

Marcus Garvey

1887-1940

Marcus Garvey was born August 17, 1887, in St. Ann's Bay, Jamaica. He worked as a printer but left Jamaica after a failed strike. He eventually became a noted essayist, editor, journalist, poet, and orator who founded the Universal Negro Improvement Association in Jamaica in 1914, after having spent a year in England working with Duse Muhammad Ali, the editor of the African Times and Orient Review. He came to the United States to meet Booker T. Washington, whose Tuskegee Institute enormously impressed him. Washington died before Garvey arrived, but Garvey stayed here, transferring the UNIA's headquarters to New York City in 1917.

Garvey also founded the "back-to-Africa" movement, which advocated the repatriation of Africa by black Americans and West Indians to form an African empire, not unlike the British empire that so influenced Garvey's vision. By the end of World War I, Garvey had established the largest mass movement among blacks in history. He was undone by unwise financial investments, some opportunistic orders, government infiltration, and his own arrogance.

He is most famous for The Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey; or, Africa for the Africans, but he was also the founder of the Negro World and the Black Man. In 1927, he was convicted of mail fraud and deported back to Jamaica. He died in London on June 10, 1940.

On July 8, 1917, Marcus Garvey delivered the following speech in New York concerning the East St. Louis race riots that occurred on July 2. The speech was published by the New York Globe on July 11.

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The East St. Louis Riot, or rather massacre, of Monday [July] 2nd, will go down in history as one of the bloodiest outrages against mankind for which any class of people could be held guilty. (Hear! hear.) This is no time for fine words, but a time to lift one's voice against the savagery of a people who claim to be the dispensers of democracy. (cheers) I do not know what special meaning the people who slaughtered the Negroes of East St. Louis have for democracy of which they are the custodians, but I do know that it has no literal meaning for me as used and applied by these same lawless people (hear! hear!). America, that has been ringing the bells of the world, proclaiming to the nations and the peoples thereof that she has democracy to give to all and sundry, America that has denounced Germany for the deportations of the Belgians into Germany, America that has arraigned Turkey at the bar of public opinion and public justice against the massacres of the Armenians, has herself no satisfaction to give 12,000,000 of her own

citizens except the satisfaction of a farcical inquiry that will end where it begun, over the brutal murder of men, women and children for no other reason than that they are black people seeking an industrial chance in a country that they have laboured for three hundred years to make great. (cheers) For three hundred years the Negroes of America have given their life blood to make the Republic the first among the nations of the world, and all along this time there has never been even one year of justice but on the contrary a continuous round of oppression. At one time it was slavery, at another time lynching and burning, and up to date it is wholesale butchering. This is a crime against the laws of humanity; it is a crime against the laws of the nation, it is a crime against Nature, and a crime against the God of all mankind. (cheers)

Somewhere in the book of life we are told that "God created of one blood all nations of men to dwell on the face of the earth," and after mankind, in scattered groups, had for thousands of years lived in their own spheres without trouble or molestation, promoting in their own way the course of peace and happiness, the white race, a party of this group, went out to enslave, conquer and rob the rights of the Peaceful. Through that system of enslavement, conquest and robbery, the black man was taken into this country where he was forced against his will to labor for the enrichment of the whiteman. Millions of our people in the early days of slavery gave their lives that America might live. From the labours of these people the country grew in power, until her wealth to-day is computed above that of any two nations. With all the service that the Negro gave he is still a despised creature in the eye of the white people, for if he were not to them despised, the 90,000,000 of whites of this country would never allow such outrages as the East St. Louis massacre to perpetuate themselves without enforcing the law which provides justice for every man be he black or white.

The blackman has always trusted the whiteman. He has always clung to him as a brotherman, ever willing to do service for him, to help him, to succor him, yet with all this the whiteman has never found it convenient to live up to the principles of brotherhood which he himself teaches to all mankind. (hear! hear!) From the time of Livingstone to the present day the blackman has always been kind to the whiteman. When there was no whiteman in Africa to help the sickly and dying Livingstone, the blackman, ever true, even as Simon the Cyrenian was true, in bearing the cross of the despised Jesus, came to the rescue of the suffering Englishman, and when he was dead, faithful as they were, they bore his body for hundreds of miles across the desert and plains of Africa until they deposited his remains at a place where other whitemen could reach him to convey him to England and inter his bones in the Cathedral of Westminster Abbey. The Negro in American history from the time of Crispus Attucks at Boston, the 10th Cavalry at San Juan Hill, which saved the day for Roosevelt, up to the time when they stuck to Boyd at Carrizal, has demonstrated to the American Nation that he is as true as steel. (cheers) Yet

for all his services he receives the reward of lynching, burning and wholesale slaughter (hear, hear). It is even strange to see how the real American white people, the people who are direct descendants from the Pilgrim Fathers, allow the alien German, Pole, Italian and other Europeans who came here but yesterday to lead them in the bloody onslaught against the Negroes who have lived here for over three hundred years. When I say that the Aliens are leading the descendants of the Pilgrim Fathers against the Negroes in this country I mean to support it with as much facts as possible.

Mayor Mollman of East St. Louis if not himself a German, is a descendant of German immigrants, he is the man to be blamed for the recent riots in East St. Louis. I say so because I am convinced that he fostered a well arranged conspiracy to prevent blackmen migrating from the South much to the loss of Southern Farmers who for months have been moving heaven itself to prevent the exodus of the labor serfs of the South into the North.

Two months ago I was in New Orleans completing a lecture tour of the United States, and on the 26th of April Mayor Fred W. Mollman arrived in the city on a trip from St. Louis. In New Orleans he was met by Mayor Behrman and the New Orleans Board of Trade. For months the Farmers of Louisiana were frightened out of their wits over the every day migration of Negroes from great farming centres of the State. They wrote to the papers, they appealed to the Governor, the Mayor and the Legislature and the Board of Trade to stop the Negroes going away, but up to the 26th of April nothing was done to stop the people excepting the Railway Companies promising to use certain restraint on the rush of people obtaining passages on the trains by Railway orders sent to them from the North. At this time Mayor Mollman arrived and the Farmers and Board of Trade met him and asked his help in discouraging the Negroes from going North and especially to East St. Louis. In an interview given out to the New Orleans press he said that the Negroes from the the South were reaching St. Louis at the rate of 2,000 per week, and that they were creating a problem there. He said that some of the largest industries in the country were established in East St. Louis and there were strikes for the last few months. He believed the labor conditions in East St. Louis were responsible for the number of Negro laborers going to that city. When the strikes started, he said, United States District Judge Wright issued an injunction restraining the strikers from intimidating the laborers who took their places. This order prevented uprisings and riots. "Conditions are very bad in East St. Louis" he said, "because many plants are suffering for the want of labor. However, our city is growing and we have a population of 85,000 persons. During 1916 we gained 1,600 in population." His interview did not make pleasant reading for the Farmers and others interested in labor in New Orleans and Louisiana so that the very next day he appeared at the Board of Trade where he met the Farmers and others and in discussing the labor exodus with them, he promised that he would do all he could to discourage Negroes from Louisiana going into East St. Louis as the city did

not want them. His interview on the first day was an encouragement to the Negroes to go to East St. Louis, as there was work for them, owing to the inability of the various plants to get labor. On the second day when he was approached he said East St. Louis did not want the Negroes, and he then promised to do all in his power to prevent them going there. His remarks to the people whom he met were published under big headlines in the Newspapers, so that the Negroes could read that they were not wanted in East St. Louis, but that did not deter the blackmen of Louisiana who were looking for better opportunities in the land of their birth going about the country looking for better conditions than the South offered with lynching and jim crowism. The Negroes still continued their migration North. The Mayor of East St. Louis returned to the city after making his promise to the Farmers, Board of Trade and others who were interested in Negro labor. On the 5th of May the New Orleans Board of Trade elected Mr. M. J. Sanders its president, and Mr. W. P. Ross as delegates to attend a transportation conference at St. Louis to be held on May 8-9. You will remember that Mayor Mollman appeared before the Board of Trade on Friday the 27th April where he made his statement of promise. The transportation conference was held at St. Louis on the 8th and 9th of May at which several prominent men interested in the labor condition of the South were present as also Messrs Sanders and Ross, from New Orleans. It isn't for me to suggest that Mayor Mollman met these gentlemen again; it is for you to imagine what further transpired while these gentlemen from the South who were so deeply interested in keeping the Negro below the Mason and Dixon line said and did among themselves while in that vicinity where Mayor Mollman held sway so much so as to be able to make a promise to keep out citizens of the United States who were not born in Germany, but in the Southland. One thing I do now know; the first riot started on May 28 after a conference of labor leaders with Mayor Mollman. On that day, May 28, crowds of white men after leaving the City Council stopped street cars and dragged Negroes off and beat them. Then the night following three Negroes and two white men were shot. An investigation of the affair resulted in the finding that labor agents had induced Negroes to come from the South. I can hardly see the relevance of such a report with the dragging of men from cars and shooting them. The City authorities did nothing to demonstrate to the unreasonable labor leaders that they would be firmly dealt with should they maltreat and kill blackmen. No threat was offered to these men because Mayor Mollman himself had promised to do all he could to drive the Negroes out of East St. Louis, and to instill fear in the hearts of the people in the South so as to prevent them coming North. On the 29th of May, a day after the first disturbance, and when three Negro men had been killed, Mayor Mollman sent a dispatch to Governor Pleasant of Louisiana advising the Negroes of Louisiana to remain away from East St. Louis. This news item from the "Call" of May 31 which I will read will speak for itself.

NEGROES ASKED TO STAY AWAY.

[Baton Rouge, La., May 30. An order advising all Louisiana Negroes to remain away from East. St. Louis, Ill., was issued to-day by Governor Pleasant, following a request from Mayor Mollman of the Illinois city.]

I have not seen the Louisiana papers that published that order but you can imagine for yourselves how the papers made prominent news of it so as to bring home to the Negroes of the State the very discouraging situation which the Mayor of East St. Louis helped to create. Because nothing was done to crush the originators and leaders of the first riot the Negro haters of East St. Louis took fresh courage and made their final attack on our defenseless men, women and children on Monday July 2nd which resulted in the wholesale massacre of our people. When we read in the white press a report like what I will read to you, we can conjure to our own minds the horror of the whole affair.

"East St. Louis, July 2d—Negroes are being shot down like rabbits and strung up to telegraph poles.

"The official police estimate at 9 o'clock put the number of dead at 100. They reach this total partly through reports that many victims have been pursued into creeks and shot, burned in buildings or murdered and thrown into the Mississippi. The exact number of dead will probably never be known. Six Negroes were hanged to telegraph poles in the south end of town. A reliable whiteman reports having counted nineteen Negro corpses on a side street.

"A reign of terror prevails. The police and the two companies of National guard are powerless. The companies of soldiers were powerless as they had orders not to shoot. The whites took their rifles from them telling them they might hurt some one whilst these very whites took the rifles and shot Negroes."

The whole thing my friends is a bloody farce, and that the police and soldiers did nothing to stem the murder thirst of the mob is a conclusive proof of conspiracy on the part of the civil authorities to condone the acts of the white mob against Negroes. (hear! hear!) In this report we further read that as the flames of fire would drive a Negro man, woman or child from a dwelling their clothes burning the mob would set up a great shout and rifles and pistols would be fired. So far no Negro was known to escape as the whites had a merciless net about the Negroes, and the cry was, "kill 'em all." Negro faces were seen at frames of windows and when they saw what happened to those who flew from the burning structures, they dropped back into the fire rather than tempt a similar fate. (deep groan) An example of what the guardsmen encountered, and themselves enjoyed, was the beating of colored women by white girls. This sort of thing was common. It resulted in the death of several Negro women. Six girls, according to the report pursued a colored girl around the main railway station. A mob formed behind the girls who were screaming

frantic epithets at the terrified black girl. "Send them back to Africa." "Kill them all." "Lynch them" shouted the young white amazons. Suddenly the crowd swept from the trail of the girl. A yell then arose. "There is one." It was a Negro walking on the railroad track. Before he realized his peril he was killed. Half a dozen pistols cracked and the man dropped without a chance to run. (groans) Two white girls, neither more than 17 years old, the report said, were cheered when they dragged a colored girl from a street car, removed her slippers and beat her senseless with the sharp wooden heels. Some reports said black women were stripped by white women for the amusement of the crowd. (Cries of shame!)

The mob and entire white populace of East St. Louis had a Roman holiday. They feasted on the blood of the Negro, encouraged as they were by the German American Mayor who two months ago went to New Orleans and promised to keep the Negroes out of East St. Louis. That this man did absolutely nothing to let the people know that the law would be enforced to preserve order and ensure the peaceful lives of the black people is amply demonstrated by a report which comes from East St. Louis, and was published in the "New York Tribune" of Saturday, July 7. Under the caption: "Citizens Blame Long Reign of Lawlessness for Riots" the paper published this bit of News. "East St. Louis, Ill., July, 6, Resignation of Chief of Police Payne of East St. Louis and of Cornelius Hickey night Chief of police or of radical reforms will be demanded of Mayor Mollman by the citizens' committee of the Chamber of Commerce. This determination is a result of the race riots here Monday in which thirty-seven persons lost their lives. Maurice Joyce, vice-president of the Chamber of Commerce, declared to-day the rioting was the direct result of the long reign of lawlessness in East St. Louis. We have a police department that is incompetent and inefficient if not worse. Not only was the word sent out that law would not be rigidly enforced but the impression was allowed to spread that law violations would be winked at." This gallant vice-chairman of the Chamber of Commerce who knew this even before one Negro was shot, never said a word and did nothing to bring the delinquent Mayor who ruled the city to a realization of these facts until great property damage was done to the Southern Railway Company, when their warehouse of over 100 car loads of merchandise was consumed by the flames causing a loss to the company of over \$500,000, and a white theatre of over \$100,000 was destroyed. It was not until property was destroyed in which the Chamber of Commerce was most interested, that the officers of that body let the Mayor know that he must do his duty. It was not through over-population or through scarcity of work why East St. Louis did not want Negroes. It was simply because they were black men. For Mayor Mollman himself said months ago that East St. Louis was badly off for laborers as many of the plants could not get hands to operate them.

I can hardly see why blackmen should be debarred from going where they choose in the land of their birth. I can not see wherefrom Mayor Mollman got

the authority to discourage blackmen going into East St. Louis, when there was work for them, except he got that authority from mob sentiment and mob law. It was because he knew that he could gain a following and support on the issue of race why he was bold enough to promise the white people of Louisiana that he would keep Negroes out of East St. Louis. He has succeeded in driving fully 10,000 in one day out of the city, and the South has gone wild over the splendid performance in so much so that the very next day after the massacre the Legislature of Georgia sent out the message that their good Negroes must come home as they will treat them better than East St. Louis did. Can you wonder at the conspiracy of the whole affair? White people are taking advantage of blackmen to-day because blackmen all over the world are disunited. (Loud and prolonged cheers)

Herman H. Dreer

ca. 1888-1981

Born in Washington, D.C., Herman H. Dreer was a Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Bowdoin College in Maine. In 1914, he moved to St. Louis to teach English at Sumner High School. After being denied entrance to both Saint Louis University and Washington University because of his race, he eventually earned degrees in English and sociology from the University of Chicago.

Concerned that St. Louis did not offer college training for its African American students, in 1934 Dreer reopened Douglass University, a university started in 1926 by B. F. Bowles, former principal of Lincoln High School in East St. Louis. Using teachers from the St. Louis public school system, Douglass University taught African American students until 1942. Dreer is also credited with initiating Black History month and served as pastor of King's Way Baptist Church.

Dreer was a prolific writer and editor. He compiled American Literature by Negro Authors (1950) and edited the St. Louis Tribune, a weekly newspaper, and the Masonic Journal of Missouri, a monthly publication. Dreer also wrote numerous books, including the novels The Tie that Binds (1958) and The Immediate Jewel of His Soul (1919).

The following articles are from a "Highlights of Negro History" column that he wrote for the St. Louis Argus for many years.

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8 April, 15 April, 22 April 1966, *St. Louis Argus*

"THE DEBT ST. LOUIS OWES TO DOUGLASS UNIVERSITY"

In 1926, Benjamin F. Bowles, having retired as principal of the Lincoln High School of E. St. Louis, Illinois, moved to St. Louis, Missouri. As he was still in robust health, he thought of establishing a college to offer courses by correspondence. When he asked Atty. Freeman L. Martin to obtain the charter for the school, Martin convinced Bowles of the great need for a university in St. Louis.

At that time all colleges in St. Louis and in St. Louis County did not admit Negroes.

Shortly after his obtaining the charter of the Frederick Douglass University, it operated with the following colleges: Liberal Arts and Sciences, Music, Law, and Religion. After a few years, because of the decline of the health of the sponsor and because no one else would assume the leadership and the responsibility, the doors of the institution were closed.

Then came the great depression of the early thirties with the St. Louis Board of Education not sponsoring summer school. To fill the void a private summer school was operated with me as the principal. I was at that time the

Katherine Dunham

1909-

The following selection is an interview of Katherine Dunham by Cheryl Jarvis which appeared in the November 1986 issue of St. Louis magazine, titled "Katherine Dunham: A Talk with the Matriarch of Black Dance in America."

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The gleaming steel of the Arch and the revitalized riverfront recede in the distance as one crosses the Poplar Street Bridge into East St. Louis. Amidst vacant lots, graffiti-laden school buildings and neglected neighborhoods is an imposing two-story brick structure, the Katherine Dunham Museum. The exterior is badly in need of paint, but within its stately walls can be found a national treasure: Katherine Dunham.

Just one of Dunham's extraordinary accomplishments would be enough for most people for a lifetime. She is: An international star who toured for 25 years with the company she established and which bore her name. An inventive choreographer who staged dazzling performances for theater, opera, television and film. A sensual, electric dancer whose legs were insured by Lloyd's of London. An anthropologist who studied the native dances of the West Indies, South America and Africa. A university scholar and lecturer whose office walls are hung solid with awards, including 10 honorary doctorates. A political activist and revolutionary teacher. A writer, a painter, a businesswoman. A wife, a mother. The matriarch of black dance in America.

Today Dunham is professor emeritus at Southern Illinois University and honorary president of the Dunham Foundation, a non-profit organization for the development of cultural arts in East St. Louis. She is elegant and gracious, reflective and articulate. Though heavier than in her performing days, she is, at 77, still beautiful. Her carriage is regal, her make-up flawless, her jewelry stunning. She still combines wisdom and glamour.

—Cheryl Jarvis

Q.: How did you first become interested in dance?

Dunham: My earliest memory is of moving around to music and seeing people being very amused by it. By the age of 10, I seriously felt that I must do something with dance. When I was 12, I produced a variety show for a church fund-raiser. I was so nervous that I lost my voice, but it didn't affect my dancing, and the show went off very well. Those were days I was feeling dance more than thinking dance. I think you dance because have to dance. I think it's more true of dance than of other art forms because it's kinesthetic.

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It's physical, spiritual and audio. It's a unified, cosmic rhythm. For me it enters the realm of mysticism.

Q.: Did you ever have any formal dance training?

Dunham: I had some formal training in high school. What it did more than anything was turn me away from scarves.

Q.: You are probably best known for the "Dunham technique." What inspired you to create a new dance form?

Dunham: I felt a new dance form was needed for black people to be able to appear in any theater in the world and be accepted and exciting. One of the prerequisites of art is uniqueness. Rather than taking years to build a classical ballet company for blacks, I decided to create a dance with an authentic base for black people. Through my anthropological work, I studied primitive and folk dances and created the Dunham dance from them.

Q.: It is said that you established black dance in America. Was that achieved easily, or was it a struggle? Did you encounter a lot of prejudice along the way?

Dunham: Black dancers were not allowed to take classes in studios in the '30s. I started a school because there was no place for blacks to study dance. I was the first to open the way for black dancers and I was the first to form a black dance company.

I think there was probably more prejudice than I was aware of at the time. I am writing a book now called *The Mine Field*, which is about the struggles during the years we founded the company. As I write the book, I realize there were times that were hard, but I was so busy then that I was usually not aware of them.

When I was aware, I took action right away. In 1950 we were touring in Brazil, which was known as a country with no discrimination. When my husband, who is white, registered for us at the hotel in San Paolo, he was told that I couldn't stay there. Right away I phoned a politician I knew in Rio. I began making a real problem for the hotel and entered a suit against it. Hiring attorneys and so forth was costly at the time, but the hotel quickly backed down. So I always took action, and as far as I can remember, I always I won.

Q.: You toured with your company in 57 countries. Which was most receptive to the new black dance form you created?

Dunham: France was probably the most receptive. Our show was the subject of conversation among the intellectual community of Paris. It gave us a

feeling of belonging to the whole community. We were accepted in Europe first, then in America. In the beginning in the United States we were classed as entertainment. It took a number of performances before we were accepted here as art. But we expected great audiences everywhere, and we usually got them.

Q.: During the years you toured you danced, choreographed, taught and also wrote autobiographies. Did you experience conflicts balancing so many interests?

Dunham: Sometimes. While touring I did begin writing autobiographies. I was also interested in painting. After our shows I would stay at the theater painting until two or three in the morning. This was a real drive for me. For three or four years I would spend every free moment passionately painting. Then that muse would leave me. It all seemed natural. Just something that took my life over for a while. I did have some art shows in Argentina. But I didn't feel good selling a painting, just like I don't feel good charging a dance lesson. I don't charge for a dance lesson, and never have. I just don't like being directly paid for a service that is so dear to me. In Haiti they used to bring me a chicken or tomato. Today they don't even have that.

I did carefully plan my time to make the company as technically good and as captivating as possible. My goals were always pretty clear to me. I tended to do things because I felt I had to do them. Everything happened in sequence. I just simply did things, and did them easily.

Q.: During your world travels you met many famous, influential people. Who did you find most interesting?

Dunham: Eric Fromm was most important to me. I always admired him and his work. We met at a party in Chicago in 1935 and remained good friends until he died a few years ago. He helped me get my fellowship to the West Indies. He never analyzed me, but as much as I ever had a guru I guess it would be him. A lot of my thinking was influenced by him. For example, my philosophy of survival. If you can achieve three things—knowledge of self, discrimination and detachment without losing love—then you probably have it made in regard to personal success and contentment.

Once I took a group of militants from East St. Louis to New York to see Eric Fromm in the hopes that he could get them to change their views from genocide to radical humanism. I think he did have an effect on them.

Q.: Many people were surprised when you left the professional stage and the New York limelight to live in the ghetto of East St. Louis. What motivated that decision?

Dunham: When I came back from Africa, where I was a consultant in cultural

arts, my brother-in-law suggested that I be artist-in-residence at Carbondale, where he was on faculty. I did that for a couple of years when Sargent Shriver asked me to come to East St. Louis to develop a cultural arts program. Initially it was to be a performing arts training center with academics and humanities, but the whole country was running out of money and we had to narrow it to dance.

Q.: Was it difficult leaving New York?

Dunham: No, it was not difficult. I was raised in Chicago. The Midwest was home to me. I'd never been interested in living in New York. I didn't feel a need existed there like it did here. I closed our school in New York and was able to get some of my instructors to come here. But many of them, former members of the company, were used to a life of glamour. East St. Louis didn't appeal to them.

Q.: But you were used to a life of glamour, too.

Dunham: The glamour never meant that much to me. Unlike the other company members, I never went out that much. I was always painting or writing after the shows.

In the beginning the separation from the company was harder than I thought it would be. In the beginning I did miss the touring, the limelight. Now I'm grateful that I don't miss it anymore. The dancing I do miss. The art historian Bernard Berenson said to me once, "Do you realize that when you're on stage, you're making love to the audience and they're making love back?" There's that magic moment, that mystical moment in dance when you find a cosmic consciousness, an illumination. You know you've arrived at what you've been working toward for a long time. That moment I do miss.

Q.: When did you know that you had to stop dancing?

Dunham: I had problems with my knees for many years. But I didn't stop dancing until I was close to 60. One day I just didn't feel like it anymore. When I first came to East St. Louis, I taught a great deal. Now I still teach, but I use someone else to demonstrate. On the other hand, in regard to my inner rhythm, I've never stopped dancing. I have a special concept of time. It's circular, without beginning, without end. So I might dance again.

Q.: Getting back to your work in East St. Louis, was it hard to get the program underway?

Dunham: It was very hard to get it going, both from within and without. We were awarded a \$400,000 grant, but a group of private citizens said the money

was needed for material survival and the grant was rescinded. We immediately transferred to the patronage of SIU under the department of international affairs.

When I came to East St. Louis, I ran smack into the hot summers and the militants. I was fascinated by it, because I had always been disturbed by civil injustice.

Q.: How did you get the militants to put down their weapons and start dancing?

Dunham: We did it through magnets—through martial arts, percussion and drumming. We began by combining karate movements with dance. We taught them the theory of karate to wear off their aggression. Little by little they started drumming, then they began dancing. The dance was slow to come, but by our third year we were beginning to attract militants in the theater of dance.

Ivory Perry

1930-1989

Born in Pine Bluff, Arkansas, long-time civil rights organizer and civil disobedience leader Ivory Perry came to St. Louis in 1954 after earning two Purple Hearts in the Korean War. In St. Louis, Perry joined CORE and fought in campaigns to open the Fox Theatre to black patrons; to win fair employment for African Americans at Laclede Gas and Jefferson Bank, and to stop the use of lead paint in black housing. Most notably, he supported public housing tenants in their nine-month rent strike in 1969, garnering community support and organizing pickets, winning limited but significant federal and local reforms. Perry died tragically in 1989.

More information on Perry and the civil rights movement in St. Louis can be found in George Lipsitz's A Life in the Struggle: Ivory Perry and the Culture of Opposition (1988).

The following interview of Ivory Perry was conducted by Mary Seematter in November 1988, covering the civil rights struggle in St. Louis between 1954 and 1968 for the exhibit "A Strong Seed Planted" by the Missouri Historical Society.

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Seematter: Why don't you start with where the movement in St. Louis really got started.

Perry: CORE—the Congress of Racial Equality—really got started in 1947, I think at Reed's Ice Cream over on Page Avenue, because they discriminated against minorities. Since that time we've picketed White Castle, Howard Johnson Restaurant, and also Footlong Hot Dog. Also, in 1956 we picketed the Fox Theatre down on Grand Avenue, because they did not allow blacks to go to the movies. We also went down to the supermarket on 6th Street downtown. We also picketed the markets. And in 1963 we picketed all of the department stores. We had a boycott at Christians' Holiday.

Seematter: Is CORE still active in St. Louis today?

Perry: We have what they call a state chapter, but not a local chapter.

Seematter: How long has it been since there has been an active local chapter—quite a while?

Perry: For CORE? I think the national office came in and disbanded this chapter I believe in around 1976 or 1977.

Arna Bontemps

1902-1973

Born in Alexandria, Louisiana, Bontemps made his reputation as a novelist, poet, and anthologist and was a central figure in the Harlem Renaissance and much admired by his peers Langston Hughes and W. E. B. Du Bois. In the 1930s, in addition to his novels and poetry, Bontemps began to write children's books, in a desire to reach a younger audience. For most of his professional life, Bontemps held positions at various colleges and universities. Having earned a master's degree in library science at the University of Chicago, Bontemps went to Fisk University in Nashville in 1943. During his twenty-two years at Fisk, Bontemps significantly expanded the university library's archives by acquiring the papers of prominent African Americans of letters.

*Bontemps's first novel, *God Sends Sunday* (1931), is largely set in St. Louis. In the following excerpt, Augie, a successful jockey, has come to St. Louis to visit his sister and begins to form connections with the "fast" crowd in the black community.*

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Augie wore his finest the day he went to look up his sister in St. Louis. He did not have an exact address and had to make inquiries as he walked along Wash Street. But he enjoyed the stroll. It gave him an opportunity to strut himself before the denizens of that neighborhood.

"I'm Lil Augie whut you reads about," he told strangers. "I got a sister named Leah in dis end o' town. Can you enlighten me?"

He was dressed in his favorite Prince Albert with gray-striped pants and patent-leather shoes beneath dove-colored spats. His silk topper slanted rather unsteadily over his left eye, and he carried a cane with a gold head. A celluloid standing collar kept his chin in the air, and his hands glistened with rich stones. Now and again, as he strolled, he brushed the flaps of the coat apart, disclosing an incredible flowered vest.

Filthy children, playing in the streets, came up to the sidewalk gaping with admiration. Augie flipped nickels and dimes at them and laughed as they scuffled in the dirt. He was smoking the long, expensive cigars that he most enjoyed, pausing frequently to light a fresh one, throwing the former aside with a majestic flourish.

That day the white sun beamed down on the dusty black neighborhood with the intense directness, the merciless concentration, of a burning-glass. The small brick houses of the Negroes seethed like ovens. From the open doors and windows wretched perspiring faces hung, faces as sad-eyed as owls. Women with thick hips, monstrous breasts, and glossy black skin stood on the

doorsteps with brooms in their hands, their heads tied with red bandannas. The idle men folks, lean bucks with long feet and long, bony hands, with ugly razor scars on their faces, sat at the feet of the women, fanning.

Little Augie, following the foot-paths and exercising great care to protect his mirror-toed shoes from dust, had a vivid picture in his mind of the same streets during wet weather. There were no lilacs at these doorsteps such as he had been accustomed to seeing at doorsteps in Louisiana. But there was laughter none the less, loud-mouthed nigger laughter, and songs in the miserable stone houses.

When he finally located Leah's house Augie was greeted by a wild troop of strange mulatto children. From her kitchen window, Leah recognized him immediately, despite his unspeakable clothes and his gold teeth. For he had not grown an inch since the day he disappeared from the plantation. He was the same Little Augie. Leah stood for a second, blinded by the water that came into her eyes; her mouth dropped open, but she could not speak. Then suddenly something that had swollen up tight inside of her burst. Words poured out.

"Come! Looka heah! Ida! Lisha! Doll! Pig! Y'all chillun come heah quick. Tha's yo' Uncle Augie out there on de street. That lil bitta man in de fine clo'es."

It was then that Augie first saw the young savages tumbling from windows, flying down steps, coming toward him. He was almost frightened. He had not been prepared to find Leah with a houseful of children, much less yellow ones.

"He-o, Uncle Augie."

"He-o, Uncle."

"He-o."

"He-o."

They tugged at his hands. He loved them immediately, but he drew back to make one reservation.

"Who done tole y'all I's yo' uncle?"

"Ah, you is Uncle Augie, a' right. Mamma seen you comin', she tole us."

"Well, lissen to me. I's gonna have to tell yo' mamma sumpin'. I ain't no 'uncle' to nobody. I is jes' plain Lil Augie. Y'all niggers is putty near big as me anyhow, an' talkin' 'bout 'uncle.'"

Of course, that won them. A fabulous relative who came dressed like a king and talking like that could do no wrong thereafter in their eyesight. By the time they had pulled him into the front room, Lisha had Augie's cane, swinging it above his head; Pig, the youngest, a ragged tot, had the silk hat over his ears; and the girls were swinging on the little man's arms.

Leah, a plain dark woman of medium size, old enough, apparently, for Augie's mother, came in and made a fuss over him. After the excitement, Augie pulled some green money from his pocket and sent the children to the store.

"Get 'bout half peck o' jaw-breakers an' stick candy," he said. "An' tell de man to send fo' o' five plugs o' Brown Mule chewin' bacca for Leah. Next time I come out heah I'm gonna bring y'all some presents whut's presents."

The youngsters filed out the door and up the street.

"Have some sit-down," Leah said.

Augie slid into his chair like a returned, embarrassed son and began telling Leah, quite simply but in great detail, the marvelous things that had happened to him since he left home. Due to the veil with which he had been born, his luck had been steadily good. All his friends had won good luck by being in his presence. Only one thing in life troubled him, he said. He was restless; he couldn't be satisfied long at a time, and he could not remain long in one place.

It was night when he finished the story. The children were in their beds and asleep, and Augie and Leah were sitting on the front steps in the moonlight. Because of mosquitoes in the air, most of the houses on the street were unlighted, but the folks were still awake. In the darkness unseen hands plucked guitars. There were many voices, an assortment of nigger blues. Above them all, like their united echo, Augie heard a coarse voice crying, making a new song.

I hate to see de evenin' sun go down,

Lawd, I hate to see de evenin' sun go down,

'Cause de man I love done lef' dis town.

Augie thought it was the best song he had ever heard.

"Lissen, Leah," he said, "whut dat?"

"Tha's a ole boogie-house song," she said scornfully.

"Lawd, Lawd!"

"You lak dat mess?"

"It's de most puttiest song that ever I heard," he said. "I gonna go home an' play it on ma 'cordion."

But he did not leave at once; another verse had begun.

Feelin' tomorrow lak I feel today,

Feelin' tomorrow jes' lak I feel today,

Gonna pack up ma trunk an' make ma get-away.

When he finally returned to his room in the old Phoenix Hotel, Augie limbered up his instrument and repeated the tune from memory. Hearing the music, Bad-foot, who was lying across the bed asleep in his clothes, awoke and blinked. A couple of idle boys came in from adjoining rooms and listened. One of them knew some additional verses, verses intended for a man to sing.

A black-headed gal make a freight train jump de track,

A black-headed gal make a freight train jump de track,

But a long tall gal make a preacher ball de jack.

A blond-headed woman make a good man leave de town . . .

"Dat ain't no lie," Augie threw in.

"It ain't no sugar-mouth talk neither," Bad-foot said. "Them's ole hard-time facts."

Lawd, a blond-headed woman make a good man leave de town
But a red-headed woman make a boy slap his papa down.

The next evening Augie and Bad-foot, in company with their new friends, went out to inspect the fancy places on Targee Street and to make the acquaintance of some St. Louis sports. The St. Louis line was, in those days, celebrated from Omaha to Richmond; they earned for St. Louis the glowing reputation of capital of the Negro sporting wheel. Augie and Bad-foot had heard accounts of it from other race-horse men. In its bawdy establishments, according to these reports, the most elegant dusky harlots of the time sat for company . . . girls with stones like hen-eggs in their ears and teeth set with chipped diamonds.

That evening, in the summer twilight, the fancy brown girls swept down on the streets, as bright as flamingoes and as numerous. They had come out for a breath of air and a stroll before the evening's appointments. Going and coming through the blue evening, rather breathlessly on their high heels, twitching themselves and laughing, they struck Augie immediately with their charming insolence, their fierce hauteur and self-possession. He had never seen girls with such airs.

Walking down the procession of them, brushing their skirts as he passed, Augie was once more convinced that he had reached his dream. Here he could not fail to forget Florence Dessau, he could not fail to lose that restless feeling; here, he assured himself, he would be permanently happy. For here was a crowd of sports who met his own conception of fine living.

Many of the women had a love for gambling which Augie admired; many followed accounts of the horse races with interest; all had heard of Little Augie long before he came to their perfumed parlors on Targee Street. All the painted brown girls were partial to jockeys, for the horse-racing game in those days was one of the most lucrative fields open to ambitious young blacks. The fantastic renown won by jockeys was comparable to that of prize-fighters.

It was still too early for Augie's crowd to turn in to one of the establishments. The strollers were clustering together in small groups at street corners and on stoops. Augie and his friends came into the lighted entrance of a pool hall and propped themselves on their canes. A little later they went in.

Some one introduced Augie to the sparkling proprietor. This was obviously a hang-out for macks, the sweet men of the period. A crowd of gaudy coatless young fellows surrounded the tables, bowing over cues. They wore gay embroidered shirts, and on their fingers, below the knuckle-length sleeves, flashed diamonds and polished nails. Their finery seemed even to exceed that

of the fancy women who supported them. Gold money made into jewelry was customary, also high-roller hats, like Augie's, with nude women or boxers or racing-horses worked in small eyelets in the crown. Several of the sports, hearing Augie's name, drew near to shake his hand and be introduced.

Augie eyed them with unbounded pleasure. He kept saying to himself, "This heah is ma company. These niggers is fancy; they is ma kind."

A few hours later, in one of the cologne- and musk-scented places, Augie met Della Green. She was waiting in a small front room overcrowded with old-fashioned horsehair furniture. A large lamp with a painted shade furnished a dim light. Two other girls were in the room, quietly smoking cigarettes; still others were moving about in the large adjoining room. Bad-foot and the others went in there to drink, but Augie sat rapt, his eyes fixed on Della. She wore magenta cloth, and her hair was short and brushed in pompadour fashion; it was curly brown hair, the hair of a mulatto, and her skin was buff. There were a few freckles on her nose and an artificial beauty spot near the left eye.

Augie walked across the room nervously and sat beside her on the couch. She met him smiling, but somehow he found it hard to approach her, hard to begin talking. His eyes were round and childlike.

"Do you want to be alone wid me, Lil Augie?"

His thoughts seemed to return from a long way. "Oh, yes. Tha's it; le's you an' me get together."

Actually, he was in no hurry. He did not merely want to go upstairs with Della. It had occurred to him that this was the kind of girl he would like to possess, to exhibit on the streets, to boast of to his cronies.

A scrawny black girl with a hideous mouth brought in a small lighted lamp. Holding this above her head, Della led Augie up a dim stairway. The unlovely black girl followed directly and placed a bottle and two whiskey glasses on a bed stand.

With Augie, Della refrained from the customary tricks of her profession. She must have felt that he was in no mood to have his head rubbed, that it would not arouse him. Instead she kept filling his glass. At length his eyes brightened; he began to feel once more like a big man who could manage women in his own way.

"Don't I suit you, Lil Augie? You look at me so funny."

"You is good for ma eyes, gal. Tha's how come I looks at you."

"Sho nuff?"

"I been lookin' all over de country for you."

"Ah, Lil Augie! You is tryin' to swell ma haid."

"Swell nuthin'. I been lookin' for jes' sich a gal as you."

"They tells me yo pockets is loaded wid spikes, Lil Augie."

"Sho, I's dirty wid money, an' I don't mind spendin' it."

"You is sweet to pick out a ole ugly gal lak me, Lil Augie."

Augie stretched across the bed in a ridiculous oversized nightshirt. By now he was too exhilarated to mind his appearance. He crossed his legs

triumphantly and lit a cigar. Della drew a crimson kimono over her ruffled nightdress.

"Whose box is dat in de corner?" Augie asked.

"It's mine. You lak music, Lil Augie?"

"Jes' crazy 'bout it," he said. "I plays de 'cordion maself. Pick me sumpin' on de box."

Della sat at the foot of the bed, facing Augie, her feet curled beneath her. She began strumming chords; later she sang a medley of songs for Augie, songs old and familiar to the places on Targee Street. She had a soft weeping voice, well suited to her songs and to Augie's taste.

Gwine to de river, take a rockin'-chair,
Gwine to de river, take a rockin'-chair,
If de blues overtake me gwine rock away from dere.

Augie's spirits continued to rise. His eyes kept feasting on Della's fine small body, her smiling girl-face.

If I could holler lak a mountain jack,
If I could holler lak a mountain jack,
I'd go up on de hillside an' call ma rider back.

She changed the chords, and Augie contributed a stanza of another tune.

If de river was whiskey an' I was a duck
I'd dive to de bottom an' never come up.

Della answered:

Silk stockings an' ruffled drawers
Got many a po' man wearin' overalls.

"Turn down de lamp now," Augie said, "an' put de box back in de corner."

"A' right, Lil Augie. Mus' I send word to yo' friends?—de ones whut come in wid you?"

"Oh, yea. Tell 'em to go 'bout they business, 'cause I ain't studyin' 'bout 'em no mo' this night."

Della laughed. She called the plug-ugly girl to the door.

"Tell de bad-foot gentaman an' his frien's not to wait for Lil Augie," she said.

Despite the brilliant rise of his fortunes, his enormous success on the sporting wheel, Little Augie had a rival in Targee Street. He had to contend with Biglow Brown, a magnificent ginger-colored giant, for the spotlight.

What Biglow lacked of Augie's glamour, his superior physical charms

supplied. He was six feet three and had large, fine hands and a savage bearing that was the rage of the fancy-houses. Since coming to St. Louis a few years earlier, he had enjoyed a lurid popularity along the line, a sort of renown that Augie could never hope to duplicate. For Biglow was precisely everything that Little Augie was not. He succeeded without money or the glowing aid of a legend. On the other hand, he was entertaining; he was a loud, sassy talker, and his extraordinary body was a feast for the gaze of the women.

Biglow had come to St. Louis from Georgia with a Negro minstrel show. In the few days the troop remained, he prospered so well that he decided to remain and desert his company. The possibilities for a first-water maquereau on Targee Street struck him as infinitely finer than his prospects on the stage and more to his taste. He was promptly taken in by one of the veteran trollops, decorated in the gaudy manner, and put on display.

Being young, however, and unacquainted with the requirements of his position, Biglow soon got himself into difficulties. While his woman was busy with her appointments he made passes at other girls, and he was unwise enough to boast of his duplicity. The quick result of his proud words was a fight.

The two women met in an alley, unknown to Biglow, and shouted accusations at each other. A yellow light fell upon their shoulders from an uncurtained upper window. The young rival of Biglow's middle-aged woman was a dark girl with Indian-like features and straight hair. Suddenly they hurled themselves together like mad cats. The older woman's hair became bushed on her head, and her clothes were promptly hanging from her body in rags; the younger one fought in a crouch, her shoulders rounded and her head lowered. Now and again they broke their holds, separated, then flew back again with increased venom. Presently they fastened themselves to each other so bitterly their united bodies reeled and dropped to the ground, the younger woman's teeth in the older one's cheek, the older one gouging at her opponent's eyes.

Both of them lost Biglow. For a middle-aged strumpet with a nasty scar on her face could offer little to a fastidious young mack. And little more could be expected from the fortunes of a black gal with one eye. He went directly to an elegant slim girl named Lila who was employed at the time in one of the houses that served a white clientele. He did not get along with Lila either, not smoothly at any rate, but he had profited by his earlier experience. He had learned to keep certain things from the gossipers, and he had found a way of strengthening his position by the use of violence.

The macks knew that the nature of women requires a certain modicum of brutality; and experience had shown that unless they received it at the hands of their lovers occasionally they would turn and lump one another. But this latter was a bad thing. It was a man's duty.

So Biglow, with his great physical power, became a sweet terror to his woman and to those with whom he jibed. If they said anything that did not please him, he slapped them with his open hand; if they accused him of

infidelity, he roared like a caged panther, broke whatever he touched, and finally hurled the lamp at them and stomped out of the room.

When Little Augie came to town, Biglow was still on Lila's string, but he had been playing around with Della. For Della's star was just rising; she was comparatively a novice and had as yet no regular mack relying on her support. Soon after Augie's arrival Biglow quarreled with Della and blacked both her eyes. Augie knew Biglow by that time, and when Della told him of the skirmish he became heated.

"I ain't gonna have it. No nigger is gonna lump yo' eyes lak dat, long as I's in town. I feels ma love comin' down, an' I can't stan' it."

"Ah, don't worry yo' mind, Lil Augie, ma eyes'll be a' right soon."

"From now on I'm gonna be de one to give you yo' knocks when you needs 'em. On'erstand?"

"That suits me," she giggled.

"You can tell that Biglow Brown that after today he got to come by me. Put his hands on you one mo' time, an' me an' him is gonna have it."

"That is mighty proud talk for such a lil man," she said.

Augie jumped to his feet, bouncing nervously. "Yea? Well, I might be lil but I's loud as a six-gun. An' I wants anybody whut don't think so to try me a barrel. Tell that nigger I said so."

Augie banged the door and went downstairs, stomping his heels to emphasize his words. On the street, in the quiet light, he felt as tall and formidable as his own tremendous shadow. But soon his love started to coming down again, and his pride melted. He began thinking of things to buy for Della to show his feeling. To begin with, he would take her out of the sporting place and set her up in a house of her own—like Mr. Woody had done for Florence. Then he would buy her clothes like the ones Florence wore. He wanted her to be as nearly like Florence as possible.

In his room, Augie talked his plans to Bad-foot. The older man by now approved of everything Augie did or said. With these new proposals, as with all the other suggestions of Augie, he was immensely pleased. Della was one of the youngest and best-looking fancy girls on Targee Street (which was saying much), and Little Augie was well able to keep her in the gaudy fashion to which she had become accustomed.

The next day was Saturday, and Augie returned from the race track as jubilant as a schoolboy. He had enjoyed the best day of his entire experience with horses. He had ridden three winners, and the excited spectators had thrown him more than three hatfuls of greenbacks, not to mention small change and cigars, to express their pleasure in him. All this, on the heels of his plans for Della, in addition to his formal earnings, intoxicated him. He knew, furthermore, that in the next day's papers his name would appear in big letters. Everybody would be talking about Little Augie.

He hurried to his room, changed to a fresh suit of clothes, a fresh candy-striped shirt, and a flowered vest. Then he went out to the barber shop

for finishing touches. He was so exhilarated he forgot to eat supper, but hired a pretentious two-horse rig with a frock-tailed driver and went directly from the shop to Della's place.

Della came down to meet him in voluminous ruffled silks, a wine-colored dress under which yellow petticoats peeped. Her mouth was red, and she was hatless, her short hair neatly brushed and odorously with pomade. She was more resplendent than Augie had yet seen her. In the moonlight she seemed, to Augie, irreproachable; not a fault was visible. Augie felt like a man who sells toy balloons at a fair when suddenly, loosing the strings he is holding, he sees above his head the sky full of the bright lovely things, gradually ascending on the wind.

"Bring de box 'long," he called to Della. "Us gonna ride in de pawk an' out 'cross de country. We gotta have some tunes."

"An' sweeten' water, too, Lil Augie. You mus' get us some rock-candy an' gin to make sweeten' water."

"Da's de ticket, baby. Mus' have out lil sweeten' water."

At the first saloon Augie ordered the rig to stop and dispatched the hackman to get a pint of gin and to take a drink himself while at the bar. When he returned Augie tossed off about an inch of the liquor and dropped the candy into the bottle. Della tasted it.

"Let it set a lil while," she said.

Augie pressed the cork and slipped the bottle into his pocket.

The hackman drove them beyond the bawdy section, beyond the squalid homes of the poor Negroes and across the city. The night seemed cool in the open-topped carriage. There were trees on Enright Street and overhead a few large stars that throbbled insecurely in their places and seemed about to fall. Augie was speechless with pleasure.

"Whut de matter, Lil Augie? Cat got yo' tongue?"

"I's jes' studyin', baby."

"Has you got troubles, Lil Augie?"

"Troubles? Gal, I's as free of troubles as de palms of ma hands is free from hair. I's ridin' on de moon."

"You is lucky."

"Oh, I was borned lucky. I's borned wid a veil. Tha's sho nuff lucky."

"Sho, a veil is lucky."

"Anybody whut takes up wid me gets lucky, too," he said. "Look at Bad-foot. I made him lucky. I gonna make you lucky too if you loves me hard enough."

"I gonna love you hard, Lil Augie. I gonna love you worser'n ever I did love ara other man."

"You gonna love me worser'n you do Biglow?"

"Shucks. That nigger ain't in it. Not de way I gonna love you."

"Yea? Tha's good. But dis gonna be de law. You can stay in de business a lil longer an' sit for de company an' all dat, but nara other man can beat you." "jes'

me. I gonna be de one to give you yo' knocks. I means it, an' I don't want no two-timin'. Nobody beats you but me. On'erstand?"

"Sho, Lil Augie. I done promise you dat."

"A'right. I jes' want us to have things plain."

Their carriage had reached the park and was moving slowly on the hilly dirt roads. Augie's diamonds flashed like fireflies in the darkness. He kept lighting fresh cigars. Della, beside him, her head tossed back, began picking the guitar. Augie thought of the bottle. He shook it before drawing the cork, and they both took long drinks. Then he lit a cigarette for Della and put it in her mouth. She didn't stop picking. Augie sang:

I got a belly full o' whiskey an' a head full o' gin;
De doctors say it'll kill me but they don't say when.

Della sang back:

See, pretty papa, pretty papa, look whut you done done,
You made yo' mamma love you, now yo' woman's come.

"Ah, you sassy wench!"

Both of them drank more sweetened water. Presently the moon whitened the park, and the tipsy Negroes, singing in their carriage, began to attract the attention of other drivers on the quiet road. But they did not worry. They finished the bottle and tossed it in the road. The rig came out of the park and on to a country drive. Augie had become mellow and amorous.

The frock-tailed hackman stopped to rest his horses a moment beside a creek. In his high seat, with the mashed-up silk topper on one side of his head, he looked as grotesque as a scarecrow.

Augie sought his girl's mouth. He could hear her breath, he could feel the heaving of her breast. Upon her face he saw the lace shadows of overhanging tree leaves.

"Is y'all ready to start home?" the hackman asked.

"Yea, I guess we betta start," Della said.

"Sho," Augie said. "Le's get goin'."

The next day was quiet for Augie. Being Sunday, he was not required to go to the race track. Targee Street was dull too. The sporting folks, having put in a heavy night, slept late in anticipation of another big one to come. The macks were lolling on the streets in their petticoat-silk shirts—that is, they wore vests without coats, the vests hanging open, the embroidered figures and candy-stripes in full display. Augie, however, never lolled like this. He wore a Prince Albert on Sunday mornings and carried a cane. And he did not lean against store fronts or gate posts. He felt himself obliged to maintain a certain dignity in Sunday clothes, to stand erect and to keep moving whenever possible.

"Hot damn!" his admirers greeted him.

"No flies is on Lil Augie."

"No, suh, Lil Augie is got de worl' tee-rolled."

"Three winners in one day! Three hats full o' money!"

"Lil Augie is got de worl' tee-rolled."

In the afternoon, Augie took Bad-foot over to Leah's house on Wash Street. He was anxious to make his old friend acquainted with his sister, and furthermore, he needed Bad-foot to help him with the packages of presents he had bought for Leah's children. When they arrived, the youngsters had just returned from Sunday school and were sitting around a small kitchen table with improvised bibs tucked under their chins to keep their Sunday-go-to-meeting clothes unspotted. Leah was standing over them with an iron kettle of mustard greens cooked with ham hocks, replenishing their plates directly from the pot.

After the meal the children stormed the front room and Augie opened his packages . . . suits of blue two-pocket overalls trimmed with red, brass-toed shoes, rubber bands to make "nigger-shooters"; Topsy dolls for the girls, and a tiny suit of man's clothes for little Fig. When the gifts were properly apportioned, Leah put them away and sent the children to play. Later she cut a cool watermelon, and she, Augie, and Bad-foot sat on the front steps eating generous slices.

Augie stayed until evening; then he began to feel restless. So he left the two older people quietly smoking their pipes and rocking on Leah's stoop and hurried over to Targee Street. But it was useless. Della was occupied with company, and he had to wait to see her. This gave him an opportunity to think and fret. It occurred to him that he needed but one thing to insure his happiness, to make it complete. He needed Della for himself; that would forestall such disappointments in the future. Yes, that was the thing, and he would arrange it immediately. This would be her last Sunday night with the company. His love was coming down.

And within a week he made good his intentions. Della was moved into a brick house with furnishings like Florence's house in New Orleans. She was dressed in cloth exactly like that worn by Florence. And she looked for all the world like Florence, except that she was smaller. But she was not Florence.

Meanwhile Augie's luck continued at the race track. He had, since coming to St. Louis, won a place among the first-rank jockeys, and Mr. Woody was talking about sending him to New York and Maryland to ride for the rich purses being offered on those tracks. Meanwhile, too, the St. Louis season was drawing to a close. There were but a few more days. Then, Augie would have to go with his stable to Louisville, to Mobile, and finally back again to New Orleans.

During those remaining days, however, there was to be the Cotton Flower Ball, the fête of the year for the black sports and fancy women of St. Louis. It was an event celebrated wherever there were fast Negroes and attended by folks from Kansas City, Omaha, Memphis, and New Orleans as well as the

St. Louis crowd. The Cotton Flower cakewalk was in the nature of an intersectional competition. In none of the other cities was there a festival to match it, a festival with its tradition and reputation for splendor.

Augie had heard about the Cotton Flower Ball for years. So he looked forward to attending his first one with more than ordinary interest. For he did not intend to be a cipher in the great mass of people who would throng Stokes Hall that evening. He determined to make himself attractive so that he would be noticed, so that he would reflect his real importance. He determined to dress Della in such clothes as would become the woman of Little Augie.

Through the intervening days, these preparations occupied his thought continuously. All his spare hours were spent in the more tawdry tailoring establishments, consulting catalogues and examining cloth. In these places he encountered other dandies, equally determined to make a vivid impression. Augie did not underestimate his rivals; he had been in St. Louis long enough to know what the sartorial competition one had to meet there was like.

The high spot of the Ball would, of course, be the cakewalk. And in cakewalks, clothes were always a factor in the rivalry. Augie wrung his hands and walked the floor like a man in agony. But when the night of the Ball came, he was ready. Gloriously ready.

Herman H. Dreer

ca. 1888-1981

The following excerpt is from The Tie That Binds: A Novel of a Youth Who Seeks to Understand Life, written in 1958. For biographical information on Herman Dreer, please refer to page 307.

. . .

The Chamber of Commerce of a metropolitan city like St. Louis is not only a business, but also a political and a social institution. The business aspect is easily apparent, since its members are chiefly persons engaged in business. The big aim of a chamber of commerce is to engage in such activities as will tend to assure monetary profit from enterprise. Hence there occurs the careful and effective organization of various committees to promote these ends: a committee on conventions, one on publicity, another on labor, one on education, and one each on marketing, politics, and law. These are all advisory; for there is a president, an executive secretary, and an executive committee with the power to act for the entire membership. Assisting all these committees is a professional statistician who, with a staff of assistants, gathers, tabulates, and interprets such information as may be needed by these committees.

For instance, the committee on conventions aims to bring to the city as many conventions or associations as possible: conventions of teachers, musicians, politicians, and the like. These conventions and associations make good business for hotels, clubs, restaurants, stores, and places of amusement. The political committee assisted by the legal staff makes a continuing study of existing laws so as to advise the members as to what ventures may be launched without violating the law of the land. This committee also seeks to have elected to political office—for the city, state, and nation—such persons as will be favorable to sponsoring legislation that will stimulate and not tend to discourage business. The conducting of lobbies is likewise a function of this committee.

In the case of the social committee, its function is from time to time to sponsor dinners, dances, and other affairs for the members, their families, and those persons that the members may invite in accordance with their constitution. The greatest social event of the St. Louis Chamber of Commerce each year is the Veiled Prophet Ball and Parade, which occur regularly the first Tuesday and Wednesday respectively in October. For seventy years the parade occurred on Tuesday, the weather permitting, and the ball on Wednesday. In those years the Queen of Love and Beauty never appeared in the parade. To make the parade more interesting and to attract larger crowds on the street, the queen along with her maids was given a float in this

Quincy Troupe, Jr.

1943-

Quincy Troupe is the author of nine books, of which five are volumes of poetry: Embryo (1979); Snake-Back Solos (1979), winner of the 1980 American Book Award for Poetry; Skulls Along the River (1984); Weather Reports: New and Selected Poems (1991), reissued in 1996; and Avalanche (1996). His sixth volume of poetry, Choruses, will be published in the fall of 1999 by Coffee House Press. He is also the coauthor (with Miles Davis) of Miles: An Autobiography (winner of the 1990 American Book Award for Non-Fiction) and editor of James Baldwin: The Legacy (1989), both published by Simon and Schuster. Troupe is the recipient of a Peabody Award for The Miles Davis Radio Project, which he wrote and co-produced. In 1999, the University of California Press will publish his critical/memoir, Miles and Me: A Memoir of Miles Davis. He is finishing a novel, The Footman Chronicles, and is writing a memoir of his own life titled The Accordion Years: 1965 to 1998. Currently, he is professor of creative writing and American and Caribbean literature at the University of California, San Diego and lives with his wife, Margaret, and their son, Porter, in La Jolla, California. The following poem is from Weather Reports: New and Selected Poems.

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SKULLS ALONG THE RIVER

For my mother, Dorothy Smith Marshall

1.

up from new orleans, on riverboats
from the gulf of mexico, memory carries
sweet legacy of niggerland speech, brown tongue, bluesing
muddy water
underbottomed spirits, crawling, nightmares
of shipwrecked bones

bones gone home to stone, to stone
bones gone home to stone

riverbottomed, underbellied spirits
to stone

bones gone home to stone, eye say
bones gone home to stone, eye say

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skulls, along the river

2.

& the faces of these faceless bones, unknown
screaming arpeggios of stitched memory, in cold light
cadences of blues
shrinking sun sprays, shrieking, with every turning
of black-boned-arms-of clocks

& it is the collected face of memory that wears
the metaphor of collected dust
the collective mathematics, of lamenting calibrations
hieroglyphics, cracking & peeling & curling in stones, dust
storms swirling around edges
bones, white as chiclet teeth in memory
cloning, the images come locked
in whatever time gives them
death there forever, forever locked in time
death there forever & forever locked
in time & inside of time

we suffer because we must
there is no other way to find beauty
there is no other way to find love
we suffer because we must
there is no other way home

to find the memory

& O, the skeletons that have passed
my cracking eyeballs, seeking true cadence
within the lamenting calibrations of music
history, rattling dice bones
on their worn out knees
the already dead, scraping earth, breath
for an even deeper death

the ultimate, transmigrating, transmuting

& O, you midnight men of peppermint moons
 rooster claw soliloquys, raking at vision's corner
 heroes, emerging, from sandblasted, history books
 grant me leather flesh, of your weather worn, wisdom
 blood-drenched gravediggers

anthracitic soothsayers

O mellow prophets of crushed grapes & stomped berries
 grant me holy syllables
 of your blues laced tongues, perfect eardrums
 grant me sacred light of your blues
 doowopping mackmen

grant me holy flight of your eagle -
 winged life, grant me the tongue of your blues
 perfect eardrums, grant me holy flight
 of your eagle-winged life
 O grant me the tongue, living
 of your blues, perfect eardrums

3,

beginning with the formless mystery of love, now
 informing it all, cadences, its ritualized celebration
 of birth, as death, as drama
 its copacetic language of blues
 inside the journey back, under buzzard wings of parody
 textures realized & lost & found & lost once again
 the slitting, definitive answer
 of a pearl handled razor, hissing through the dark's wailing wall
 mystery, of flesh
 wallowing in its own
 gluttony, inside the breath of death

now, hear, the hieroglyphics of space & time, forming
 sculpting in winds, from great distances, voices
 shapes, down way, way low
 voices, taking on colors, turning around & taking on shape
 voices, spinning & taping into memory, phono-discs
 changing into blurring faces, swimming
 trying to breach this calligraphy
 of space & time & distance
 voices, down way, way low, spinning themselves
 into memory, phono-discs, voices, spinning
 resurrecting faces down in memory, graves
 calling them up through metaphors

calling them up through song

send back now the poem to memory, the voice
 further back than bone, see there, now, the polished stones
 lifted & singing

singing, become birds that are soaring, words
 their wings being the holy myths that fill up our lives
 with movement, movement
 now, listen to the blood burning songs, breaking through
 & into our river voices of veins, climbing towards
 the plateau of the heart

listen to the rains
 beating against the underbelly of those stones
 marking worm deep, earth bottoms, where
 the narcissus of flesh

rests

listen to windtongues
 drums breaking now into flames & wind, trumpet songs
 opening up doorways to rivers, listen now
 to hearts, listen
 to rhythms of stones, beating hearts
 climbing through the dark, listen
 to rhythms, your soon to be
 calcified, worm eatened
 heart, listen now
 eye say

listen now, to the dark

come back home, again, carrying my age strapped
 on my hip, like a revolver
 all my young, quicksilver years, running into this river
 mississippi river, snake-back carrier of dreams
 & home is wherever ancestors bones are
 buried, kneedeep memories, live as dreams
 become ribcages of miracles
 legends, built from death
 like a man holding the sun between his teeth
 his smile a dazzling daybreak, a blue-black blues man, son
 of a man, who was the sun of another, man caught the sun
 between his gapped teeth, sprouted wings
 & flew away into the music

now his spirit holds up the sky
 dancing in the river, his smile the golden eye
 torching high, blue mornings, flies

snake-back carrier of dreams, mississippi
 seven throw eleven to win at the game of dice
 eye carry snake-back river of dreams on my back
 river mississippi, where the raised spirits climb out of now
 move beneath the arch's parabolic flight—upside down
 beautiful, silver, question mark? razor's sharp
 edge, of a stationary pendulum?—slashing the blue
 throat, of the sky, now, turning into a skillet
 fried-yellow, now, burnt into our dreams

snake-back carrier of dreams, the song climbs
 out of itself, now, carrying the raised voices of ancestors
 shaking riverweeds from itself, now, the voice full of voices
 turns into faces, familiar to memory, dreams
 spinning faces, familiar as crushed, coal dust
 greets me here, now, with outspread arms that filigreeing
 cobwebs drape, speak of old streets, where familiar buildings
 have been removed, like the abscessed teeth from the mouth
 of that old fisherman, ghoul
 who used to tell me all those great stories
 of the heydays of st. louis, before the scars came
 before the mumbles came & he lost even his peg-legged teeth
 like those abscessed buildings were lost
 before he fell into senility & was pulverized
 by the pendulum, swinging wrecking ball of progress
 that is time, which is history's consuming fire
 which is life & death, at the same time

7.

but this road that has been so long gone, now
 is here, again, back, again, blues
 long gone eye have come back to this muddy river
 again, to this toad squatting city of catfish arms
 widespread in slippery welcome
 have come back home, again
 to all my quicksilver memories, running
 into this river, mississippi river, st. louis
 snake-back carrier of dreams

river mississippi

snake-back carrier of dreams
 seven throw eleven eye win
 the game of dice—like winning in life—
 seven throw eleven eye win, whatever
 the game holds for me, now
 whatever this catfished armed city holds
 for me, now, eye win if only eye can
 come forward while going back
 at the same time, throw seven throw eleven
 eye win at the game of dice & the blues

snake-back carrier of dreams

seven throw eleven eye win
 the blues, eye win the blues
 seven throw eleven

eye win the blues

Darlene Roy

1945-

Born in St. Louis, Missouri, in 1945, Darlene Duncan Swanson Roy was reared in East St. Louis. After graduation from Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville with a B.A. in sociology in 1967, she received a masters in social work in 1971 from Saint Louis University.

In November 1967, Roy became a caseworker with the Illinois Department of Public Aid in St. Clair County, which, in July 1997, became the Department of Human Services. Presently, she is the local office welfare administrator.

In 1986 Roy helped found the Eugene B. Redmond Writers Club and has served as president since its inception. She is the associate editor of Drumvoices Revue: A Confluence of Literary, Cultural and Visual Art jointly published with SIUE.

Roy's broad ranging poetry, essays, and articles have appeared in many anthologies and magazines, including The Original Chicago Blues Annual, Black American Literature Forum, Take Five, Eye Ball, Drumvoices Revue, Black Bord's Digest, American Poetry Anthology and Literati Internazionale, among others. She is currently completing a volume of new or selected poetry tentatively titled Black Bridge and Other Blues: Eyes on East St. Louis.

Roy is the mother of one son, Troy Anthony Swanson, and has three grandchildren: Akhiba, Tamara, and Jeressa.

The following poems are representative of the inspiration Roy gained from East St. Louis. "Black Bridge Blues" refers to the elevated train track that dominates the south end of East St. Louis. Many famous blues artists entered East St. Louis on those tracks and played at the clubs under the bridge. "Dunham's Dance" is a tribute to Katherine Dunham.

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BLACK BRIDGE BLUES

Midnight train crossin' the Black Bridge/
makes me feel awful sad
I say, that train crossin' the Black Bridge/
makes me feel awful sad
Starts me to thinkin' about/
the only love I ever had
When that whistle gets to woo-wooin'/
I feel lonesome as can be
I say, that mockin' whistle/
makes me lonesome as can be
Signifyin' about when it took/
my East St. Louis man from me
The rumblin' of the Black Bridge/
'bliges me to weep and moan
I say, that Black Bridge a rumblin'/
'bliges me to weep and moan
Old memories rise up to haunt me/
makin' a graveyard of my home
Black Bridge train clickety-clackin'/
bring my East St. Louis man to me/
Oh, midnight train clickety-clackin'/
bring my lover man back to me
Revive my lifeless home/
save me from chronic misery
'Cause with my man here to groove on
I'll be free
I'll be free
I'll be free

. . .

DUNHAM'S DANCE

Brazen, bronze liferythms
rise in the guise
of icy-sweet hips thrusting
on drumdrenched shores

SHE SOUGHT

the Dunham mystique,
the Dunham technique.
Body gleaming
sweat steaming
as lithesome danseuse
pranced to music Africa

SHE WROUGHT

the Dunham mystique,
the Dunham technique.
Bold, old passionprints
designed poetic pride
from rekindled consciousness

SHE BROUGHT

the Dunham mystique,
the Dunham technique.
Bewitched Haitian terpsichorean,
Ashanti medanza of desire
whirled the guba dust
of anthropology/danceology

SHE TAUGHT

the Dunham mystique,
the Dunham technique.

Jabari Asim

1982-

Jabari Asim is assistant editor of The Washington Post Book World. He describes himself as "a proud native of north St. Louis," in the Jeff-Vander-Lou neighborhood, where he was raised, and where he raised his four children with his wife Liana before moving to Washington, D.C.

His work has appeared in several collections, including Soulfires: Young Black Men on Love and Violence (1996), and Brotherman: The Odyssey of Black Men in America (1996); and his poetry is forthcoming in Beyond The Frontier, edited by E. Ethelbert Miller and published by Black Classic Press.

"Walking Home" and "Wet Streets Sleep" first appeared in Delmar in 1991.

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WALKING HOME

The grunginess of it all
(grayish colors in the fading light).
Senses worn weary by the slip-sliding,
the constant scrambling across
life's slick surface.

The sound of my own breathing.
It echoes across the sparse space
& gives the impression that I'm being followed,
but . . .

There's nothing there.
Except recollections. Fragments of scenes.
Of her sweet supple Blackness
wrapped around me like the night,
the whistling wind & the guitar.

Guitar sounds. Sounds of a single guitar.
Strumming. Its persistent, plaintive
note wafting on the wind.

Chris Hayden

1950-

A native of Centralia, Illinois, Hayden graduated from Northwest High School in St. Louis and went on to attend UMSL and obtain his law degree from Washington University Law School. He has published numerous poems in local publications, including Drumvoices Revue, Delmar, Break Word With the World, and RiverKing Poetry Supplement. A regular book review author for the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, Hayden in 1992 was also one of three winners of Pamoja Theatre Group's One Act Play Contest, for the play "Clemmie Jones." His forthcoming publications include a poem in the seventh volume of Break Word With the World. Hayden describes "The Quiet Zone," which first appeared in Delmar in 1993, as "my poetic expression of my frustration, awe and resignation with and at the apathy and complacency of and in my home town."

THE QUIET ZONE

You can be crazy in St. Louis
Oh yes, we got plenty crazy people here
More on the street than in Malcolm Bliss
But this be the Quiet Zone
You can't be no New York Crazy
No L.A. Crazy
No 'Frisco Crazy
Not even no Chicago Crazy
That kinda crazy that has a beard and wild hair
Like Ginsberg and plays the top of a fire hydrant
Like it is a bongo
This be the Quiet Zone
If you be crazy
You got to have a crazy that is shy
That amuses
That denies itself
Keep those visions of Heaven and Hell
Of midair doors to Daliville
To yourself
Or they'll call the cops
Hold 'em in your guts
'Til they eat you alive
Prophets sages and holymen
Belong in Church
Crazy is alright in there
Remember
All else be the Quiet Zone