

Mark Christian Thompson, *Black Fascisms: African American Literature and Culture Between the Wars*. (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007). X, 232 pp., \$19.50 paper.

In *How Bigger Was Born*, Richard Wright described the political choice available to young black men like Bigger Thomas as being between communism and fascism. A plethora of recent scholarship from critics like Barbara Foley, James Smethurst, and William Maxwell has articulated the complex relationship between black and red in the first half of the twentieth century. Mark Christian Thompson's *Black Fascisms* begins to explore the other half of Wright's binary, tracing the uses of fascist ideology in the work of Marcus Garvey, George S. Schuyler, Claude McKay, Zora Neale Hurston, and Richard Wright.

Thompson consciously distances his subject from twentieth-century European fascism, arguing for the fascist leanings of black writers, as "a positive form of black political engagement" (21), a negation of Marxism within, rather than outside, the black radical tradition. The value of this approach is that we come to understand fascist tendencies as an organic feature of the evolution of blackness within Western racialized capitalism. Like Cedric Robinson in *Black Marxism*, Thompson takes a long view of black political development, which allows him to understand fascist tendencies in mid-century African American literature and culture as more than just a response to events in Germany and Italy. Taken together, *Black Marxism* and *Black Fascisms* provide a bracing corrective to the Cold War orthodoxy that describes African American politics as the struggle between liberal integration and conservative separatism.

Thompson helps to re-orient our understanding of the Harlem Renaissance and African American writing in the 1930s by putting Marcus Garvey (who proclaimed, "We were the first fascists") and what Tony Martin calls "Literary Garveyism" at the center of his study. Despite his tremendous popularity with African Americans, Garvey has usually been relegated to the margins of African American cultural history. Reading canonical African American literary figures through the lens of Garvey's notion of

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black liberation helps to complicate those figures and make sense of aspects of their work that have been difficult to assimilate to traditional critical paradigms. The readings of McKay's *Harlem: Negro Metropolis*, Hurston's *Moses, Man of the Mountain*, and Wright's *The Outsider* all not only advance Thompson's thesis they also enhance our understanding of those authors.

Black Fascisms also expands the geo-political context of African American literature between the wars. The influence of the 1935 Italian invasion of Ethiopia on Garveyism and Hurston's idealization of Haiti in *Tell My Horse* push the analysis of black fascism into the black diaspora and help to create a broader black understanding of McKay's engagement with the Soviet Union and Wright's fascination with French existentialism.

The book's one weak spot is its conclusion, which jumps ahead to the 1960s and the Black Arts Movement. The discussion of Amiri Baraka fails to take the full trajectory of Baraka's career into account and Thompson's treatment of anti-Semitism doesn't rise above truncated after-thought.

Black Fascisms is an important contribution to our understanding of African American politics, culture, and literature in the first half of the twentieth century.

Thompson III, J. Phillip, *Double Trouble: Black Mayors, Black Communities, and the Call for a Deep Democracy.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). Xii, 338 pp., \$29.95 hardcover.

In *Double Trouble*, Thompson wrestles with the conflict of the viability of Black elected officials successfully leading major U.S. cities and remaining accountable to the "Black poor." Thompson asserts the strategy of deep pluralism... "how marginal groups are to achieve power in competitive struggles with other groups while still striving for a politics of common good."¹ The work provides a wealth of knowledge concerning inner city politics since the

1 Thompson, 2006: 27.