamlike quality of the mother-figure, both her emotional reality and proximity and her very real absence - the very pathos of her distance. And so we are also reminded of the moving attempt Wright made to establish, post mortem, a meaningful relationship with his grandmother - the memory of her after her death... It is as if this black mother who is both there and not there - is inextricably tied up with the presence/absence of "black hope" - the projected title of yet another unpublished work. So we are left with Johnny Gibbs' inner struggle to be hopeful, to make an absent mother-figure materialize out of the shadows. As if

Richard Wright had been trying to say that one of the central problems of delinquency could well be a psychological point of no return, an inability to retain and internalize the hopefulness that maternal bonding could give before the demands of a racist society took hold.

*Rite of Passage* may be taken for a simple, realistic morality tale written by Richard Wright in a deliberately limp language which the lost boys of Johnny's generation could understand. Yet again the very simplicity of the novella is deceptive. To me, *Rite of Passage* is a subtle story of shifts, of sleights of time, tone and atmosphere. There is the intriguing biographical shift of the first writing of the novella in 1945 and Richard Wright's will to bring it to light 15 years later, after his mother's death. There is the shift in style from the naturalism of the body of the text to the almost surrealistic ending bringing to mind echoes of *The Man Who Lived Underground* and the unpublished essay, *Memories Of My Grandmother*. There is at the core of the story, the uneasy shift of innocence to manhood, black manhood. And here we have the leitmotif of passing rites contained in most of Richard Wright's fiction - published and unpublished. Finally, for us, in 1993, there is that historical shift from the mores of black childhood and gangs in 1945 to the gangs of today and the resulting tragic loss of black lives.

The history of childhood is in its childhood. The history of black childhood is in its infancy. But *Rite of Passage* is destined to make its own contribution to the history of black childhood and adolescence in the second half of this century. And perhaps the beginning of a committed answer lies in spanning the literary and historical roots, the changing emotional modes of expression of the lethal problem of black violence. A problem to be carefully unraveled in time even if it takes us back to our very first "rite of passage": our middle passage as slaves, as the hopeless children of absent parents unable to reclaim them. Δ

## Abstracts of Conference Papers

### *Paris Conference: African Americans and Europe February 5-9, 1992*

#### "Daddy Goodness: Richard Wright's Last Lamoon"

My paper, "Daddy Goodness: Richard Wright's Last Lamoon" focused on Richard Wright's unpublished play, *Daddy Goodness*, which Wright adapted from Louis Sapin's *Papa Bon Dieu* in the late 1950s. Besides a critical analysis of the play, the paper explored Wright's friendship with Sapin, a Frenchman, whose play satirized religious cult figures of the 1930s. It also briefly examined Wright's interest in the theatre, pointing out Wright's role in the Negro Federal Theatre in Chicago, his dramatization of *Native Son*, and his friendship with other important playwrights. Like some of the other talks presented at the Conference, the paper focused on unexplored areas of Wright's career.

Bruce Dick, Appalachian State University - Professor of English

#### "At Last Somewhere At Home": The European Refiguration of Mississippi in *The Long Dream*

*The Long Dream* is finally getting the attention it deserves as one of Wright's greatest creations. Discussions of the novel, however, all too frequently gravitate toward a configuration

with the author's earlier masterpieces set in Mississippi, albeit for understandable reasons. I propose an examination, however, of the novel's European birth and the effect recent reading, writing, and personal experiences had on Wright as a way of mining a new approach to the text.

In the final chapter of this last published novel, Wright replays an ending he used in his writing several times, that of flight to a "promised land." This had functioned most importantly in his early fiction at the conclusion of his magnificent short story, *Big Boy Leaves Home*. In that narrative, the title character narrowly escapes the lynching and burning that he witnessed being inflicted on his best friend Bobo. Hidden inside the blackness of a truck rumbling north, he replicates the flight of slaves to the "Promised Land" of the North or Canada. Wright wrote the story, however, knowing the ironic reality of that distant realm, a grim reality he would chart in fiction in *Native Son* and in the second part of his biography, *American Hunger*. In parallel fashion, this latter text similarly extended the narrative of *Black Boy*, which also ended in flight to a presumed positive and promising Northern rebirth.

The concept of actual flight eventually culminated in Wright's own life in his removal from the United States to Paris, where *The Long Dream* was written. Once again, he created a narrative based in the South of his youth that ended in flight, this time a literal one, for the final, brief chapter takes place in the belly/womb of a great silver airplane/fish, an appropriately liminal space for the hero, Fishbelly. As he looks out the window he feels his "yearning to be at last somewhere at home."

We know, however, from a letter Wright wrote to his editor Edward Aswell, that writing this final scene in the plane gave him more trouble than anything else in the book. Why? Perhaps one answer lies in the obvious parallel in this decisive moment of transition in his character's life, the matching one in his own, and ambiguities about the realities he knew would await Fishbelly once he landed at Orly, the beginning point for the fascinating unpublished sequel "Island of Hallucinations." As this projected title demonstrates, Wright's own life in Paris had been illuminating, exhilarating, but disillusioning as well, and the reading and experiences he had in the years preceding the composition of *The Long Dream* had a crucial effect on the outcome of his refiguration of Mississippi and the way he planned to expand Fishbelly's story in the sequel.

John Lowe, Louisiana State University - Professor of English

### *Washington University Conference : Richard Wright in the 1950s February 20, 1993*

Dr. Gerald Early (Washington University - Professor of English and African and Afro-American Studies) opened the symposium by describing how most attention to Richard Wright's works remains focused on works of the 1930s and 1940s: *Native Son*, *Uncle Tom's Children* and *Black Boy*. The many and varied works of the 1950s — *Black Power*, *Pagan Spain*, *The Color Curtain*, *White Man, Listen!*, *The Outsider*, *The Long Dream*, *Savage Holiday*, *Eight Men* — have been neglected by comparison. "Wright was by no means an inactive writer or thinker during this period," said Early, and "and in some ways, with the many avenues he was exploring - Third World Independence, existentialism and a groping after some kind of post-modernist concept of the world, a new wave of Pan-Africanism and black nationalism — he was on a cutting edge of much that was going on at that time. But he may have been deeply troubled, an uneasy man in many respects,

troubled and uneasy in ways that are new and different and unexpected, than the writer of the 1930s and 1940s, and in ways that may make many of us feel uncomfortable, which may explain in part why we do not read these 1950s works."

Dr. Lynn Weiss' (Washington University - Associate Professor of English and Afro-American Studies) paper discussed Wright's visit to the Gold Coast (later Ghana) as described in *Black Power*, and Wright's search for common ground with Africans. "The uneasy position Wright occupied between the black African and the white westerner occurs again and again throughout *Black Power*," she said. Weiss concluded that Wright, while remaining committed to political and economic independence for the Gold Coast, found Ashanti slavery and local religious practices distasteful and puzzling, and failed to feel "at home" in Africa because he "was looking less for a racial homeland than for the realization of a society informed by American democratic ideals. Wright was deeply critical of the America he had known and left. But he was as deeply committed to the society it proposed, if never achieved. Wright's journey to the Gold Coast affirmed this commitment to those democratic ideals, even as it exposed the fiction of race at the center of American life."

Dr. Kenneth Kinnamon (University of Arkansas - Professor of English) drew a portrait of Richard Wright in the 1950s from the 40 newspaper and magazine interviews Wright gave during that decade. (These interviews will be collected in Kinnamon's forthcoming book *Conversations with Richard Wright*, edited with Michel Fabre and with the cooperation of Ellen Wright and to be published in July by the University Press of Mississippi.) "Taken together these items attest to Wright's substantial reputation during the last decade of his life, contradicting the notion still sometimes expressed that during that later years of his expatriation his star was dimming," said Kinnamon. These interviews in addition give "a vivid sense of Wright's mature personality and character, " showing a much more lively and charming man than one would expect, given the tone of his works. Kinnamon focused on interview excerpts that show the depth of Wright's political thinking, his thinking on race, and the influence of philosophers such as Nietzsche, Freud and Sartre on his thought.

Ollie Harrington (Cartoonist), on videotape, described his meeting and subsequent friendship with Wright in Paris. He noted Wright's hypochondria and paranoia, and said it was not necessarily unreasonable. "And he (Wright) always had a premonition that a plot was being fixed up against him with the purpose of getting rid of him. Of course we couldn't take these things seriously. He told us that his place was bugged. We laughed about it, but we found a French electronics man who went to his apartment one day and

found that it was bugged in several places." Harrington concluded that Wright's mysterious death may have been the result of poisoning, as "several of his French, his African friends, had been poisoned, some in Geneva, and others in Luxembourg and various places, so it was a reasonable assumption."

Guy Land (working on documentary film on Richard Wright) spoke briefly, saying the seven-minute tape of Harrington showed highlights of a three-hour interview. The proposed documentary film on Wright is being produced by Dave Lacy, an Emmy winner for *Eyes on the Prize II*.

Dr. Amritjit Singh (Rhode Island College - Professor of English) said that the nonfiction of the 1950s illuminates the fiction. The texts *The Long Dream*, *The Outsider* and *The Color Curtain* show that Wright continued to grow as an intellectual during the years of self-exile, and he more and more identified with the colonized of the Third World. Displaying concerns actually global in scope, in his 1950s fiction Wright wrestled in particular with the problem of "what should the newly freed person do? Wright concerns himself with this question in both his fiction and non-fiction. In his fiction he gives us two possibilities, very clear choices: Cross and Fishbelly. Both Cross and Fishbelly are outsiders in Wright's terms, yet one possibility he implicitly rejects, that of Cross, and the other he never got to finish. The end of *The Long Dream* leaves Fishbelly's fate up to our imaginations."

Ms. Julia Wright called her father's expatriation "exile." "I don't agree with people who feel his departure from the States was sudden, and this exile thing came about out of the blue. I think my father always rehearsed exile throughout his life and many of his characters did." She cited the fictional examples of Fred Daniels and Cross Damon. Ms. Wright listed ten reasons why her father may have chosen self-exile: freedom from racism, for self-protection and his family's protection, because "Paris was very consciously a bridge over into the Third World," and other reasons. She said Wright's reading during the 1950s indicates deep concern with "the white man's mental makeup, to find out what makes a racist tick...What has racism done to the mind of the oppressor? Is there a cure?" Ms. Wright cited American anti-Communism and other reasons why Wright's 1950s writings are little read and out of print. She ended with a discussion of Bigger Thomas and described a dream she had about Bigger and her father. A

Catherine Rankovic, Washington University - Instructor of African and Afro-American Studies.

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## Report from the College Language Association Convention April 1-3, 1993

The *Richard Wright Circle* organized a special session on *Richard Wright: His Language, His Literature*, which included papers by Robert Butler (Canisius College), Virginia Whatley Smith (University of Alabama, Birmingham), and Jocelyn Chadwick-Joshua (University of North Texas).

In his paper, "The Multicultural Background of *Native Son*," Butler argued that Wright "rejected 'schematic responses' to Bigger Thomas's crisis of identity which would lock him in an 'either-or' world of 'mindless dichotomies.' *Native Son* emphatically reveals that an 'either-or' approach to identity which requires Bigger to choose between 'your culture or mine' can only make him what

Max or Buckley want him to be. Bigger instead chooses a self in 'conflict' brought about by dialogue which enables him to be a true 'native son,' a person who sees as fruitful the clash between his culture and the many other cultures which comprise the rich diversity of America."

Whatley Smith's paper entitled "Image, Text, and Voice: Oppositions of Meanings in the Wright-Roskam Photographic Text" closely examined how by means of image, text, and voice *12 Million Black Voices* "portrays the historical fall of Africans into American enslavement and their transformation into the millions of Negro captives of the United States up to the period of the text,

1941. Yet it is in the attempt of the triadic media of image, written text, and verbal narrative to establish a fluid exchange of dialogue that oppositions arise which, when reassessed, have been contrived behind the scenes by both writer and photographer. In essence, the Wright-Roskam picture-word conflict exemplifies how discursive formations emerge or more specifically what Roland Barthes calls 'codes of connotation' [come to the foreground]. These codes of connotation, arising from the collusion or disjunction of image, text, and/or voice, also illustrate how words acquire their historical and cultural meanings and why the photographic text ultimately reveals itself as a slave's narrative."

Chadwick-Joshua's "*Black Power Revisited: A Dialectical Analysis of Wright's African Vision*" made a case for the book as a persuasive narrative dialectic. After surveying how early critics of the book "precluded any possibility of this work's long-range impact or its realistic validity," Chadwick-Joshua contends that had these critics been able to "embrace a more objective, deconstructive response, they would have realized what we now so clearly see in [*Black Power*]...that Wright remains paradoxically outside of as well as inside of himself... In this way, Wright achieves the dialectic in an atypical manner: we see him ask questions of himself as well as ask questions of the people -- hundreds of them. Only this way, according to Wright can one even begin to hope for a glimpse of truth."Δ



Don Marshall in a scene from *The Man Who Lived Underground*.

## World Premiere of Richard Wright's *The Man Who Lived Underground*

**Pittsburgh, PA - City Theatre** on the South Side, 57th S. 13th St., presented the world premiere of a stage adaptation of Richard Wright's short story *The Man Who Lived Underground* with Don Marshall in the title role of this one-man show. The stage adaptation, by Producing Director Marc Masterton and Marshall, marked the inaugural professional production of the City Theatre Lab - a flexible performance space adjacent to the Theatre's South Side facility. *The Man Who Lived Underground* opened on Wednesday, May 26, 1993 at 8:00pm and continued through Sunday, June 20. Vernell Lillie, artistic director of Pittsburgh's eminent African American performance group, Kuntu Theater, took on the role of dramaturg for this production.

In Wright's story, Fred Daniel is falsely accused of murdering a white woman. Daniels - beaten by his interrogators - signs his name to a confession he has not read to end his pain. Escaping his captors, he makes his descent into the "underworld" via a manhole cover. Through the municipal sewer system, Wright's outlaw-hero manages to tunnel through walls into a maze of basements and cellars. *The Man Who Lived Underground* explores the adventures, emotions, and self-discoveries of a man who flees an inhospitable society and takes his life underground. Since "underground" living has been a central theme in black American culture, history, and writing, the story serves as a metaphor for the African American experience.

## Rave Reviews! *The Man Who Lived Underground*

"I came away believing that I had just seen a representation of Christ's life and death...Don Marshall turns in protean work that by the show's end left me feeling I had spent the evening down in the sewers with him...The City's lab space is to serve as an experimental off-shoot of its mainstage. In that light, this experiment is a success."

-In Pittsburgh

"Don Marshall's emotional kaleidoscope and those eloquent lines illuminate the dilemma of all those who are forced to exist in society's shadows."

-Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

"...a tour de force by the remarkable Don Marshall...gripping, and Masterton has staged "The Man Who Lived Underground" with a master's vision. Element after element has a virtuoso's touch, including Nelson Harrison's eerie fragments of composition and Jack Etheridge's dazzling sound design."

-Pittsburgh Tribune-Review

"The combination of the author's poetic realism and Marshall's burnished voice holds you spellbound...Marshall gives a riveting performance. He has the presence, vocal range and timing necessary to carry the production."

-Pittsburgh City Paper

## An Interview with Don Marshall

A native of Aliquippa, PA, Don began his theatre career in the University of Pittsburgh's mainstage production of *Steel City* in 1976. He then moved to the San Francisco Bay area where he was founder, and initial Artistic Director of the Oakland Christian Drama Guild in Oakland, CA. He performed with the Black Repertory Group of Berkeley, CA from 1977 - 1985, starring in *Purlie*, *Run Lil Chillun*, *Magnolia*, *Purlie Victorious* and other productions.

Since Marshall's return to Pittsburgh, he has acted in and directed a number of productions. Don directed the Ozanam Cultural Center's teen production of *Purlie* in 1990, has been Special Consultant to the Arts Education Department for the Pittsburgh Board of Education, served as Technical Director of the Kuntu Repertory Theatre, and continues to be active in commercial films, videos and on the concert stage on the East and West coasts.

A former minister, broadcaster, corporate executive, and small business owner, Marshall is a graduate of the University of Pittsburgh. Δ

The following interview was conducted by Maryemma Graham in the final day of Mr. Marshall's four week performance, June 20, 1993.

**Maryemma Graham:** Where did *A Man Who Lived Underground* come from and what stirred you to do it?

**Don Marshall:** I do one-man shows. I have two or three that I've written on my own, not plays, just a one-man show where I take an audience through the Black experience and try to let them see it through the eyes of Martin Luther King, Jr., Langston Hughes, Paul Robeson, James Weldon Johnson, and do their speeches. I was doing the one-man show "Paul Robeson," but the last time I was doing it I called New York and asked about getting the rights. I was told the rights had been given to Avery Brooks. So there was a missing piece in my repertoire and I wanted to replace it somehow. Secondly, I had been looking for about a year and a half, almost two years, and last summer I was doing two pieces at one time. I was doing *Our Country's Good* for this same theater on the mainstage and then I was rehearsing *Steel City* here at the University's Shakespeare Fest. This Native American woman came to me one day and said, "Donald, there is this book I read recently, I think you ought to read it." It was Errol Hill's piece *Shakespeare in Sable*, and being the only actor in this part of the country that I know of who does one-man shows, it became so interesting to me. African Americans who in theater a hundred or a hundred-fifty years ago always had a one-person show and that's how they survived. Because when they couldn't get a role in legitimate theater, as they called it, they would put on their one-person shows. I said it would serve two purposes, replace something in my repertoire and carry on a tradition. I had looked at his piece *The Man Who Lived Underground* on several occasions. One time I saw ten minutes of it done by a guy with a comedic sense. But this struck me as not being comedic. I wanted to go into depth. I went to Marc Masterton after tinkering with it for about a year. I was leaving one of their productions and he said, "Well Don, what are you getting ready to do now?" And I said, "Well, in about a month I'm going over to rehearsal, I'm already in *Black Bottom*. But in the meantime, I have this piece I think I'm going to do a one-person show on." He said, "Well, let me take a look at it, would you?" I did and he called me back about a week later and said, "I'd like to talk to my Board of Directors and see if we can put this on." I said, "I don't want to sit around and wait that long." He said, "But it is

very interesting piece, just let me talk to them." I said, "Okay cool, go ahead and talk to them." About two weeks later, he called me up and said they gave me the chance to do it. The next step was to get funding. Two weeks later we had the funding. From there is was a matter of getting the rights to adapt it. And he contacted Mrs. Wright, the estate, and we went to work on it.

**MG:** What went on in your life before you went into theater, and how do those events now affect your performances?

**DM:** About twenty years ago, I was a minister between 1967 and 1972.

**MG:** Well, the skills are related.

**DM:** Oh, absolutely. I mean, bottom line to me, it's the same. A black newspaper here in the city, *The Pittsburgh Courier*, did an article about me about five years ago and it was headlined "His Ministry is the Stage." I have a ritual, when I go into that theater, every time before I perform; it's just me and the Lord for a while by ourselves. I don't want anyone around me. I believe this is a gift that was given to me and I am responsible for nurturing it. To me it's just destiny because of the way that it happened, the way that I worked with all the things that went on. But my primary concern in bringing it (*The Man Who Lived Underground*) to the stage was to stay true to what he (Richard Wright) had to say. I had developed an idea about how to start a teenage African American theater. I directed a teenage group about two years ago, the city funded me for three months to do it and let them put on their production. I taught them everything about the theater. I brought them in, worked with them for a while until I saw whose abilities and talents led in this direction or that. Some wanted to be behind the scenes, some wanted to work with lighting, some with sound, some wanted to build the set, others wanted to act, and some wanted to direct.

**MG:** And you still had time to do your own work?

**DM:** I would be with them from nine in the morning until four in the afternoon and then I'd go rehearse for another performance. [I laid down at one this morning and was up at six, I'm not a person who sleeps long. Energy is something I have too much of at my age.] But what I wanted to do with this piece was adapt it to the stage, have it choreographed and put together with a score, and have the same piece with lesson plans for the children. I could then take it to particular cities and go into the schools beforehand. I would talk to them about the various areas, what it is they have to do and how it intertwines with a piece, then perform the piece, come back to them afterwards and critique the whole thing. What happens is I found that theater itself, if you get involved, allows you to expand your own self-confidence and self-image. It develops certain qualities and skills with every person. If you set a goal for those young people and they know in order to reach that goal, it means they have to work, they'll do it. I've got to break this thing down into segments, and if you show them how it's done, they follow that pattern, and when you see them getting off-target, you talk to them. Once they reach that goal, once they see that they

The *Richard Wright Newsletter* is published biannually by Northeastern University, Dept. of English, 406 Holmes Hall, Boston, MA 02115 (617) 873-4549.

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The editors welcome all news relevant to the life and work of Richard Wright. The *Richard Wright Circle* is supported by the departments of African American Studies and English at Northeastern University.

can actually do it, their eyes light up like 150 watt light bulbs! You say we're going to put on this production, we have so much time to do it, this is what we're going to get done, and they follow that course. And when that production goes off, and it is a good one, you can't believe it. It taps that well of creativity that may not be tapped at the schools and universities and in the community setting. This has a very positive affect on the rest of these young people's lives. We managed to teach these young adults responsibilities like punctuality, having deadlines to deal with, and other things through theater. And that is our social responsibility.

**MG:** So much attention is often paid to Wright's novels that his short stories are overlooked, how relevant to this generation, and ours at another point in our lives, do you feel these short stories are?

**DM:** *The Man Who Lived Underground* written in the late thirties/early forties came back to life in the sixties. We went underground in the sixties (I'm fifty-one), we had to go underground to keep it going and now it's right back to that again. He [Wright] was so far ahead of his time in some of the things that come out, but at one and the same times, a person today following that same concept will

find the same depth of approval and life in those pieces. To show how important these stories are to this generation, there were three matinees and I would say about 270 to 280 youths were in the audience. None of them will ever forget it. A group that attended the play this past Wednesday was from the High School of Creative and Performing Arts. They were required to read the text before they came and then relate it to what was happening on the stage. I had an hour long talk with them after the show backstage, and they were absolutely astonished. And that is why Wright's stories are so important to me. I turned down performances in other parts of the country, film offers, auditions; I had to do this. I was obsessed. My agent in New York is so burned with me because I was supposed to be there in January. And I went there for two weeks in February, and left right back out, and went right back to work on this. And I kept saying, "I'm busy on something!" But they could never understand if you're an actor, how can you tell New York you're busy?! Wright's writings helped me return because they're so important, not only to the stage, but they also need to be filmed. Δ

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## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### Publications

In February 1994, HarperCollins will publish *Rite of Passage*, a novella Richard Wright began in 1945, with an introduction by Arnold Rampersad. Wright originally envisioned this story's being included in his second collection of short fiction. *Rite of Passage* deals with violence and crime among the young, and the text has prophetic relevance in light of the conditions of life in contemporary urban America. The publication of this book will enable us to expand our knowledge of Wright's unrelenting honesty in dealing with matter of race and environment in America.

Dr. Virginia Whatley Smith issued a call early in 1993 for material that might be included in "NEW REFLECTIONS: Essays on Richard Wright's Travel Books." *Black Power* (1954); *The Color Curtain* (1956); and *Pagan Spain* (1957) function as a collective body and as a distinctive genre, reflecting the diversity of Wright's cultural and political aesthetics in context of his American, African American, European, Pan-African, and other international experiences. Papers were invited for a volume of critical essays giving "new reflections" of these works based upon recent theoretical developments in light of issues of multiculturalism, gender representations, revisionist historicism, post-colonialism, etc. Essays on individual works as well as intertextual relationships were encouraged. Although the deadline for completed manuscripts was July 15, 1993, Circle members who have publishable manuscripts on Wright's travel books may wish to contact Dr. Virginia Whatley Smith, Department of English, University of Alabama - Birmingham, Birmingham, AL 35294.

Greenwood Press [88 Post Road West, Box 5007, Westport, CT 06881] has published *The Racial Problem in the Works of Richard Wright and James Baldwin* written by Jean-Francois Gounard, with foreword by Jean F. Beranger. The book examines the writings of Wright and Baldwin and uncovers a complementary relationship between the two writers. Both writers reflect the profound desire of black Americans to be recognized as first-class citizens: Wright aroused white America's conscience, Baldwin made that conscience experience guilt. According to Gounard, studying the thirty-year evolution of their ideas is essential to understanding the evolution of the American race problem.

Los Hombres Press, Box 632729, San Diego, CA 92163-2729, gladly announces *Desert Storm: A Brief History* by Leonard D. Moore. One of the most promising young haiku poets, Leonard Moore, offers a searching and sensitive commentary on the horrors of Desert Storm.

The University of Florida Press, 15 NW 15th Street, Gainesville, FL 32611, has published *The Black Press in Mississippi, 1865-1985* by Julius Thompson. This work, the first complete treatment of the journalism experience of blacks in a single state, documents all the known examples of the black press in Mississippi from 1865 to 1985, including newspapers, newsletters, magazines, radio, and television.

Amistad Press, Inc. [1271 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10020] launched the Amistad Literary Series with six volumes on modern African American authors. *Richard Wright: Critical Perspectives Past and Present* edited by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and K.A. Appiah, includes reviews of Wright's work up to *American Hunger* (1977), essays on Wright's autobiographical writing and fiction (with exception of *Savage Holiday*), and a bibliography.

The inaugural issue of *Southern Cultures*, a new quarterly, will be published this fall. The journal is interested in examinations of "the folk, popular, and high culture of the South, emphasizing both common themes and conflict among dominant and alternative cultures in the South." We urge members of the Circle to submit articles on Richard Wright and the South. For more information, contact: Alecia Holland, Managing Editor, *Southern Cultures*, Center for the Study of the American South, Manning Hall, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC 27599-3355.

*Richard Wright in the 1950s: A Symposium*, the proceedings of the 1993 Washington University conference, has been published as Occasional Paper No.2. Copies cost \$7.00 and may be obtained by writing to Dr. Gerald Early, American Culture Studies Program, Campus Box 1109, Washington University, St. Louis, MO 63130.

### Conferences

The editors of *American Literary Realism*, Robert E. Fleming and Gary Scharnhorst, have been asked to host the American Literature Association Symposium on "REALISM AND NATURALISM." They ask all scholars to please attend the conference to be held at the Plaza las Glorias in Cabo San Lucas, Mexico from November 11 to 14, 1993. Should you want any additional information, please call or write them at 505-277-6347, Department of English, Humanities 217, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, New Mexico 87131-1106.

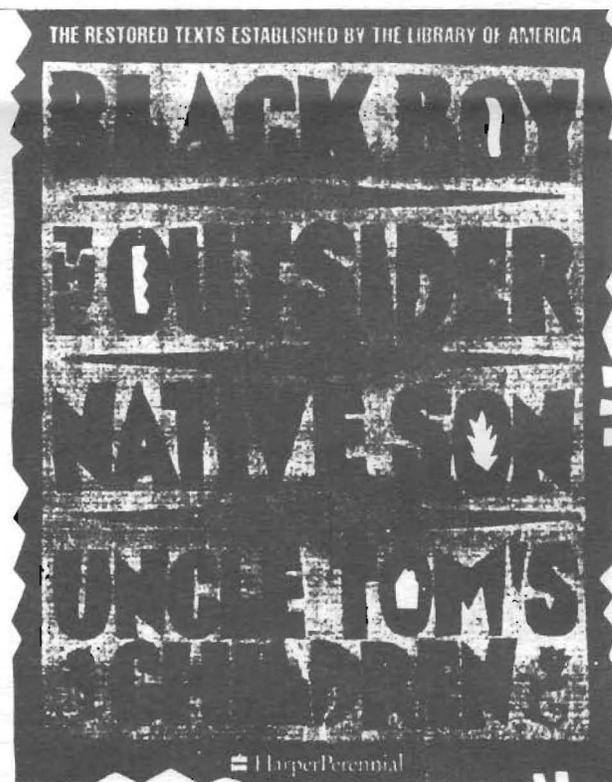
### Documentaries

Mississippi Educational Television has been awarded a \$650,000 grant from the National Endowment for the Arts to produce a documentary on the life and work of Mississippi writer Richard Wright. Educational Television director A.J. Jaeger said, "Richard Wright's work has had a profound impact upon American literature and upon the success of the civil rights movement in America... This program will complement our 1975 documentary on the life and work of William Faulkner, which brought to the world's attention the significant intellectual contribution of the state of Mississippi."

### Author Societies, Organizations

The organization of the Toni Morrison Society has been announced. The organizing meeting was held at Stouffer Harborplace Hotel, Baltimore, Maryland, Friday, May 28, 1993, at the Annual Conference of the American Literature Association. For more information, contact: Carolyn C. Denard, Organizing Chair, Georgia State University, (404)-651-2900.

An international group of scholars have formed the Collegium for African American Research (CAAR), for the purpose of exchanging ideas, methodologies and critical perspectives and advancing scholarship in African American Studies. CAAR has proposed publishing a European newsletter and the development of an African American research center in Europe to facilitate the spread of information and documentation about the black experience. At a meeting held in Seville in April 1992 in conjunction with the Biennial Conference of the European Association for American Studies, a steering committee was created, a constitution drafted, and officers elected. For further information, contact Maria Diedrich (President), University of Hannover, Germany; Alessandro Portelli (Secretary), University of Rome, Italy; or Carl Pedersen (Treasurer), Roskilde University, Denmark.



New paperback editions of Wright's works available from HarperPerennial.

For information, please write: Special Markets Department, HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 10 East 53rd Street, New York, NY 10022.

Richard Wright Circle  
Northeastern University  
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Boston

Northeastern University 

## Richard Wright Circle Membership

You are invited to become a member of the *Richard Wright Circle*, which is an international association of scholars, teachers, students, and other persons who have sustained interest in the life and work of Richard Wright. The *Richard Wright Circle* started in 1990, the fiftieth anniversary of *Native Son*. The Circle is dedicated to promoting the teaching of Wright's works in undergraduate and graduate programs, encouraging textual scholarship and preparation of critical editions, galvanizing a network of international scholars to facilitate scholarship and criticism on Richard Wright's literature.

Each member will receive a biannual publication, "The Richard Wright Newsletter," containing brief research and archival notes, letters of inquiry, information about new directions in criticism and scholarship, and items on conferences in and outside of the United States.

This is a special opportunity to be a part of an interpretive community devoted to Wright's works.

Complete the information below and send a \$10.00 check or money order for a one year membership to the *Richard Wright Circle*.

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

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Send form and dues to: Dr. Maryemma Graham, Northeastern University, 406 Holmes Hall, Boston, MA 02115; (617) 373-4549; Fax Number (617) 373-2509.