

New Negro Voices in Virginia: Black Intellectual Leaders and Hampton Institute's *Southern Workman* during the Harlem Renaissance

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Introduction

In 1928, long before his time as a spiritual mentor to the Civil Rights Movement, Howard Thurman published a prescriptive article in Hampton Institute's *Southern Workman*. In "The Task of the Negro Minister" Thurman blends the Christian mysticism of an already seasoned minister with the practical socioeconomic concerns of a New Negro intellectual. The African-American minister, he writes, "must be a thinker. He must sense the dilemmas which his people face in American life and must offer intelligent spiritual and practice guidance to them. [...] He must judge the ethical significance of the religion of Jesus in the light of the Zulu proverb: 'Full belly child says to empty belly child, be of good cheer.'"¹ In just this short statement, Thurman questions what it means to live ethically in a society of such stark racism and inequality, and asks black ministers to reckon with this problem in order to offer both spiritual and practical advice to their congregants.

Thurman was not alone in using the *Southern Workman* to voice his concerns about the material realities facing African Americans. Throughout the journal's existence, a variety of African-American political leaders and educators from diverse backgrounds used the *Workman* to communicate their ideas about art, politics, labor, economics, international issues, and religion, among other critical issues. The Hampton-based monthly provided a space for the African-American leadership class to share their thoughts with each other, flesh out ideas that would be expanded in later works, and reach a larger audience.

¹ Howard Thurman, "The Task of the Negro Ministry," *Southern Workman*, 57 no. 10 (1928): 392.

With a particular focus on the 1920s, this paper examines six *Workman* articles by influential African-American scholars who contributed to New Negro intellectual life: James Weldon Johnson, Carter G. Woodson, Alice Dunbar-Nelson, E. Franklin Frazier, Thomas Dabney and Howard Thurman. Though their careers diverged— they became academics, novelists, journalists, activists and a minister— during the 1920s the *Workman* featured prominently in their intellectual development, and is thus essential to any discussion of their lives and work. Further, this paper concludes that the *Workman* must be read in conversation with northern journals to gain a full understanding of New Negro intellectual thought.

Combined with illuminating the vibrancy of the New Negro Era, the case studies of this essay highlight the broad topical coverage in the *Southern Workman*. James Weldon Johnson, architect of the New Negro movement and then-Executive Secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), argues for change through racial uplift, dedication to civil rights organizations, and adherence to a brand of cultural nationalism. Carter G. Woodson, key institution-builder and the father of African-American history, lays out a specific program of black nationalism and economic independence which will liberate the black race from second-class citizenry in American society. Alice Dunbar-Nelson, educator, journalist and civil rights activist, argues that the uplift of African Americans depends on children's education, and prescribes a program of cultural nationalism to be implemented in the curriculum of black schools. E. Franklin Frazier, famed sociologist and academic, undergoes an intellectual shift within the pages of the *Workman*, from calling for co-operatives and autonomous black business ventures in the early 1920s to arguing against the idea of an independent black cultural or economic movement by 1927. Thomas L. Dabney, labor activist and National Urban League (NUL)

researcher, cautions that the labor movement is stymied by racism within its ranks, and argues that class solidarity is necessary for fundamental economic change to American society. Finally, Howard Thurman, Christian minister and later spiritual leader of the Civil Rights Movement, calls black ministers to meld spirituality and social reality and become mentors to all those in need. Each of these New Negro thinkers presents his or her own arguments for how best to bring about greater equality in America, and their usage of the *Workman* in service of such an end testifies to the journal's importance in the wider African-American intellectual debates of the time.

Scholars of the New Negro movement and Harlem Renaissance often look primarily at northern publications when investigating black intellectual thought in the 1920s. Historians such as Nathan Irvin Huggins and David Levering Lewis, and more recently George Hutchinson and Martha Jane Nadell, tend to focus on northern cities such as New York as hubs of black intellectual thought.² With this emerges the trend to examine mostly northern publications, such as the NAACP's *Crisis* and the NUL's *Opportunity*, Oswald Garrison Villard's *Nation* and A. Philip Randolph and Chandler Owen's socialist *Messenger*. In fact, comparing Hampton Institute's *Southern Workman* to such northern publications led historian Walter C. Daniel to argue that the *Workman* failed to engage seriously with New Negro ideas and discourse, or to publish editorials addressing the rising racial and class tensions at Hampton and in American society at large.³ But

² Nathan Irvin Huggins, *Harlem Renaissance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971); David Levering Lewis, *When Harlem Was in Vogue* (New York: Knopf, 1981); George Hutchinson, *The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1995); Martha Jane Nadell, *Enter the New Negroes: Images of Race in American Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004).

³ Walter C. Daniel, *Black Journals of the United States* (Westport, Greenwood Press, 1982), 352.

by overlooking the *Workman* as a forum for black intellectual debate, historians miss out on the pithy manifestos published within its pages.

In addition, the failure to recognize the *Workman* as a serious forum for black intellectual debate leads historians to omit crucial phases in their subjects' intellectual development. While Jonathan Scott Holloway rightly asserts that E. Franklin Frazier had by the 1930s developed a "class-driven worldview that overwhelmed racial ideology," examining the *Workman* illuminates that during the 1920s Frazier recommended economic nationalism in the form of black autonomous business ventures. Thus the *Workman* helps to demonstrate that Frazier's views, fiercely defended in public forums, remained ever difficult to pin-down. Likewise, Jacqueline Emery chronicles Alice Dunbar-Nelson's use of cultural nationalism and subtle feminism in her 1925 *Courier* column. Yet Dunbar-Nelson debuted such ideas far earlier, in her 1922 article for the *Workman*.⁴ Looking at her article "Negro Literature for Negro Pupils" broadens, in time and place, Dunbar-Nelson's efforts to showcase her ideas. Thus these *Workman* articles ultimately complicate and illuminate the development of key black intellectuals' ideas.

The New Negro Movement, the Harlem Renaissance and the Southern Workman

By the early 1920s the term "New Negro" had come to define a group of black intellectuals who believed in race pride, forms of cultural nationalism and a strong stance against Jim Crow segregation and racial violence. This "Talented Tenth" of black leaders, including intellec-

⁴ Jonathan Scott Holloway, *Confronting the Veil: Abram Harris, Jr., E. Franklin Frazier, and Ralph Bunche, 1919-1941* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 126; Jacqueline Emery, "Writing to Belong: Alice Dunbar-Nelson's Newspaper Columns in the African American Press," *Legacy: A Journal of American Women Writers* 33 no. 2, (2016); Gloria T. Hull, *Color, Sex & Poetry: Three Women Writers of the Harlem Renaissance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987); Anthony M. Platt, *E. Franklin Frazier Reconsidered* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991).

tuals, artists and musicians, businessmen and political leaders, sought to uplift the black working class through achievements in the social sciences, culture and intellectual life. Many factors, including war, racial violence, Garveyism and burgeoning African-American cultural developments, contributed to the rise of the New Negro in the 1920s.

The late 1910s saw both the return of African-American troops from World War I and the beginnings of the Great Migration of southern blacks into northern cities such as New York, Chicago and Detroit. The young black men returning from Europe faced with fresh eyes the discord between American rhetoric of democracy and liberty abroad and the reality of racism and inequality at home. While Marcus Garvey led a mass movement under his Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) and began the *Negro World* to popularize his ideas on black nationalism and Pan-Africanism, whites rioted during the Red Summer of 1919, killing and injuring many African Americans in cities and towns across the country. All of these factors influenced the rise of New Negro publications and works, though the self-conscious creation of the New Negro himself did not come about until the mid 1920s.

In 1924 sociologist and educator Charles S. Johnson convened a group of artists in Harlem, New York, nominally to celebrate the success of Jessie Fauset's novel and actually to call attention to the successes of black artists. In 1925 the philosopher Alain Locke, who had been selected by Johnson to edit a special volume of *Survey Graphic*, published *The New Negro: An Interpretation*. An anthology of black artists' and intellectuals' work, *The New Negro* added to an increasing body of work from black poets and novelists, such as Langston Hughes and Claude McKay, anthropologists like Zora Neale Hurston, artists such as Aaron Douglas and Bruce Nugent, and social scientists like Abram Harris and Elizabeth Moss Haynes. These indi-

viduals and many more published their art and scholarship in journals such as W. E. B. Du Bois's *Crisis*, Charles S. Johnson's *Opportunity*, Villard's *Nation*, Owen and Randolph's *Messenger*; Wallace Thurman's short-lived *Fire!!*, Carter G. Woodson's *Journal of Negro History*, and, as this paper will demonstrate, Hampton Institute's *Southern Workman*.⁵

The *Southern Workman*, the second longest continually-running black publication after the *Crisis*, did not begin as a natural forum for discourses between leading African-American intellectuals. Initially an organ of propaganda for Hampton's founder, white philanthropist General Samuel C. Armstrong, the *Workman* served as a promotional tool for the school's "gospel of salvation by hard work."⁶ Started in 1868 Hampton Institute initially offered two to three years of training and no B.A., sustained on the funds of northern white philanthropists. In those early years Armstrong and his white conservative backers saw Hampton as a way to reinforce the existent power structure in the modernizing South and African Americans' subordinate role within it. But Armstrong's goal of fostering generations of black educators who would "embody, accept, and preach an ethic of hard toil or the 'dignity of labor'" to black working class came under increasing fire as the 19th century drew to a close. Both southern planters and African-American community leaders protested Armstrong's vision, the former rejecting the idea that African Americans should receive any education and the latter rallying against Hampton's ideology and support of disenfranchisement, segregation, and civil inequality.⁷ During his tenure Armstrong

⁵ For a discussion of the Harlem Renaissance see Lewis, "Chapter 4: Enter the New Negro," 89-118. More broadly see Huggins and Hutchinson. For information on social scientists, see Holloway and Francille Rusan Wilson, *The Segregated Scholars: Black Social Scientists and the Creation of Black Labor Studies, 1890-1950* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006).

⁶ Walter C. Daniel, *Black Journals of the United States* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1982), 352.

⁷ James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 36, 34.

kept the *Workman* a conservative publication and refused to engage with the criticisms of the black press, or address the issues most pressing to African Americans, such as civil rights, labor and politics. In fact, during those early years the *Workman* promoted Jim Crow law and African-American subordination.

After Armstrong's death its new president, Hollis Burke Frissell, instituted changes both to Hampton's academic programs and to the *Workman*. When Frissell took over as president of Hampton in 1899, he subordinated Hampton's academic department to its industrial work program in an attempt to appeal white donors. He also altered the *Workman*, changing it into a journal that more resembled black scholarly publications, with articles by contributors on race relations, black education, black wage-laborers, churches and businesses. It even began including a few artistic pieces, such as poems by famed African-American poet Paul Laurence Dunbar. Noted black contributors included Robert R. Moton, R. R. Wright, Kelly Miller and Booker T. Washington. Yet the most important changes to both Hampton and the *Workman* did not truly begin until the school came under the leadership of its third white principle, James Edgar Gregg.

In 1918 Gregg, pressured by the growing New Negro movement, attempted to both update Hampton to the changing times and to maintain the school's emphasis on black subordination. Keeping Hampton's program of vocational training, Gregg began a B.A. program in Education and an M.A. in Library Science, and brought in African-American educators for the first time in the school's history. These included Oberlin-trained music director Robert Nathaniel Dett, Cornell-trained botanist Thomas W. Turner, and Chicago-trained anthropologist Allison Davis. But the school's segregation, program of subservience and low academic standards continued to frustrate students, while Gregg's limited changes drew protest from white philan-

thropists, who had never intended to support black liberal arts education.⁸ During these years the *Workman* changed as well. By the early 1920s the journal began to include articles by New Negro intellectuals who proved themselves more than willing to attack societal inequalities and prescribe potential solutions. Arguably the most influential of these black leaders, at least during the time of his article's publication, was writer and civil rights activist James Weldon Johnson. In his address to Hampton students, Johnson advocates cultural nationalism and warns about the dangers of not fighting against Jim Crow subordination and inequality.

James Weldon Johnson

James Weldon Johnson had an expansive career. Executive Secretary for the NAACP from 1919 until 1927, he worked as an activist and lobbied for the Dyer Anti-Lynching bill, wrote an influential novel and several volumes of poetry, compiled anthologies of African-American songs and poems, and wrote dozens of essays and a sociological study. Though towards the end of his career Johnson came under attack from rising black radicals who felt his views too conservative, his tireless work for equal rights helped carve the way for future generations of activists. In his 1923 Hampton commencement speech later published in the *Workman*, Johnson encourages the Hampton graduates to tackle American inequality through a combination of racial uplift, individual and collective civil rights activism, and realization of societal recognition through culture and the arts. His address to Hampton students reveals his hopes for the graduat-

⁸ See Anderson, "Chapter 7: Training the Apostles of Liberal Culture: Black Higher Education, 1900-1935," 238-278, and Andrew J. Rosa, "New Negroes on Campus: St. Clair Drake and the Culture of Education, Reform, and Rebellion at Hampton Institute," *History of Education Quarterly*, 53 no. 3 (2013).

ing Southerners and his belief in their importance, and the *Workman's*, in the wider New Negro movement.

James Weldon Johnson's career saw a succession of firsts. Born in Jacksonville, Florida, Johnson graduated Atlanta University before returning to his hometown to both run and expand his former grade school, start the first African-American daily in the nation, the *Daily American*, and become the first African American admitted to the Florida bar. By the turn of the century Johnson, having moved to New York City, was supporting himself through a successful musical career; in 1900s he composed "Lift Every Voice and Sing," which would become known as the "Negro National Anthem," worked on Broadway shows with his brother and the producer Bob Cole, and wrote several jingles for Teddy Roosevelt's presidential campaign. In 1906 Johnson secured a consular position in Venezuela and then another in Nicaragua, during which time he wrote his only novel, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*. Following the Wilson administration's ascent to the White House, Johnson returned to the US and began editing the African-American weekly *New York Age*. In 1915 he joined the NAACP, quickly becoming a successful organizer and nation-wide recruiter and, in 1919, the board elected him the organization's first African-American Executive Secretary. During the near decade of his tenure as Secretary, Johnson focused on the legal aspects of interracial relations, lobbied for the Dyer Anti-Lynching bill, and kept the organization internally harmonious, Northern and interracial.⁹

Meanwhile, Johnson's career as a writer, editor and architect of the Harlem Renaissance had taken off. During the US occupation of Haiti, Johnson wrote a four-part expose, published in

⁹ For information on Johnson's life and works, see Eugene Levy, James Weldon Johnson, *Black Leader; Black Voice* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973) and Robert E. Fleming, *James Weldon Johnson* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1987).

Villard's *Nation*, that pushed for Haitian independence. In 1921 he published a volume of poetry, *Fifty Years and Other Poems*, and followed this by several anthologies, including *The Book of American Negro Poetry* (1922) and *The Book of American Negro Spirituals* (1925). In the preface of the latter he argued for a form of cultural nationalism, declaring that African-American spirituals, which had derived both from European culture and African song and dance, constituted the only truly original form of American art. In 1927 he published his famed *God's Trombones: Seven Negro Sermons in Verse*, written in the style and rhythm of a black Southern preacher. By 1930, having left the NAACP for Fisk University a few years prior, Johnson published *Black Manhattan*, a sociological study of African-American life in New York City that aimed to show black accomplishments and instill racial pride.¹⁰

Johnson's speech printed in the *Workman*, entitled "The Larger Success," gives particular insight into his ideology of racial uplift. Johnson, like other African-American intellectuals of the time, believed that black leaders needed to foster education and enlightenment in the black working class to help them assimilate successfully into wider American society. The "larger success" of which Johnson speaks to the Hampton graduates is a "larger sense of the future— that sense of the future which comprehends not only the greatest service to self but the greatest service to others." The graduates must begin "building for the future greatness of a race" through service. Johnson himself had spent two (rather unpleasant) summers teaching in Henry County, Georgia in 1891-1892, and in 1923 advised the Hampton students, "who are trained and inspired," to bring "light" "hope" and "help" to the rural black working class. But as an integrationist and relative moderate, Johnson argues that this 'race building' should occur in the service of "our com-

¹⁰ Lewis, Levy.

mon country,” the country for which he had served as a diplomat, “the greatest democracy under which men have ever lived.”¹¹ With their service Hampton graduates will not only be uplifting the black working class, but also building a true democracy in which all people would receive the rights due to them.

In order to bring true democracy and racial equality to America, Johnson argues that the graduates must both stand strong in the face of racism and join national organizations to fight against it. The graduates’ individual actions matter a great deal. They must “stand firm and unequivocal in [their] claim for every right common to American citizenship” and “[m]ake those who withhold these rights feel constantly that they are committing an injustice.” Within their actions lie two possibilities— “full and unlimited American citizenship” or “permanent secondary status.” Accordingly, these Southern graduates must not “become Jim-Crowed in [their] souls.” Yet despite these warnings, Johnson’s address rings with optimism. Though problems are abound, service to the race “has a definite end in view,” as long as group efforts are undertaken. Johnson advises “correlat[ing] all of the forces within the group— economic, intellectual, moral, and political— in order to break down the barriers that will not give way to individual effort.” This means creating “an adequate machine and that machine is a national organization.” But Johnson does not mean to push for a Garveyesque racial nationalism. He rather hopes to build organizations that are “in no sense for the exclusive advantage of the Negro” but “for the benefit of true democracy in America.” One imagines he has something akin to his own interracial NAACP in mind. In the end, Johnson leaves the challenge of how specifically to combat racism up to the graduates. He tells them that it is up to “your particular group, and for your native land,

¹¹ James Weldon Johnson, “The Larger Success,” *Southern Workman*, 52 no. 9 (1923): 429.

that you are called upon to see that these questions are answered right.”¹² But he also leaves little doubt that these young New Negroes are up to the challenge, and gives a good indication as to where he believes they would make the greatest inroads in the fight for equality.

Johnson argues that culture and the arts provide a particularly good place to start gaining respect from white American society. As a Harlem Renaissance artist himself, Johnson articulates his own form of cultural nationalism. He encourages graduates to look to Africa for inspiration, for “the torch of civilization was lighted on the banks of the Nile.” But he also lets them know that they need not look so far abroad. As a compiler of spirituals, “the soul of America,” Johnson sees African- American history as rich with cultural heritage. In fact, perhaps due to the rise of black artists in 1922-1923, as well as his own success as a musician, Johnson argues that the “artistic endowment” in African Americans “outweighs all [their] other gifts.” In his Hampton speech Johnson quotes from in his *Book of Negro Poetry*, saying,

“A people may become great through many means, but there is only one measure by which its greatness is recognized and acknowledged. The final measure of the greatness of all peoples is the amount and standard of the literature and art they have produced. The world does not know that a people is great until that people produces great literature and art. No people that has produced great literature and art has ever been looked upon by the world as distinctly inferior.”¹³

This is the power of culture for Johnson— it will bring about respect and through it black artists will inspire racial pride in all African Americans. Johnson did not believe, as did Alain

¹² Ibid., 435, 432, 434, 435.

¹³ Ibid., 430, 432, 434.

Locke and Langston Hughes, that African Americans would develop a racially unique culture or art. Rather, Johnson sees the arts as a realm in which rising black artists might gain the respect that they deserve and in doing so force whites to realize the fallacy of racial superiority. Thus the arts offer one of the most open avenues for full integration and equality.

While Johnson understands civil rights organizations and cultural successes as the best ways to attack socioeconomic inequality in America and bring about full integration, another rising black intellectual understood the problem, and its solution, quite differently. Carter G. Woodson, the father of African-American history, published his own article in the *Workman* just a year before Johnson's appeared. In it Woodson calls for black autonomy in both economic and cultural spheres, and an increased emphasis on African and African-American history to inspire working-class blacks and instill racial pride. African Americans, Woodson argues, will gain true equality only by developing an independent educational system, autonomous businesses and publications, and a separate body of literature and history.

Carter G. Woodson

Carter G. Woodson, historian, journalist and author, created numerous institutions and publications to foster both the careers of scholars of African-American history and the production of black history itself. As historian Pero Gaglo Dagbovie notes, "Woodson was the principle mentor and promoter of the early black history movement; he did for his movement what Alain Locke, Charles Johnson and James Weldon Johnson did for the Harlem Renaissance, facilitating productive, cross-generational dialogues and relationships."¹⁴ In his 1922 article for the *Work-*

¹⁴ Pero Gaglo Dagbovie, *The Early Black History Movement, Carter G. Woodson, and Lorenzo Johnston Greene*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 5.

man, Woodson calls for black economic and educational independence, the development of a black press and a black literature, and the preservation of black history. Through the *Workman* Woodson reaches out to a southern readership and promotes his own blend of black nationalism and American individualism.

Woodson became one of the most important historians and black institution-builders of his generation. Born in New Canton, Virginia the son of former slaves, Woodson worked in coal mines until age twenty when he entered Douglass High School. By 1908, after having taught, worked in US and the Philippines, traveled extensively in Europe and Asia and earned a B.A. from Berea College in Kentucky, Woodson received his M.A. from the University of Chicago. In 1912 he became the second African- American man to earn a doctorate in History at Harvard, after W. E. B. Du Bois. In 1915 Woodson published his first book, *The Education of the Negro Prior to 1861*, and co-founded the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (ASNLH), along with its publication the *Journal of Negro History*, to promote the study and dissemination of the African-American past. While a Dean at Howard University from 1918 to 1921, Woodson not only ran a column for Marcus Garvey's *Negro World*, but also published a study of the Great Migration that combined demographic analysis, census data and traditional historical methods. His biographer Jacqueline Goggin argues that Woodson used *A Century of Negro Migration* (1918) to demonstrated black migrants' class consciousness and resistance to economic exploitation, a view which differed from that of certain prominent African-American newspapers, such as the *Chicago Defender*. Woodson also used *JNH* to publish letters from migrant workers, as well analyses of African-American migrants and migrant labor, like the migra-

tion study of Donald Henderson and Elizabeth Ross Haynes' analysis of African-American domestic workers.¹⁵

Woodson's most influential works came in the 1920s and 30s. In 1922 he published *The Negro in Our History*, which remained the standard textbook of African-American history in elementary through high schools well into the 1940s. By the time Woodson received the Spingarn Medal and launched Negro History Week (the precursor to Black History Month) in 1926, he had quit academia for good to focus on "the cause" of black history. In 1933 Woodson published his most renown work, *The Mis-Education of the Negro*, in which he argued that the educational system begun during Reconstruction with the funds of white philanthropists taught African Americans to despise their own people. In *Mis-Education* Woodson called for a new training system that would allow for the study of African heritage, a program of black economic nationalism that included blacks patronizing African-American businesses, and a turn away from both individualistic materialism and political systems without roots in the African-American experience, such as socialism and communism. Looking at Woodson's 1922 article for the *Workman* helps to situate his ideas on black nationalism and economic independence within his longer intellectual trajectory.¹⁶

In "Some Things" Woodson begins by calling for African-American economic and educational independence. Economic independence is the key to all power in America. "You may talk about rights and all that sort of thing," Woodson writes, but "[t]he people who own this country will rule this country." Far from Johnson's call for civil rights institutions and cultural

¹⁵ Wilson; Dagbovie, *Early Black History Movement* and Dagbovie, *American History Reconsidered* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010).

¹⁶ Dagbovie, *Early Black History Movement*, 69-73.

inspiration, Woodson argues that economic nationalism is the key to the future success of the race. He encourages more African Americans to take up business ventures, such as banks and insurance agencies, and calls for those reading the *Workman* to “learn to take these things more seriously.” Of course, good education is key to good business, and good education will emerge only by snipping the ties between black educational institutions and white funding. African Americans, who Woodson points out are three generations out of slavery, must become educated enough to “develop and grow without the stimulus of instruction” in order to “become persons well rounded in philosophy and science and history and what-not, and to be able to help one another.”¹⁷ In order to rise in society, and divorce themselves from poisonous white institutions, African Americans need to create their own.

African American cultural development will support these aims. An independent black press must be developed to write accurate accounts of black accomplishments and “be an inspiration to youth.” Woodson does not blame the white press for its blatant racism, but rather emphasizes that African Americans must “tell the story ourselves,” and by doing so counter mainstream narratives. In a similar vein Woodson argues that an independent black literature is crucial for instilling race pride in future generations. He chides African Americans for “trying to straighten our hair and bleach our faces,” because “some of the greatest men who have ever appeared in the history of the world” were African Americans, such as Frederick Douglass, Booker T. Washington, S. Coleridge-Taylor and Paul Laurence Dunbar. By publicizing their work, black people will realize their own value, become inspired and go on to accomplish great things.¹⁸ This black liter-

¹⁷ Carter G. Woodson, “Some Things Negroes Need To Do,” *Southern Workman*, 51 no. 1 (1922), 33-34.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 35.

ature is not to gain recognition from white society, but rather for African American inspiration alone. Here, Woodson foreshadowed black artists of the 1960s who emphasized the necessity of owning the means of one's cultural production. Moreover, he shone a light on the problem of white patronage.

Finally, the father of black history emphasizes the importance of knowing one's personal and racial heritage. Woodson instructs African Americans to recognize the contributions of past generations, of those who "achieved a great deal more than some of us could have achieved." He cites a successful black businessman as an example, highlighting again the importance of economics for eventual social equality. African heritage is important too, for Africans are a "people of whom you should feel proud." Ultimately, Woodson believes that history will be the catalyst to self-improvement, and "inspire [African Americans] to greater achievements."¹⁹ For Woodson, history takes on the role that culture does for Johnson. Merely recording history and disseminating it will inspire black people to greatness, and force white society to recognize black achievements.

Woodson and Johnson worked to tackle the same problem of inequality using the methods based on their own experiences and professions. Alice Dunbar-Nelson, an activist, educator and journalist, would also use her own professional career as the inspiration for her advice to the readership of the *Workman*. In her article she calls for both the cultural nationalism of Johnson and the focus on history and literature of Woodson. Unique to her understanding, however, is the role that primary education and girls play in racial uplift.

¹⁹ Ibid., 36.

Alice Dunbar-Nelson

Alice Dunbar-Nelson rose to prominence as a dedicated educator, civil rights activist, clubwoman, journalist and poet. In her article for the *Workman*, she gives specific attention to the importance of educating young people, details how teachers will accomplish this most effectively, and subtly reminds her readers of the importance of women and girls.

Alice Dunbar-Nelson began her career as a teacher and poet, later turning to activism and journalism. Born in New Orleans Dunbar-Nelson attended a teachers' program before starting a career in education. She published her first volume of poetry in 1895 at only nineteen years old, and by 1897 had moved to Brooklyn, New York where she taught, worked at the White Rose Mission and maintained active involvement in women's clubs. Briefly married to the famed poet Paul Laurence Dunbar, by 1916 Dunbar-Nelson had remarried and settled in Wilmington, Delaware where she spent the majority of her life. Throughout the 1920s she contributed actively to many leading black publications, including *JHN*, *Crisis*, *Ebony* and *Topaz*, and *Opportunity*, wrote columns for the *Pittsburg Courier* in 1926 and 1930, and for the *Washington Eagle* from 1926 to 1930. Active throughout the 1920s in local politics as well as the campaign for the Dyer Anti-Lynching bill, Dunbar-Nelson had her work included in both Johnson's *The Book of American Negro Poetry* (1931) and Robert Kerlin's *Negro Poets and Their Poems* (1935).²⁰

Dunbar-Nelson's article in the *Workman* broadens scholarly understanding of her activism. Historian Jacqueline Emery demonstrates that by 1926 Dunbar-Nelson was advancing cultural nationalism in her *Courier* articles by arguing "that reading African American literature and engaging in conversations about it are powerful means of constructing identity and advanc-

²⁰ Hull, "Chapter 2: Alice Dunbar-Nelson (1875-1935)," 33-107.

ing the race,” all the while subtly challenged her newspaper’s “emphasis on racial advancement as African American men’s advancement.”²¹ Yet four years before her days as a *Courier* writer Dunbar-Nelson was already prescribing her own solution to uplifting the black race and reminding readers of the importance of women, both as students and as educators. Like Woodson and to some extent Johnson, Dunbar-Nelson understood history, literature and common culture as key to racial uplift.

In her article “Negro Literature for Negro Pupils” Dunbar-Nelson argues that correct primary education is key to racial uplift. She claims that each great civilization, such as Jewish people and the Chinese, “impresses most painstakingly upon the rising generation the fact that it possesses a history and a literature, and that it must live up to the traditions of its history, and make that literature a part of its life.” Because African Americans have been so long oppressed in American society, given “a blonde ideal” to emulate, educators must “remedy” the situation. The task should not be taken lightly. “Every teacher in a colored school is a missionary,” Dunbar-Nelson writes, tasked not only with instilling knowledge in African-American children but also “character through pride of race.” Educators of young children are particularly important, because “the sentiment of pride and honor fostered in the Negro youth will fire his ambition, his desire to accomplish, even as others of his race have done before him.”²² This means instructors must teach the history of great African-American men, such as Booker T. Washington and Frederick Douglass, as well as the works of black poets and writers. But, because the audience she has in mind are children, Dunbar-Nelson recommends a particular curriculum for the task.

²¹ Emery, 289.

²² Alice Dunbar-Nelson, “Negro Literature for Negro Pupils,” *Southern Workman*, 51 no. 2 (1922), 59, 61-2.

For race pride to set in among black children, the lessons must catch their imagination. Children, as Dunbar-Nelson well knows, are easily bored. They will not sit for “dull statistics” or “tedious iterations that we are a great people,” and will dislike “idle boasting of past achievements” that lead to suspicions of insecurity on the part of the speaker. Rather, Dunbar-Nelson prescribes a curriculum filled by poems, fables and Sunday school lessons. These will foster the imagination of a child and “lift him above the dull brown earth and make him akin to all that is truly great in the universe.” She gives no small number of options for acceptable teaching material. The stories of Crispus Attucks about the Revolutionary War, the ballad of “Black Samson of Brandywine” by Paul Laurence Dunbar, Aesop’s fables and Alexander Dumas’s *Three Musketeers* as well as Pushkin, because both authors were believed to have African heritage. She gives more examples, such as stories from Du Bois and poems from Lowell, imagined romances with black protagonists, and biographies of “those who have accomplished great things in the face of heavy odds,” like Washington and Douglass.²³ This form of cultural nationalism that she espouses emerges directly from Dunbar-Nelson’s long career in education.

Finally, Dunbar-Nelson adds to her general prescriptions a particularly regional and feminist understanding of education. She laments standard textbooks written for northern children. It is a “Herculean” feat to teach southern children about snow that they have never seen. Art classes instruct children to paint by books, and this teaches them not to trust their own perceptions; instead, children should be free to “look out of the window and see the beauties of his own environment.” Standard readers, therefore, should reflect the region from which the children are to be taught. Dunbar-Nelson also reminds her reader, subtly, that girls are important, both as children

²³ Ibid., 60, 62-3.

and as teachers. Many of her pronouns are feminine— a choice separating her article from the other five New Negro writers in the *Workman*. And it is little black girls, she reminds the reader, who are given a “milk-white literature to assimilate” when “beautiful brown dolls” exist. These girls need a literature too, for she imagines the heartbreak of a pupil whose “eager soul was convulsed with shame that her one people had never accomplished anything in the realm of the books she lived.” This is the sort of student who will love Zora, from Du Bois’s *The Quest for the Golden Fleece*. These girls are especially important, Dunbar-Nelson knows, because of the role they may later play as educators themselves, growing into the “young girl teaching in a Southern city” who struggles to explain snow to her skeptical students.²⁴ Dunbar-Nelson alone of the New Negro writers for the *Workman* seems concerned for girls’ education, and her contribution to the *Workman* forces the readership to recognize some problems that may face African-American women alone.

Dunbar-Nelson joins Johnson and Woodson in her focus on culture as key to racial uplift— albeit in a way unique to her own career and experience. However, culture was not the only prescription given within the *Workman*, and during the 1920s the journal also featured the opinions of key social scientists who focused their attention on political economy, family structure and society. One such scholar was E. Franklin Frazier. In his contributions to the *Workman* the famed sociologist and academic writes far more on community organizations and economic structures than on the arts. Furthermore, Frazier’s multiple articles in the *Workman* throughout the 1920s make the journal especially critical to understanding his intellectual development.

²⁴ Ibid., 60, 61

E. Franklin Frazier

E. Franklin Frazier became an immensely influential sociologist, serving a long career at Howard University and authoring several often-cited studies, such as the 1939 prize-winning *The Negro Family in America*. His early-career articles in the *Workman* show the development of his ideas over time, from his commitment to autonomous black community organization and business in the early 1920s to his rejection of black artistic and economic autonomy by 1928. The change in tone in his later piece demonstrates not only his shifting worldview, but also his understanding of the *Workman* as a key publicist for his ideas. While initially using the *Workman* as a promotional tool for the Atlanta School of Social Work, Frazier's return to the journal in the late twenties demonstrates his view of it as key publication for debates on cultural and black nationalism.

Frazier's academic career spanned for nearly fifty years. After graduating Howard University in 1916 Frazier taught briefly, including a year at Tuskegee, and was one of the few African-American intellectuals who took a public stance against World War I. While at Clark University Frazier spent nine months in Denmark studying rural cooperatives, research which had a large impact on his early writings in the *Workman*. After receiving his Master's in Sociology, Frazier accepted a professorship at Morehouse College and headed the Atlanta School from 1922 to 1927. Building the program from the ground up, Frazier used all the tools available to him to make the Atlanta School a success, including administration, activism, fundraising, research, recruiting and promotion through lectures and publications.

From 1922 through 1925 Frazier used the *Workman* as a forum to promote his ideas developed in the Atlanta School, such as social services, community organizations, collectives and

black autonomous business ventures. However, as his relationship with the organization soured through disagreements with racist white administrators and board members, Frazier's publications in the *Workman* dropped off. Returning in the later 1920s, Frazier's 1928 article reflects his disillusionment with social work and black business ventures. Historian Jonathan Holloway contends that by the 1930s Frazier argued for a class-based interracial workers movement and radical reordering of society.²⁵ The *Workman* captures Frazier at an earlier period, during which he argues for community services, mutual aid and autonomous black business models to uplift the working class.

Later in life Frazier went on to publish his most influential works. From 1929 to 1934, while earning his doctorate under famed sociologist Robert E. Park, Frazier taught at Fisk University then moved on to Howard, where he remained until his death in 1962. In 1939, after the publication of *Negro Family*, Frazier participated in a well-documented debate with the Jewish anthropologist Melville Herskovits about the cultural heritage of African Americans. In 1948 Frazier was elected the first African-American president of the American Sociological Association, and in 1951 he was named the chief of the international Division of Applied Social Sciences for the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization. In 1957 he published the American version of his most controversial work, *The Black Bourgeois*, to widespread skepticism by black and white scholars alike.²⁶ Though by the 1930s and 40s Frazier saw class as the nexus for societal change, in the 1920s he focused on racial unity through cooperatives and black business ventures.

²⁵ Holloway, "Chapter 3: Searching for Culture, Running from the Past: E. Franklin Frazier, Academic Segregation, and Race Politics," 123-157.

²⁶ Platt, *E. Franklin Frazier Reconsidered*, "Prologue. Neither Stain nor Stone," 1-10.

Frazier argues for self-sufficient black communities in his 1923 article “Neighborhood Union in Atlanta.” After the race riots in Atlanta African Americans found themselves shut out of the “wider community” yet, Frazier claims, a “rampant individualism” prevailed among them. The Union brought black residents of Atlanta together and began providing the key services denied to them by Jim Crow law. Frazier details the Union’s different departments, which provided “activities such as recreation, health, sanitation, child welfare.” Union-organized activities included block-parties, a literature and music program, healthcare, religious life and classes on health, sanitation, arts and trades such as dressmaking. Through these activities the Union instilled in residents “a spirit of democracy and neighborly feeling” and “a feeling of community responsibility and pride,” feelings evident in the children who, having grown up with the Union, return from school to become “leaders in their community.” The Neighborhood Union in Atlanta thus represents a successful effort by African Americans to create “a self-sufficient and respectable community of their own.” Though Frazier does add a note of skepticism on how long “two fully developed, independent communities can exist in the same city,” as the Director of the Atlanta School he sees an autonomous black community built on social services as a potential way for African Americans to better their circumstances and raise future leaders.²⁷

In “Co-operatives: The Next Step in the Negro’s Business Development” (1924) Frazier takes his argument a step further by promoting black economic independence. In this article, as in previous ones, Frazier outlines the inner workings of cooperatives in Denmark, insisting that the cooperative model is natural for African Americans, as evidenced by other successful cooperatives such as fraternal societies and religious organizations. The benefits of cooperatives are

²⁷ E. Franklin Frazier, “Neighborhood Union in Atlanta,” *Southern Workman*, 52 no. 9 (1923): 437, 438-440, 442.

manifold: they are simple in structure, create their own demand “naturally,” foster firsthand business experience and management education, eradicate the middleman, and operate within a democratic structure that ensures “the smallest producer the same prices as the larger producer.” Cooperatives will not only help uplift the black working class economically, but they will lead to a natural increase in farmers’ education and less susceptibility to fraud from white businessmen.²⁸ Though the socialism of the cooperative complies with Frazier’s later thinking, his argument that African Americans should remove themselves from the mainstream economy complicates his relationship with black nationalism, against which he later argued vehemently.²⁹

By 1928, after his fallout with the Atlanta School and at the height of the Harlem Renaissance, Frazier argues against black cultural and economic independence. In “A Folk Culture in the Making” Frazier writes that a black “cultural autonomy” cannot emerge within American society, not only because African Americans have no particular biologically racial features, but more importantly because black Americans have historically been “forced to participate in the whole gamut of American life.” African-American artists have become great by “their mastery of social forms of American culture,” not due to their racially distinctive culture. Already Frazier begins to contradict his previous promotion of autonomous black business ventures, writing that African Americans are “tied up so intimately with the whole fabric of American life that even the cry for economic independence in the sphere of business often becomes futile.” That said, Frazier encourages black leaders to promote “spiritual values” in the working class, and to take advantage of the “artistic creations” from African-American folk culture. He approves of, for ex-

²⁸ Frazier, “Co-operatives: The Next Step in the Negro’s Business Development,” *Southern Workman*, 53 no. 11 (1924): 506-509.

²⁹ Holloway, 149-151.

ample, James Weldon Johnson's "Negro Anthem," then sung in black schools. This sort of art encourages a cultural advancement "unique but not in opposition to [African Americans'] growth and wider participation in American life as a whole."³⁰ This later article for the *Workman* lends insight into Frazier's 1930s studies on African-American cultural heritage, especially given that he had not yet begun to work with his later advisor Robert E. Park, who is often credited with strongly influencing Frazier's ideas.³¹ Frazier's return to the *Workman* after his fallout with the Atlanta School attests to his understanding of the journal as not simply a promotional tool for his institution, but rather as a forum to debate ideas central to black intellectual thought at the time, such as cultural and economic nationalism.

Along with Frazier another African-American intellectual would repeatedly use the *Workman* to promote his ideas. Though Thomas L. Dabney, labor activist and organizer, shares with Frazier and Woodson an emphasis of the importance of the economic aspects of black life, most critical for Dabney is organized labor's treatment of African-American workers. And, as a New Negro and a Southerner, Dabney demonstrates a stronger pessimism about the ability of white institutions to change than some of his Northern brethren, such as Johnson.

Thomas L. Dabney

Thomas L. Dabney worked for years as an educator, labor activist, organizer for the American Negro Labor Congress, researcher for the NUL and journalist. While recounting progressive victories within the labor movement in the *Workman*, Dabney remained ever-skeptical

³⁰ Frazier, "A Folk Culture in the Making," *Southern Workman*, 57 no. 6 (1928): 196-199.

³¹ See Holloway, 131-33.

about the ability of organized labor to address the racism permeating its ranks. As a black Southerner and a socialist, Dabney viewed racial inequality as economic and remained more pessimistic than many Northern New Negro intellectuals about the prospects of large-scale change.

Dabney's work in the 1920s centered on organized labor. After fighting in World War I and spending time assisting his family, Dabney graduated Virginia Union and in 1925 and received funding from the NAACP and the American Fund for Public Service to enroll in Brookwood Labor College, a training ground for white, immigrant and black labor activists. During the same year Dabney traveled with other labor activists to Soviet Russia, later writing articles about the benefits of Soviet health and welfare programs for several publications including the *Workman*. After graduating Brookwood in 1926, Dabney began publishing in journals such as the *Messenger*, *Opportunity*, *Labor Age*, *Social Review*, *Modern Quarterly* and the *Workman*. As a New Negro Southerner who remained in the South for most of his life, Dabney's work demonstrates the differences between the attitudes of New Negro Southerners and Northerners, the latter of whom tended to be more optimistic about the seriousness with which white southern liberals took interracial coalitions.³²

From 1926 through 1930 Dabney published multiple short pieces in the *Workman*, generally articles developed from his research with the NUL. In them he explored topics such as African-American conferences and education in rural Virginia, Soviet welfare, courses on black history in white and black schools, attitudes of whites and blacks towards unionization, and race leadership. As a lead researcher for the NUL starting in 1926, Dabney studied African-American

³² See Claudrena N. Harold, *New Negro Politics in the Jim Crow South* "Chapter 6: New Negro Southerners," (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2016); Charles F. Howett "Organizing the Unorganized: Brookwood Labor College, 1921-1937," *Labor Studies Journal*, 6 no. 2 (1981): 165-79.

trade unionists and his articles on them challenged stereotypes about the black worker's hostility to organized labor.³³ Later studying the use of black history in schools, Dabney lamented that "by rather a curious irony of fate, the Negro, while playing an important part in the establishment of the public school system in the South, has almost no place in its curriculum."³⁴ Though some white southern institutions had begun to incorporate studies of race relations, Dabney did not see this "as any radical change." Though "promising and encouraging," he remarked that "the South is still conservative. To a large extent the traditions and customs of long standing hold it in their grip."³⁵ But while Dabney found education important, his interest in socialism and training at Brookwood meant he believed inequality in American society required an economic solution through organized labor.

His 1928 article "Organized Labor's Attitude Toward Negro Workers" demonstrates Dabney's optimism about progressive changes and pessimism about the attitude of white labor leaders. Dabney begins his article optimistically. Increasingly, due to industrialization, urbanization and the Great Migration, black and white labor leaders and progressives have realized that economic and industrial (rather than biological and psychological) issues are at the heart of the "so-called Negro problem." Progressive intellectual leaders of both races— including Charles S. Johnson, T. Arnold Hill, Charles H. Wesley and Abram L. Harris— have begun to increasingly study "the industrial phase of the race problem." Some encouraging signs have come too from within the union leadership itself, such as attempts at American Federation of Labor (AFL) con-

³³ Quoted in Eric Arnesen, "Following the Color Line of Labor: Black Workers and the Labor Movement Before 1930," *Radical History Review*, 55 Winter (1993): 58.

³⁴ Thomas L. Dabney, "The Study of the Negro," *The Journal of Negro History*, 19 no. 3 (1934): 269.

³⁵ Dabney, "Southern Students Study Race Relations," *Southern Workman*, 55 no.9 (1926): 400.

ventions to ban discrimination in unions, the ban itself having gone into effect in the Pennsylvania State Federation of Labor. In addition certain unions, such as the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union and the Industrial Workers of the World have taken a "more liberal stand on the race question in trade unions."³⁶ To all of these developments Dabney gives due note.

Yet despite these few encouraging signs, racism on multiple fronts still prevents the class solidarity necessary to bring about economic change. Historically, racism and the lack of African-American workers in industrial jobs meant that "attitude of the American labor movement toward Negro workers has always been either indifference or positive opposition." Little about this has changed. Dabney recounts his findings, gathered through questionnaires and other research methods, that "the policy of the majority of unions [is] to cater to local sentiment regarding the Negro," which means that "Negro members of mixed unions are discriminated against on account of race." This problem will not be easily eradicated.

Two fundamental issues lie at the heart of organized labor's race problem. First, Dabney argues that American workers both in unions and outside are "still individualistic. Whatever social consciousness [the worker] has acquired is racial rather than class." This can be attributed to classic American values and historic racism in American society. A second and potentially larger issue comes from the labor leadership itself. The AFL leadership, despite of the "high sounding moral platitudes which fill the orations of the average labor leader," remains "essentially conservative and apathetic toward Negro workers." Dabney ends his article pessimistically. "Effecting solidarity in the working class is no easy task," he writes, and without a commitment to addressing racism from labor leadership, Dabney implies, the "race problem" will remain "an insur-

³⁶ Dabney, "Organized Labor's Attitude Towards Negro Workers," *Southern Workman*, 57 no. 8 (1928): 323, 329.

mountable obstacle” to class consciousness.³⁷ As both a radical and a realist Dabney praises change where he sees it but remains unconvinced that organized labor will step up to the challenge of reordering society on an interracial class basis. A frequent contributor to the *Workman*, Dabney’s work demonstrates New Negro Southerners’ dedication to the same intellectual debates as their Northern counterparts, and shows the *Workman* as a journal for articles on fundamental social issues of the day, such as the role of African Americans in organized labor.

As has been demonstrated the New Negro intellectuals who published in the *Workman* focused on many crucial aspects of American society, such as labor, economics, culture and education. And, as an article by Howard Thurman demonstrates, the journal’s scope extended to religion as well. This focus on religion is unsurprising, especially in light of the scholarship of Wallace Best, who demonstrates that the New Negro Era was a transformative time for African-American religion. During the 1920s demographic changes diversified blacks’ spiritual practices, raised fundamental questions regarding the church’s social and political responsibilities to the black community, forced old line churches to reevaluate their practices and purposes, and resulted in a proliferation of new churches. In monthlies like Randolph and Owen’s *Messenger*, some intellectuals even debated the utility of religion. Thurman, who perhaps more than any of the other *Workman* contributors affected direct societal change through his influence on the Civil Rights Movement, used the journal to reach out to African-American ministers, calling on them to be students, leaders and spiritual mentors to all those in need.

Howard Thurman

³⁷ Ibid., 327-8, 324, 330.

In 1953 *Life Magazine* named Howard Thurman one of the twelve “Great Preachers” of the 20th century, years before his deep influence on a generation of Civil Rights leaders such as Whitney M. Young, Jesse Jackson and Martin Luther King Jr. During his lifetime Thurman authored twenty-three books, along with numerous sermons, speeches and pamphlets, spent time at leading black institutions, and founded the Church for the Fellowship of All Peoples in San Francisco, the first US church with both an interracial membership and ministry. In 1928 Thurman wrote “The Task of the Negro Ministry” for the *Workman*, an address from an already celebrated African-American minister and educator.³⁸ In his appeal Thurman encourages black ministers to understand the realities of modern American society and to become spiritual mentors to their congregations. As a New Negro (and an Economics major) he clearly sees the socioeconomic realities present in the African-American community, and as a Christian mystic he believes those realities can only be properly confronted with deep spiritual reflection.

Though devoutly Christian throughout his life, Thurman remained untethered to a particular denomination, as evidenced by the decision the Church for the Fellowship independent. He also often revealed mystic tendencies, which Ernst Troeltsch defines as a discarding of hardened worship forms, doctrines and traditional historical elements of the church in favor of an inward religious experience with no permanent form and a unity of all mankind.³⁹ Born in Dayton Beach, Florida in 1900, Thurman was the first African-American boy from his hometown go to high school, in his case Florida Baptist Academy. He graduated Morehouse in 1919 with a B.A. in Economics and moved on to study ministry at the Rochester Theological Seminary. During

³⁸ John H. Cartwright, “The Religious Ethic of Howard Thurman,” *The Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics*, 5 (1985): 79-80.

³⁹ See Cartwright, 80-82.

this time he also served as Assistant to the pastor of First Baptist Church in Roanoke, VA, and was ordained there. In 1926, after graduating Rochester, Thurman accepted a pastorate in Oberlin before moving to a joint appointment at Morehouse and Spelman Colleges as the Director of Religious Life. In 1932 Thurman became the first Dean of Rankin Chapel at Howard University and joined the faculty as an Assistant Professor of Theology.⁴⁰

As Thurman's reputation increased he began to forge his own path, in and out of the borders of academia and conventional Christianity. With his second wife, Sue Bailey Thurman, Thurman led a national YMCA and YWCA African-American delegation to India and elsewhere, meeting both Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi. During this trip, overlooking the Khyber Pass, Thurman claims to have had a vision of a spiritual unity of all peoples beyond race and class that became the basis for his San Francisco-based Church of the Fellowship, which he founded in 1944 along with Dr. Alfred Fisk, a professor and Presbyterian clergyman. Nine years later Thurman accepted the post of Dean of Marsh Chapel and Professor of Spiritual Resources and Disciplines at Boston University, becoming the first African American to hold the post in the mostly white university. After serving as Dean for twelve years, Thurman retired to San Francisco and founded the Howard Thurman Education Trust, which provided scholarships for college students and supported community intercultural activities.⁴¹

⁴⁰ For information on Thurman's life and theology see Walker Earl Fluker, "Chapter 5, Dangerous Memories and Redemptive Possibilities: Reflections on the Life and Work of Howard Thurman," in *Black Leaders and Ideologies in the South Resistance and Nonviolence* eds. Preston King and Walker Earl Fluker, (New York: Routledge, 2005), 147-76.

⁴¹ Zachary Williams, "Prophets of Black Progress: Benjamin E. Mays and Howard W. Thurman, Pioneering Black Religious Intellectuals," *Journal of African American Men*, 5 no. 4 (March 2001): 28-35.

Thurman's teachings, which influenced leaders such as King (who carried *Jesus and the Disinherited* during the Montgomery Bus Boycott), focused on inner reflection and the unity of all peoples. The teachings of Gandhi and Thurman's earlier mentors clearly influenced his beliefs, such as his understanding all people shared a "hunger of the heart," or an internal restlessness that seeks movement towards God. Thurman felt strongly that community, built through love, gives meaning and structure to life, and that social change needs to be premised on the reconciliation (another word for community) of the races.⁴² Though some suggest that Thurman remained unengaged socially, in fact his ideas on and campaign for nonviolent resistance influenced many of his followers and civil rights leaders alike.⁴³ In his *Workman* article Thurman argues that spirituality and reality must remain firmly interconnected, and that it is the job of the minister to make sure his congregation lives ethically, both to save their souls and to affect social change.

In "The Task of the Negro Ministry" Thurman warns against institutionalized religion and calls for communal spirituality. The growing "centralization" and "expansion" of institutional churches concerned Thurman. During the Great Migration migrants not only joined storefront churches but added to the already large congregations of formal institutions, such as the African Methodist Episcopal Church in Chicago. According to Thurman these vast new churches had begun to lose contact with the individual members whose work and contributions had helped build them. Thurman still does believe that the "minister must encourage the development of systemic procedure in the institutional religious life," but he also encourages ministers to clarify to their

⁴² Cartwright, 91, 82-84.

⁴³ Williams, 30.

congregants that “the Spirit of Jesus grows by contagion and not by organization,” and that “a man’s life is changed by contact with another life.”⁴⁴ After all, Jesus’s disciples were a “fellowship,” rather than a formal organization. Thurman thus emphasizes that community, rather than institutionalized worship, awakens true spirituality.

This spirituality, however, must remain grounded in the realities of American society. As a New Negro and a minister Thurman hopes to address social and economic realities through religion, arguing that this world and the next should not be falsely separated. Thurman points out the reality that most “[n]egroes are poor” and “a part of a social system in which the dominant group is represented by vast economic power and the social security it brings.” After Emancipation freedmen began to overemphasize material possessions, sure that only through worldly goods would they gain any form of security. Ministers must guard against this practice, but also be on the lookout for its reverse, that is, “an overemphasis upon the other world” brought on by the realities of poverty, violence and Jim Crow law. Ministers should therefore help their congregations realize “that life and religion may not be separated without disaster to both,” and help their congregants understand how spirituality can inform their actions in the world. Preambling his later involvement with civil rights and social justice, Thurman quotes Olive Schreiner, one of his mentors, writing that “[t]he present, the present only, is ours to work in, and the future ours to create.”⁴⁵ For Thurman, inward spirituality informs one’s ability to live ethically and affect change.

⁴⁴ For information on African-American religion during the Great Migration see Wallace D. Best, *Passionately Human, No Less Divine: Religion and Culture in Black Chicago, 1915-1952* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Thurman, 389-90;

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 387, 388, 390-91.

In his last section, Thurman emphasizes that ministers must truly understand the modern world in order to be appropriate spiritual mentors. New challenges face African-American ministers in a rapidly changing 20th century, such as the acceptance of the theory of evolution, the popularization of radio broadcasts, and a new generation of educated African-American youths who do not believe in “certain conventional standards of morality” such as abstinence. Rather than offering dogmatic guidelines, Thurman encourages the minister to “be a student” and to learn how “to interpret life in terms of a creative idealism.” The minister must educate himself on “the findings in all the major fields of human knowledge,” think them through and interpret them in terms of spirituality. Only with this base of knowledge can a minister appropriately “sense the dilemmas which his people face in American life” and “offer intelligent spiritual and *practical* guidance to them.” [emphasis added] Importantly, Thurman believes that “God-conscious” ministers can offer answers that others cannot, and produce “a creative synthesis in light of which all the facts of science or what not may be viewed.”⁴⁶ The role of the black minister is to guide people within American society and help them affect change. Thurman’s article in the *Workman* asks African-American ministers to be both spiritual mentors and agents assisting in societal change, demonstrates his own role as a New Negro intellectual, and shows the *Workman* as a journal willing to engage in debates on pressing societal issues of the era.

Conclusion

All of the New Negro contributors to the *Workman* offered to their readership ways to affect change in American society based on the author’s own experiences, education and inter-

⁴⁶ Ibid., 391-2.

ests. Though they went on to have diverse and often high-profile careers, they all chose to publish short manifestos on social change in the *Workman*. For this reason the journal cannot be overlooked as a promotor of New Negro thought. Their articles for the *Workman* illustrate the authors' own personal intellectual development, often giving insight into earlier and lesser-known phases of their careers, and should be put into conversation with similar articles in northern journals for a more complete understanding of New Negro intellectual life in the 1920s.