One of the fascinating controversies in Richard Wright's complex artistic and personal careers involves his working relationship with the white playwright Paul Eliot Green (1894-1981) of North Carolina. Wright learned of Green through the literary, artistic, and interracial grapevines of the day, and it was the novelist who made the first approach to the playwright, doing so in a letter in 1936, as he records in his memoirs.

Green had received the Pulitzer Prize in 1927 for his play In Abraham's Bosom. This play is a dramatization of a black man's struggle to build schools for his people in eastern North Carolina; he also wants to build a life for himself despite being the "wrong sheet" brother of the white landlord and the unacknowledged offspring of the community's patriarch. It featured not only an African American theme for subject of its art, but also featured the black actors Rose McClendon, Fannie Bell De Knight, Gus Smith, and (in England) Grace Walker. Furthermore, during the era 1927-1940, Green was virtually alone among Broadway and off-Broadway playwrights whose works consistently provided African American actors an opportunity for serious dramatic roles, a fact known well to Wright.

In 1936 Wright was in Chicago working for the federal theatre project of the federal writers program, and he wrote to Green in order to get permission for--and artistic advice about--a production of Green's Hymn to the Rising Sun, an anti-chain-gang play grounded in a number of real incidents of racist abuses in Richmond and Charlotte. As Wright records in his memoirs, some of the black actors in the program protested the play because they wanted a happier and more uplifting theme. Incredibly, some even denied that there were such abuses of the chain gang in North Carolina and Virginia. Wright's own life was threatened, he had to transfer jobs within the program, and eventually the mayor of Chicago intervened to cancel the production. Wright and Green were very much frustrated by the strange politics that censored their artistry. For what it is worth, in his memoirs Wright records problems with local members of the Communist Party (CP) over his artistic freedom in the abortive production, although others date his definitive split with the CP much later.

However, neither man abandoned the effort to fuse art and politics, or in the Aristotelian phrase dear to Green, to actualize art. In 1940, Wright agreed to work on a redraft of his new novel Native Son so that the work could be brought to Broad-
From the Editors

In the Fall '96 issue we invited members to share ideas for celebrating the Richard Wright Centenary (2008). And we do need those ideas as soon as possible. As a catalyst, we have itemized a few of our ideas about what should be done to make 2008 a memorable year for an international readership, teachers and students, and Wright scholars.

1. Instead of planning a single, large and costly conference for Natchez, Mississippi or Paris, France, we propose that all academic institutions where Wright's works are studied plan local symposia or conferences for 2008.

2. It would be good for the Beinecke Library, Yale University, to plan a special conference on Wright's unpublished manuscripts. The Richard Wright Circle would be interested in having selected papers from such a conference published in a special Wright number of African American Review.

3. HarperCollins should explore the feasibility of issuing a Centennial Edition of Wright's works.


6. The Richard Wright Circle should encourage prisoners who feel they have learned invaluable lessons from reading Wright's works to submit brief essays for the Richard Wright Newsletter and longer articles to other journals.

We could list ad infinitum, but we are more interested in having ideas from members than in listening to our wish list.

1997 promises to be a good year for serious study of Richard Wright and other African American authors. The publication within the last few months of Houghton Mifflin's Call and Response, The Norton Anthology of African American Literature, Trouble the Water: 250 Years of African American Poetry, and other books that contain Wright's work creates optimism. So too does Trudier Harris' founding of the George Moses Horton Society for the Study of African American Poetry, which will have its inaugural meeting at the 1997 ALA. Already the Horton Society has a very handsome web site: http://www.unc.edu/depts/csas/horton. Forthcoming books from the University Press of Mississippi that may be of special interest to Richard Wright Circle members are The Several Lives of Chester Himes.

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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.
by Edward Margolies and Michel Fabre, scheduled for May, and A Place Called Mississippi: Mississippi Narratives edited by Marion Barnwell, scheduled for July. The Modern Language Association will issue Approaches to Teaching Wright's Native Son, edited by James A. Miller, this summer. The forthcoming Richard Wright issue of Mississippi Quarterly will feature Michel Fabre's "Richard Wright's Critical Reception in France" and Yoshinobu Hakutani's "The Critical Response in Japan to Richard Wright." These events contribute to a healthy climate for promoting the study of Wright's works for themselves or in conjunction with works by others.

The theme of this year's Natchez Literary Celebration (May 29-31) is "Famous Southern Families in Fiction and in Fact." The Richard Wright Literary Excellence Awards will be presented to Elizabeth Spencer and Shelby Foote on May 31.

On behalf of the RWC, we extend our sympathy to the family of Stephen E. Henderson who died in January and to the family of John Albert Sekora who died on February 2.

We urge members of the Circle to send letters requesting that the U.S. Postal Service issue a stamp honoring Richard Wright in 1998, to: Dr. Virginia Noelke, Chair Citizens' Advisory Stamp Committee, 475 L'Enfant Plaza SW, Room 4474, Washington, D.C. 20260-2437.

It is our understanding that this committee will not take action unless it receives hundreds of letters. Therefore, we also ask that members encourage students, colleagues, and professional organizations to write in support of this effort. Ideally, the stamp would be issued at Natchez on September 4, to coincide with Wright's 90th birthday.

Please remember that we are anxious to receive ideas and manuscripts from our members. We need to develop a backlog of material, especially for the Fall '97 issue. May we hear from you soon?

Maryemma Graham
Jerry W. Ward, Jr.

Introducing . . .
the Assistant Editor

As the school year comes to a close, so does my tenure as the novice at the Newsletter. In a few weeks, I'll finish up my MA at Northeastern in English. Thanks to the Newsletter, my future career as a college instructor is informed by a first-hand struggle with the publishing process and by cutting-edge writing about Richard Wright and his contemporaries. Teachers' (and students') contributions to this year's newsletter have been especially thought-provoking for me as an aspiring teacher of literature and writing.

My gratitude to the Editors for their guidance and faith, and to all you subscribers for supporting the Newsletter. It's been a pleasure working with you.

Diane Putnam

ALA Symposium on The Trickster
October 9-11, 1997
The Cal-Neva Resort
Lake Tahoe, NV

Call for Papers: Author Societies and individuals are invited to propose papers or panels on any aspect of the Trickster, Gambler, or Confidence Man in American Literature. The Symposium will feature an opening celebration, panels all day Friday and Saturday, formal and informal talks by leading experts in the field, an excursion to nearby Virginia City, Nevada, and a closing cocktail buffet, all in the dramatic High Sierra setting of sparkling Lake Tahoe, with its boating, fishing, skiing, hiking, and superb clubs and restaurants.

Deadline for proposals: June 15, 1997. Send to the Symposium Coordinator: Jeanne Campbell Reesman, Division of English, Classics, Philosophy, and Communication, University of Texas at San Antonio, San Antonio, TX 78249. Ph. 210-458-4374; fax 210-458-5366; email reesman@lonestar.utsa.edu.

Conference registration: $45. Room: special conference rate of $85 per night.
Deadline for hotel registration: September 8.
Phone: 702-832-4000 or 800-CAL-NEVA.
Teaching Richard Wright . . .

in Chicago, Illinois

BY BARRY KRITZBERG

Let Them Read All About It
In The “World’s Greatest
Newspaper”!

Students are generally skeptical about Wright’s claim, in “How Bigger Was Born,” that “many of the newspaper items and some of the incidents in Native Son are but fictionalized versions of the Robert Nixon case and rewrites of news stories from the Chicago Tribune.”

They understand Wright’s purpose in using such headlines as “NEGRO RAPIST FAINTS AT INQUEST,” but students tend to see the newspaper articles as exaggerated and, therefore, ineffective.

The best way to answer student reservations is to let them decide for themselves by comparing the “fictionalized” versions in the novel with the articles in Chicago newspapers on the Robert Nixon case.

The Daily News (12 May 1938) broke the story first: Mrs. Florence Johnson was beaten to death with a brick and a suspect, Robert Nixon, was in custody. The very next morning the Tribune reported that the murder was committed “by a colored sex criminal” and added, as a testimonial to police vigilance, that “fifteen colored men were seized in the investigation.”

A detective, quoted in the American (29 May), declared that Nixon was the likely slayer: “He was a sex pervert and the sight of sleeping persons aroused in him the killer instinct.”

The Daily Times, not to be outdone by the competition, came up with the “inside story of the morn’s capture” (31 May), even though a state’s attorney had described Nixon (American, 30 May) as “more alert and more cagey than we had suspected.”

Nixon confessed to the slaying and police assumed that he was responsible for a number of unsolved crimes. “The sex moron” (Daily Times, 2 June) cooperated by reenacting one of these other crimes “with the agility of an ape.”

Fingerprints were found at one murder scene, for example, but no article reported that they belonged to Nixon; blood was found on Nixon’s clothing on the night of Mrs. Johnson’s murder, but no lab report confirmed that the blood was hers. (Nixon maintained that the blood came from slaughtering chickens at the butcher shop where he worked, but only readers of the Chicago Defender—a
black community newspaper--learned of Nixon's explanation.)

When my students come to the Tribune article (5 June), "Brick Slayer Likened to Jungle Beast," they readily concede that those apparent exaggerations of the novel are really just what Wright says they are: "rewrites of news stories from the Chicago Tribune."

The students learn more from this exercise, however, than that Wright's fictionalized newspaper articles are an accurate reflection of newspaper reporting in Chicago in 1938.

They understand, too, why Wright alludes to wealthy, white thrill-killers, Nathan F. Leopold, Jr. and Richard Loeb, in Native Son. The pair showed no remorse for their murder of Bobby Franks ("it is as easy for us to justify the experiment as it is to justify an entomologist impaling a beetle on a pin"), but they could afford to hire Clarence Darrow, the most celebrated lawyer of the day, to defend them. The judge, taking note of the youth of the offenders, did not send them to the electric chair, but gave them sentences that offered the hope of eventual parole.

There was no sympathetic judge to take note of the youth of Robert Nixon or Bigger Thomas. Both were poor and black, and both went to the electric chair.

... in Tougaloo, Mississippi

BY TERRICA REDFIELD

Lawl Today! versus The Outsider: Realistic Representation of the African-American Male

Richard Wright's Lawd Today! and The Outsider contain very similar passages that illustrate the thoughts and actions of two specific African-American male characters. The portrayal of these characters, although they do not or should not be thought to represent the African-American male in general, has significance in that both characters, although fictional, may be found in society. The very commonplace, or even not so commonplace, characteristics of Jake and Cross raise a question: which character best represents the real African-American male? Does the simpleton, somewhat vulgar, manner of Jake or the intellectual criminal mind of Cross best represent African-American fathers, brothers, and sons? Although the answer to this question is debatable, it is possible to make a compelling argument based on the use of language in each book to decide which representation of the African-American male is more real according to one's everyday experiences with these males.

In reading Lawd Today!, one might find Jake and his friends' treatment of African-American women offensive or at least degrading. Although the things they say regarding these women can be considered degrading, the choice of words they use is even worse. The language used in this instance is significant in that it is purposely used to illustrate a culture that is not so glamorous as one might like to believe. The actions and language of Jake in this book give him life-like qualities, but these qualities are illustrated to an extent that many African-Americans would rather pretend that men like Jake do not exist. Jake's limited knowledge, innate lust and basic lack of respect for women is illustrated in Part One: Commonplace, Chap.

(cont.)
ter XII of *Laud Today!* The men describe the waitress as a race horse and a car they would like to “drive.” The girl is described as plump, teasing, and assumed to be stuck-up and money hungry because of her skin color. Because Jake and his friends describe the woman as inanimate objects to be possessed, it seems that Jake and his friends view women as objects to be conquered and used for their own personal comfort. The narrator’s description of the woman makes one feel that she is unambitious and ignorant to a certain degree. She spends her days working as a waitress passing the time by sensually teasing men like Jake. She is merely a woman designed to tempt and please men.

Cross’s treatment and thoughts of Black women in *The Outsider* are essentially the same as Jake’s. The difference is that Cross’s thoughts are more intellectually conveyed. In Book One: *Dread of The Outsider*, this is illustrated in a lunchstand situation; Cross views the waitress as “woman as body of woman”: “The girl turned to prepare his order and his eyes, trained by habit, followed the jellylike sway of her sloping hips. At once his imagination began a reconstruction of the contours of her body, using the clues of her plump arms, her protruding breasts, the gently curving shape of her legs, and the width of her buttocks. Through the bluish haze of tobacco smoke and amidst the hub of laughter coming from the rear of the cafe, his senses dreamily seized upon woman as body of woman, not the girl standing by the steam table, but just woman as an image of a body and he drifted toward a state of desire, his consciousness stirring vaguely with desire for desire” (Wright, 30-31). In this instance, the narrator describes the way the waitress walks in a sensual, almost romantic way. Instead of her “oversized buttocks” trembling, her “sloping hips” have a jelly-like sway. Cross doesn’t merely lust for this woman’s body, he seems to analyze his desires for her. She is still just an object to fulfill his wants and needs upon, however, he ponders the reason why she means nothing to him in actuality but is aroused by a sensual desire in him for her body, a female body. However, the girl becomes “an intractable bitch” at the sight of her “hard face, coarsely formed mouth, huge cheekbones and stubborn chin” (31). In essence, her face ruins his mood.

Many people would much rather assert that Cross’s representation of the African-American male is more real simply because he is intelligent and articulate; however, his character does not seem as real a representation as Jake because Cross thinks too much and too deeply about usually considered simple matters such as his desire for the girl at the lunchstand. My opinion is based on my experience with African-American males. A more realistic representation of the African-American male would have to make me feel I could walk outside my room or off campus and find one person like that or hear one conversation like that on any given day. Jake’s character and experiences are more likely to fill this criteria.

Although Jake and Cross feel basically the same about the women they meet at the lunchstands, I do not know if I know any man who would express his feelings the way Cross does. He uses descriptions such as “gently curving shape of her legs,” “protruding breasts,” and “contours of her body,” while Jake and his friends describe the woman they meet as being “built for service,” having a bulging stomach, brasstinted hair, hairy armpits, and fat fingers. Men, in general conversation, would describe the “gently curving...
shape of her legs" as big legs, "protruding breasts" as big hooters or titties, and the "contours of her body" as a Coca-Cola bottle figure. Everyday on the radio or just by listening to men talk of women can be heard the phrases "Baby got back," "junk in her trunk," or "big booties." Even the character Theo on "The Cosby Show" called nice-looking girls "hamburgers." Also, I don't know a man who would think to describe his purely lusty desire for a woman as a desire for "woman as body of woman." He would more likely say, "I want her." I would hope that there are men who have a way with words like Cross does, who can make a degrading statement seem a little nicer, but the average African-American male seems to resemble Jake in this aspect.

It is obvious that there are more Jakes than Crosses in the world, whether one wants to admit it or not. All one had to do is listen to the conversations of men about women for which they have lusty feelings. Regardless of whether they are intellectual professionals, town drunks, or college students, the description of women will generally be more vulgar than romantic or sensual. In homes, on the basketball court, in the locker room, in clubs, and even in classrooms, the choice of words in the discussion is not intellectually based. Therefore, although I do not like to admit it, based on everyday experiences, Jake's character in Lawd Today! is more realistic than Cross's character in The Outsider in the dimension of how language is used to describe women.

Terrica Redfield is a sophomore English major at Tougaloo College in Tougaloo, Mississippi.

(Wright & Eliot, from page 1)

way by none other than Orson Welles, a man who in that day could do no artistic thing wrong on Broadway or in Hollywood. John Houseman was to help Welles produce the play, and Green quickly sent a telegram to Wright offering to serve as co-writer with the novelist on the playscript. Wright readily, and enthusiastically, agreed.

In order to do this work, Wright came to Chapel Hill, living "at a Negro boarding house" in town during that Jim Crow era but often visiting and taking meals with the Green family. Most defiantly, Green arranged for Wright to work in Bynum Hall on campus even though campus security personnel had earlier escorted away black students and a black professor whom Green had attempted to bring over from nearby historically black Shaw University. This time around, with support by University of North Carolina President Frank Porter Graham and University Chancellor Robert House, Jim Crow was successfully defied. Indeed, students and faculty and townspeople often looked in curiously but sympathetically at the two writers in Bynum Hall. They saw a black and a white scriptwriter hard at work on Native Son. Best evidence of their working together in Chapel Hill is that it was amicable, even warm, and entirely successful at the personal level of relationships.

However, when he returned to Broadway, Wright found that Houseman disliked the version of the script that the integrated team had produced. Green, evidently with Wright's initial approval, had rewritten Bigger Thomas to reflect classic tragic characteristics, to be realized as a major figure with a major flaw that was deepened by racism but not created by racism—nor by poverty, nor by anything else emanating from society, since Green's Bigger was to possess an internal character flaw. Thus, (cont.)

Indeed, students and faculty and townspeople often looked in curiously but sympathetically at the two writers in Bynum Hall. They saw a black and a white scriptwriter hard at work on Native Son.
the Chapel Hill draft developed a tragic flaw in Bigger Thomas, and the famous trial scene emphasizing the societal impact of racism and poverty was played down considerably. By contrast, Houseman wanted to focus on racism as the agent of influence, and thus played up the trial scene as a statement about racism’s impact on Bigger Thomas’s life and actions.

Green, who was teaching a full load of classes at the university, could not come to Broadway for the final sessions of rewriting. He had to fight the battles through the mails. He lost the fight, and a bitterness set in between Houseman and Green that persisted until 1974.

Partly because of Canada Lee’s strong performance as Bigger Thomas, partly because of Orson Welles’s genius for production, partly because of Houseman’s superb directions, but also because of the effective writing. For the Pulitzer committee, the greatest attraction was the writing of Green and Wright. Native Son was rated the year’s best by Robert Burns Mantle, the dean of Broadway critics. Mantle campaigned vigorously for it in the press and in the critics’ circles, and recorded his support in his subsequently published collection Best Plays of 1940. The play finished a close second to Lillian Hellman’s more topical Watch on the River Rhine.

Drama critics will have to determine whether Houseman or Green offered the better dramatic interpretation of Wright’s novel. A close textual analysis of the scripts by Professor Laurence Green Avery shows that the Broadway production followed the Chapel Hill version with the exception of the courtroom scene; and Wright was always insistent that he co-authored the project with Green, despite later disclaimers by Houseman unsubstantiable by the surviving texts. In any case, contemporaneous New York critics thought Green was the co-author, and in 1940 it was Green’s name that carried the greater weight with such authorities. As the decades have passed, of course, Green’s reputation has declined while Houseman’s has waxed, and presumably most of today’s drama experts would give the nod of critical preference to Houseman’s courtroom scene.

More interesting to me as a cultural historian is the way that Green and Wright fought shoulder to shoulder in both figurative and physical senses to land a blow on damnable Jim Crow at the state university of North Carolina in 1940.

John Herbert Roper is the Richardson Professor of American History at Emory & Henry College in Emory, VA.

Note: Sources for this piece are in Wright’s published memoirs, American Hunger, and in the Paul Green Papers of the Southern Historical Collection of the Library of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
"Writing the Self through Homer: Peter Abrahams' *Tell Freedom* mirroring Richard Wright's *Black Boy."

DR. NGWARSUNGU CHIWENGO
Samford University

Peter Abrahams—the first black South African to write in English—published *Tell Freedom* after reading the African American Harlem Renaissance writers Jean Toomer, Countee Cullen, James Weldon Johnson and Richard Wright. Although the literary influence of the first two is obvious in his early writings, it is Wright who the most significantly helps him understand and articulate the essence and the position of blacks within a dominant white world. Both authors write to articulate the dominant white world. Both authors write to articulate the psychological and physical trauma blacks endure as both colonized and subalterns. Yet, as a Colored inhabiting a site between whiteness and blackness and as the very epitome of the irrationalities of the ideological paradoxes of an apartheid state, Abrahams writes to tell a democratic world the humanity of Africans and of the abuses endured by the latter.

(continuation on page 11)

"The Search for Richard Wright: Horace Cayton's *Unfinished Quest*

DR. VIRGINIA WHATELY SMITH
University of Alabama, Birmingham

Richard Wright remains a giant in the canon of African American letters, but the author's "life" story has remained elusive. To date, four biographers have presented narratives of the black writer: Constance Webb, Michel Fabre, Addison Gayle, Jr., and Margaret Walker. Michel Fabre's text of *The Unfinished Quest of Richard Wright* has held steadfastly as the definitive text, mainly because of Fabre's advantage of being a Frenchman who gained Ellen Wright's confidence and getting access to all of Wright's papers after Webb betrayed Ellen Wright.

Yet there remains a "loose cannon" or unacknowledged biographer who may have been the second biographer of Wright and written the definitive text. Horace Cayton, famed sociologist and graduate of the University of Chicago, knew Wright in the 1940's when he wrote *Native Son* and *12 Million Black Voices*. Cayton, along with St. Clair Drake, in fact came in frequent contact with Wright when they wrote *Black Metropolis*, a sociological study of Black Chicago and Wright wrote an introduction. Cayton, after Wright's death, set out on a quest to write a definitive biography of Wright, but was felled by a heart attack once he landed in Paris in 1967. However, he had spent years gathering materials before then in the forms of notes, manuscripts, collected data, and extensive taped interviews with Wright's childhood friends, i.e., Joe C. Brown, or with colleague-enemies, i.e., Ralph Ellison. As a result, an "archival biography" on "The Search for Richard Wright" exists.

Fabre and Walker had the ad-

(continuation on page 11)
RWC sponsored session:

Richard Wright:
Teaching His Work

Chair: Yoshinobu Hakutani,
Kent State University

1. "Wright's Uncle Tom's Children of the Great Depression,"
Linda Wagner-Martin, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (see column at right).
3. "Black Boy: A Record of Childhood and Youth," Trudier Harris, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and National Humanities Center.

Panel members to include:

Yoshinobu Hakutani, Chair
Kent State University
Linda Wagner-Martin, Panelist
UNC, Chapel Hill
Robert Butler, Panelist
Canisius College
Trudier Harris, Panelist
National Humanities Center
Donald B. Gibson, Panelist
Rutgers University

"Richard Wright's Uncle Tom's Children of the Great Depression"

LINDA WAGNER-MARTIN
University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

In addition to all the effective ways we approach Richard Wright's work, I'd like to suggest the usefulness of emphasizing that Uncle Tom's Children was a work of the 1930's depression. Turned on its head after more than a decade of unprecedented prosperity, the battered U.S. economy did its bit to create catastrophe for those American dreamers--black and white alike--who had migrated north to share in the prosperity of the urban, unionized labor force. What happened, in part, to the fiction of the 1930's, the decade when Wright was training himself as a writer, was that suddenly the child or the adolescent became a key protagonist. To represent unspeakable living conditions--genuine poverty, unfeigned hunger, a desperation that quickly gave way to a hardened aimlessness--writers focused on the innocent. Halford E. Luccock termed the shift between 1920s writing and 1930s as giving rise to "the emergence of hunger" in literature.

(cont.)

General ALA Information:

Preregistration conference fees will be $40 (with a special rate of $10 for independent scholars, retired individuals, and students). The hotel is offering a conference rate of $98 a night (single or double).

A welcoming party will be held on Thursday evening, May 22; the first session will begin Friday morning at 9 a.m. and a final celebration will follow the last session on Sunday at 5:30 p.m. You can make your hotel reservation by calling 1-800-535-1201 and requesting the American Literature Association rate.

Conference Director:
Professor Gloria Cronin
English Department
Brigham Young University
Provo, UT 84602
FAX: (801) 373-4661
Internet: croning@jkhbhrc.byu.edu
CLA Abstracts
(cont. from page 9)

CHIWENGO:

Both Abrahams and Wright's characters are defined and determined by the manichean evolutionary paradigms within which they unfold. While Abrahams celebrates the idyllic African past and the humanness and generosity of Africans, Wright, on the other hand, deplores the African American's lack of the latter, thus reinforcing the very stereotypes of the oppressor. Although both authors tell the saga of two boys who evolve from poverty to wealth and oppression to freedom, the freedom, achieved through literacy, that they both extol remains theoretical, for freedom results in their physical and mental displacements and alienations. Abrahams well states in Tell Freedom that his apprehension of his being-in-the-world stems from his readings of Negro writers. He suppresses, however, that Tell Freedom devised by Wright, is rethought and written through Black Boy. Abrahams' subjectivity comes into being, thus, solely in his relationship to Wright's experience and being.

WHATELY SMITH:

Vantage of using Cayton's materials to construct their biographies of Wright, and they appropriately acknowledge Cayton in their footnotes. Yet, a footnote is not enough. Cayton's "biography" is in "archival" form, and represents a "missing link" in the canonicity of chronicles representing Wright's life. The current MLA call for papers seems thematically to be focused on the role of the "archive."

This paper will focus on the collective representation of a figure, Wright, and subjectivity of the biographer. But more importantly, it will, through the archival materials of Cayton, address the matter of "claims of authenticity" as far as 1) Who's correctly telling the story; 2) the story represented; and 3) the authenticity of the biographer.

"Blueprint for Negro Writing," "How 'Bigger' Was Born," and the text of 12 Million Black Voices prove beyond a doubt his thorough knowledge of the strongest depression fiction. The most moving testimony to his understanding of the economic, racial, and political currents of the decade remains the earliest story in Uncle Tom's Children.

The heart of that opening story is the innocence, the youth and naivete, of the four black adolescent males. "Big Boy Leaves Home" not because he wants to, not because he has any place to go, but because otherwise he will be murdered. Like thousands of other men in the U.S., white and black, society has no room for Big Boy. It has wiped out three of his friends, and the narrative describes all three of those deaths--reserving the most space and terror for the brutal lynching, burning, and dismembering of his best buddy, Bobo. Wright adds his condemnation to the chorus of other writers compelled to draw characters who are disenfranchised, disoriented, hungry--true children of the Great Depression.

ALA Abstract
(cont. from page 10)

WAGNER-MARTIN:

Richard Wright's interest in such established proletarian writers as Jo Sinclair, William Rollins, Jr., Erskine Caldwell, Nelson Algren, the Hemingway of To Have and Have Not and the Steinbeck of The Grapes of Wrath, as well as his statements in
I write to announce the founding of The George Moses Horton Society for the Study of African American Poetry and to invite your membership in the organization. As you know, Horton was a poet enslaved in the Chatham County and Chapel Hill areas of North Carolina from his birth in the late eighteenth century until well after Emancipation. In April 1997, the University of North Carolina Press will publish The Black Bard of North Carolina: George Moses Horton and His Poetry, edited by Joan R. Sherman. It is a happy coincidence that this publication was in process even as the Horton Society was founded. In the spring of 1996, I conceptualized the Horton Society in an effort to encourage sustained scholarly focus on the works of African American poets and to foster presentation and publishing opportunities for that scholarship.

The Horton Society is an affiliate organization of the American Literature Association and will hold its inaugural meeting at the annual meeting of that association in Baltimore in May of 1997 (please check conference program for exact day, meeting time, and place). We invited suggestions at that meeting about how best to proceed with the work of the Horton Society. I realize that many of you may not be able to attend this initial meeting; please forward comments and suggestions to our mailing or email addresses.

From 3-5 April 1998, the Horton Society will hold its first conference in Chapel Hill—in conjunction with the first biannual North Carolina Literary Festival (more information in a future mailing). I anticipate a gathering that will include keynote addresses, panel sessions, and poetry readings. Several members of the Advisory Board have agreed to participate, and others are contemplating doing so. We will also send out a call for papers. To date, Yale Series of Young Poets winner Margaret Walker and Pulitzer Prize winning poets Rita Dove and Yusef Komunyakaa have agreed to read at the gathering; we will plan a scholarly panel on each of these poets. The University of North Carolina Press will publish a volume developed from papers presented at the conference. I invite you to mark your calendars and come to Chapel Hill for this historic occasion.

Our website address is: http://www.unc.edu/depts/csas/horton.

To join the George Moses Horton Society for the Study of African American Poetry, send your name, address, telephone number and email at home and at school (please indicate at which address you prefer to be reached). Also mention any of your current poetry projects.

Charter Membership dues are $100 for institutions, $35 for faculty, $15 for graduate students, and $25 for all others. Please make your check or money order payable to The George Moses Horton Society and return with your information to:

Ms. Lovalerie King, Secretary-Treasurer
The George Moses Horton Society
English/UNC, Chapel Hill
CB# 3520 Greenlaw Hall
Chapel Hill, NC 27599-3520
Renewal Notice

As you receive this issue of the Richard Wright Newsletter, we want to remind you that if you did not renew your membership in the Richard Wright Circle after receiving the Fall/Winter 1996 issue, now is the time for renewal. The yearly $10 membership fee runs for one calendar year and entitles you to two issues of the Newsletter: Fall/Winter and Spring/Summer. In order to receive the next issue and continue your membership, you need to fill out and send us the form below (to insure that we have your latest address) along with a $10 check or money order made out to the Richard Wright Circle. Please remember that your membership dues still constitute the primary funding for the Circle and Newsletter. Your cooperation in helping us to maintain the Circle and Newsletter is greatly appreciated.

Thanks to those subscribers who renewed after the last issue!

Richard Wright Circle Membership

Please Detach Here

Name: _____________________________________________________________

Address: __________________________________________________________

Telephone: (Home): ___________________ (Work): ____________________

E-Mail Address: ______________________ Fax#: ________________________

Area of Special Interest in Wright Studies: _____________________________

Other Scholarly Areas: _____________________________________________

Latest Publications: ________________________________________________

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