

Alain Locke and Afro-American Fiction
by Richard A. Long
Atlanta University

Alain Locke came to critical consciousness after the turn of the century. In the realm of fiction the American writers being discussed then included the realists, Theodore Dreiser, Frank Norris and Stephen Crane. Already in the circle of those beyond the debates of the day were James and Howells and a rather different Mark Twain from the one recognized by modern criticism. By 1907 when he graduated from Harvard, Locke may have known either directly or by report of the attempts of some Afro-Americans to write fiction. These, notably, would have been Paul Laurence Dunbar and Charles Chesnutt. Between 1898 and 1904, Dunbar published five novels and three books of short stories. In virtually the same period, 1899 to 1905, Chesnutt published three novels and two volumes of short stories. The feverish activity of Sutton E. Griggs in Nashville, which resulted in the publication of four novels between 1899 and 1902, may have escaped the attention of the young Locke.

After Harvard, Locke went to Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar, where he continued his broad-based conquest of philosophy, literature, and art in the milieu that produced the magisterial eleventh edition of the Encyclopedia Britannica. The euphoria which characterized the intellectual life of pre-World War I England and Europe