

# LANGSTON HUGHES



MRS. ROBERT MALLARD swears out a warrant for the arrest of William Howell after her husband had been lynched in Lyons, Ga. This lynching occurred in December, 1948, Howell was later tried a n d found "not guilty." A high point of the trial was when a member of the jury was allowed to step from the jury box and testify in Howell's favor.

## Recalls Triumphs And Tragedies Of A Race As Told By The Defender

By LANGSTON HUGHES

During the year in which "The Chicago Defender" was founded in 1905 there were 57 Negroes lynched in the United States, an average of more than one a week. The following year, 1906, was the year of the great "Atlanta" race riot in which many in that city were killed. That same year in the United States 62 Negroes were lynched. In 1907 Alain Locke received a Rhodes Scholarship to Oxford University in England and 58 Negroes were lynched.

In 1908 when 89 Negroes were killed by mobs, Cole and Johnson produced the "Red Moon" in which Abbie Mitchell starred. In 1909, the year the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People was initiated, 69 Negroes were lynched. In 1910 there were 67 black lynchings. In 1911, when the National Urban League was organized, 60 Negroes were hanged or burned without trial. In 1912 the number was 61.

In 1913, however, when Harriet Tubman died, only 51 were lynched. And the same number in 1914 when Handy wrote "The Saint Louis Blues" and Mamie Smith made the first blues record. In 1915, the year that Booker T. Washington died, 56 of his fellow countrymen were put to death by white mobs.

**THE EARLY YEARS**

So, in its early years, "The Chicago Defender" had a lot of lynching news to report, while at the same time it reported the upward progress of the Negro — the news of our leaders, show people, and prize fighters, and the more sensational of our crimes. The "Defender" kept its readers posted on happenings throughout the Negro world. In the Deep South, Middle West, and Far West it had many avid readers.

As a child in Kansas I grew up on "The Chicago Defender" and it awakened me in my youth to the problems which I and my race had to face in America. Its flaming headlines and indignant editorials did a great deal to make me the "race man" which I later became, as expressed in my own attitudes and in my writing. Thousands and thousands of other young Negroes were, I am sure, also affected the same way by this militant and stirring edited Chicago weekly.

Then when World War I began and many new job opportunities for Negroes were created in the North, the "Defender's" Come-North campaign became a great social force that helped change the history of our race in this country. In 1916 there had been 50 lynchings in the sunny Southland. The it might be cloudy and cold in the North, the "Defender" said, "To die from the bite of frost is far more glorious than at the hand of a mob." Its founder and owner, Robert S. Abbott, urged his readers to come North, come North, come North.

Although the South mistreated its Negro citizens, it did not want to lose its basic supply of cheap labor. There were cities in the South where it was forbidden to sell or circulate "The Chicago Defender" and the Longview, Texas, race riot began when a

mob of white men went into the Negro section looking for a colored teacher accused of sending news to the "Defender."

**RACE RIOTS**

That was the year, 1919, when there were 76 lynchings in America, more than there have ever been in any single year since. That year, too, was the time of bloody race riots in an ever increasing number of U. S. cities. In Omaha, Neb., a white mob wrecked the Court House to drag a Negro from it through the streets, shooting him more than a thousand times. And in the great Chicago riot of 1919 which grew out of housing problems, 38 persons were killed and more than 500 injured. In 1921, a year of 59 lynchings of Negroes, there was a race war in Tulsa, Okla. In Chicago then Dixieland jazz was beginning to catch on and, on the stages of the South Side, some of the best colored talent in the country was appearing.

In Harlem in the early twenties the now famous "Negro Renaissance" in the arts was underway. Negro themes and Negro performers

were reaping applause on Broadway. In 1925 Alain Locke edited his anthology of the arts of that period, his widely read "The New Negro." That year there were only 17 lynchings. The "Defender" of this post-war period reported all these events of both sorrow and gladness, struggle and achievement — but with the accent always on the struggle and the goals of freedom still to be attained. In its second decade, the "Defender" continued to be a great militant pro-democratic paper and a thorn in the side of bigoted American racists.

**VOICE OF PEOPLE**

From 1905 to 1925 the "Defender" said for the anonymous millions of Negroes all of the things pent up in their hearts concerning segregation, and fear of riots and lynchings and police brutality and joblessness, and their loathing of second-class citizenship. From New Orleans to Detroit, Chicago to the West Coast, this paper was the popular mouthpiece of the Negro masses.

In those days before our many regional Negro newspapers had

grown to the positions they now occupy in various cities and sections of the country, and before some of the eastern Negro weeklies had become national in scope, it was the "Defender" that said best most of the things millions of Negroes wanted said about their needs, their dreams, and their demands in this America of ours. The "Defender" said them loudly and simply and clearly in big headlines, strongly worded editorials, and in pictures of mob fires and black bodies on Southern trees that cried "Shame!" from the printed page. The journalistic voice of a largely voiceless people, that was "The Chicago Defender."

Now, fifty years after the founding of this newspaper, conditions have changed greatly, racially speaking, in our country. But not so greatly that the Negro masses do not STILL need a great strong voice to speak up—and to speak out — for them. Integration is NOT here yet, not by a long shot. America's highly publicized Supreme Court decisions of very recent years have been read of and



IN THE EARLY 1920's Bessie Smith was a topnotch figure on the U. S. stage. In 1925, at the same time Negro themes and Negro performers were reaping applause on Broadway, there were 17 lynchings in the South.

heard of in many parts of our country, but have had as yet no practical effect whatsoever on Negro life in a great many localities. Outside of some of our larger cities, decent housing for Negroes is as hard to find as ever. Entrance to public places in thousands of American towns — movies, restaurants, hotels and motels—is still either impossible to secure, or is available only on the old ugly insulting Jim Crow basis. Lynchings and race riots have died down, but the THREAT of lynchings, and of riots, too, is still in the air of more communities than it is pleasant to contemplate. Police brutality is still present. Jim Crow cars still run on the rails of the South. The number of newly integrated public schools opening their doors this fall to ALL children will still be small compared to the number of segregated schools in operation. For all the noble work of the Negro press, the NAACP, the Urban League, the churches, fraternities and sororities, and our race leaders, be-

hind the average man or woman who buys a weekly copy of a Negro newspaper at a news stand, Jim Crow follows the reader as closely as his shadow.

**CITE RACE STRIDES**

The majority of the people who buy the Negro papers are not those lucky few in our race who have managed to escape the dark shadows of prejudice in America, or are fortunate enough to live in integrated communities where they can almost forget about race, or enough to buy their way to forgetfulness with vacations in New York or Europe.

The readers of the Negro papers are mainly those who STILL need a voice to say what they STILL want and have NOT yet gotten — namely full citizenship, full equality, full civil rights, job rights, and an absence from fear, want, and contempt. So long as millions of Negroes who shove out their small change every week for Negro papers, do not have these basic rights — and are hardly likely to have them tomorrow or the next

day — just so long will the Negro press be of great value to its basic readers — providing the Negro press does not forget about them, and the publishers and editors of Negro papers do not grow too far away from the Negro masses to understand their needs.

**THE NEXT FIFTY**

My hope is that the "Defender" will remain a NEGRO paper as long as we Negroes need it. Personally, I think there is probably another fifty years of great racial and democratic service ahead for "The Chicago Defender." However, by the time its 100th Anniversary rolls around, the "Defender" might well be an integrated newspaper — or maybe even a white paper — without loss to anybody.

Perhaps "integration" and "Segregation" will be forgotten words by then, and maybe there will not have been a lynching since 1955 in Mississippi. When this desirable state of affairs come about, the



LANGSTON HUGHES, distinguished poet, author and lecturer.

"Defender" will have played a great part in bringing into being such a wonderful day. Blessings on the "Defender" at fifty!