Langston Hughes, Rudolph Fisher, and Wallace Thurman
The Influence of Race, Class, Religion, and Calibanic Discourse
On Their Lives and Works

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FOREWORD

I, Royce Bryant Smith, was notified March 15, 2003 that I had been selected as Lane College’s representative to the united Negro College Fund Andrew F. Mellon – Benjamin Mays Minority Undergraduate Fellowship Program. I chose Dr. Patsy J. Daniels as my faculty mentor. In June of 2003, I was inducted into the Academy at the Mellon Minority Undergraduate Fellowship Program’s southern Region’s summer Institute as an official Mellon Fellow and scholar.

During the summer institute, professors of the academy, doctorial candidates, and graduate assistants assisted in helping the new fellows prepare a prospectus of scholarly work. Dr. Lydia English, Director of the Andrew F. Mellon Minority Undergraduate Program, Dr. Cynthia Neal-Spence, Director of the United Negro College Fund Mellon Minority Undergraduate Program, and Dr. Rudolph Byrd, Director of the United Negro College Fund Mellon summer Institute, coordinated a month long program dedicated to teaching the new fellows how to begin the writing process in view of writing the prospectus. Graduate assistants who gave on sight instruction and assistance were: Stacy Boyd, Lina Buffington, Vera Denise James, Renee Moore, and John Thabiti Willis. Staff members who assisted the various needs of the fellows were: Gabrielle Samuel-O’Brien, Ada Jackson, and Dr. Leroy Davis.

The following reflects the prospectus and research paper in fulfillment of The United Negro College Fund Andrew F. Mellon – Benjamin Mays Minority Undergraduate Fellowship Program submitted on April 20, 2004.
The Harlem Renaissance is the name given to the period in African American literary history from the end of World War I through the middle of the 1930s Great Depression. During this historical time period within the African American culture, writers produced a “sizable body of literature in the four prominent genres of poetry, fiction, drama, and essay” (Reuben). Paul E. Reuben says, “The Harlem Renaissance was more than just a literary movement; it included racial consciousness, ‘the back to Africa’ movement led by Marcus Garvey, racial integration, the explosion of music, particularly jazz, spirituals, and blues, painting, dramatic revues, and others” (Reuben). It was a time when African Americans began to fully explore themselves.

W.E.B. DuBois, a key player of the Harlem Renaissance and founder of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, introduced the notion of double consciousness in his book *The Souls of Black Folks*. DuBois said, “One never feels his twoness, - An American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder: (45). Carter G. Woodson, founder of the Association for the Study of Afro-American Life and Black History Week in America, wrote: “The program for the uplift of the Negro in this country must be based upon a scientific study of the Negro from within to develop in him the power to do for himself what his oppressors will never do to elevate him to the level of others” (144). Many important writers contributed to this flowering of African American culture and literature, including Langston Hughes, Rudolph Fisher, and Wallace Thurman.

Langston Hughes, Rudolph Fisher, and Wallace Thurman’s lives connected; their works were similar in tone even though different in content; hence, it is important to read these three authors in conjunction with one another. The reader can identify race, class, and religion as
major themes in the works of each. Further, Calibanic discourse, a relatively new theory of literary criticism, is reflected with the works of Hughes, Fisher, and Thurman.

In making an analysis of these authors, the use of poststructuralist thinking will serve as a key element in understanding the texts and the authors. Scott Carpenter defines in his book *Reading Lessons: An Introduction to Theory*: “Poststructuralists… are way of rapid conclusions… they like to pay a great deal of attention to detail” (54). Jacques Derrida’s theory of deconstruction which “Suggests that meanings are not limited to the association and oppositions within a given text; instead, words and images carry tremendous baggage, bearing traces of all past usages and associations” (qtd. In Carpenter 118) will also illuminate an examination of the authors and their work. Further, James W. Coleman’s Calibanic discourse can be applied to the authors’ works in order to verify his analysis of African American male writers of the twentieth century. Coleman defines Calibanic discourse as:

The perceived history and story of the black male in Western culture that has its genesis and tradition in language and nonlinguistic signs. It denotes slavery, proscribes freedom, proscribes sexuality, inferior character, and inferior voice. In summary, the black male is the slave or servant who is the antithesis of reason, civilized development, entitlement, freedom, and power of white men, and he never learns the civilized use of language. His voice is unreliable; his words fail to signify his humanity. He also preys on civilization and represents bestial, contaminating sexuality. Clearly, Western culture must confine the black male to roles and places befitting his inferiority, and/or it must punish him, and even brutalize and kill him, for his criminality and reprobate character. (Coleman 3)
Last, New Historicism may also be used as analysis of the three authors and their work. What a scene means and how we interpret it largely depends on the context in which “our reading of any action or utterance… requires that we understand the circumstance surrounding the object of study” (Carpenter 117).

In order to fully understand “what” the Harlem Renaissance was to American culture, one must first understand the historical dynamics and significance of the year 1919 when African American soldiers returned home from World War I and marched in a major parade in downtown Harlem. Historically, it was a time of pride for African Americans who had fought in Europe for the American cause. Upon their return, however, Jim Crow laws, lynching of African Americans, and segregation still ran rampant throughout the country for which these soldiers had gallantly fought. Alain Locke explains the general attitude of resentment of African Americans when he wrote “The New Negro” that appeared in *The Survey Graphics*, a national magazine devoted to sociology and social work, in 1925. Locke, in an attempt to dispel the national belief that African Americans were lazy, shiftless, and unable to be intellectual, wrote defiantly in regard to the American “race problem” about the “New Negro” who had emerged on the scene in open contrast to an old view of “white supremacy” within the culture. He contends that the “Sociologist, the Philanthropist, [and] the Race-Leader are not aware of the New Negro, but they are at a loss to account for him” (Locke 964).

The naming of the Harlem Renaissance came about as a result of a single event that took place in New York City’s Harlem district on May 1, 1925. *Opportunity*, a magazine established by the Urban League under the direction of Charles S. Johnson, sponsored a banquet to honor the winners of the literary contest that it had recently conducted. The cash prizes that were to be awarded totaled $470 and were made available by the wife of Henry Goddard Leach, editor of
The Forum magazine. In order to make the event a socially “worthy” event in the eyes of both white and African American people, “the distinguished whites” had agreed to serve on the panel of literary contest judges alongside the African American judges. The judges were “Carl Van Doren, Zona Gale, Fannie Hurst, Dorothy Canfield Fisher, and Alain Locke… for short stories; Witter Bynner, John Farrar, Clement Wood, and James Weldon Johnson for poetry; Eugene O’Neill, Montgomery Gregory, Alexander Woolcott, and Robert Benchelty for drama; Van Wyck Brooks, John Macy, Henry Goddard Leach, and L. Hollingsworth Wood for essays; and Eugene Kincl Jones, Frank Lorimer, and Lillian Alexander for personal experiences” (Lewis 113). Three hundred sixteen people attended the gala at The Fifth Avenue Restaurant. The winners included: John Mattheus, who won first place in his short story writing, Zora Neal Hurston, who won second place for her short story “Spunk,” Eric Walron, who won third place for his short story “Voodoo’s Revenge,” and John Home, who won honorable mention in short story writing; E. Franklin Frazier won first place for his essay on social equality while Sterling Brown took second place for his essays on Roland Hayes; Countee Cullen and Langston Hughes tied for third place in poetry, while Cullen also won second place in poetry on that evening. Hughes, however, won, first place in poetry during the contest with the poem “The Weary Blues.” So excited by the poem, James Weldon Johnson read the poem at the banquet:

Drowning a drowsy syncopated tune,

Rocking back and forth to a mellow croon.

I heard a Negro play.

Down on Lenox Avenue the other night

By the pale dull pallor of an old gas light

He did a lazy sway…
He did a lazy sway…

To the tune o’ those Weary Blues.

With his ebony hands on each ivory key

He made that poor piano moan with melody.

O Blues!

Swaying to and fro on his rickety stool

He played that sad raggy tune like a musical fool.

Sweet Blues!

Coming from a black man’s soul.

O Blues! (qtd. In Lewis 114)

It was the “first time [that] something of the soul of the black migrant had combined with the art and spirit of a superior poet” (Lewis 114). The nation was awed by the talent displayed on that evening by the young artists. The whites praised the event, as did the African Americans. The New York Herald newspaper, in praise of the banquet, coined the term “Negro Renaissance” (Berry 62). Because this event took place in the Harlem district of New York City to which many successful African Americans had begun to move in an attempt to find a better life, the name “Harlem Renaissance” came into existence. Harlem, as viewed by Alain Locke, was “the first concentration in history of so many diverse elements of Negro life” (Locke 963). Locke further exclaims that Harlem was “significant [and] prophetic” (964) of how members of the African Diaspora socially, intellectually, artistically, and even financially played a major role in the development of the United State of America.

Race, class, and religion can clearly be noted as themes constantly found throughout the writings of Hughes, Fisher, and Thurman. Each uniquely contributed to the New Negro
Movement, i.e. The Harlem Renaissance, with a passion and zeal that has left readers spellbound for years after all three of their deaths.

A review of their lives may cast light on their passion and zeal as artists, activists, and great thinkers and how they inevitably became the precursors of modern African American literature. Langston Hughes, born James Mercer Langston Hughes, on February 1, 1902 in Joplin, Missouri, was raised in Lawrence, Kansas and Cleveland, Ohio by his mother and grandmother. His father, James Hughes, deserted the family and moved to Mexico while Hughes was still an infant. Hughes never truly forgave his father for this abandonment, yet he forged a life without him. Through life experiences, Hughes became the most traveled of the three authors discussed. After his graduation from high school, Hughes visited his father in Mexico before he matriculated at Columbia University in 1921. The strong movement that had begun in Harlem in 1919 pulled the creative and eager young man there. Economic challenges faced him in Harlem which soon led to his obtaining a job on a cargo ship and sailing for Europe and West Africa. He returned to Harlem in 1924 and entered Lincoln University where he remained until graduation in 1927. He was able to do this with the aid of a white patron, Mrs. Charlotte Osgood Mason, who also subsidized Zora Neal Hurston, Alain Locke, Wallace Thurman, and other African American writers of the era. Hughes was historically noted for having affairs abroad which included an affair with Oriental ballerina Si-lan Chen (Berry 184), a Russian actress [whom] he called “Natashsa” (Berry 187), and was said to have married Ann Hawkins, a white woman, while living in Carmel, California in 1933, yet there was never a marriage license produced nor could he have “kept it a secret for long” (Berry 217). Further, Hughes was engaged in a long term love affair with Carl Van Vecthen and was noted for being Van Vecthen’s “Negro boyfriend” (Lewis 180) among the Harlem Renaissance circle of literati.
Five years older than Hughes, Rudolph “Bud” Fisher was born in Washington, D.C. on May 9, 1897 and raised by his parents in Providence, Rhode Island. Fisher’s father was a clergyman. Fisher’s mother was a social worker. Fisher graduated with honors from Providence’s classical High school in 1915. He received the Bachelor’s degree in English and the Master’s of Arts degree at Brown University. In 1924, he graduated from Howard University Medical School with highest honors. He met his wife, Jane Ryder, in 1924. They married in 1925 and had one son, Hugh, in 1926. Fisher was most noted for his literary contributions to the Harlem Renaissance; however, he was also an accomplished musician. In fact, he was “responsible for arranging a number of songs for Paul Robeson’s first New York concert” (BRIW).

A few months younger than Langston Hughes, Wallace Thurman was born in Salt Lake City, Utah on August 16, 1902. Like Hughes, he was raised by his mother and grandmother. Thurman matriculated at the University of Utah before transferring to the University of Southern California in 1922. While in California, Thurman founded a magazine entitled Outlet, hoping to begin a literary Renaissance in the West. Outlet, the first of his many ventures, only lasted six months, and in 1925 Thurman headed east to Harlem. He took a job as a reporter and editor at The Looking Glass and then became managing editor of The Messenger. His editorial expertise earned him his notoriety in the Harlem Renaissance Movement. He met Louise Thompson in early 1928; they were married on August 22, 1928 and separated six months later. Thurman, considered the “leading bohemian intellectual” (Berry 100) within the Harlem Renaissance circle, was said to have been in such awe of Louise Thompson upon meeting her that instantly he proposed. This was typical of Thurman’s spontaneous nature. After discovering that Thurman participated in homosexual activities, Thompson filed for a divorce in which she was awarded
alimony payments. Thompson originally accepted a “twenty-five dollar annuity and a Reno divorce – then backed out of the agreement in order to be with her dying mother” (Lewis 279). Hence, Thurman did not pay the alimony and remained against the divorce and he always firmly insisted that Louise was his “secret love” (Berry 213) until his death.

Curiously, the three authors’ lives touched one another’s for over a decade. In 1927 and 1928, Wallace Thurman and Langston Hughes lived in the same boarding house at 267 West 136th Street in New York while Rudolph fisher was beginning his medical practice in Harlem. Sometimes, the authors could be insulting to one another but more often they provided both praise and constructive criticism of one another’s work. On one occasion, Thurman wrote Hughes a note in regard to a submission that Hughes had made to *The Messenger*, a magazine that Thurman served as editor for in 1927, that said the short stories were “very bad stories, but better than any others he [Thurman] could find, so he published them” (Berry 41). Hughes took the comment in stride and without remorse. Thurman typically was “one of the most talented, well-read, neurotic writers” (Bell 145) of the literati; hence, ill feelings were seldom harbored among the three men for lengthy periods. Bruce Nugent, who once lived with Thurman at the 136th Street address in Harlem, wrote: “Wallie had a fascination for people that only the devil could have- an almost diabolical power. Langston was the opposite; he couldn’t touch anyone without making them better” (Berry 76). Fisher, in contrast to the lives of Thurman and Hughes, “managed an intermingling of kindly satire and bittersweet tensions in his fiction” (Kent 45), which normally heralded a gentler criticism from the Harlem literati.
RACE

Race, as a study or theory, was a major and imminent factor throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. When race was approached as a study of human societies, the general approach to race was Social Darwinism which suggested that race was “thought to represent different stages of the evolutionary scale with the white race... at the top” (Gossett 144). Therefore, the leading society, usually white, represented the power and influence of its various racial accumulations. This society had the power over all of its cultures and subcultures, the amount and quality of the intermixture that may be between it and the governance over education, philosophy, religion, and art. Heredity thus became important in the conditioning of the development of a subculture had to successfully be accomplished.

Racism in the United States began prior to the Civil War yet rose to greater heights during and after it. Racism remained a social part of American history in education, politics, and even in religion for a century after the emancipation Proclamation of 1863; consequently, during the period of 1880-1920, most Americans “generally lack[ed] any perception of the Negro as a human being with potentialities for improvement” (Gossett 286). Because stolen Africans had been slaves, whites could not bring themselves to feel that these poor creatures could be equal in any fashion to them. In order to successfully complete such a thought, one must delude oneself to think and feel that another human is less than human in order to enslave him. Hence, the difference in attitude toward African Americans in the America was strikingly opposite. In the South, the propagandist for slavery portrayed African Americans as “occupying a condition for which God and nature had fashioned him – as loyal, devoted, willing to be led, childlike in his helplessness” (261). The North’s view was different in that the abolitionists saw African Americans as “the pathetic victim of a cruel system; but this did not mean that he was the
inherent equal of the white man” (261) Several books were written by racist men that helped to promote racism within the United States against the African American. Hinton R. Helper published *Nojoque* in 1867. Although a Union loyalist, he hated African Americans. Such was his hatred that titles within his books were “The Negro’s vile and vomit-Provoking Stench” (qtd. in Gossett 262). He promotes that “the color white has always been in nature a thing of life, health, and beauty, whereas the color black has always been a symbol of ugliness, disease, and death” (qtd. In Gossett 262).Similarly, in 1868, Dr. John Van Everie wrote *White Supremacy and Negro Subordination*. Van Everie was completely against the education of African Americans, noting scientifically in his book that education would “do irrevocable damage to his [the Negro’s] brain [by] develop[ing] the Negro ‘a broad forehead and small cerebellum’” (qtd. in Gossett 163). In the academy, one of the leading sociologists at the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century was Lester F. Ward. Ward did not believe in social Darwanism and was heralded as a champion who spoke against it. He was also heralded as “the St. Augustine of the American cult of science” (160) and was credited with doing more than anyone else to formulate the basic pattern of the American concept of planned society” (160). Ward opposed the view that to improve society one need improve heredity. Ward also “drew a distinction between the ‘historic’ or ‘favored’ race which had originated in Europe” (Gossett 164) while arguing that the races of black, red, or yellow were inferior, although they had the ability to do as well as whites. He supported statements made by Auguste Comte which said that blacks were equivalent in work ethics, craftsmanship, and even art as whites, yet they were inferior in intelligence (165). In government, the important issue was the vote and the education of the African American and how it would affect the United States. James K. Vardaman, a governor of Mississippi, in vehement opposition against African American equality, commented
on philanthropists who funded African American colleges in the south: “What the North is sending south is not money but dynamite… this education is ruining our Negroes. They’re demanding equality” (qtd. in Gossett 277). The executive and judicial branches of the United States Government were both in agreement that the African American had no place in America. In the Supreme Court case *Plessy v. Ferguson* the doctrine of separate but equal schools was enforced by the government, which for African Americans meant separate and far less equal. Theodore Roosevelt outgrew his willingness to support the “Negro effort” during his second campaign for President. He wrote in 1906 to Owen Wister: “Now as to the [N]egroes! I entirely agree with you that as a race and in the mass they are altogether inferior to whites” (qtd. in Gossett 268). William Howard Taft began his administration in 1909 by “assuring the white south that he would appoint no federal officials in their region who would be offensive to them” (Gossett 279). Woodrow Wilson’s administration took the most drastic action against African Americans. With Wilson’s expressed approval, the federal civil service workers were segregated by race in their places of employment which also included separate eating and toilet facilities. Post Office and Treasury officials in the south were given freedom to “discharge or downgrade Negro employee” (279).

Books, pamphlets, and articles of racism were dedicated to the promotion of hatred for African Americans during the period of 1865 to 1915. Torrents of books were published during this era that tended to reflect the general opinions of Hinton R. Helper and John Van Evrie. Books in print during the era that promoted the inferiority of African Americans include: Charles Carroll’s *The Negro a Beast*; or *In the Image of God*, William P. Calhoun’s *The Caucasian and the Negro in the United States*, William b. Smith’s *The Color Line: A Brief in Behalf of the Unborn*, and Robert W. Shufeldt’s *The Negro, A Menace to American Civilization*. Similarily, in
1884, Nathaniel Southgate Shaler published in the *Atlantic* his views on the “Negro Problem.” Shaler contended that “what progress the Negro had made he [the Negro] owed to the discipline of slavery. As a free man, the Negro showed a strong tendency, which was probably ineradicable, to return to his naturally savage state” (qtd. in Gossett 281). The statistician for the Prudential Life Insurance Company Frederick L. Hoffman wrote a book in 1896 entitled *Race Traits and Tendencies of the American Negro* which was widely quoted from by southern politicians. Hoffman was convinced that “the high incidence of tuberculosis, syphilis, gonorrhea, scrofula, and other diseases among Negroes would lead to their extinction as a race” (Gossett 281).

Lynching, as a result of the end of the Civil War and Reconstruction, became a popular mode of tyranny within the United States. Statistics on lynching began to be kept in the 1880s. Between 1882 and 1888, more whites were lynched than African Americans. However, from 1893 to 1904, an average of 100 African Americans per year was lynched, compared with an average of 29 whites. In the thirty-three year period between 1883 and 1915, the annual toll of African Americans that had been lynched never fell below 50 except once in 1915 (Gossett 269).

W.E.B. DuBois, in refute to Mississippi governor James Kimble Vardaman’s position that “the Negro was a lazy, lying, lustful, animal which no conceivable amount of training can transform into a tolerable citizen” (qtd. in Gossett 271) easily said that “anyone who is nostalgic for the superior virtue of the past should read a history of the lynching in this country” (DuBois 63).

W.E.B. DuBois discussed the dismay of African American at the turn of the twentieth century when he introduced the idea of “double consciousness” in *The Soul of Black Folk*. He elaborately discusses how “one ever feels his twoness, an American, a Negro; two souls, two
thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body” (DuBois 45). DuBois further questions: “Is the unwritten law… that the character of all Negroes unknown to the mass of the community must be vouched for by some white man[?]” (177). Like many other African Americans, DuBois had grown tired of lynching, segregation, and Jim Crow laws that required “separate facilities for Negroes” (Gossett 274).

Race therefore played a significant role in the Harlem Renaissance. Whether to bring to the surface the beauty of the African American culture or to dispel the belief that African Americans were subhuman because of their race, this period proved that African Americans were indeed intellectual, artistic, and creative.

In his autobiography The Big Sea, Langston Hughes creatively and wittily wrote about Jim Crowism in the south. He tells the story of traveling through Tennessee to Mississippi with students from Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee. He took the trip after a cancellation from the Y.W.C.A. who had originally asked him to read his poetry, as Fisk had, during a conference. The conference was cancelled because the Mississippi River had flooded out many of the delegates who would be in attendance. Hughes decided to travel the countryside of the south with his first stop being Beale Street in Memphis, Tennessee. He explained how he knew that Jim Crow laws forbade African American passengers to sit wherever they wished on the train. Hughes and his Fisk entourage sat in the Jim Crow car that was located near the engine. Because the sun was bright and cinders flew into the car, Hughes put on “a pair of smoked glasses” (286) to cover his eyes. Shortly the train stopped to water the engines. He and his entourage stepped off of the train and onto the platform and bought ice cream from the vendors. In jest, one of the Fisk students whispered in his ear: “Mr. Hughes, don’t you know that the white folk down South don’t allow Negroes to wear smoked glasses?” (Hughes 286). Immediately he took the glasses
off and looked around to see if any white person had seen him with the glasses on. The students roared in laughter, and he realized that it had all been a joke played on him. However, the reality of the incident was that it could have very well been an actual occurrence, and Hughes was not interested in being lynched in Tennessee or in Mississippi. When the entourage made it to Vicksburg, Mississippi, Hughes’s comments that the only thing that he remembered from the town was a riverfront café with “marvelously misspelled signs on the wall:

ALL FIGHTIN MUS BE DID OUTSIDE

And another:

IF YOU WANTS TO PLAY THE DOZENS FO HOME

and

WHEN YOU EAT, PAY ER RUN

CAUSE MR. BOSS GOT HES GUN (Hughes 287).

This was not Hughes’s first encounter with racism in the United States. Hughes, although he loved Lincoln University, grew to resent it. Lincoln had been established in 1854 as the first college in the North for black men. However, in the nineteen twenties Lincoln had no African Americans on its faculty, administrative staff, or board of trustees. Hughes soon learned that the freedom of the campus was a function of the color lines “that cuts across American life, dividing the white from the non-white… the dark students on the campus, the white teachers in their houses across the road—meeting a few hours a day for classes, and that was just about all that” (Hughes 309). In his senior year, Hughes wrote a research paper that tabulated whether or not the junior and senior class preferred an all white faculty. He was shocked to find that his results were sixty three percent of his classmates preferred the all white faculty. Hughes, in obvious disgust, wrote, “it seems to me the height of absurdity for an institution designed for the training of
Negro leadership to support and uphold... the unfair and discriminatory practices of the American color line” (Hughes 307, 308).

Comparably, Wallace Thurman lashes out at the comfort of African Americans during the era with the notion that whites were superior. In Thurman’s *Infants of The Spring* an argument occurs between Samuel, a white patron of Negro art, and Raymond, the protagonist of the story and secretly representative of Wallace Thurman. Raymond accuses Samuel of being a hypocrite and a racist. Samuel, in ager says: “That’s what I say about you Negroes. You don’t know a friend when you have one. You don’t know how to treat decent white people who mean you good. You’d rather lick the boots of trash” (Thurman 138). A fight ensues when Raymond throws an empty glass at Samuel and in return Samuel kicks Raymond. The room becomes an uproar with activity. The next day, Stephen, the white man who has moved to Harlem against the wishes of his friend Samuel, confronts Raymond. Raymond and Stephen are yet friends. Stephen wants an explanation for the agitation and “tongue lashing” that led to the fight. Raymond responds with a very vicious reply of the results of white people who become Negro crusaders. In a clever manner, Thurman expresses his own disgust for the white patrons of the Harlem Renaissance through the use of Raymond. Raymond says, “They have regimented their sympathies and fawn around Negroes with a cry in their heart and superiority in their head. It’s a new way to get a thrill” (140). He, Raymond, further criticizes African Americans. Raymond goes on to say, “being a slave race actuated by slave morality, what else could you expect? Within themselves and by their every action they subscribe to the doctrine of Nordic superiority and the louder they cry against it the more they mark themselves inferiors” (140). Unfortunately, Thurman did not have many nice things to say about the Harlem literati as the members of the Renaissance referred of themselves. He suggests in *Infants of The Spring* through the voice of
Raymond that “the more intellectual and talented Negroes of my generation are amongst the most pathetic people in the world today” (Thurman 225).

Wallace Thurman was the first of the Harlem Renaissance authors to write about discrimination among African Americans in regard to color. Thurman, being the darkest of the three authors in this piece, could never quite break free of his sense of “gloom and despair and rejection and self-abnegation” (Jarraway 44). In *The Blacker the Berry*, through the use of the character Emmy Lou Morgan, Thurman tells a story of how a dark skinned black person lived in America in the early twentieth century. The problem Emmy Lou refers to in *The Blacker the Berry* is not “being black” or even being a Negro, the problem in her mind is being “too black […] dipped, as it were, in indigo ink when there were so many more pleasing colors on nature’s palette” (22). Thurman’s pain was almost frighteningly torturous as he describes Emmy Lou in the opening of *The Blacker the Berry*. Thurman describes Emmy Lou’s family’s reaction to her complexion in a manner that any person who was not “fair skinned” or had a “light complexion” could relate easily as they knew what she said was true. He describes her complexion in such a manner: “It was an acquired family characteristic, this moaning and grieving over the color of her skin. Everything possible has been done to alleviate the unhappy condition, every suggested agent had been employed, but her skin, despite bleaching, scourging, and powderings, had remained black – fast black – as nature had planned and effected” (21).

In an attempt to escape the trials of prejudice in small towns, Emmy Lou ventures on to Harlem. Here she becomes involved in a relationship with Alva. After long suffering with him, she realizes that “she had been nothing more than a commercial proposition to him at all times” and she suspected that he “didn’t care for dark women either” (Thurman 212). Thurman, disguised this time as the character Truman Walter, “levels the most devastating critique of
Emmy Lou quite determinant approach to racial individuation inciting her victimization” (Jarraway 47). When “all… you know,” Jarraway explains, is “that white is the symbol of everything pure and good, whether that everything be concrete or abstract,” then “potential[ly] we[…] all [become] color-prejudiced as long as we remain in [an] environment [where] prejudices are always caused by differences [and where] the majority group sets the standard” (143, 146).

Rudolph Fisher, the least radical of the three authors mentioned in this work, worried that “Harlem’s intellectual and artistic elite would be crushed by frantically stimulated whites” (Lewis 165). He was disturbed over the mocking of the culture of his people and over the way white had begun to perceive the Harlem Renaissance. In *The Conjure-Man Dies: A Mystery Tale of Dark Harlem*, Fisher deals very cleverly with race issues in America. Fisher does not focus on abuse of the race as did Hughes and Thurman, but he focuses more on telling his tale. This novel sit he first mystery novel ever written by an African American author during that time. Hence, when describing Perry Dart, the protagonist of the novel, Fisher says that Perry had been chosen to be a detective in Harlem by the white-led city administration because “his generously pigmented skin rendered him invisible in the dark, a conceivably great advantage to a detective who did most of his work at night” (Fisher 14). Certainly this description ties together Thurman’s feelings of African Americans of darker complexions serving in lesser positions in life than did those who were lighter in complexion and closer to “white.” This, of course, supports Thurman’s view that there was racial prejudice even among African Americans that had been inbred in them through discrimination. However, Fisher was aghast that these same people, the whites, had by the height of the Harlem Renaissance, flocked into Harlem in an exploitive manner. As a consequence to their arrival, the African Americans who lived there had begun to
do everything to cater to them. This disturbed fisher all the more. So moved, he wrote an article for *American Mercury*, entitled “The Caucasian Storms Harlem.” He was so moved that he wrote, “The best of Harlem’s black cabarets have changed their names and turned white” (qtd. in Lewis 165).

Langston Hughes, who had Charlotte Mason as a patron, could not escape the exploitation of white patrons of the art either. In his growing resentment of Mason, he began to rebel against her. Mrs. Mason wanted Hughes to create works in a primitive manner. Hughes did not feel this primitive nature of Africa that she desired (Berry 104). In a revolutionary move, Hughes penned the poem “Pride”:

**Pride**

Let all who will

Eat quietly the bread of shame.

I cannot,

Without complaining loud and long,

Tasting its bitterness in my throat,

And feeling to my very soul

It’s wrong.

For honest work

You proffer me poor pay

For honest dreams

Your spit is in my face,

And so my fist is clenched

Today-
To strike your face. (qtd. in Berry 106)

Inevitably, the two, Hughes and Mason, broke with one another. Hughes sadly was to discover that his patron’s “interest did not extend to any relationship in which she could not exert control over him” (Berry 107).

Wallace Thurman recognized the tragedy of exploitation by whites and the self-hate of African Americans. “We’re a curiosity,” Thurman says through the voice of Raymond in Infants of the Spring. “… even to ourselves. None of us seem [sic] able to rise above our environment” (Thurman 221). Unfortunately, even Thurman himself could not rise above the self-hate found within himself and eventually died at an early age. However, his “bohemian” beliefs would not allow him to label himself as a “Negro artist,” but merely an artist. Thurman held fast to the conviction that “A Negro who achieves personal success [can] fight his way past racial barriers. I still believe that despite my own disillusionment on many occasions” (qtd. in Lewis 278). Further, Thurman never truly surrendered his faith “in the power of the arts to ennoble and transfigure the individual of genius” (Lewis 280).

In his fight against racism in America, Wallace Thurman “stoically… accepted the refusal of a Los Angeles theatre to sell him a center aisle ticket (on five occasions) to [view] Harlem, his own successful Broadway play” (Lewis 278 that was on tour. He had been told that there were no seats available. After several tries, he was sold an orchestra seat ticket. Similarly, Langston Hughes faced the same difficulty. On the production of Hughes’ play Mulatto that was held at the Vanderbilt Theatre in New York City, Martin Jones, director and agent for the play, had not permitted Hughes and African American members of the cast any complimentary tickets to the play and excluded them from a buffet dinner that was held backstage after the performance. Hughes, in an effort to combat the racism wrote: “At first at the Vanderbilt, the box
office tried not to sell Negroes seats in the orchestra. When I learned of this, I not only protested, I bought as many orchestra seats myself as I could afford in the very center of the theatre. These I gave to the darkest Negroes I knew, including Claude McKay” (qtd. in Berry 241). In this case, as in others, it is clear that racism is indistinct from classism.
CLASS

When class as an identity is discussed in American literature, it is often hard to separate class from the discussion of race as an identity. Usually, there is a very thin line between class and race in American literature, especially African American literature and society. African Americans throughout American history, like many other ethnic minorities that were not of European decent, were generally looked upon as inferior. Prior to the Harlem Renaissance period in literature and art, there had not been a “widespread collective movement among African Americans to revise stereotypical notions of African Americans through art, literature, and politics” (Jones 10) in America. This period dispelled many cultural beliefs that African Americans were inferior largely due to a major aspect that often goes unnoticed. First, it takes ingenious to learn the language of the oppressor. Second, it is even more genius to learn to write and communicate in this language when the oppressed is considered inferior to the oppressor.

In the discussion of class as an identity, one must first note that African Americans were robbed of their native language, culture, and religion through slavery. As a result of this loss, they were forced to speak in the language of their captors or slave owners and adapt to the culture of those oppressors. Consequently, in this adaptation, the oppressors, in their superior thinking mindset, never felt that the oppressed would culturally invent a second culture or sub-culture within the larger culture. Patsy J. Daniels, author of The Voice of the Oppressed in the Language of the Oppressor, details connections of how “writer[s] use the language of the oppressor to manufacture or invent a cultural space for himself or herself from which to speak” (Daniels 5). Thus, African Americans were forced to create a voice or space from which to speak. The Harlem Renaissance, historically, proved to be a time when white America began to
take note of the African American voice. It was also a very conflicting time within the African American culture concerning “which” voice best represents the African American culture.

After writing *The Blacker the Berry*, Wallace Thurman received terrible reviews for his novel partly because African Americans were not quite ready to face the fact that they too had supported a form of segregation and prejudice within African American culture. Thurman writes, in *The Black the Berry*, about Emma Lou’s grandmother and her role as the founder of the Boise, Idaho’s Blue Vein Society. As founder of the society, Emma Lou’s grandmother was opposed to Emma Lou’s mother marrying a dark skinned man. Further, as the leader of the Blue Vein Society, it was her duty to defend the rules set forth by the organization in regard to the mixing of blood. Thurman discredits the general thought and propaganda of the era that promoted the idea that people of color were inferior to white people. Hence, the complexities of the intellectualism that began to separate African Americans based on the color of their skin was denounced in *The Blacker the Berry*. It was generally believed in African American culture during this period of time that if one was fairer skinned toned then his intelligence was higher than a person of a darker hue because genetically he had the genes of the intellectual race, i.e. the white race. This notion, of course, supports the Darwinian theory that “evolving institutions and civilizations… change gradually… as biological organisms change their physical characteristics” (Gossett 144). Hence, if one was superior in intellect because he or she was white, then a person who was partially white, if married to another partially white person and produced offspring, would eventually, through generations of this type of careful genetic engineering, produce a white intellectual being who would fit intelligently into American society and culture. Langston Hughes, Rudolph Fisher, and Wallace Thurman lived during an era when “The Blue Vein Society” was at its height. Blue Vein Societies promoted discrimination within the African
American culture. The Blue Vein Society originated in Nashville, Tennessee where “admittance was only granted to blacks whose skin was light enough to make visible the bluish-purple veins of their wrists” (Gullickson 1). These societies attempted to preserve the “distinct freeborn mulatto status which existed before the [Civil] war” (Gullickson 1). The Blue-Veins felt that they brought to the African American culture superior resources than did the darker hued African Americans. For one to be a Blue-Vein, one would have to be a descendant of the white slave master who was also the oppressor. The oppressor, then, was supposed to be superior in intellect, religion, and culture to the oppressed who of course is the slave. This makes the Blue-Vein closer to the oppressor through association.

Wallace Thurman, in *The Blacker the Berry*, discusses the atrocious behavior of African Americans during this period. Emmy Lou, the main character in the novel, beings to face the prejudice of “fair sinned” African Americans and their refusal to accept darker hued African Americans into “society.” The practice of the Blue-Veins, as Thurman explains, was to intermingle among one another so that “the grandchildren of the blue veins could easily go over into the white race and become assimilated so that problems of race would plague them no more” (Thurman 29). Ironically, Emma Lou, a very dark skinned woman who has been ostracized by society does not realize her own internalized snobbery and prejudices created by those same people within the African American society who had rejected her all of her life. Emma Lou, being a granddaughter of the Blue Vein Society considers Hazel Mason a barbarian and she “resented being approached by anyone so flagrantly inferior, any one so noticeably a typical southern darky, who had no business obtruding into the more refined scheme of things” (Thurman 42). Emma Lou had met Hazel Mason while attending college at the University of Southern California (USC). Mason was the daughter of a black man who had found oil on his
farm, thus establishing his wealth. While at USC, Emma Lou asks another associate, Grace, who had been cast out of the social circle of the collegiate life why she had not been asked to pledge into the Greek letter sorority which had been established by the “colored girls” on campus. Grace explains to her that the sorority would not pledge either of them because “you are not a high brown or half white” (Thurman 56). Emma Lou soon learns that regardless of her social status of being the granddaughter of the founder of Boise’s Blue Vein Society, she was yet too dark to even be considered for membership for the Greek letter organizations. After Emma Lou’s experiences at USC, she escapes to Harlem. She soon learns that even Harlem, the Mecca of African American culture during this period, is “just as color conscious as other African Americans” (De Jongh 43). She laments on one occasion to Alva, her lover, “Who wouldn’t be color-conscious when everywhere you go people are always talking about color?” (Thurman 179).

According to James De Jongh, Rudolph Fisher, who also suggests the color consciousness of Harlem in *The Walls of Jericho*, wrote this short story in a manner in which the “ironies of passing, of racist uplifts of the race, and of interracial bigots” (De Jongh 44) stand out among the usual themes found within his work. Fisher’s *The Walls of Jericho* is structured around a remote, incongruous analogy between the Biblical legend of Joshua and the character Joshua Jones. The novel reveals Fisher’s ironic view of “walls people build around their neighborhoods” (Bell 139). In its modern context, however, the novel signifies the “external reality of the color line that encircled the growing Harlem colony during the 1920s and the disparity between the surface behavior and deeper self of the characters” (Bell 139). Likewise, Jinx and Bubba, the two main characters found in *The Conjure-Man Dies*, constantly use a barrage of color-conscious aggression toward one another, which inevitably denies them the
opportunity to become friends. Fisher conceals, until the end, the plot reversal which is that light-skinned blacks are rising in stature because they have begun to move into Harlem’s “most exclusive and all white Court Avenue” (De Jongh 44) and yet the dark skinned blacks are in complete opposition to this move. In his writing, Fisher more cleverly hides the ills of color-consciousness within the race than does Thurman in his own. Although Thurman uses color realistically in _The Blacker the Berry_, it usually becomes a “metaphor for condition” (Williams 286). This inevitably promotes a slight aspect of the “protest novel” in that most of the oppression applied to Emma Lou Morgan, the main character, is not by whites but by blacks. Neither was Hughes exempt from this form of protest in his writing. Hughes produced the poem “Cross” which says:

_Cross_

My old man’s a white man
And my mother’s black.
If ever I cursed my white old man
I take my curses back.

If ever I cursed my black old mother
And wished she were in hell,
I’m sorry for that evil wish
And now I wish her well.

My old man died in a fine big house.
My ma died in a shack.
I wonder where I’m gonna die,
Being neither white nor black. (qtd. in Berry 64)
The figurative nature of the poem suggests the perils that one of mixed descent or a mulatto must feel in life. However, during this period in the history of America, it was still common place to be of “white” descent which, of course, posed a problem within the culture, especially when intelligence was merited by skin color. Subsequently, where Fisher viewed color prejudice with slight amusement and Hughes with indifference, Thurman lashes out in bitter rage. Thurman realizes that “color prejudice is not only the cardinal vice of white American society [it is also] the source of much tragicomic nature of the Afro-American experience within the black community itself” (Bell 149). Hence, it was Thurman’s satire that history records as being successful in “unmasking the hypocrisy and self-righteousness of the leaders of the race” (149) through his novel The Blacker the Berry, whereas both Fisher’s and Hughes’ work vaguely brought color consciousness to the forefront of the Harlem Renaissance thinking. Perhaps Fisher and Hughes were less passionate because they were lighter in complexion than was Thurman, yet Thurman’s goal became a “form of humanism that sought to lift lower-class blacks out of their ethnic community to spurious perfection of assimilation into the larger white community” (149). This assimilation into the white community was the goal of the majority of the black middle class during the Harlem Renaissance era, which resulted only in “an alliance with white working class” (149). As a result, sarcasm, exaggeration, invective, and irony were all used in the “service of satire [in order to] comment on intraracial discrimination and racial chauvinism, sparing neither the man on the street nor the leaders of the race” (149). However, the character of Stephen, a white character who is part of Negeratti Manor in Infants of the Spring asks Raymond during a debate: “you stand on a peak alone, nonchalant, unconcerned… Propogandists you despise. Illusion about Negroes you have none. Your only plea is that they accept themselves and be accepted by others as human. But what the hell does it all mean?... Are you as emancipated as
you claim? Aren’t you, too, hindered by some racial complex?” (Thurman 60). Thurman was inclined not to understand the complexities of racism and classism and was thus shocked at a review by Eunice Hunton Carter published in the May 1929 edition of the *Journal of Negro Life* which stated: “Mr. Thurman has become a devotee of the most unfashionable of American literary cults – that [is] dedicated to the exploitation of vices of the Negro of the lowest stratum of society and to the mental debauching of the negroes in general” (Bell 162). Further, Alain Locke commented on Thurman in a letter to Charlotte Osgood Mason: “The novel is so poorly done it hardly seems possible that the best-read, most brilliant, and most uncompromising of the Harlem artist could have written it” (qtd. in Lewis 277). Aubrey Bowser lamented in *The Amsterdam News*, “white authors do not need to write against Negroes anymore… the Negroes are writing against themselves” (qtd. in Lewis 239). Hughes, on the to her hand, praised Thurman for the “gorgeous book” and predicted [that] it would ‘complicate things immeasurably’” (qtd. in Lewis 238).

African Americans could not accept protest against color consciousness or prejudice within the race during the Harlem Renaissance era because it made them view their own internal social condition. Their own condition very generally supported the ‘blue vein” ways of thought and action, yet they did not want to own this ugly fact. More often than not, W.E.B. Du Bois considered his “talented tenth” to be members of a fairer skinned society from the African American community. Subsequently, W.E.B. Du Bois, Alain Locke, James Weldon Johnson, and other notable writers began to be looked upon as a “dying” generation of thinkers who were being replaced by a new Negro thinker. Du Bois negatively reviewed Rudolph Fisher’s *The Walls of Jericho* and as a result met a public attack from Wallace Thurman. Du Bois, in his review, questioned why fisher’s “glimpse of the better class of Negro” (qtd. in Lewis 229 were
not equivalent to Fisher’s own “blood line” from his own family. In condemning Fisher’s novel, Thurman felt that Du Bois had unfairly criticized “the first novel written by a Negro which does not seem to be struggling for breath because the author insists upon being heavier handed with either propaganda… or with atmosphere” (Lewis 229). For Thurman, Fisher’s satire made a “more reasonable and reasoned point [that] expose[ed] the cleavages within the Afro-American world” (Lewis 230).

Another element that plagued the Harlem Renaissance was the exploitation by white patrons of the African American artists in a grotesque support of the African American cause. During the Harlem Renaissance and prior to the Great Depression, many writers and artists relied on patrons in order to survive in Harlem. The patrons, normally wealthy white individuals, provided financial support to the writers and artists which enabled them the opportunity to create without having to depend on other means in order to survive the financial realities of living in a city. African American artists of the Harlem Renaissance often had to “negotiate their vision of the African American experience alongside the stereotypical assumptions” (Jones 68) of the patrons. Yet, the status, wealth, and power offered by white America to African American artists during the Harlem Renaissance before the economic disaster in 1929 only served as a “shadow [rather than true] substance” (Bell 149).

Charlotte Osgood Mason was the patron of Langston Hughes, Alain Locke, Zora Neal Hurston, and briefly Wallace Thurman, a fact which typically reflects the relationship between the African American “artistic production [and] self representation [with] white patronage” (Jones 68). Hughes felt the Harlem literati circle worked against “an undertow of sharp criticism and misunderstanding from his own group and unintentional bribes from whites” (Lewis 191); for example, in order for Hughes to be “patronized” by Charlotte Osgood Mason, his work had
toremain “primitive” by her standards. He wrote “She [Mason] wanted me to be primitive and know and feel the intuition of the primitive… I did not feel the rhythms of the primitive surging through me… I was only an American Negro – who had loved the surface of African and the rhythms of Africa – but I was not Africa” (Berry 104). James Weldon Johnson, Secretary for the national Association for the Advancement of Colored People, surmised that “the greatest handicap the [black artist] experiences is that he is not permitted to forget that he is a Negro… The economic and social strictures do not play… so large a part” (qtd. in Lewis 193).

Thurman, like his main character, Raymond from *Infants of the Spring*, was frustrated at being patronized by philanthropists, social workers, and Negrophiles” (Bell 148) and sought to lose race-consciousness and be acclaimed for his own achievements as an artist. Fisher was slightly more at liberty to be creative and write what he chose to write about since he was a noted physician and therefore did not struggle financially. Thurman and Hughes, on the other hand, were constantly at the mercy of others financially, Hughes more so than Thurman. Thurman worked for Macaulay books as a managing editor. Hughes had Charlotte Osgood Mason as a patron and he worked an assortment of jobs in order to support himself. None of the three could fully support the idea of white patrons of the Harlem Renaissance because often when the whites were involved, they displayed a superior attitude. Further, Hughes’ association with Charlotte Osgood Mason deteriorated completely when he realized that Mason was a white woman who fully believed that “the expression of political opinions should be left to white people, like herself” (Berry 105). He, being a revolutionary thinker of this age, eventually had to part company with Mason in 1930.

Another aspect of fighting racism and bigotry began, for Hughes, during his collegiate years at Lincoln University. While at Lincoln, Hughes had conducted a survey in which he
discovered that most of the students preferred an all white faculty and an all white board of trustees. This infuriated him. Yet, what seemed to have put him on a political mission for the “emancipation of the Negroes and of the oppressed massed” (Berry 197) was a statement made to him during his commencement from Lincoln by an alumni who had heard about the survey and the stir that it had caused across the South, and who remarked: “Young man, suppose I told the truth to white folks. I never would have built the great institution I’ve built for my race” (Hughes 309). The implication is that things “gotten out of white folk” by African Americans could only be accomplished through “flattery, cajolery, good natured begging, lying, and general Uncle Toming [but] not by truth” (Hughes 310).

Thurman, through the character of Truman in *The Blacker the Berry*, expresses his contempt not only for mulattos who “have always been accorded more consideration by white people than their darker brethren” (Thurman 144) but also for the system which provoked it. Thurman goes on to comment, “It was for the mulatto offspring of white masters and Negro slaves that the first schools for Negroes were organized… it is generally the Negro with a quality of mixed blood in his veins who finds adaptation to a Nordic environment more easily than one of pure blood, which, of course… to an American Negro, [is] convenient if not virtuous” (144).

Alaine Locke, to the amazement of all of the Harlem literati, made a very conflicting move to what he had written in *The New Negro*. Locke had written that African Americans must “free themselves from the patronizing and the philanthropy of whites” (Berry 88), yet he continued to be supported by Charlotte Osgood Mason. Locke had agreed with Mason that young African American artist must be continually urged to stress African origins within their works.
Wallace Thurman, who was widely known for criticizing the artists both black and white during this era, comments through the voice of Raymond in *Infants of the Spring*, expresses his criticism of African American artists. Raymond says that “the Negro intellectual and artist had no goal, no standards, no elasticity, no pregnant plasma” (Bell 148).

Wallace Thurman also reveals in *The Blacker the Berry* how sad it was that in Harlem, considered the Mecca of African American culture during this era, white supremacy was yet rampant. He noted that people who went to the employment agencies of Harlem we all African American yet varied. He notes that “some [were] greasy, some neat, some fat, some slim, some brown, some black” (Thurman 79) yet there was a Jewish woman who was “[the] overseer of the dirty, dingy office [who] asserted and re-asserted her superiority” (80) over the masses who entered the agency seeking employment.

However, it would be a social event in Harlem that forced the evils of classism and prejudice within the race to surface again. The wedding of Countee Cullen, a cohort of Hughes, Fisher, and Thurman, to Nina Yolande Du Bois, whose father, W.E.B. Du Bois was “still one of the most distinguished Afro-American leader[s] and spokesman” (Berry 94) of the era, was considered the highlight of the spring.

According to Levering Lewis, Nina Yolande Du Bois was “outstandingly ordinary – a kind, plain woman of the modest intellectual endowments” (Lewis 201). She, the sole surviving daughter of W.E.B. Du Bois, had been educated in England’s Bedales School in 1914. Bedales School was one of England’s “finest preparatory academies” (202). She then matriculated at Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee where she met Countee Cullen, Harold Jackman, and Jimmy Lunceford. It was known in Harlem that Yolande was “infatuated with Jimmy Lunceford, one of the young pioneers of swing” (202).
Nevertheless, at the insistence of W.E. B. Du Bois, Yolande was to marry the “poet laureate” (Lewis 202) of the Harlem Renaissance. The wedding took place on April 9, 1928. It came at the height of the Harlem Renaissance and affected both the social and the literary circles of the era. The wedding was “a pageant performed before three thousand witnesses in Harlem’s Salem Methodist Episcopal Church” (Berry 94) where Cullen’s adoptive father served as pastor. Celebrities from around the country including James Weldon Johnson, Charles Johnson, Mary white Ovington, the Eugene Kinckle Joneses and others packed into Salem Methodist Episcopal Church to witness the grand affair. Dr. Melville Charlton, organist for Union Theological Seminary, rendered the music that was applauded by a large crowd that had gathered outside of the church. Both Langston Hughes and Rudolph fisher were among the wedding party. Wallace Thurman was excluded from the invitation list to the wedding and was vehemently and eternally vexed because of it. He wrote a letter to Langston Hughes stating, “You know I am not good enough to be in Countee’s ball. I mean marriage” (Thurman). Thurman hinted further his anger towards not being invited to the wedding because of his dark complexion in The Blacker the Berry during a discussion between Cora (the disguise of Zora Neal Hurston) and Tony (the disguise of Langston Hughes) at a rent party. Tony comments, “Cora here just felt like being indignant, because she heard of a forthcoming wedding in Brooklyn to which the prospective bride and groom have announced they will not invite any dark people” (Thurman 143). In the voice of Truman (the disguise of Wallace Thurman himself), Truman goes onto sarcastically comment, “You can’t blame light Negroes for being prejudiced against dark ones, All of you know that white is the symbol of everything pure and good” (143).

Although the wedding of Countee Cullen and Yolande Du Bois had been a grand affair, the marriage only lasted a few months. It was the gossip of Harlem that Cullen was involved in
an affair with is best man, Harold Jackman sailed to Paris immediately after the wedding leaving his new bride to get there when she could. At summer’s end and after Yolande’s arrival in Paris, the Cullen marriage disastrously ended. Langston Hughes commented to a close friend, “Countee should never have married for some of the same reasons I should never marry” (Berry 94), referring to both of their homosexuality.
RELIGION

After the Civil War in united States History, African Americans were freed from the actual act of slavery innately meant that they were free to make their own families and free to make their own family institutions. White Americans, who had become superior only be owning “black” slaves, preferred not worshipping with these being. Hence, at births, confirmations, communions, marriages, deaths, or any other occasion of life, American whites and African Americans became alien to one another. Although African Americans were often spectators and were more intimate in the lives of their white counterparts, whites generally had no shame in intruding on the more intimate lives of African Americans and deemed their lives as primitive. As an indirect result, religion and family became the “foci of Negro life in a special degree” (Hughes 5) in that African Americans began to create their own religious institutions.

Before pursuing the study of African American religion, the culture and tradition of African Americans must first be examined. The enslavement of the African American not only destroyed the traditional African system of kinship but it also affected other forms of social life, such as the family. Because there was no legal marriage between slaves, the relationship of the entire African American family depended solely on the slave owner, who had the liberty to do what he or she chose in regard to the slave. Hence, the destruction of the African kinsman ship plunged the Africans into “an alien civilization in which whatever remained of their religious myths and cults had no meaning” (Frazier 14) in this new culture because a form of Christianity would be taught to the conquered slaves by the conquering masters.

E. Franklin Frazier, author of The Negro Church in America, discusses how the religion of white American brought social cohesion to the African slaves. Frazier explains how it was difficult for white Christian missionaries to convert the African slave from his or her religion,
hence the missionaries “concentrated their efforts on the children” (Frazier 15). Frazier points out that there is no evidence to support that slaves maintained African practices and mixed them with Christian religious practices.

With the dawn of the Great Awakening, a religious movement that began in England and spread throughout colonial America, the emergence of the Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian sectors of religion also took within the slave culture. According to Frazier, these three religions (Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian) flourished among the slaves and more so after emancipation because the doctrines of the churches appealed more to “the poor and the ignorant and the outcast” (16), which describes the condition of the freed slaves already “possessed developed systems of religious beliefs concerning their place in nature and in society” (17). Inevitably, however, the slaves adapted to the notion of being Christians and began to apply it to their own lives. In so doing, the Negro Spirituals emerged as did the “invisible institution” which eventually became the African American church.

Frazier gives two separate accounts, one from an ex-slave, and the other from a Swedish visitor to the Americas during slavery, of how this “invisible institution” was viewed. The slave, in explaining the freedom within the “church meeting” remarked:

Our preachers were usually plantation folk just like the rest of us. Some man who had a little education and had been taught something about the Bible would be our preacher. The colored folks had their code of religion, not nearly so complicated as the white man’s religion, but more closely observed… When we had our meetings of this kind, we held them in our own way and were not interfered with by the white folks… (Frazier 23)
The Swedish observer’s account of her visit to Charleston, South Carolina in 1851 gave a more in-depth account of the slaves’ assembling. She wrote in her account:

In the village itself everything was still and quiet. A few Negro men and women were standing about, and they looked kind and well to do. I heard in one house a sound as of prayer and zealous exhortation. I entered, and saw the assemblages of Negroes, principally women, who were much edified and affected in listening to a Negro who was preaching to them with great fervor and great gesticulation, thumping on the table with his clenched fist… (Frazier 23, 24)

It is important to note that there were free African Americans before emancipation. George Leile, a former slave, was freed in 1773. On May 20, 1775, he was licensed and ordained a Baptist minister. In December of 1777, he constituted the church and thus became the first pastor of The First African Baptist Church in Savannah, Georgia (History). One of the most prominent moves in the religious movement of the African American culture came when Richard Allen and Absalom Jones founded the Free African Society because of being beaten out of the St. James Methodist Episcopal Church where whites and blacks attended church together yet with separate seating. As a result, Richard Allen formed the African Methodist Episcopal Church and became its first bishop in 1816 while Absalom Jones founded the Protestant Episcopal Church which soon became the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church. Much later after emancipation, African Americans who were Baptist and Presbyterians organized. Later, in 1870, Isaac Lane organized the African Americans who were still part of the Methodist Episcopal Church South and formed the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church in Jackson, Tennessee.

Upon emancipation, however, many problems began to surface once again among African Americans in regard to church and religious affiliations. Frazier notes that the Protestant
Episcopal, Presbyterian, and Congregational Churches that had been formed by freed men before emancipation shunned its members’ desire to include worship styles that were considered “emotional and ecstatic” (Frazier 37). Further, the organization of many churches within the African American culture was based on “distinctions of color and what [was] considered standards of civilized behavior” (37) that had been taught in the white congregations. The Baptists and Methodist offered a more liberal policy which also allowed the ministers to preach by a method of being “called into the ministry” rather than attending seminary. Hence, a form of autocratic leadership developed under the sole rule of the preacher. Carter G. Woodson contends in The Mis-Education of the Negro, “The educated Negro minister is so strained as to drift away from the masses and the illiterate preachers into whose hands the people inevitably fall are unable to develop a doctrine and procedure of their own” (Woodson 58).

The turn of the nineteenth century brought many African Americans from their rural environment of the South to the industrialized North. With the migration, the southern cultural element of church and religion came with them. Throughout the writings of Langston Hughes, Rudolph fisher, and Wallace Thurman, this religious culture and way of thinking within the African American community is colorfully and sometimes shockingly reflected.

Langston in The Big Sea explicitly expressed his views of religion and how it affected his life. Hughes begins his short story “Salvation” with “I was saved from sin when I was going on thirteen. But not really saved” (Hughes 18). He goes on to explain what he meant. He had attended a revival service at his aunt Reed’s church where there had been much singing, praying and preaching and “some very hardened sinners had been brought to Christ” (18) during this particular revival. Before the revival ended, a special service had been conducted for youth. Hughes, being a youth at the time, was instructed to attend. He, like many African American of
the era remember, was escorted to the front pew and placed on the “mourners’ bench with all the other young sinners, who had not yet been brought to Jesus” (Hughes 19). In the African American tradition, the “mourners’ bench” was a bench or pew, usually during revival, for anyone who had not accepted Christ in their lives, and hence, had not accepted the doctrine of Christianity. This pew was also used as the pew for immediate family members of a deceased person to sit during the funeral services of a loved one; therefore, the term “mourner’s bench” evolved (Wiley). Hughes goes on to comment that his aunt had told him that “when you were saved you saw a light, and something happened to you inside! And Jesus came into your life! And god was with you from then on” (Hughes 19). Hughes describes the wonderful “rhythmic sermon” that the preacher preaches, the song that followed, and then the preacher’s asking the children to come. Hughes explains how the little girls ran to the preacher in tears and a few of the little boys rose from their seats and went to him yet he was still “waiting to see Jesus” (19). Finally, he and another boy named Westly were left on the bench and they still did not go to the preacher’s outstretched hand. Westly, after it began to get hot in the church due to the deacons and sisters who fervently prayed, whispered to Hughes, “God damn! I’m tired o’ sitting here. Let’s get up and be saved” (20). Westly got up and left Hughes alone. His aunt then came and prayed for him while the prayers and songs continued to “swirl all around me in the little church” (20. Finally, after much prodding, Hughes got up and shook the preacher’s hand. He said that he had begun to feel guilty that he was wasting so much time and yet God had not struck Westly dead for telling the obvious lie about seeing Jesus when clearly Westly had not seen him. When he rose, there was “a sea of shouting… waves of rejoicing… women leaped in the air” (20) because he had accepted Jesus into his life. When things quieted down, the youth were “blessed in the name of God” (21) and joyous singing began again. Hughes commented that, later that
night, when at home, he cried because he had not seen Jesus and he did not believe there was a Jesus anymore because Jesus did not come and help him.

Thurman, in *The Blacker the Berry*, introduces color consciousness within the African American religious community through the character of Emma Lou Morgan. While Emma Lou resides at the Y.M.C.A. in New York preparing for her teacher examination, she befriended a young lady named Gwendolyn Johnson. After searching for churches to attend, the two young ladies settled on the decision to attend Harlem’s St. Mark A.M.E. Church. St. Mark A.M.E. Church was “one of the largest and most high-toned churches in Harlem” (196). It is in this church where Emma Lou and Gwendolyn enjoy sitting in the congregation and “observing the fine clothes and triumphal entries of its members” (Thurman 196) as well as, as time progresses in the plot of the story, begin to participate in the church activities for the younger parishioners of the congregation. In their search for congregations, several churches had “immediately been black-balled” (198). One church, in particular, was the Episcopal Church in Harlem. This church is immediately placed on Emma Lou’s list of churches not to attend because “many members were ‘pinks’ and despite the fact that a number of dark-skinned West Indians, former members of the Church of England, had forced their way in… The Episcopal Church in Harlem, as in most Negro communities, was dedicated primarily to the salvation of light-skinned Negroes” (198). “Pinks,” according to Geraldine’s mother’s teaching, was a complex that many African Americans of the era had that promoted the idea that light-skinned people were superior to dark-skinned people because they, the light-skinned people, were closer in complexion to white people who were considered a superior race. Hence, Geraldine’s mother, in complete defiance to his idea, had taught her to adore darker hued people and insisted that Geraldine marry a dark-skinned man so that her children will be “real Negroes” (198). Consequently, when Gwendolyn
and Emma Lou meet beaux from various church socials, it is Gwendolyn who insists that she and Emma Lou remain indifferent to the “high yellers” or light-skinned people.

Emma Lou, unlike Gwendolyn, “couldn’t get excited over them [the choices of beaux from the church socials]… [because] their air of being all-wise amused her [and] their affected church purity and wholesomeness, largely a verbal matter, tired her” (Thurman 199). In the end, Emma Lou dated Benson Brown, against the wishes of her friend Gwendolyn, “precisely because he was one of those ‘yaller niggers’” (201). Benson is, to Emma Lou, “almost as colorless and uninteresting to her as the rest of the crowd with whom she now associated” (201), but he does not mind her being dark. Benson has many strikes against him from the beginning of this relationship with Emma Lou, yet the one thing that keeps her interested in him is the fact that he is light-skinned and pays attention to her. He is the son of an ex-preacher who had stopped preaching to become a Pullman porter because there is more money in being a porter, while his mother remains an active member of the church and community. He, Benson, is a college student who had taken six years to graduate high school and seemingly would take equally the amount of time to graduate from college. He has “a placid, ineffectual dirty yellow face, topped by red mariney hair, and studded with gray eyes. He [is] as ugly as he is stupid” (202), yet he is interested in Emma Lou. He is everything that Emma Lou needs at the moment but he is not Alva, the man that she loved dearly and the man that she truly wanted.

Rudolph Fisher, in his short story “Miss Cynthie,” comically explores the mentality of a rural southern woman’s reaction to the big city and her belief and faith in her grandson to “become somebody.” Her belief is, like many other African Americans during this historical period, that education would change the “Negro status” and one should go to college to become a “preacher or a doctor.” She advises a bellboy:
Be a preacher or a doctor. Work yo’ way up and don’ stop short. If the Lord don’ see fit for yo’ to doctor the soul, then doctor the body. If you don’ get to be a reg’lar doctor, be a tooth doctor. If you jes’ can’t make that, be a foot-doctor. And if you don’t get that fur, be a undertaker. That’s the least you must be. That in’ so bad. Keep you acquainted with the house of the Lord. Always mind the house o’ the Lord – whatever you do, do like a church steeple: aim high and go straight.

(Fisher 36)

Miss Cynthie is awed by the splendor of Harlem. She can hardly believe that African Americans attend churches in the large cathedral like buildings. Miss Cynthie is forced to come to terms with her old religious perceptions in a more modern era when her grandson, the pride and joy of her life whom she has left Waxhaw to come visit in Harlem, leads her “like an early Christian martyr” (Fisher 42) into Lafayette Theatre. She settles in her seat and becomes quite comfortable with the performances until her grandson, David, appears on the stage. At the end of a thunderous encore of David’s performance, she remained stunned in her seat when David reappears and begins ot tap and sing a tune that Miss Cynthie had taught him as a child. He then told the audience that he, like Adam, had never had a mother but was raised by his grandmother and that she was the true reason for his success. He then told the crowd that is was she who had always taught him to “do like a church steeple – aim high and go straight” (47). The reality dawns on her that she has raised more than a preacher or doctor, she had raid a young man who is now a star and on his way to Broadway. In the end, fisher cleverly writes: “Perhaps she [Miss Cynthie] was thinking, ‘God moves in a mysterious way,’ but her lips are unquestionably forming the words” (47) to the song that she had taught David as a child that he had performed in her honor on that evening.
Langston Hughes cunningly wrote a short story in a parable fashion entitled “Thank You, M’am” that hints at the effects of migration from the rural areas of the country to Harlem and how religion or that act of Christianity as well as the act of humanity could be shown in places where one least expects it. In “Thank You, M’am,” a young boy named Roger decides that he is going to snatch the purse of Mrs. Luella Bates Washington Jones that has “everything in it but a hammer and nails” (Hughes 70). Unfortunately for Roger, he loses his balance and slips. Mrs. Jones, in reply, kicks him “squarely in his blue-jeaned sitter” (70). She then reaches down, grabs him by his shirt, shakes him, and questions why he has attempted to rob her as a small crowd begins to form about them. When she asks him if he will run if she releases him, he tells her he will, and she responds that she will not release him. She looks into his dirty face and questions him as to why his face was dirty at the hour of the day that it was. She then decides that she will take him to her own home and do just that, wash his face. In her grasp, he is then taken to her house. She demands that he washes his face and then demanded an explanation of why he had attempted to “snatch” her pocketbook. He tells her that he made the attempt because he wanted to buy a pair of blue suede shoes. Compassion settles on her yet she insists on teaching him a lesson. She first lectures him, saying, “I have done things, too, which I could not tell you, son – neither God, if He didn’t already know. Everybody’s got something in common” (72). Mrs. Jones cooks dinner and makes him eat. She then gives him ten dollars to buy a pair of blue suede shoes. She then escorts a very touched boy to the door who “wanted to say something other than, ‘Thank you, m’am’ to Mrs. Luella Bates Washington Jones” (73).

Langston Hughes also wrote “Cracker Prayer” in *The Tales of Simple* that reflects not only a religious view, but also makes the united States of America, a country that claimed to be a
Christian and righteous nation during the twentieth century, take a look at the hypocrisy within racism, Jim Crowism, and segregation. In “Cracker Prayer” there is an aged white man named Colonel Crushenberry, referred to by simple as an “old cracker,” who is near death, wants to make peace with God before his transition. Crushenberry beings his prayer in a Christian manner saying: “Oh Lord, help me to get right, do right, be right, and die right before I ascends to Thy sight” (Hughes 108). Suddenly, the prayer shifts and Crushenberry prays:

Help me to make peace with Nigras, Lord because I have hated them all my life.

If I don’t get into Heaven, Lord, I certainly do not want to go to hell with all them Nigras down there… Lord, take me to heaven where I will not have to associate with a hell full of Nigras… did you make Nigras just to bedevil white folks? Was they put here on earth to be a trial and a tribulation to the South?... I do not want no Nigras lined up telling me that the supreme Court has decreed integrated seats in the Celestial Chariot, too. If I hear tell of such, Lord, I elect to stay right here on earth where at least Faubus [governor of Arkansas who defies integration of the school system] is on my side. (109, 110)

Rudolph Fisher uses religion humorously in The Conjure-Man Dies through the character of Mrs. Aramintha Snead. Mrs. Snead decides that it is her Christian duty to pray for jinx who is accused of killing the conjure man. She questions Jinx so quickly and fervently that Jinx does not have time to fully respond. “Does you know the six’ commandment?” (Fisher 163) she asks as she continues her litany and investigation of Jinx’s salvation. “Don’t know even a single one of the commandments, does y’? Well, you’s a hopeless sinner. You know that, don’t y’? Hopeless – doomed – on yo’ way… to brun in hell, where the fire is not quenched and the worm dieth not” (163). Bubber brown attempts to spare him, yet Mrs. Snead silences Bubber and begins a lengthy
prayer. When finally she ends her prayer, she asks Jinx, “‘Don’t you feel better?’” (Fisher 165). She is aghast when Jinx replies “no.” Another humorous instance of Fisher’s weaving religion into *The Conjure-Man Dies* comes when Bubber Brown and Tiger Shade accidentally walk inside a funeral parlor. While inside the parlor they continue to hear singing. Tiger insists that it is a radio, yet Bubber is not quite so certain because the words repeatedly sung were: “Oh, am I born to die… to lay this body down” (244). Somehow, the two managed to walk into the embalming room. Just as Tiger strikes a match to provide light, they notice that the white sheets that covers a corpse moves simultaneously as “Am I born to die?” (245) is heard eerily chanted in the background. Bubber and Tiger run out of the room. When they make it out of the funeral parlor, they suddenly hear, on the adjacent side of the room, a preacher who gives the benediction to a church service that is obviously being held. Although rather humorous, Fisher provides an insight on the rise of store front churches in Harlem and how they could easily be adjacent to any other establishment within the city.

Wallace Thurman in *Infants of the Spring* comically mocks organized religion. On one occasion at Niggeratti Manor, the setting of the novel, the entire group would gather in a circle and begin to pray. The prayer would be considered blasphemous by any standard of Christian theology. While in the circle, the group joins hands, bow their heads, and Eustace, who serves as master of ceremonies, prays:

> Beloved, we join hands here to pray for gin. An aridity defiles us. Our innards thirst for the juice of juniper. Surely, god who let manna fall from heaven so that the holy children of Israel might eat, will not let the equally holy children of Niggeratti manor die from want of a little gin, let us pray… Lord, send us some
gin. Hear, oh hear, our plea. Send us some gin, Lord, send us some gin. (Thurman 102).

To the dismay of the group, “the prayer of the holy children of Nigerratti Manor… met with no results” (105).

Whether from a realistic approach or from a sarcastically wry yet humorous approach, the authors Langston Hughes, Rudolph Fisher, and Wallace Thurman cunningly use religion and religious themes in their work. Their use of religion in their works bears wrenching implications that must be observed in literature. The use of religion may have an attempt to show the ills of the African American community such as Thurman’s *The Blacker the Berry* where, once again, the African American community had to address its own hypocrisy when supporting the evilness of color prejudice and color consciousness, or it may have been an implication, such as in Thurman’s *Infants of the Spring*, which suggests the ignorance of people who follow the “jackleg” preacher in a society that should be more learned and intellectual. Langston Hughes’ “Salvation” that appears in his autobiography *The Big Sea* makes him question his own salvation and the reasons to adopt any religion. “Salvation” was written in reflection of what a thirteen-year old child feels. Hughes suggests that as a child, he discovered that not all things are necessarily true that adults tell children. Rudolph Fisher’s “Miss Cynthie” reflects the humbleness of the rural South and how adaptation to the big cities of the North brings new ideas that are not in conflict with one’s own faith. On the other hand, Mrs. Snead in Fisher’s *The Conjure-Man Dies* shows religious piety that has no affect on an unreligious person. All of the various forms and uses of expressing religion in the works of these authors help to build stronger characters and stronger plots within their works.
CALIBANIC DISCOURSE

In order to fully understand Calibanic discourse, it is essential that Shakespeare’s comedy, *The Tempest*, is studied and understood. In *The Tempest*, Prospero take Caliban’s island and then makes Caliban a slave for himself and his daughter Miranda. Miranda tries to teach Caliban the “civilized” language of her own people. According to Miranda, Caliban was savage and “capable of all ill” who did not “know [his] own meaning, but would gabble like a thing most brutish, [therefore] she endow[s] [his] purpose with words that made them known” (I.ii.20).

The language that Miranda teaches Caliban “forces his definition in her terms and in Prospero’s: Caliban/cannibal – the savage brute whose purpose is enslavement” (Coleman 2). Caliban does try to learn the language for his own benefit unsuccessfully: “you taught me language, an my profit on’t is, I know how to curse. The red plague rid you for learning me your language!” (I.ii.20) thus, we may note that Caliban cannot use Prospero’s language for his own benefit because Prospero had too much control over the language in order for this to happen.

James W. Coleman, in explain Calibanic discourse, quotes John Edgar Wideman, who discusses the effects of black people when they have been taught a “foreign language.” Wideman concludes that African descended people employ a certain tension and resistance to imposed tongue and disciplines. According to Wideman, every generation has to negotiate with self-determination and self-realization when learning a “foreign language,” because of its “structure, vocabulary, its deployment in social interactions, its retention of racist assumptions, [its] expressions and attitudes, its contamination by theories of racial hierarchy” (Coleman 2) recreates a scenario of master and slave as can be seen in the relationship between Prospero and Caliban. Being unable to master the language, Caliban can still curse in the language. This only emphasizes his inferiority because he sounds vulgar and brutish only because he is unable to use
the civilized forms of Prospero’s language. Caliban then threatens Prospero’s world by attempting to have sex with Miranda. Coleman says, “scholars have made [Caliban] synonymous with the oppression and generally negative perception of black men and other non white male” (Coleman 3). Hence, by Coleman’s definition, Calibanic discourse is the myth of the “black male in Western culture” that began with “language and nonlinguistic signs” (3). Further Coleman explains, the most vivid manifestation of Calibanic discourse is “the association of the physical bodies of black men – even by other back men – with criminality, danger, and inferiority; fundamentally, ‘black men’ is synonymous with these terms and with a larger story” (3).

Wallace Thurman shows the vices of Calibanic discourse in *The Blacker the Berry* through the characters of several male characters. Jasper Crane, one of the first men that Emma Lou meets during her exploration of Harlem culture, proscribes the sexuality and inferiority of the African American man. Jasper, a man from Virginia, fresh to New York, who does not have a job, borrows five dollars from her while sitting in a theatre. He, in exchange for the five dollars, “kisses her passionately” (Thurman 127) and never returns. Hence, his sole of Jasper makes him like Caliban in the aspect that his characterized in stories written by African American men. The characters both of Alva, the love of Emma Lou’s life, and his roommate Braxton, reflect the inferiority of the African American man and his voice. Neither of the two maintains a steady job, yet Harlem night life seems to be the focus of their existence. The description of their room, in its disarray, hints at the sexually promiscuous of these two men for even in the disarray, the room “bore evidence of the orgy which the occupants of the room staged over every weekend” (102). Thurman writes about the shiftless nature of the African American male, which of course defends Calibanic discourse, through the use of these two characters. Alva, in meeting Emma Lou only because Geraldine and Braxton have made fun of him, uses a
“smooth tongue [and] phrases with… double meaning[s]” (Thurman 132) in order to pursue Emma Lou. Alva, like most of them portrayed in *The Blacker the Berry*, has a strong tendency to speak in an empowering voice, yet through trickery and deceit; they defeat their own purpose, and like Caliban from Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, enslave themselves within the system. Braxton loses his job and seeks financial support from Arline, a young lady also new to New York yet from the South, who does not know his scheme. Braxton, in Alva’s opinion, is “a hustler [who is] a distinct failure [and] he couldn’t steal, and he always allowed his egotism to defeat his own ends when he tried to get money from women” (161). These characteristics make Braxton a slave to society. Alva, for whatever purposes, soon becomes an alcoholic and, rather than becoming a heroic figure of the novel, becomes a very tragic person who is the maker of his own undoing. His empowered voice diminishes quickly in the eyes of the reader and Emma Lou who, when finally deciding not to strike him but to leave him thinks “Alva, [is not] as he had been, but [is] as he was now, a drunken, drooling, libertine, struggling to keep the embarrassed Bobbie in a vile embrace” (221).

The character of the King Solomon Gillis in Rudolph Fisher’s short story “City of Refuge” is a fine example of Calibanic discourse. King Solomon Gillis moves to Harlem and is a very likable person. Although “country,” his voice presented in the short story is quite empowering. Unfortunately, Gillis is approached by Mouse Uggam, a dope dealer who leads the unsuspecting Gillis down a long path of drug dealing. The story line shows Calibanic discourse in the representation of black men in association with criminality. It is interesting that Fisher ironically brought the subject of African American criminality and inferior voice to the forefront of the Harlem Renaissance when he wrote the short story “City of Refuge.” Gillis, through the eyes of the society who attempts to apprehend him in the end of the story, becomes the savage-
like Caliban in *The Tempest*, in that he fights every white officer near him and only “allows” himself to be arrested when a black officer appears. Gillis comments, “Even got cullud policemans” (Fisher 36) Fisher proves that African American male writers used, unconsciously, and without naming it, the practice of writing through methods of Calibanic discourse prior to the theory being further explored.

Langston Hughes, in *Tales of Simple*, although brilliant in parable, the main character, Simple, uses a very weak version of Calibanic discourse in the writing of the character Simple in that Simple is “supposed” to be an African American man who has not been educated by civilized or white society. Hence, his voice would be considered inferior; yet the irony of the Simple tales is that the “common sense” used in his voice reverses the Calibanic discourse theory and actually empowers the African American male role and voice in this piece.

Like the importance of race, class, and religion, Calibanic discourse within the writing of Langston Hughes, Rudolph Fisher, and Wallace Thurman is important to the discussion because it proves how certain themes within African American literature are not as new as some would think them to be. Although these artists wrote before the time of postmodernism, many of the themes include Calibanic discourse are reflected in their work.
CONCLUSION

IN December 1930, Langston Hughes left the home of his and Zora Neal Hurston’s patron Charlotte Osgood Mason. It had been a very unpleasant experience that caused his health to begin to become poor. He went to Cleveland, Ohio to live with his mother for a short period and restore his health. During this time, his doctor felt it best that his tonsils be removed. On January 15, 1931, after attending a play at the Karamu House in Cleveland, Ohio, he learned that the Karamu House’s “theatre group was about was about to obtain production rights to a Negro folk comedy which they hoped to stage in February” (Berry 111). *Mule Bone* had been a collaboration between Hughes and Hurston in February of 1930 after he had mentioned his play *Mulatto* to Theresa Helburn, one of the founders of The New York Guild. Helburn was not interested in *Mulatto* because she had been presented many “serious problem drama[s],” (Berry 101) and she was more interested in Negro comedy. Although Hughes did not like the idea, he took it to Hurston, who thought it was a great idea, and proposed the two collaborate. They would use one of Hurston’s folk tales, yet Hughes would modify the play. Hughes suggested the play be written in three acts. The two “employed the stenographic assistance of Louise Thompson” (Berry 101) and the project began in March of 1930. As the relationship between Charlotte Mason and Hughes began to diminish, so did the collaboration between Hughes and Hurston on the completion of *Mule Bone*. Hughes contacted Carl Van Vechten, who was said to have received *Mule Bone* from Hurston. Hughes then sent his copy of *Mule Bone* to Van Vechten, who, after reading both manuscripts, noted there had been changes. When Hughes discovered what had happened, he immediately took action and prepared a legal suit. The entire Harlem Renaissance group of artists and authors were then thrown into the middle of the
Hughes-Hurston battle. Mrs. Rowena Jelliffes, owner of the Karamu House in Cleveland, wrote to Hughes’ attorney, Arthur Spingarn:

It seems to me that Miss Hurston has behaved very strangely. I know from Louise Thompson, who worked with them on the typing of the play, that Langston Hughes did the construction of the play and that it was understood between [them] from the beginning that they were to be co-authors of the play. Moreover, I have seen and examined in detail the work notes for the entire play in Mr. Hughes’s own handwriting. I can see, comparing his script with hers, that she has made changes in an attempt to claim that she has re-written the play. But there’s no question that it is the same play – and the changes are feeble.

Believing as I do, that Langston Hughes has rights in the matter, I will not produce it under her name alone. I think she has treated him very badly…

(Berry 114)

As a result of the feud between Hughes and Hurston, *Mule Bone* was never performed during either of their lives. Also the quarrel between Hughes and Hurston led to the end of the friendship between Dr. Alain Locke and Hughes. Hughes wrote in a letter to Arthur Spingarn:

I do not understand Dr. Locke’s zeal in upholding Miss Hurston’s position – except that they are both employed by the same patron. Miss Hurston has probably claimed “Mule bone” as entirely her own before Dr. Locke and their patron; and Dr. Locke, knowing only one side of the story, chooses to back Miss Hurston. So far as I can recall, I have never spoken to Dr. Locke about our comedy, nor was I aware until I heard from you, that he even knew Miss Hurston and I had worked on a play together… (Berry 116)
Sensing tragedy on the horizon, Hughes wrote in *The Big Sea*, “I never heard from Miss Hurston again. Unfortunately, our art was broken, and that was the end of what would have been a good play had it ever been finished – the first real Negro folk comedy – *Mule bone*” (Hughes 334). Hughes further comments: “That spring for me (and, I guess all of us) was the end of the Harlem Renaissance. We were no longer in vogue…” (Hughes 334).

In May of 1934, Wallace Thurman visited Langston Hughes in Carmel, California. Thurman was in Los Angeles producing movies. While in California, he managed to meet his father for the first time only to discover that his father was dying from tertiary syphilis. Thurman began to fell “an immense discouragement of unbearable isolation, a perpetual fear of some remote disaster, an utter disbelief in [his] capacity, a total absence of desire, and an impossibility of finding any kind of interest” (Lewis 279). In June, doctors on the West Coast cautioned Thurman about his health. He flew back to New York, “determined that his end should be spectacular” (West 85) and hosted a huge party in his own honor. In July, he suddenly collapsed and was admitted in the incurable ward on Welfare Island where he remained until his death. Mercifully, he died on December 22, 1934. His widow, Louise Thompson, Dorothy West, Walter White, Aaron and Alta Douglas, Countee Cullen, Richard Bruce Nugent, Harold Jackman, Dorothy Peterson, Walter White, and William Rapp attended his funeral in Harlem. Langston Hughes was out of the country and therefore did not attend.

On December 26, 1934 just four days after Wallace Thurman’s death, Rudolph Fisher also died a “maddeningly avoidable death” (Lewis 304). Fisher fell victim to “intestinal cancer caused y exposure to his own x-ray equipment” (Lewis 304). Julius “Jules” Bledsoe sang at his funeral while officers of the 269th Infantry Regiment, who had gallantly marched in Harlem at the beginning of the Harlem Renaissance, marched in the processional as part of Fisher’s funeral
cortege. Countee Cullen, Harold Jackman, and Noble Sissle were among the pallbearers. Again, Hughes was out of the country and did not attend the funeral services.

Alain Locke was devastated by the deaths of Wallace Thurman and Rudolph Fisher. He wrote to Charlotte Osgood Mason, “It is hard to see the collapse of things you have labored to raise on a sound basis” (Lewis 205). For Langston Hughes, it was equally devastating and possibly more traumatic in learning of “Bud” Fisher’s and “Wallie” Thurman’s deaths, two of his close compatriots of the Renaissance movement. Hughes wrote in *The Big Sea* that Fisher “could think of the most incisively clever things to say – and I could never think of anything to answer… I used to wish to talk like Rudolph Fisher. Besides being a good writer, he was an excellent singer… I guess Fisher was too brilliant and too talented to stay on earth long” (Hughes 241). Unlike Hughes’ reaction to Fisher, his reflection on his friend Wallace “Wallie” Thurman was slightly different as Hughes sometimes found it difficult to understand Thurman. Hughes wrote in *The Big Sea*: “He [Wallace Thurman] was a brilliant black boy, who had read everything, and whose critical mind could find something wrong with everything he read… Thurman read so many books because he could read eleven lines at a time. He would get great volumes from the library… [and] go through them in less than a week. He wanted to be a great writer, but none of his own work ever made him happy” (Hughes 234).

Hence, the end inevitably came for the union of Langston Hughes, Rudolph Fisher, and Wallace Thurman. It is safe, therefore, to say that had Fisher and Thurman lived, they too would have eventually produced as much work as Hughes produced within his own life time and prior to his death. However, Hughes, Fisher, and Thurman contributed greatly to the Harlem Renaissance movement with themes of race, class, and religion which was expressed within their
works and they were the prelude thinkers and writers of Calibanic discourse which slowly and sometimes ambiguously appears in their work as time progressed.
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Fires can’t be made with dead embers, nor can enthusiasm be stirred by spiritless men. Enthusiasm in our daily work lightens effort and turns even labor into pleasant tasks.

~ James Baldwin ~