

the

A RECORD OF THE DARKER RACES

Founded-1910
Reg. U.S. Pat. Off.

Published under supervision NAACP Department of Public Relations:
Henry Lee Moon, Director

In This Issue

Cover: Summer Fun (Photo by Dick Read)

The Civil Rights Bill of 1966 by ROY WILKINS	302
Green Land of Guyana by STEPHEN GILL SPOTTSWOOD.....	307
First World Festival of Negro Arts by WILLIAM GREAVES..	309
Mississippi and the NAACP	315
1966 Summer Project in Louisiana	319
Emma Bowen: Counsellor to Youth	320

Departments

EDITORIALS	298
BATTLEFRONT	321
FREEDOM NEWS	326
COLLEGE AND SCHOOL NOTES	334
LIFE MEMBERSHIPS	336

Dick Read, Art Consultant

THE CRISIS, founded in 1910, is the official organ of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. It is published monthly from October to May inclusive and bimonthly June-July and August-September by The Crisis Publishing Co., Inc., 20 West 40th Street, New York, N. Y. 10018, Arthur B. Spingarn, president; John Hammond, vice-president; Samuel Williams, secretary; Theodore Spaulding, treasurer; and Roy Wilkins, assistant secretary. The subscription price is \$1.50 a year or 15 cents a copy. Foreign subscription \$1.75. Reentered as second class matter July 22, 1949 at the post office at New York, N. Y., under the act of March 3, 1879.

The contents of THE CRISIS are copyrighted. Copyright 1966 by The Crisis Publishing Company, Inc. All rights reserved.

Vol. 73, No. 6

Whole Number
634

JUNE-JULY, 1966



THE FIRST WORLD FESTIVAL OF NEGRO ARTS: An Afro-American View

By William Greaves

I HAVE had the good fortune to attend the First World Festival of Negro Arts which took place in Dakar, Senegal, from April 4 to April 24, 1966. It was truly an historic occasion. Approximately 2,000 black artists from all over the world met in that West African city. They came to get acquainted, to be inspired, to return to their origins, but mainly to help reveal the important contributions the black man has made, and is making, to world civilization. The event, which was covered by the mass media of a number of countries, received world-wide recognition.

From the outset, the idea of such a Festival raised some searching questions. Why a Negro Arts Festival? What is "Negritude"? Is there such a thing as a black man's art? How will the Festival be received by the Western World? Will it be tinged with racism? And so on. In order to see a World Negro Arts Festival in its proper perspective one must first consider the historical

MR. GREAVES is a free lance film and television producer. A production of his for the USIA was shown at the Dakar Festival.

background against which it appears.

For the past several hundred years the white people of Europe and America, in quest of a better life for themselves, engaged in the business of nation and empire building. This required large reservoirs of manual labor. In that pre-industrial period, the type of man best suited for working impossibly long hours performing backbreaking chores was the slave—black or white. The black slave eventually won out as the "Joe boy" of the Western World. After all he was a "foreigner," different in color and worshipped divine power in strange ways. Tired, in the twilight of their decaying cultures, the Africans were easy victims for the younger, more industrialized, more aggressive Europeans who used them to hew wood and draw water.

There were, however, complications. The movement toward humanitarianism and liberty which was sweeping Europe and America made the problem of securing and maintaining slave labor very difficult, particularly from the standpoint of conscience. This "problem" was overcome largely through special

efforts of the press. A campaign of vilification was unleashed to so downgrade the intelligence, humanity, and spiritual qualifications of the black man that he would in the eyes of white society be rendered a savage, a near-animal whose heathen ways completely disqualified him from sharing in the liberty and justice of the newly emerging modern world. It followed that, if he were a near-animal, it was quite all right to exploit his labor and take away his land. The legacy of these distortions is still with us.

Under the influence of international realities and domestic pressures, a new attitude toward black people is developing in this country. Attempts are being made to correct the false notions about the Negro. And one of the most important challenges facing our country as well as the rest of the Western World, will be that of setting the record straight. An indication of just how distorted the picture is can be seen from the following statement by the late William Leo Hansberry, widely recognized authority on African history: "Most people are unaware that more Stone Age cultural artifacts have been found in Africa in the past 50 years than have been found in all of Europe during the past 2,000 years."

Seen in this light, the emergence of a Negro Arts Festival becomes a rational and necessary development. It seeks to close the enormous information gap regarding the cultural achievements of the black peoples—a gap which has caused much suffering and tragedy, for men both black and white.

Can this gap be closed? And will it affect the status of the black man? One might argue that the Jewish people, particularly since World War II, have been most adept at publicizing their cultural prowess, and still they suffer. Why bother where the Jews have failed? But have they failed? I think not. I think there is less anti-Semitism in the Western World today largely because the West is now more aware of the Jewish contribution to the arts of peace. I don't think there is any need for anxiety or guilt concerning the production of a Negro Arts Festival for it simply serves the highest purpose of education—to enlighten and enliven the human spirit. The First Festival of the Negro Arts was a big step in the attainment of that objective.

THE subject of Negritude dominated the discussions and debates which took place at the Colloquium, a two-week-long conference of intellectuals. As I understand it, however, this controversial concept, as propounded by President Leopold Senghor of Senegal, asserts that the black artist has a special and important contribution to make to world culture, that he should be proud of that contribution and that the non-black world has much to gain from a fuller recognition of it.

Negritude had given rise to anxiety among some white people who feared that it represented a return to the racism which they themselves are trying to eliminate from Western civilization. Some American Negroes fear it because they feel that, at a time when the American Negro is striving for full equality, Negri-

tude might antagonize whites and delay the full integration they seek in American society. If Negritude is a negative concept with negative purposes, if it is a return to the racism of the past, then it is a concept both useless and dangerous to the modern world. Yet, viewed through the lens of history it is an inevitable development. And when defined in President Senghor's terms it is obvious that Negritude is a positive response to negative historical events. It is an attempt at cultural survival in what has been, until recent times, a predominantly hostile world.

Always, there will be those, black and white, who seek to exploit any negative racial aspect of the situation. These people are the agents of death; there were very few at the Festival. Its overriding mood was that of interracial harmony. It was a pleasure to see audiences, which were sometimes two-thirds white, enthusiastically enjoying the fruits of "Negritude." This is as it should be; the white world has long thrilled to such meagre fruits of Negritude as were available. Indeed, one can now visualize a day when there will no longer be a dearth of information on the contribution of the Negro to world culture. Once this gap is closed, the feelings of racial superiority and inferiority which afflict both black and white communities will die more easily. For if Negritude can serve the purpose of correcting the widespread notion that the black man is a cultural Johnny-come-lately, it will provide a firm basis for racial respect, an important prerequisite for the equality the black man is seeking.

THUS, the Festival took on a special significance, a significance which to the African mind transcended all other arguments which some American Negroes gave for not attending the Festival. Why did not more show up in Dakar? Some probably didn't know the Festival was taking place; some simply didn't have the money. Some may not have wanted to antagonize those members of the white community who feared or disliked the idea of such a festival. Some didn't go because the United States State Department had a hand in the American participation at the Festival; some didn't go because a white woman was put in charge of the U. S. Committee for the Festival. Some did not approve of some of the international policies of President Senghor's government; and some didn't go because of their disapproval of the war in Vietnam. Some artists didn't go or enter their work because they felt they should be paid to participate in the Festival. Some didn't go because they don't believe there is any such thing as a "Negro artist."

And finally, some Negroes didn't go because they dislike Negroes and Africans. The Africans with whom I spoke felt that these arguments were irrelevant, that except in cases of financial difficulty, at this turning point in history American Negroes should have come -- were a "green" woman in charge of the U. S. Committee. It is the hope of many Africans that, at the next festival, more of the "big guns" in Afro-American arts and letters will, despite their grievances, be on hand to celebrate the black man's con-

tribution to world culture.

AS for the Festival itself, much has been written elsewhere extolling the sheer theatricality and brilliance of the Sierra Leone, Mali, Ivory Coast companies. Full tribute has been paid to the vastly impressive exhibit of ancient African art. The contemporary art exhibit would have watered the mouths of most American art gallery owners had they had the foresight to attend. The Ethiopian participation was majestic. And the Republic of Chad's performance was a cosmic experience of the first order. Most of the performances were essentially symbolic in character. They illustrated the African view of art which is utilitarian. To the African, art is a bridge linking the soul of man with cosmic experience, an instrument enabling man to vibrate with existence itself. It is not an end in itself, but a means to a greater end.

Despite the absence of many big names, the American participation was one of the highlights of the Festival. Langston Hughes, the DePaur Chorus and Duke Ellington were outstanding; Marion Williams and her gospel singers were absolutely electrifying. The Alvin Ailey Company was a roaring smash hit, and this is particularly interesting because in outer form there was little in their performance reminiscent of the dance of Africa or even American Jazz. They relied on modern dance forms, on excellent, but westernized, choreography to convey their "Negritude." In terms of style, at least, they proved that the concept of Negritude is valid only when one considers it in an historical,

anthropological and geographical context, and that its classic example is African Art. In other words, Negritude has neither more nor less validity than European or Chinese influence in art. In form it is most evident in African art. It is least obvious in some of the art of the American and French Negro which often relies on European models of expression.

The Ailey Company, working with non-African styles, demonstrated that Negritude does not necessarily rely on external form to reveal itself, that, it can be a state of consciousness which reflects itself in many ways. Some Afro-Americans call that state "soul." While there was often variety of style, that which was common to most contributions to the Festival was "soul"—in delightful, unusually great quantities. The Ailey Company was successful partly because of their skill, but also because "soul" veritably cascaded from them out over the footlights.

There is a tendency among some Negro intellectuals to view soul as the private property of the black man—a ludicrous notion. Soul is the necessary ingredient of all great art—white, yellow, brown or black. Without it, great art does not exist. It is interesting, however, to view this phenomenon in a "Negro" context in that it occurred with such profusion at the Festival. It is often said that an artist, to be great, must have suffered, must have struggled for survival, physical or psychic. The Negro eminently qualifies by these criteria. I would guess that the Negro, suffering through the centuries, has become very aware of

human emotions, of sadness, of joy, of pain, of pleasure, and he has, through his art, expressed this awareness.

It is a fact that most works exhibited at the Festival contained tremendous emotional vitality. Perhaps this vitality is one of the major contributions of African creativity to the world of the Arts. It certainly was one of the primary reasons for the Festival's great success.

DAKAR is a beautiful city; the Senegalese are a beautiful people. It is delightful to see a Senegalese woman walking, tall and elegant, with her long dress, or "gran bou-bou," billowing after her in a dance of color. The food is fine, the beaches are magnificent. And yet one soon becomes aware of an undercurrent, an undercurrent of tension between the French and Senegalese.

The French are in full economic control of this African nation; they seem also to exert considerable political influence. And one has only to walk down the streets of Dakar, to look at her restaurants, beaches and private clubs to get the message that this is a country whose real independence is yet to come. I was often amused (perhaps this is the wrong word) by some of my French friends' continual rationalizations, continual insistence that the Senegalese are "like children," "stupid," that "they don't think," "they don't want responsibility," etc.

I am fully aware of the racial prejudice and discrimination so evident in America. From my own experience I know that there are many people in America, both black and

white, who actually believe that the black man has made no significant contribution to world culture but I was somewhat unprepared for the variations on the theme I encountered in Senegal.

There seemed to have been considerable ambivalence among some of the French in Dakar in regard to the success of the Festival. It was even rumored that one or two members of the French community associated with the management of the Festival sought to subvert, subtly to be sure, the efficient functioning of the event in order to demonstrate the Africans' inability to properly manage their own affairs. I was told that France has spent considerable time and money persuading the Senegalese that France was the "mother" country, that culturally they should be Frenchmen. And here was a festival which might culturally alienate the Africans by persuading them that they should be Africans more than Frenchmen, that they should cherish their own cultures as well as those of others.

AS I moved around the city listening, talking with and observing the Senegalese in their neo-colonialist relationship with the French, a passage from French literature continually passed through my mind. It was written in the 18th century by Count Volney, a French nobleman, who was a brilliant philosopher and political figure. His book, *Ruins of Empires*, contains the following statement: "There a people, now forgotten, discovered, while others were yet barbarians, the elements of the arts and sciences. A race of men now rejected from

society for their sable skin and frizzle hair, founded on the study of the laws of nature, those civil and religious systems which still govern the universe."

This statement coming from a present day African or Afro-American would immediately be interpreted by some as racist in character. But Count Volney was a respected figure in French political affairs and his views on the Africans were not uncommon in the Europe of his day. Yet, some Frenchmen now seem to hold the view that the newly independent Senegalese are constitutionally unable to run a modern state by themselves and they have undertaken to unburden them, indirectly, of the awesome responsibilities of nation building. No doubt the Senegalese have heard these suggestions so often that some may behave in such terms. But I also met many Senegalese who were hell bent on the idea of building a healthy nation for themselves.

To be sure, the sentiments expressed by Volney pertained to ancient Ethiopia (which formerly included the Sudan and much of East Africa) whose history he had studied. In recent years, however, there has been a steady build-up of information on Africa which now suggests that the arts of peace flourished not only in Ethiopia but in other parts of that vast continent as well. Today there is growing talk of Benin, Ife, Songhay, Mali, Monmatapa, Zinbabwe. All of these are now regarded as outstanding examples of human endeavor in civilization. It is in this context that a World Festival of Negro Arts takes on special significance, for in displaying the

cultural artifacts of those civilizations, it provided a proper antidote for French, European and white American chauvinism toward the black man. It is more than unfortunate that knowledge of early African civilizations, so widespread in the Europe of Volney, does not have wider currency in the modern Western World, for I am certain that if more people knew that the black peoples of the world are the possessors of a rich cultural history much of the foundation upon which racial discrimination is built would crumble.

Unfortunately, ignorance still prevails in this regard and we Negroes have been faced with the arduous task of gaining political, economic and social equality without the special advantages which a wider familiarity of such facts might afford us. The Europeans have been quite skillful at the business of disseminating information about their culture and civilization; so skillful that, during the past 200 years it was seemingly thought that they were the only custodians of civilization, that the endeavors of other cultures were of trifling value. As I see it, the overall purpose of the Festival was to help correct this tragic misconception.

PERSONALLY, I look forward to the day when there will be no need for a Negro Arts Festival to counteract ignorance and malicious propaganda, when black and white will be fully apprised and appreciative of the black man's contribution to world culture. I look forward to the day when we, like the Euro-

(Continued on page 332)

gress. But the four changes I have urged represent a firm consensus within the Leadership Conference as to what civil rights groups should support as a minimum.

These suggestions do not represent a criticism of the Administration's program, nor are they offered in derogation of it. We believe it would be a national tragedy if Congress failed to enact the Administration bill. Our changes are advanced as a supplement, in the same manner that the Leadership Conference in 1964 and 1965 offered suggestions—that were adopted by the Congress—suggestions that went beyond the original bill as introduced.

It is our hope that, just as in 1964 and 1965, the voice of public opinion let Congress know that what we sought was reasonable, just, and practical, it will again convey to the Congress the sense of necessity and urgency for the strengthening changes we advocate.



C. Richard Read, right, Crisis art consultant, receives Award of Excellence from Leonard E. Hill, for his entry in the creative communications contest sponsored by the Religious Public Relations Council. Presentation was made at the Council's 37th annual convention in Nashville, Tenn., April 18-21. Mr. Hill, managing editor of The Baptist Program, served as chairman of the awards committee. Mr. Read is creative director of the Department of Supporting Services of the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.

NEGRO ARTS FESTIVAL

(Continued from page 314)

peans, can sit back and relax—secure in the knowledge that we are studied, respected and appreciated. Paradoxically, it is largely the white world which will tell the black world when there is no longer a need to stage a festival based on the theme of Negritude. But let us also hope that when that day arrives there will be festivals not only in Africa, but everywhere, which celebrate the human spirit with all the fire and soul generated at the First World Festival of Negro Arts.

NEGRO HERITAGE

Achievement in brief from the past as well as the present. Profusely illustrated. 5 volumes with 2 Binders \$19.50. (Each volume, with binder, \$5.75). Mail order today!

P. O. Box 8153 — Chicago, Ill. 60680

Book Authors!

Join our successful authors in a complete and reliable publishing program: publicity, advertising, handsome books. Send for FREE report on your manuscript & copy of *How To Publish Your Book*.

CARLTON PRESS Dept. xxg
84 Fifth Ave., New York, 10011

FREE

