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“I Seem To Be Thinking Of Africa All The Time”:
Nancy Cunard’s *Negro: An Anthology*

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree Masters of Art
in Afro American Studies

by

Thabisile Griffin

2014

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

“I Seem To Be Thinking Of Africa All The Time”:

Nancy Cunard’s *Negro: An Anthology*

by

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Masters of Art in Afro American Studies

University of California, Los Angeles, 2014

Professor Robin D.G Kelley, Chair

The appearance of Nancy Cunard’s 1934 massive *Negro: An Anthology* represented a significant rupture in the literary and socio-political worlds of the interwar era. This collection of over 150 Black voices from around the world, along with a few notable white contributors, symbolized an important breach in Black radical literature at that time. Although Cunard’s interest in Black people and culture occasionally adopted a slightly exotic cast, her investment in *Negro: An Anthology* was essentially political. **This thesis attempts to situate the anthology within a broader context of global contingencies and historical convergences of the 1930s, with the understanding that Cunard was indeed a product of the networks of power of that time.** Today, *Negro: An Anthology* is considered a major contribution to the intellectual and cultural history of 20th century African diasporic history.

The thesis of Thabisile Griffin is approved.

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2014

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Introduction

The first edition of *Negro: An Anthology* (1934) is an extensive volume of 855 pages, weighing in at almost 8 pounds of featured articles, poems, essays, pictures and sheet music depicting diverse narratives of Black life across the African Diaspora. Describing her work as a “brief outline of the history of the black race,”¹ Cunard emphasized her personal desire to counter what she believed to be the racial superstitions of her day. In a review for *The Pittsburgh Courier*, renowned historian and bibliophile Arthur A. Schomburg praised the book for balancing Black creativity with social critique:

within the plethora of pages is encompassed a miniature world depicting important happenings to the Negroes whose descendants are now portrayed giving articulation to the cultural side for the world and the bitter feeling manifested in the human machinery of evolution, in its inflexible work.²

Organized mostly geographically, more than half of the book consists of pieces from the United States, with substantive sections devoted to Europe, the West Indies, South America and Africa. Contributors represented a dazzling array of Black and white literary figures, including Zora Neale Hurston, Langston Hughes, W.E.B Du Bois, Theodore Dreiser, William Carlos Williams, Josephine Herbst, Sterling Brown, Countee Cullen, George Padmore, Jomo Kenyatta, James Ford, George Antheil, Kenneth Macpherson, Ezra Pound, Louis Zokofsky, Walter White and Samuel Beckett.

Yet, this impressive collection of luminaries did not guarantee the book’s publication or ensure its popularity. On the contrary, publishing *Negro* was something of a financial feat for

¹ Nancy Cunard, editor. , Introduction to *Negro: An Anthology* (London: Wilshart Press, 1934).

² Arthur A. Schomburg, “Nancy Cunard In Negro, Anthology Criticizes Whites Who Have Not Changed In Beliefs on the Negro”. *The Pittsburgh Courier*. (April, 14th, 1934), 2.

Cunard, who subsidized its publication with funds won in a libel suit against the British press for sensationalizing her romantic encounters with Henry Crowder, a Black American musician. The settlement supported a limited print run of 1,000 copies released in early 1934 by the London-based publisher, Wishart Press. A family-owned, anti-fascist publishing company, Wishart had informal ties to the Communist Party of Great Britain. In 1936, under the name Lawrence and Wishart, the press became the official voice of the Party, issuing explicitly Marxist books and pamphlets during the Popular Front era.

What follows is a genealogy of *Negro: An Anthology* within the context of Nancy Cunard's rebellious life and times. "Genesis" describes her bourgeois yet defiant upbringing, mercurial personality, the events that lead to her meeting the man who reportedly inspired her to assemble *Negro*, Henry Crowder, and her relationship with her parents would radicalize her and ultimately bring her into contact with an emergent Black internationalist vision. These were, indeed, rebellious times. "New Negro" emerges as both a local and global phenomenon, through reframing the Harlem Renaissance and discussing how Communism, anti-Fascism, and anti-colonialism profoundly shaped Black art and politics during the 1930s, which found expression in Cunard's anthology. The third chapter, "Negro: An Anthology, 1934," discusses the contents of the book, the connectivity of its contributors and the ultimate convergence of race, class, gender and sexuality in its pages. Finally, "Reception" showcases a portion of the responses Cunard received through mail correspondence shortly after *Negro* was released. I seek to employ Michel Foucault's "genealogy" as a method of reconstructing the origins and assembly of *Negro*, not as a manifestation of some inexorable movement toward progress, liberation, or global Black

solidarity, but as a product of contingent and simultaneous structures of power, with the understanding that interpretations are also dependent on the specific continuations of power.³

By constructing a genealogy of *Negro: An Anthology*, I hope to destabilize many accepted narratives on the interwar period, while also re-situating Cunard's role as an instigator – or in Foucauldian terms, an “author” – who characterizes “the existence, circulation, and operation of certain discourses within a society.” In other words, Nancy Cunard was more than an accidental editor and publisher; her class and racial transgressions and political transformation reveal a convergence of a complex web of discursive practices that are not fully evident in the text itself. *Negro*, after all, is one of several seminal texts of the 1930s that literally produces the modern African-descended subject. That Nancy Cunard is behind this text is no small irony.

Besides exploring Cunard's life and times, I examine how *Negro* was assembled, produced, received, and painted against the socio-political backdrop of the 1930's—remaining cognizant of the fact that constructing an anthology is both an act of inclusion and exclusion. With this understanding, we can then ask questions such as: why is *Negro: An Anthology* significant? Why did Nancy Cunard undertake the task of compiling this work? What impact did it have on Black cultural, intellectual, and political developments throughout the African diaspora? With this project, I seek to look at *Negro* as a system and a structure, situating it as a larger product of historical convergence of the 1930s. By examining this production and release of *Negro*, we can identify these conjunctures as fundamental to the construction and reconstruction of historical text. With this understanding, we can then create narratives that re-

³ Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History”. *The Foucault Reader*, ed. P. Rabinow, (Harmondsworth: Penguin), 87-90.

imagine black literature, expression and political trajectory that offer new ways of thinking about contemporary intersectional struggle.

Chapter 1: Genesis

Nancy Cunard was born into a family whose riches were built on trans-Atlantic shipping. Her great-grandfather, Samuel Cunard, founded the British and American Royal Mail Steam-Packet Company in 1839, a mere six years after England's Slavery Abolition Act of 1833 and thirty-two years after the Slave Trade Act of 1807. Subsequently evolving into Cunard Steamships Limited, the line was known for its safe voyages and operated independently until the cruise company, Carnival Corporation, procured it in 1998. Perhaps an early link to the Cunard name and black radicalism was in 1847, when Frederick Douglass sent a letter to the editor of the *London Times*, protesting his treatment on a Cunard ship after he had been refused entry to the first-class cabin for which he had paid. This letter got back to Samuel Cunard a week later, who wrote back via the *Times* (April 13th, 1847), "No one can regret more than I do the unpleasant circumstances respecting Mr. Douglass's passage; but I can assure you that nothing of the kind will again take place in the steam-ships with which I am connected."⁴ It is unclear whether or not Cunard upheld his promise in the following years, but according to Douglass, who talked about it in his memoir, *My Bondage and My Freedom*:

⁴ Samuel Cunard, *The London Times*, (London, April 13th, 1847), *Jim Crow in Britain*. <http://www.bulldozia.com/projects> (accessed March 12th, 2014).

So good an opportunity for calling out a full expression of British sentiment on the subject, had not before been occurred and it was most fully embraced. The result was, that Mr. Cunard came out in a letter to the public journals, assuring them of his regret at the outrage, and promising that the like should never occur again on board his steamers; and the like, we believe, has never occurred on board the steamships of the Cunard line.⁵

Nancy arrived forty-nine years later, in the spring of 1896. Born to Maud Alice Burke, described as an “American beauty queen,” and Sir Bache Cunard, Nancy grew up in a castle in rural Leicestershire. Surrounded by opulence, from horses to gold, she nevertheless lacked attention and affection from both her mother and father. Due to her parent’s frequent absences, Nancy was raised by servants, and was often described as a lonely and wandering child. She was also remembered for her desire to study and question everything. Her biographer, Lois Gordon, reports “but even before she was four ‘her desire to read was acute and there was an early reverence in her for those who wrote books’.”⁶ According to Hugh Ford, beginning in her youth Cunard remained,

devoutly studious; read, spoke, wrote many languages fluently, and published poems in English, French, Spanish...Her eye was never for the obvious, and it may have lighted upon attributes to which we were blind, or provided those enchantments that often were abruptly disenchanted.⁷

Her ability to find and critique seemingly obscure narratives and accounts would also influence her greatly in her future political activism and literary production.

Nancy was still a child when she began formulating her earliest critique of her parent’s failure to uphold the bourgeois private sphere. As Gordon points out, “when the Cunards were at

⁵ Frederick Douglass. *My Bondage and My Freedom* [1855], (New York: Dover, 1969), Chap 24.

⁶ Lois Gordon, *Nancy Cunard: Heiress, Muse, Political Idealist*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 6.

⁷ Hugh Ford, *Nancy Cunard: Brave Poet, Indomitable Rebel*, (Philadelphia: Clinton Book Company, 1968), 21.

home, the young Nancy was often bewildered by their ambiguous moral values.” She was described as being disgusted by their habits- particularly her mother who would often claim she never wanted any kids, and only had a daughter to fulfill the duties of a wife. Nancy would grow despising everything her parents and her class represented. Her mother, Maud, would often invite male admirers to their house when her father was out, or even on weekends when he was present in another room in the house. Sir Cunard exhibited a strange nonchalance about her mother’s infidelity, which repulsed Nancy, and revealed the contradictions of the morality and civility of an aristocratic English life. Her mother would come to be known for her casualness in sexual intimacy, and ironically enough, this characteristic would be a trait that her daughter would eventually portray.

Although Nancy despised Maud and her bourgeois attitudes towards family and society, as an adult she exhibited similar tendencies. Both Maud and Nancy spent much of their lives travelling around Europe. Both were voracious readers, loved France, moved effortlessly among men of high literature and art, and were legendary for their sexual freedom.⁸ Nancy would later have relationships with many notable modernist writers of the era including Ezra Pound, Pablo Neruda, T.S Eliot and Wyndham Lewis. In the following years, Nancy would gain access to Black musicians of the early 20th century, along with many other contributors to the anthology, through her sexual and intimate relationships with them.

Sexual and social “rebellion,” from open bi-sexuality to flaunting gender conventions, was not unusual for her class during the early 20th century. She recalls her experiences during her summer in Venice in 1913, when she and the daughter of the Duchess of Rutland, Diana

⁸ Gordon, *Nancy Cunard*, 5.

Manners, formed a group with other young women calling themselves the “Corrupt Coterie”.

These daughters of great aristocracy

...were fearless but polite rebels, committed to the ostentatious defiance of conventions...they did as they pleased. They had all-night parties, created and performed plays for one another bathed naked in the Adriatic in the moonlight, wrote one another witty and wanton love letters...⁹.

History was certainly in favor of this rebellious culture, as 1914 ushered in World War I, and introduced forms of youthful social resistance and discontent with traditional thinking, including an emerging artistic and sexual freedom. Viewing art as a medium that could potentially dramatically change history, the Corrupt Coterie significantly altered Nancy’s life, and would later heavily influence her time in France.

In 1920, Cunard moved to France and got involved with the Dadaists and Surrealists, finding temporary solace in groups of artists that shared her ideals of using literary forms of expression to expose the contradictions and the “hollows” of the upper class. Or, as her lover Henry Crowder put it, “the life of a literary bohemian was [Cunard’s] first tentative step toward radicalism.”¹⁰ The eve of this decade would launch a shift in the global political climate, with the collapse of the Second International (Socialists), the success of the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, and the rise of the Third (Communist) International in Moscow in 1919. The First Pan African Congress was organized by W. E. B Du Bois in 1919 as well, followed by four more meetings in the decade following. Africans in the diaspora, through Garveyism and other nationalist movements, mounted a challenge to European imperialism and began mobilizing for self-rule. In the early 1920s, Cunard was a self-proclaimed anarchist, but by the time she

⁹ Gordon, *Nancy Cunard*, 23.

¹⁰ Henry Crowder, *As Wonderful As All That? Henry Crowder’s Memoir of His Affair With Nancy Cunard 1928-1935*. (Navarro, California : Wild Trees Press, 1987), 8.

published *Negro*, she had become a Communist convert. As she asserted in the Foreword to *Negro*, “it is Communism alone which throws down the barriers of race as finally it wipes out class distinctions.”¹¹

In many ways, the fairly obscure jazz pianist and bandleader, Henry Crowder, would serve as the bridge between Cunard’s left turn and her encounter with the Black Radical Tradition. They first met in Venice in the autumn of 1928. Crowder had just completed a long engagement at Hotel Luna as a member of Eddie South’s quartet (“The Alabamians”). Born in Georgia in 1890 to an extremely poor, devout Baptist family, Crowder remained a devout Christian until his death in 1955. In his memoir, he confesses that since childhood he was never attracted to white women. He questioned white people’s superior attitudes towards Black Americans, remained skeptical of interracial unions, and later on moved to Washington D.C. where he married “a beautiful little brown-skinned school girl by the name of Mary Francis Turner...her freshness, her simplicity and her sweetness furnished such a great difference to the women with whom I worked, I was immediately attracted to her.”¹² Married and somewhat settled, Crowder began working as a pianist and vocalist for the famous Mahogany Hall in Washington D.C, a “high-end”, well-paying brothel that catered only to rich white men.

Crowder’s life before meeting Cunard was defined by strict religious observance, musical opportunities, and incipient efforts at organizing. He was in the process of formulating a coalition of Black performers during his stay in D.C, stating that he

conceived of the idea of uniting all of the colored musicians in the city in one big organization under my direction. The idea caught on and after some very hard

¹¹ Cunard, *Negro*, 14.

¹² Crowder, *As Wonderful As All That?* 41.

work the thing was accomplished. I became a central figure in the jazz musical field in Washington. I was very proud of my accomplishments.¹³

When World War I ended, and the Armistice was signed in 1919, the demand for musicians decreased in D.C., and Crowder and his wife moved to Chicago to find work. Disappointed with the lack of job opportunities, he soon relocated with other band members to New York, leaving his wife behind in the Midwest. It was at a nightclub gig in New York that a tall and “rather good looking man” by the name of Bowen offered Crowder and his band-mates tickets to Europe, to serve as a jazz collective in his new night spot in Paris.¹⁴ Crowder and the band boarded the huge trans-Atlantic liner bound for France, in hopes of following through with the contractual agreement, and a new life in a city with “no color-bar.” A few days after they had arrived, Bowen informed the band that the proposition to open up the nightclub in France had fallen through and they were out of work again, this time in a foreign country. Eddie South and the Alabamians received an offer to go play in Venice, Italy, for about eight weeks, so once again they boarded an international train bound for new opportunities, and for Henry, the start of a new relationship.

In 1927, a year before meeting Crowder, Cunard had launched Hours Press in a large country house she had reconstructed in La Chapelle-Reanville. Hours Press temporarily served as her small publishing house dedicated to radical literary production. Crowder and Cunard’s path crossed when he became her Editorial Assistant. He ultimately took no part in publishing decisions, which was not surprising, given his distaste for left-wing politics and ideas. Crowder spent his days reading, composing music, and packing and shipping books from the library. He

¹³ Crowder, *As Wonderful As All That?*, 44.

¹⁴ Crowder, *As Wonderful As All That?* 45.

generally did not spend much time in the print shop itself, and eventually Cunard “hired a professional craftsman to handle the technical part of the printing.”¹⁵ She took on a paternalistic approach to their relationship, and would serve as a cultural patron for his jazz compositions. Cunard referred to Henry Crowder as “my Afro-American musician,” and in return he was expected to introduce her to

the complex and agonizing situation of blacks in the United States. She listened with growing indignation to accounts of race riots, lynchings, and widespread segregation. She also began to writing to all her friends about blacks, encouraging them to visit her and expand their social circles...so she could introduce [them] to the world of black people, frequently writing: ‘I seem to be thinking of Africa all the time.’¹⁶

It is unclear when or where Cunard first developed an understanding of the Black condition and its relation to class politics. Few biographical accounts characterize her interactions with Black culture in her early youth, and when they do, they note her fascination and tendency to exoticize Africa and African culture, much like this excerpt describing her teenage years from Robert L. Allen’s “Introduction”: “[I]t was through her contact with surrealists that Nancy was introduced to elements of African and black American culture...she described her ‘African part’ as ‘my ego, my soul’.”¹⁷ There is an assumption that Cunard first encountered Black American oppression, disenfranchisement and violent struggle through Crowder, which she certainly implies in the “Foreword” of her anthology. However, as a travelling writer and popular figure with strong connections to a diverse array of prominent

¹⁵ Crowder, *As Wonderful As All That?*, 85.

¹⁶ Gordon, *Nancy Cunard*, 154.

¹⁷ Crowder, *As Wonderful As All That?*, 9.

artists, it is unlikely that Cunard was unaware of the Black American condition prior to her interactions with Henry Crowder.

Chapter 2: New Negro

Along with a new class-based revolutionary front, the 1920's would offer up what would come to be known as the Harlem Renaissance and change popular trajectory for Black liberation struggles globally. Resistance literature and performance art created a global framework for a strategy towards equality, as the migration of over a million Black Americans moved to Northern Western U.S cities. They were met with a population of immigrants from southern and eastern Europe, responding to capitalism's growing demand for industrial labor and markets. Many of these Black actors came by way of the Great Migration, seeking a better standard of living and relief from the horrors of Jim Crow and its attendant violence. However, race relations everywhere in America were brutal. With the false assumption of a lesser repressive climate in the North, close to two million Black Americans in the urban metropolises of New York, Chicago and Detroit were met with ongoing physical, emotional and psychological violence. Explosive episodes of racial violence initiated by police and/or working-class whites resembled the anti-Jewish pogroms in Russia and elsewhere.

This temporal period produced a nuanced, continued explosion of black art, literature and protest. Such expressions were nuanced and diverse, never monolithic. Some "New Negroes"

utilized a constitutional framework, others sought to find both a real and imagined promised land, and others chose to stay and *transform* the country's socio-political institutions--not just for Black Americans, but for everyone. Black thinkers and creators not only exhibited a wide array of conceptualizations of freedom and equality, but Black and white artists and activists managed to form genuine bonds as well. The plurality of these expressions, both inter- and intra- racial, are central to understanding the construction and reception of *Negro*.

Although the city was believed to be what Brent Hayes Edwards calls the “worldwide black culture capital,”¹⁸ the “Renaissance” did not start or even end in Harlem. Besides spilling over standard geographical and temporal boundaries, elements of the Renaissance contained a Black radical critique that shaped both the global left, and a growing trend in race-specific economic activism.¹⁹ New Negroes had already forged global alliances prior to the claims of the inception of the Harlem Renaissance, and in the United States,

...the initial demands for a “Black International”, an explicitly anti-capitalist alliance of peoples of African descent from different countries around the world, were quite deliberate attempts to respond to and intervene in the discourses of policy and institution building that arose after World War I in the Communist International and the League of Nations.²⁰

Economic conditions forged a new convergence between Marxist ideals and African diasporic struggle during the Great Depression, and political agitation often took the form of global black working class struggles and experiences.

By decentering Harlem as the physical space for the renaissance, while at the same time

¹⁸ Edwards, Brent Hayes. *The Practice of Diaspora*. (Boston: The President and Fellows of Harvard College, 2003), 5.

¹⁹ Baldwin and Makalani, *Escape From New York*, 17.

²⁰ Hayes-Edwards, *The Practice*, 243.

acknowledging Harlem as what Mark Anthony Neal calls the “productive site of diaspora,” we can paint a much more inclusive context of the culture that *Negro: An Anthology* arose from. While the ‘New Negro’ became more “internationally minded” than the rest of the population in the 1930s, his/her sympathy with other oppressed people of color had been aroused long before. Black activists and intellectuals situated Black liberation within a global context prior to the end of modern slavery, building a foundation for international connections and networks that helped propel New Negro politics on to the world stage.²¹ Placing *Negro* in a larger global trajectory allows us to see that it as a product of a particular historical convergence. The anthology, after all, was born in part out of Cunard’s encounter with Crowder’s stories of “the astonishing complexities and agonies of Negroes in the United States... with a major effort to fight racial injustice throughout the world,”²² as well as her own contribution to anti-Fascist proletarian internationalism. The underlying class critique in the anthology would turn out to be one of the most provocative elements of her book. As Crowder mused, “She also gives the book an unmistakably communistic flavor, which, for the most part, is her own doing. She prefaces the book by trying to convey the theory that the Soviet form of government offers the only hope for the Negro.”²³

Three years prior to *Negro*’s publication, the vagaries of Southern racism, class politics, and sexuality converged in the 1931 campaign to free the “Scottsboro Boys”. Cunard participated in the campaign to clear the names and win the freedom of the 9 Black boys who were wrongfully accused of raping two white women on a train en route to Chattanooga, Tennessee. Indeed, with Scottsboro looming in the background as the preeminent racial justice

²¹ Baldwin and Makalani, *Escape From New York*, 79.

²² Gordon, *Nancy Cunard*, 156.

²³ Crowder, *As Wonderful As All That?*, 182.

struggle in the U.S. and around the world, *Negro: An Anthology* served as a site where race and class—and to a lesser extent, gender and sexuality—converged. In *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists*, Robin D. G. Kelley situates the Scottsboro trial in the context of international Marxist movements and racial justice struggles. In 1931, nine Black teenagers “riding the rails” through Alabama in search of work were charged with raping two white women, also traveling on the same train. Their cases were tried and appealed and made it before the U.S Supreme Court, but under the Jim Crow legal system, the all-white jurors delivered guilty verdicts. Their legal proceedings would come to be known as the “Scottsboro Trials,” and the case received attention from various civil rights organizations and the American Communist Party. The Communist-led International Labor Defense (ILD) arranged legal counsel and organized an international campaign exposing the injustices of the case and demanding their freedom. During the seven-year timespan of the proceedings, the Scottsboro Boys became an international cause for civil justice. It spotlighted the post-Reconstruction Jim Crow realities of legal “justice” in the American South.

Through the case, the CP gained respect from many civil rights leaders and other Black organizations by holding mass rallies, marches, letter-writing campaigns, and a deluge of press reports. Because of their leadership with the campaign and their stance against segregation, the communists attracted significant Black support. The CP and ILD also organized black sharecroppers and poor farmers in rural Alabama, pulling in not just ordinary black workers, but local leaders such as Al Murphy and Hosea Hudson. Recruitment of community leaders was a major factor in helping the Party strengthen ties with the skeptical Black community.²⁴ The

²⁴ Robin D. G. Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists During the Great Depression*, (North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 23.

Scottsboro Defense Committee eventually included the NAACP, as well as other prominent civil rights organizations in their legal defense and mobilizing efforts. The ILD and NAACP would come to be in conflict during their involvement with the case, challenging each other's intentions and urgency within the Defense Effort. The Communists quickly gained podium as a "race-organization" through their passionate involvement with Scottsboro, while the black elite of the NAACP wrestled with a lack of support and weak organization in Alabama at this time.²⁵ Through the Communists, Cunard became heavily involved with the case and in 1932 after her second trip to Harlem, would go on to use negative press from her relations with Paul Robeson as an opportunity to gain a podium for funds she was raising for the trials.

Cunard first visited the United States in July of 1931. She arrived in Harlem, a city exploding with creativity and crashing against the severe realities of a close to 50 percent unemployment rate. She quietly met with many potential contributors of the anthology, notably leading figures of the Renaissance such as W.E.B Du Bois, Countee Cullen, Alain Locke, Langston Hughes and Claude McKay. Her second trip to New York in 1932 was a different matter. She had been seen around town with Paul Robeson, and was staying at a Black hotel in Harlem. For an entire week, the tabloids portrayed her as a sexual predator and traitor to the white race. Although there were photographs of her and Robeson spending time in New York, Nancy claims in a 1932 issue of *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, that "aside from a rather formal introduction, she and Mr. Robeson did not know each other."²⁶ This denial on her end seemed necessary, considering the immense amount of vulgar and violent backlash Cunard received

²⁵ Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe*, 80,81.

²⁶ *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, "Nancy Cunard Stopping at Harlem Hotel", Volume XLVIII, No.24, May 5th 1932.

immediately after completing her second trip. Incensed Northern and Southern whites were unsparing in their vitriolic attacks, as evident from an anonymous letter signed “Northener”,

You may deceive people abroad but you can’t deceive the American public. We know why you are a nigger lover. One good thing, you are hastening the founding of a society to combat degenerate whites and their negro associates. You are truly a disgrace to your family, you are a disgrace to your race.²⁷

White Southerners took offense to Cunard and the radical race, gender, class, and sexual politics she embodied. The self-proclaimed secretary of the “Second Caucasian Society in America” hinted at a possible boycott of Cunard in the years following her second visit to Harlem in 1932.

In a letter addressed to Cunard, the “secretary” states,

This is one of the rare instances, where we have found it necessary, especially among intellectuals, to deal drastically, with those who would impair the fundamental principals of the Caucasian race of peoples. Since you have evidently found it expedient to disrespect your Aryan birthright... we shall call for you, just as soon as the necessary plans have been completed for your reception.²⁸

Cunard took advantage of the buzz from the press and the hate mail to publicize her newest project, the Scottsboro Trials, and created funding cards that read:

Every voice of protest is of imperative urgency and necessity to free the 9 innocent working class victims of American race hatred. If you are against the lynching and terrorisation of the most oppressed race in the world, if you have any innate sense of justice, sign this protest and contribute towards the defense funds.²⁹

In many ways, the Scottsboro Defense effort, the relationships made with the American Communist Party and the correspondences had with principal figures in Harlem shaped not only

²⁷ Anonymous letter from “Northener,” (1932), Box 20, Nancy Cunard Collection. Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas in Austin.

²⁸ Letter from “White Southerner” (1932), 1. Box 20, Nancy Cunard Collection.

²⁹ Scottsboro Appeal Funding Sheets (1933). Box 28, Nancy Cunard Collection.

her anthology, set to be released two years later, but her political trajectory for the following decades as well.

The year 1933 brought forth President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal — a set of response programs to the Great Depression. The New Deal not only offered a new series of plans and laws to revive the economy, it ushered in a new paradigm in political thought, through destabilizing the Republican party and strengthening the Democratic party into the majority. By the end of Roosevelt's first administration, the majority black American votes had switched from Republican to Democrat. However, New Deal policies had little to no direct effect on civil rights issues, and in most instances actually discriminated against African Americans.

Chapter 3: Negro: An Anthology, 1934

With the help of her friend and lover, Raymond Michelet, as well as a young Samuel Beckett translating the majority of the French pieces in the book, *Negro: An Anthology* was released on February 15th, 1934. The layout of the book is fascinating in itself. Every detail of the book, from the material of the cover to the organization of the sectioning, was done with direct intention from its editor. Cunard's deliberateness in her project was remembered by close friend Sir Rupert Hart-Davis,

I treasure the memory of the interview at which she showed Jonathan Cape an enormous dummy of her anthology *Negro*. He spent some time painstakingly explaining how the book's bulk could be reduced and its format improved. "But you don't understand, Mr. Cape," she squeaked at him: "this *is* the format." And indeed it was, for she had already had the whole book set up in that unwieldy form.³⁰

Cunard sets up her contents pages in an unusual fashion. She splits the anthology in two, and lays out the second contents section first (pgs. 437-822), followed by a foreword, then outlines the beginning contents (pgs. 3-433). The first contents page, entitled "West Indies and South America" lists out three sections, and is broken up into Jamaica, Hayti, Cuba, Barbados, Trinidad, Grenada, Virgin Islands, Guadeloupe, British Guiana, Brazil and Uruguay. Then Cunard inserts her foreword, followed up with a second contents section, consisting of 11 sections of "America", "Negro Stars", "Music", and "Poetry".

Cunard's foreword is a rich description and commentary of her monumental project. She begins by introducing her work as a "panorama", composed of seven parts. By starting to

³⁰ Ford, *Nancy Cunard*, 30.

describe the beginning of the anthology as a compilation of works on the oppression of 14 million Negroes in America, Cunard sets up grounds to talk about the Scottsboro case and her position in the appeals. She discusses the Scottsboro boys and lynchings as much more than an isolated attempt at execution of innocent lives, but a “part of the effort to force into the dumbest and most terrorized form of subjection, all Negro workers who dare aspire to live otherwise than as virtual slaves.”³¹Cunard spends a significant amount of time talking about the Scottsboro implications, as she was in the midst of working with the case in conjunction with her work on *Negro*.

Before she talks specifically about what is included in her anthology, Cunard gives us a strong idea of her ideological position in 1934. She says,

Progressive members of the race are aware that they must fight every way they can to advance and to maintain whatsoever they have already achieved against inconceivable opposition. There are certain sections of the Negro bourgeoisie which hold that justice will come to them from some eventual liberality in the white man. But the more vital of the Negro race have realized that it is Communism alone which throws down the barriers of race as finally as it wipes out class distinctions. The Communist world-order is the solution of the race problem for the Negro. James Ford, Negro worker and intellectual, was nominated by the Communist Party as candidate for Vice-President of U.S.A in 1932.³²

It seems she is hinting at the actions of the NAACP during this proclamation, indirectly criticizing their decisions during the Scottsboro appeals. Cunard also makes clear her political position in support of one of her contributors and comrades, James Ford.

Continuing her foreword, Cunard gives a quick summary of the sections in her anthology. In chronological order, she goes through sections of the project and gives commentary on what is

³¹ Cunard, *Negro*, iii.

³² Cunard, *Negro*, iii.

included. Immense praise is given to Black culture, particularly in the theatrical and musical section, and she explicitly states that her book does not do justice to the grace, beauty, genius, dramatic and musical excellence, and splendor of African culture. Next she talks about the poetry section, and how “facts have made it”, and the work could not be separated from the politic, thus all of the pieces included are strong critiques on black oppressive conditions. In discussing “West Indies and South America”, she says work is offered that affirms Latin America’s and the Caribbean’s inclusion in the racialization and oppression of darker skinned people. She makes note that the struggle against the economic discrimination towards the Negro is a recurring subject in these writings.

Cunard’s “European” commentary talks about what she calls the “honest defenders” of black people, with a special emphasis on Soviet Russia. She states that Russia has once and for all solved the “problem” of the races, and exhibits complete racial equality. Also stated is a bold claim that Soviet Russia is the only nation where the Negro is a free man. Her Africa section largely discusses what the white man is doing and what he has done, to Africa. She affirms that “the studies of George Padmore and others, of the economic, inter-racial, social and political systems implanted by the different imperialist masters, assuredly throw an arc-light strong enough on the irrefutable truth. The truth is that Africa is tragedy”. She also notes at the end of her foreword that the anthology closes with “The White Man is Killing Africa”, and that any writing on the Negro must include the insistent chords of oppression, struggle, and protest, but also with truth!³³

The anthology begins with “America.” Divided into 11 sections, this portion goes through aspects of black culture and race relations. The 11 sections are not in any particular

³³ Cunard, *Negro*, iv.

order, but all seem to be building up to her pieces on the Scottsboro case and James Ford. She starts the anthology with Edward A. Johnson's "A Brief Outline of Negro History in the U.S Until Abolition", roughly covering from 1619 until 1865, and continues on with a story on Nat Turner, and a refreshingly early introduction to black women's contribution to black liberation during chattel slavery in "Three Great Negro Women".

One of the most significant aspects of *Negro* lies in Black women's visibility within the project. The America section holds more than a few writings from Zora Neale Hurston, as she discusses folklore, narratives, expressions, and other ethnographic works. The third essay in the anthology, "Three Great Negro Women," delivers an enlightening spotlight on Phyllis Wheatley, Sojourner Truth and Harriet Tubman, written by Gladis Berry Robinson. This speaks highly to Cunard's agency in constructing this book- as a production where race, class *and* gender converged.

In the article "Negro Education in the South", James W. Ivy provides multiple tables of statistics on economic investment, expenditures, salaries, number of pupils, number of high schools, graduates, per capita costs and school funds. These tables are usually juxtaposed with white statistics, highlighting the major resource gaps between black and white southern students. Through this comparative, he creates a striking model supporting his argument for a first-class public education for black folks in the South, and argues that because of the poor education and inadequate resources, a systematic policy is kept to keep Negroes in their place in society.

Continuing on the America section, Cunard delivers not only a scathing review of W. E. B. Du Bois' work, but a character assassination of him in her prelude to his contribution in the anthology, entitled "A Reactionary Negro Organisation: A Short Review of Dr. Dubois, *The*

Crisis, and the N.A.A.C.P in 1932.” She critiques DuBois and others like him under what she calls the “white man’s niggers” and also further goes on to personally attack Du bois in side commentary, stating the fact that he “has only a little Negro blood has nothing to do with it, he is known as and professes to be a Negro...we call this hypocritical, treachery.”³⁴ Accusing him of covering up the true state of the Negro’s ghastly misery in America, she not only attacks him, but the actions of the NAACP as well.

Like Du Bois, the NAACP as an organizational unit was also written off as hypocritical. Most of her disdain stemmed from her and the ILD’s sharp disagreements with how the NAACP handled the Scottsboro case, including their misappropriation and decisions in the allocation of funds, and a disagreement in court representation as well. She writes,

To dissociate itself completely from the main burdens and struggles of the Negro workers- that is the general policy of the entire NAACP...it is necessary to say immediately, and this cannot be denied, that the Communists are the most militant defenders and organisers that the Negro race has ever had; they are the *only* defenders of the oppressed Negro masses.³⁵

Cunard articulated very explicitly who she believed contributed appropriately to the Negro struggle. Meanwhile Du Bois’s article that followed, “Black America by WEB DuBois: Editor of the *Crisis*,” reveals his socio-political position in the early 1930s. With safe assertions such as “the unity, then, in the Negro-American group, while still predominantly a matter of blood, is by no means wholly so. It is increasingly a psychological unity- a matter of memories and hurts and ambitions...,”³⁶ Cunard seemed was frustrated by Du Bois’ lack of class analysis in the essay, as she directly related to Negro unity. She also seemed to have problems with his

³⁴ Cunard, *Negro*, 147.

³⁵ Cunard, *Negro*, 145, 146.

³⁶ Cunard, *Negro*, 152.

bourgeois liberal rhetoric in his essay and consequently his actions- and chose to preface his piece with her own review, and what she believed to be her corrections to a detrimental trajectory. Du Bois would publish *Black Reconstruction* a year later, in 1935, which would include a Marx-influenced analysis of labor and capitalism, yet centered on race.

John L. Spivak also contributes excerpts from his book *Georgia Nigger* (1932), a chilling piece describing torture methods of “freed men” or peonage laborers in the Jim Crow South. Along with Spivek, there are a significant amount of contributions from Black labor organizers such as Eugene Gordon, Michael Gold, Will Heberg and finally B. D Amis, who identified that peonage was the “scrouge that enslaves thousands of black agrarian workers.”³⁷ James Ford receives the eleventh section of America, including his life sketch of him from the *Negro Worker*, a piece on the vote when he ran his electoral campaign, as well as his article “Communism and the Negro.”

“Negro Stars” showcases a few articles and 10 pages worth of images of music and theater performers, including Louis Armstrong, Josephine Baker, Rose McClendon, Florence Mills, Ethel Waters, Benjamin Lewis, and boxer Jack Taylor. Immediately following is a separate “Music” section, where Cunard inserts pieces on American spirituals, songs of protest, blues and jazz, pieces on Creole folk music, Negro music in “Porto Rico”, Jamaica, Hayti, Zulu, East and West African songs, as well as work from the Congo. Included are photocopies of John Henry compositions, blues sheet music and Zulu sheet music. The poetry section follows, including works from black writers such as Langston Hughes and Countee Cullen, West Indian poets, and pieces by white writers on Negro themes.

³⁷ Cunard, *Negro*, 227.

“West Indies and South America” are essays describing the socio-political and cultural makeup of these countries. The histories included of these lands are especially rich, and consider social conditions as they related to slavery and racial construction. For example, A.A Thorne’s essay on British Guiana talks about the Dutch paternal affection for ‘coloured’ children, and how after their freedom was immediately bought, “mulatto” kids often inherited estates from their white slave-owning fathers.³⁸ “Free mulattos,” as they were called, were often sent to Europe to go to school, and were not considered of the Negro race, as their mothers were. Charles Alexander’s essay called “Negro Workers Starving in Cuba” heavily outlines a communist agenda in this section of the anthology. He argues that Negro workers must build trade unions and organizations in order to survive. Alexander says that only through organization and struggle on the principle of revolutionary class programme, will Negro workers in Cuba be able to take control of their livelihoods.

The second section, entitled “Europe,” showcases what Cunard calls the “honest defenders” of colored people, with a special emphasis on Soviet Russia. Included are works from various white writers and allies to the cause of the Negro, along with illustrations documenting racism. From members of the Surrealist group in Paris, this section includes the seminal piece “Murderous Humanitarianism”, drafted and signed by Andre Breton, Paul Eluard, Pierre Unik, Yves Tanguy, and Martinicians-- Jules Marcel Monnerot and Pierre Yoyotte. This piece was not only a critique on imperialism, but most importantly a surrealist declaration against racism and white supremacy. It is indicative of the strong influence the newly joined young, black Martinicians had on the group at this time.

³⁸ Cunard, *Negro*, 308.

“Africa” is the final section included in the first contents page. It is broken up into three parts, starting with a collection of essays and articles on individual countries, as well as the continent as a whole. Included, are anthropological works on pre-colonial civilizations, empires and ethnographic components such as riddles, proverbs and Hausa writing. Part two is labeled “Negro Sculpture and Ethnology”, which consists of twenty-two pages of pictures of figures, followed by essays on black artistic styles in relationship to each other. Part three encompasses articles on Africa’s colonial state, particularly the relationship between “the white man” and Africa. Pieces on religion, imperialism, conquest, and colonial influence are included, but what is especially striking about this section is the very last essay, “The White Man is Killing Africa: Colonisation in Africa” written by Raymond Michelet, and translated by Cunard herself. Michelet constructs an impressive outline of taxation structures, division and theft of lands, recruiting of labor, forced labor, salaries, and company profits. He delivers staggering comparatives of Negro and white worker’s salaries in countries like South Africa, and goes into detail on colonial resource profit. For example, Michelet includes how in only five years, the Equatorial Mining Company had augmented its capital thousands of pounds of profit, which was then distributed to members of the board and shareholders.

There is a also a Black Armies and Recruitment section in Michelet’s piece, in which he describes organizing a black military essential for “not only for the maintenance of European domination in black countries, but also for the protection of the whites themselves in Europe. The black people are obliged to defend the very ones who oppress them.”³⁹ Other sections in this piece include “Risings, Imperialist Justice and Police Measures, Repressions,” “Numbers in Depopulation”, “The Consequences of Colonial Regime,” “The Great Works of Civilisation,”

³⁹ Cunard, *Negro*, 835.

and ends with a portion entitled The Great “Achievements”. The last part on achievements describes the contradictions in European claims for advancing colonialism, such as education, religion and “bringing justice.” These details in Michelet’s essay are crucial to understanding colonialism, by laying out numbers and narratives that directly impact the black population on a micro and macro level. His sections also connected colonial strategies in their specificities with colonial actors, and revealed how they were used as tools of control and domination in areas of the African continent.

The last inclusion of Michelet’s piece is the “Speech of Albert Sarraut, Colonial Secretary in 1932, at the Ecole Coloniale, Paris”. In the last paragraph of the essay, Sarraut inserts an excerpt from Marx, critiquing capitalists and their disregard for the well-being and life of the worker unless forced to do it by the community. His response to Marx ends the anthology, and affirms the implications of Cunard’s project; “Thus it is only by a collective struggle, a revolutionary struggle that the Africans will be able to maintain their life and being, and put an end to the system of slavery- here complete slavery; there, semi-slavery, under which they are maintained by white imperialism.”⁴⁰ *Negro: An Anthology* was a call to action for the black working class to collectively overthrow capitalism and imperialism.

Cunard’s anti-racism was grounded in a Marxist critique of black oppression as both a national and a class question. At the time, she openly supported the Communist Party’s position, as she wrote in her Foreword, that the only solution of the race problem for the Negro is the Communist world order.⁴¹ This belief shaped the anthology entirely. Cunard’s own inclusions in her own anthology are a testament to her objective in the production of the book. Not only was

⁴⁰ Cunard, *Negro*, 855.

⁴¹ Cunard, *Negro*, iii.

her critique of DuBois and the NAACP evident of her agency, but her commentary on Marcus Garvey and the UNIA in her piece in the “West Indies and South America” section on Jamaica also included an anti-capitalist and anti-imperial critique. After giving a brief history of the island, including a discussion on maroon exile, emancipation and “Jamaica of today,” she assesses,

While Garvey has done great good in arousing the race consciousness of the Negro, his scheme stopped short at the purely racial. It simply ignored the far deeper and only solid basis on any reform-revolution is the correct word- in the condition of the black races in the world, their economic, their class status...He failed, he fails now to see that only by the combined and organized struggle of the white as much as the black oppressed classes of the world be, in the same day, free. Free of the diverse, yet precisely similar rule of the white capitalist and imperial powers.⁴²

Cunard goes on to critique his inability to understand how the eradication of exploitation of the exploited masses of other races, *along* with Africans, was necessary and how one could not be accomplished without the other. While Garvey was able to break down various forms of slavery in his oratory, he was not concerned with the oppression of other races, and this of course went contrary to Cunard’s Marxist critique of black oppression, and the solution of the race problem.

Cunard combined an ideologically diverse body of individuals as her contributors- surrealists, Marxists, cultural nationalists, and bourgeois liberals as a representation of black trajectory at this time. Although the anthology does not encompass every political and cultural approach, it goes beyond painting a portrait of the black world into a critique of the black condition. She provides an array of cultural and political positions to expose the multiple forms of resistance through poetry, culture, art, narratives and politics. Insistent in her book is a strong critique of the black condition under capitalism, colonialism, imperialism and fascism. Cunard

⁴² Cunard, *Negro*, 448, 449.

not only calls to action the black workers in her foreword, she does so throughout the entire piece, through exposing class contradictions in in the black diaspora. She is calling for a revolutionary solution, a communist world order, and the collective unity of the black worker.

Although she was not alone in thinking communism as the solution to the black struggle in the early 1930's, *Negro* is significant in its production because it is a body of work that purposely includes contesting modes of resistance on a global level. Not only does she combine an ideologically diverse body of contributors- surrealists, Marxists, cultural nationalists, and bourgeois liberals, she exposes multiple forms of resistance through various forms of cultural productions- poetry, visual art, music, essays, articles and studies. Cunard also spends a significant amount of time portraying Africa as a site of struggle against Imperialist aggression, along with a site of undeniable culture and art. She makes sure not to reduce the continent to simply an exotic space of the Other, evident through the majority of the contributions on Africa being heavily political. A feminist trajectory is also apparent in the anthology, as she includes works from major black women writers, as well as portraits of important historical women figures. The inclusion of women, ties into her influence from the Corrupt Coterie but more significantly, her time spent with the Surrealists in the 1920s, and their liberatory ideals on gender and sexuality.

Cunard conceived of the anthology as an expose of the Black condition, a celebration of Black creativity, challenge to global racism and capitalism, and an argument for socialist revolution as a pathway for the liberation of Black people and humanity as a whole. She and many other contributors asserted that the overthrow of imperialism was a precondition for ending

racism. Cunard represented a prominent figure that was able to pull off a project of this magnitude, with influences that crossed boundaries of class, space, race and gender.

Considering the socio-political climate of the 1930s, the inter-war period, and the global struggles against capitalism, imperialism and fascism, the anthology is radical because it addresses these factors through a various body of responses and boundary crossing. This crossing, is what Brent Hayes-Edwards wrote black radicalism emerged through- “black radicalism *is* internationalization...it is not the next level of anti-colonial agitation.”⁴³

Certainly she was not the only prominent white woman of this period with these political beliefs, but she constructed a piece that altered the discourse on black liberation simply through its scope and access. Through her interactions with the Communist Party, as well as the diversity of black voices included in the anthology -- most importantly that of George Padmore -- Cunard was essentially looking to inspire a black proletariat united front.

Born in Trinidad in 1904, George Padmore, birth name Malcolm Nurse, was a black communist organizer, intellectual and agitator. He moved to the United States in 1924 under plans of studying law at Fisk University, but ended up leaving for New York after experiencing enrollment complications on campus. Although he is most known for his work in the Pan-African movement in England and Ghana, he spent a significant amount of time organizing at Columbia University, New York University and eventually Howard University in Washington D.C. Nurse officially joined the Communist Party in the late 1920s, assumed the name “George Padmore” as a revolutionary pseudonym, and was quickly “vaulted into a position of great power and influence as the highest black representative in the Comintern at a moment when Moscow was

⁴³ Hayes-Edwards, *The Practice*, 243.

keenly interested in the 'Negro question'."⁴⁴ He climbed the ranks in the US Communist Party, rising from a fiery student organizer at Howard to a highly valuable figure for the Communist International. Padmore represented a strong leader that could affirm the party's anti-racist position, as well as simultaneously appeal to the masses of black workers, something the CP deemed a necessary strategy in their program.

In mid 1933, Comintern developed a new policy that would result in the disbandment of the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers (ITUC-NW), which was the unit created to organize workers of African descent around the world. Padmore learned of this, and immediately resigned from the International, heavily disagreeing with the Soviets' decision to concentrate on aligning themselves with the "so-called democratic imperialist countries against fascism even if it meant ignoring the abuses of European colonialism."⁴⁵ Padmore considered this to be a betrayal of the fundamental interests of his people and therefore disconnected from the Communist International.

Nancy Cunard officially met George Padmore a year prior to his resignation, in autumn of 1932. They had already corresponded previously to discuss material that would be in *Negro*, and Padmore would later recruit her to be the head British organizer of funds for Scottsboro defense. Cunard stated in her letter to his wife Dorothy, that, "indeed, Padmore is one of the principal and most important of the many contributors to the large African section of the work. No one as well as he could have written such authoritative, sound, detailed, yet succinct articles, in the socio-political-economic-historical field."⁴⁶ Padmore contributed several articles to the

⁴⁴ Hayes-Edwards, *The Practice*, 249.

⁴⁵ Hayes-Edwards, *The Practice*, 268.

⁴⁶ [Box 16, Folder 10] "Letter to Dorothy Padmore", (1959), 1. Nancy Cunard Collection. Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas in Austin.

anthology, including “Ethiopia Today” and “White Man’s Justice in Africa.” Cunard described him as a man with innate nobility, and utterly international and cosmopolitan. While Padmore was instrumental in helping Cunard find African contributors, as well as submitting his own works for the anthology, his ideological trajectory influenced Cunard greatly in her grappling with the “negro question”.

Through Padmore, Cunard met several French-African intellectuals, including Padmore’s close friend and comrade, Tiemoko Garan Kouyate. Kouyate was born in 1902 in the French Sudan, and worked as a teacher in the Ivory Coast until 1923, when he moved to France. After moving to Paris, he fell into a group of French African and Caribbean communists whilst studying at the Sorbonne. A labor organizer, communist leader, and a pioneer of African nationalism, he helped found the radical anti-imperialist group, the Ligue de Defense de la Race Negre and the the Union des Travailleurs Negres.⁴⁷ Both Padmore and Kouyate strove in the 1930s to develop “racial solidarity” and institutionalize an autonomous “center of diffusion” for black internationalism *within* the structures of communism.⁴⁸ However, it is interesting to note that within the same month that *Negro* was released, the Control Commission of the Comintern would officially publish Padmore’s expulsion from the party. He had left the party six months before then, and Kouyate had severed his ties with the Communist Party even prior to Padmore, based on similar rejections of Comintern’s universalism, and insistence that “racial oppression involves factors and forces that cannot be explained through a class exploitation critique.”⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Hayes-Edwards, *The Practice*, 242.

⁴⁸ Hayes-Edwards, *The Practice*, 244.

⁴⁹ Hayes-Edwards, *The Practice*, 245.

Equally as interesting, and also within the same month as the release of *Negro*, Padmore wrote DuBois stating his desire to work in connection with him in the Pan African movement. He states that he has told the French negroes of the NAACP and requests help in creating a basis for unity amongst “Negroes of Africa, America, the West Indies, and other lands.” This letter proved the start of a mutual respect and relationship between the two, and after World War II, they would end up collaborating in the Fifth Pan African Congress held in Manchester.⁵⁰ Prior to this letter, Padmore had called Du Bois and other nationalist and civil rights leaders “petty-bourgeois reformists” and a “wing of misleaders” in his publication in the *Negro Worker*. This is significant because it disproves the notion of homogenous thought within the main actors of the anthology. While Cunard was denouncing DuBois as hypocritical and treacherous, Padmore, her primary influence and ideological mentor at this point was taking steps to develop a working relationship with him.

Since his student organizing days, Padmore would uphold a radical and unwavering anti-imperialist trajectory, and in 1935 he shifted from institutions of “international communism” to C.L.R James’s International African Friends of Ethiopia in London. Padmore and Kouyate would also go on to start the “Negro World Unity Congress, a pan-African trans-national coalition, utilizing their extensive contacts in Africa. Kouyate’s friendship with Padmore, and the ideals of the Communist Party around it, would greatly influence Cunard in her ideas of Black oppression as a national and a class question.

⁵⁰ Hayes-Edwards, *The Practice*, 247.

Chapter 4: Reception

Positive reception towards the anthology would come from a diverse body of actors, including a significant number of prominent figures of the Harlem Renaissance. There was also a plethora of responses from the Left. Because Cunard stayed in Harlem during both of her visits to the United States and had access to creative and intellectual leaders, the positive response from Harlem Renaissance figures would not be surprising.

Shortly after the anthology's release in early 1934, letters of praise came pouring into Cunard's apartment in London. Alain Locke, the man regarded as the "Father of the Harlem Renaissance" wrote her from Howard University and called her book "the finest anthology in every sense of the word ever compiled on the Negro...a unity of effect and a subtle accumulative force of enlightenment that is beyond all contradiction and evasion. It is just the kind of thing needed at this time; and all of us are grateful. I shall try to spread the influence of the book everywhere possible."⁵¹ Locke, who had contributed an exquisite essay to her anthology on poet Sterling Brown ("Sterling Brown: New Negro Folk Poet"), had released his own anthology a few years prior, in 1925. His work, entitled *The New Negro: Voices of the Harlem Renaissance*, situates what he calls the Negro's new "race-spirit" as the driving force behind a wave of black creative work, while claiming a "new internationalism" for Black people as a whole. Locke succeeded in assembling primary actors of the Harlem Renaissance in a body of work that utilized both politics and art as evidence of a new movement. And yet, despite the iconic place *The New Negro* occupied in the world of arts and letters, Locke praised Cunard's text as the finest anthology ever compiled on the Negro.

⁵¹ [Box 20, Folder 10] "Letter from Alain Locke", April 14th 1934, 1. Nancy Cunard Collection. Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas in Austin.

Many other letters of praise spoke of the same sentiment- playwright and educator John Frederick Matheus wrote, “the peoples of Negro blood everywhere owe you a debt of gratitude. No one of us has been able to put within the covers of a book so much for our defense. With such staunch friends our cause with that of humanity can not be lost.”⁵² Activist, historian and writer Arthur A. Schomburg submitted a review to the Associated Negro Press in 1934 and said:

Within the plethora of pages is encompassed a miniature world where all important happening to the Negroes whose descendants are now portrayed giving articulation to the cultural side for the world to see the bitter feeling manifested in the human machinery of evolution, in its inflexible work. We are highly indebted and express our keen delight for the unselfish contribution on the part of Nancy Cunard, to the cause of the downtrodden lowest man, in helping him to see the light to the road of human emancipation.⁵³

Members of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored Peoples (NAACP) also applauded Cunard’s production, which was interesting, considering her strong and what Crowder called “disrespectful” contestation of Du Bois’ essay in her anthology. NAACP field secretary William Pickens wrote:

It is a great magazine of POWER of all sorts on the question, and will be valuable a hundred years from today, and for many generations longer than that no doubt. I think it is of very permanent value. Nothing quite so extensive has been collected and arranged on that subject before, in one volume, and nothing quite so variegated and comprehensive has ever been put together in any work before, on the subject of NEGRO.⁵⁴

NAACP member and sociologist E Franklin Frazier, who would go on to write *Black Bourgeoisie*, a critical discussion of black middle class American ideology and conservatism,

⁵² [Box 20, Folder 10] “Letter from John Frederick Matheus”, April 7th 1934, 1. Nancy Cunard Collection. Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas in Austin.

⁵³ [Box 20, Folder 10] “Letter from Arthur A. Schomburg”, 1934, 1. Nancy Cunard Collection. Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas in Austin.

⁵⁴ [Box 20, Folder 10] “Letter from William Pickens”, April 21st, 1934, 1. Nancy Cunard Collection. Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas in Austin.

called *Negro* an “interesting and valuable piece of work” and said he would “do everything possible to have people in the United States order copies of the book.”⁵⁵ Frazier contributed the essay “The Pathology of Race Prejudice” in which he discusses the parallels of the behavior of those with the Negro-complex, and the behavior of the insane. In his letter to Cunard from Fisk University, communist and strong admirer of Du Bois- L.F Coles, said in his letter requesting a copy that “there is not a book published in years, if at all, that compares with your book in make up and management. I hope that the sales will be beyond expectation, for all people who wish to be informed about the Negro problem in the world should read your book.”⁵⁶ The common thread running through these responses is the claim that *Negro: An Anthology* is the first of its kind; there was nothing like it.

Cunard also received an important note from educator, public and civil rights leader, advisor to President Franklin D. Roosevelt and member of his Black Cabinet- Mary McLeod Bethune. She took note of Cunard’s portion on Black women in her anthology, and wrote, “I want to add my expressions of approval and appreciation to others which you have, no doubt, received as a result of this fine piece of work. I congratulate you and sincerely hope that your interest in American women, especially Negro women, will continue.”⁵⁷ It makes sense that gender would be Bethune’s focal point in her letter to Cunard, as the anthology included far more women’s voices than any of its predecessors. A year later Bethune founded the National Council of Negro Women for the National and International Concerns of Black Women. This organization would come to serve as an international Black women’s united front for unity,

⁵⁵ [Box 20, Folder 10] “Letter from E. Franklin Frazier”. April 3rd, 1934. 1. Nancy Cunard Collection. Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas in Austin.

⁵⁶ [Box 20, Folder 10] “Letter from L. F Coles”. March 20th, 1934. 1. Nancy Cunard Collection. Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas in Austin.

⁵⁷ [Box 20, Folder 10] “Letter from Mary McLeod Bethune”, April 9th, 1934. 1. Nancy Cunard Collection. Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas in Austin.

social justice and human rights. Perhaps Bethune envisioned the anthology to be a constructive step in the direction of her vision.

The cost and availability of the anthology was an integral factor in its reception. *Associated Negro Press* director Claude A Barnett, mentioned that he hoped the book would be on sale at some point, and the cost is “something of a deterrent,”⁵⁸ so for that reason they did not mention the price in their review. Black novelist and singer Taylor Gordon remarked in his letter to Cunard that, “The great pity is the fact that you have to charge so much for it, the people that should read it the most will never be able to, unless something is done about the cost later on, maybe the most important things can be sifted out and put into circulation...I do think every American should read the book, as well as all the foreign countries...I’m wondering if they’ll let it get into Africa at all?”⁵⁹ Concern about the book getting into the “right hands”, raises a few questions about if Cunard and her contributors had similar ideas on who the audience of the book would be.

City editor of black newspaper *The New York Age* William E. Clark, said in his response to her work:

Your anthology has attracted wide attention here but comparatively few negroes have been able to purchase copies. May I suggest that you ask the R.H. Macy Co. Agents for the book in this country, to place advertisements in the negro newspapers. At the present time most people don’t know where the book may be purchased in this country.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ [Box 20, Folder 10] “Letter from Claude A. Burnett”. March 26th, 1934. 1. Nancy Cunard Collection. Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas in Austin.

⁵⁹ [Box 20, Folder 10] “Letter from Taylor Gordon”, May 1934, 1. Nancy Cunard Collection. Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas in Austin.

⁶⁰ [Box 20, Folder 10] “Letter From William E. Clark. July 26th, 1934. 1. Nancy Cunard Collection. Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas in Austin.

Editor of communist paper, *The Daily Worker*, and contributor to the anthology- Clarence “C.A” Hathaway said in his letter to Cunard that “James W. Ford was in to see me a few ago and showed me a copy of your book...It appears to be an excellent collection of material on the Negro question. I was wondering if, as a contributor to your book, it were not possible for me to receive one. I would not only read it myself, but I would see to it that the book was properly reviewed in the columns of the Daily Worker.”⁶¹ Although James Ford would go on to denounce Padmore’s participation in the anthology, primarily his defense of Emperor Haile Selassie in his piece on Abyssina- the Communist Party USA did indeed consider her material as communist matter, and reviewed and circulated the book amongst organizers. Harry Haywood (who worked with Cunard on the Scottsboro case with defense and legal appeals) from the ILD, as well as active communist organizer W.G Binkley were also eager to get copies once they heard of the collection.

Positive white response came as well, with not so much comment on access, affordability and reach, as the Black response. Even with the recent white American death threats against Cunard, many of Cunard’s friends in the U.S and Europe, in communist parties or of leftist politic appreciated her work with as much, if not more, praise as the Black intellectuals. Socialist and white American writer Theodore Dreiser, who wrote a speech included in the anthology to free the Scottsboro boys, called *Negro* a “handsome piece of work.”⁶² Jewish American anthropologist Melville Herskovits, called the anthology a “beautiful volume;”⁶³ Herskovits

⁶¹ [Box 20, Folder 10] “Letter From Clarence C.A Hathaway”, March 21st, 1934. 1. Nancy Cunard Collection. Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas in Austin.

⁶² [Box 20, Folder 10] “Letter from Theodore Dresier”, April 12th 1934. 1. Nancy Cunard Collection. Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas in Austin.

⁶³ [Box 20, Folder 10] “Letter from Melville Herskowitz”, March 16th 1934, 1. Nancy Cunard Collection. Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas in Austin.

produced knowledge that emphasized race as a sociological concept and frequently corresponded with Cunard on issues of disenfranchisement.

Josephine Schuyler, liberal white Texan heiress turned journalist, also wrote Cunard about what she had just read. Josephine was the wife of journalist and highly-provocative author George Schuyler, writer of *Black No More*, a piece of work that critiqued race as an obsession and a commodity situated in a 1931 Harlem Renaissance satire. He created a black scientist character that could transform blacks into whites, and explored the many implications of this reality, utilizing caricatures of prominent figures of the renaissance including W.E.B Du Bois and Marcus Garvey. Josephine and George married and procreated under the belief that a mixed, inter-racial marriage and family could solve United States social problems. She wrote her reaction to Cunard, stating, “I was so excited. I sat right down and began to look and read. Then George came and he pounced upon it. And he looked at it for hours. I think you have done a brave, courageous and splendid thing!”⁶⁴ She also corrected a tiny semantic error from an article she had contributed to it but otherwise calls the book “perfect”.

An anonymous Communist Party organizer from the United States who appeared to be an acquaintance of Cunard’s, wrote her a lengthy letter in response to *Negro*, along with other CP updates. The content of her response in particular, speaks to the militancy of Cunard’s circles and thus the leftist reach the anthology had. The book was indeed taken seriously among the party, as it was meant to be- despite Cunard’s insistence on her non-allegiance to any particular organization. The organizer wrote:

⁶⁴ [Box 20, Folder 10] “Letter from Josephine Schuyler”, 1934. 1. Nancy Cunard Collection. Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas in Austin.

About NEGRO. I took it to town with me one week or so ago. I made the usual calls. ILD, WIR, NSL, Musicians League, John Reed Club, etc. In each place in turn, comrades swooped down on the book. And all work ceased while the pages were thumbed while the workers mobbed around from the first page to the last. Dozens of them bid to borrow it. Comments were frequent. Some criticisms- but more, much more enthusiastic praise. Said one: That Cunard dame achieved a United Front with all the bastards, the thing the C.I hasn't even had a smell at. Just listen to the DuBois lullaby in juxtaposition with the militant awakening martial tune of Communism- Ford, Amis, Gordon and the others. She's got em booked for like alright. In black and white too.⁶⁵

The organizer went on to write that the inclusiveness of the book was pointed out as its chief weakness, but says one can argue that it is impossible to compile an authoritative anthology without including the "lice." She goes on to say, "the keepers of the holy gates of race consciousness and race isolation while rapidly losing prestige still have enormous personal followings,"⁶⁶ viewing Cunard's project as a tool to gain a broader audience for a united class warfare front. Included in the letter is a criticism of the price of the book, as well as the usual praise for the volume being what she calls "the most comprehensive on the Negro ever bound in a single volume."

George Padmore's association with the anthology reinforced the party's suspicions of what they understood to be his "change in ideology." Cunard wrote about it to Mrs. Padmore and mentioned organizer and CP candidate for Vice President in 1932, James Ford's attack on George:

I returned to France in April 1934, and was half in Paris and half at home, at Reanville. The campaign against Padmore started about then...on account of his article reproduced in *Negro*, James Ford of the U.S (like all the other contributors, some 100 and more) received his copy when the book came out. One day in mid

⁶⁵ [Box 20, Folder 10] "Letter from Anonymous CP Organizer", May 7th, 1934. 1. Nancy Cunard Collection. Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas in Austin.

⁶⁶ [Box 20, Folder 10] "Letter from Anonymous CP Organizer", May 7th, 1934. 2. Nancy Cunard Collection. Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas in Austin.

(?) March or early April I found a long attack on Padmore, signed by Ford, in (I think) “The Afro-American”. It was a stupefying piece of vilification, out of a clear sky, and its purport was that Padmore had changed his ideas and, as it were, “gone over to the other camp”. I remember it was headed “Padmore sups with Kings and Princes”—merely because he had written in his own (admiralty clear and well-informed) long article on Abyssinia in “NEGRO” that Haile Selassie was an enlightened monarch! I also thought it was very shabby that the Anthology—with not only Ford’s article in it, but those of several other Negro members of the CP of the U.S.—should have got only this, in lieu of a proper review of its 850 double-size pages and all the feeling expressed in them.⁶⁷

Cunard seemed to be highly confused and troubled by these attacks, and could not seem to understand the implications of the divide; “I remember on no occasion in which he said, or wrote and published, anything damning to Communism or the C.P (which CAN be two different things, though they should never be!).”⁶⁸ Although her letter to Dorothy Padmore recounting all of the pushback was written in 1959, Nancy still had a clear idea of the general attitude toward George and his contribution to the anthology more than a decade later.

Although James Ford and the CP in the United States were denouncing Padmore, Comintern organizers in Russia showed no such attack on him, Cunard, or her work. On the contrary, Nancy mused,

The Russians were enthusiastic about “NEGRO” and asked me to let it be translated in whole, also if I thought I could make another Anthology, on Colonies alone, and thirdly, if I would consider collecting and bringing to the Soviet Union, to tour the whole country, a large loan collection of African sculpture. To all these three things I said yes immediately and was pleased indeed.⁶⁹

In fact, upon arriving in Russia on a trip alone, Nancy also noticed that Communist Party member Homer Smith, already had *Negro* in his hands, fondling the cover and smiling in praise

⁶⁷ “Letter to Dorothy Padmore”, 1959, 4.

⁶⁸ “Letter to Dorothy Padmore”, 1959, 5.

⁶⁹ “Letter to Dorothy Padmore”, 1959, 8.

of her work.

Six years after the release, in 1940, Cunard (who was then highly involved in the Spanish Civil War), left Spain with political refugees to Chile and Mexico, and later, discouraged that she could not find a boat back to Britain, made her way to the West Indies. She stated, “During my three months there, in Grenada, Barbados and St. Lucia, how many were those who, despite the ban on “NEGRO” took pleasure in showing me their concealed copy, on each of the islands, several times over. Whenever the name of Padmore came up, it was spoken with the greatest admiration, and not only by his friends, but by all kinds of people who had never seen him, but knew about his writing and other work. The authorities (although this was never voiced to me) had the greatest apprehensions about his influence, and I suppose the conjunction of our friendship (which was known), and “NEGRO”, and possibly my Scottsboro efforts of as long ago as 1933-34, were the reason for my being permanently watched. Padmore was, and will certainly ever remain, a force and an inspiration in the West Indies.”⁷⁰ Although the book was banned from the British West Indies on the basis of its “seditiousness,” Cunard points out the impressive reach of both her and Padmore’s work.

⁷⁰ “Letter to Dorothy Padmore”, 1959, 7.

Conclusion

Despite a sensational debut, in the years following 1934, *Negro* virtually disappeared from public attention. The reactions it received were multiple, for reasons involving Cunard's relationship with Henry Crowder, George Padmore and his affiliation with the Communist Party, the price and availability of the book, as well as the overall content. Regardless, Nancy Cunard's anthology was a production much larger than her own agenda; it was a window to immense global changes. The upsurge of inter-racial alliances because of anti-facism and anti-colonial struggles, a generation of people that were threatened by the New Deal and the global phenomenon of the "new negro," all contributed to the emergence and culmination of the anthology. Cunard's investment in black cultural production was by no accident; she was simply responding to the transformative times of the 1930s.

Armed with Marxist ideology and a stronghold on Padmore's declaration from his 1931 piece, *The Life and Struggles of Negro Toilers*, "the oppression of Negroes assumes two distinct forms, on one hand they are oppressed as a class, and on the other as a nation,"⁷¹ Cunard produced a body of work that called for a collective Black worker's united front. Through the multitude of historical conjunctures during the inception, creation and release of the book, we are able to look into a window of intense and radical black activism. During a time when knowledge circulation and information was critical to Black radicalism, *Negro* revealed the multiple layers of ideas and positions of Black radical thought.

Through my discussion of the global contingencies and historical convergences of the 1930's in the "New Negro" chapter, this thesis has positioned the anthology within a much

⁷¹ George Padmore, *The Life and Struggles of Negro Toilers*. (London: Red International of Labour Unions, 1931), 5.

broader context that allows a genealogical interpretation of the text itself. Cunard's affiliation with the surrealists, Marxists, cultural nationalists, bourgeois liberals, and her friendship with Padmore, reveal her to be a product of networks of power at that time. Thus, *Negro* is indeed a product of contingent and simultaneous structures of power as well.

In this thesis, I have conveyed that Cunard's production was in fact much more complex than what Lois Gordon claims in her biography, "to undermine any rationalization for racial injustice based on notions of white cultural superiority,"⁷² *Negro* in fact, served as a site where race, class, gender and sexuality converged. As the editor of this work, Cunard did not make connections; she revealed them. Through my examination of the inclusions and exclusions of figures in the anthology, along with their relationship to one another, we can see how Cunard provided a window into 1930's Black radicalism. This project has re-imagined Black literature, expression and political trajectory by situating these narratives within a much broader global context. Hopefully, through this method of rediscovering *Negro*, we can find nuanced and transformative ways of looking at Black Studies as a global project.

⁷² Gordon, *Nancy Cunard*, 156.

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