Review: White Standards and Negro Writing

Reviewed Work: Soul on Ice by Eldridge Cleaver

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The White Negro: Superficial Reflections on the Hipster, a 9,000-word essay by Norman Mailer, connects the “psychic havoc” wrought by the Holocaust and atomic bomb to the aftermath of slavery in America in the figuration of the Hipster, or the “white negro”. It is a call to disassociate from Eisenhower liberalism and a numbing culture of conformity and psychoanalysis to embrace a rebellious, personal violence and emancipating sexuality that Mailer associates with marginalized black culture. The essay Generally speaking, Negro writing in the past has been confined to humble novels, poems, and plays, decorous ambassadors who go a-begging to white America. They entered the Court of American Public Opinion dressed in the knee-pants of servility, curtsying to show that the Negro was not inferior, that he was human, and that he had a life comparable to that of other people. White America never offered them any serious criticism. The mere fact that a Negro could write was astonishing. Nor was there any deep concern on the part of white America with what role Negro writing should play in American culture; and if there was any role, it was through accident rather than intent or design. It crept in through the kitchen in the form of jazz and jokes. FACT #9: White/Negro I.Q. differences are constantly excused as results of environmental variations. But at least five studies that have attempted to equate socio-economic backgrounds of the two races indicate no significant change in relative results. As environment improves, the Negro does better but so does the White. (18). FACT #10: In 1915, Dr. G. W. Ferfuson took 1000 school children in Virginia, divided them into 5 racial categories, and tested them for mental aptitude. On average, full-blooded Negroes scored 69.2 % as high as Whites. Three-quarter Negroes scored 73.0 % as high as Whites. One-half Negroes scored 81.2 % as high as Whites. One-quarter Negroes scored 91.8 % as high as Whites. All of these Blacks lived as and considered themselves “Negroes.”