

~~SECRET~~TELLIGENCE AC...  
WASHINGTON 25, D. C.

INDEXED - 38

Received from CIA Foreign Office  
Date 2/18/51  
3:00

TO: The Director  
Federal Bureau of Investigation  
Attention: Mr. C. D. DeLoach

FROM: W. G. Wyman  
Assistant Director

SUBJECT: Richard WRIGHT

1. Richard WRIGHT, the American Negro writer who is now living in Paris, spoke at a conference of the "Club de l'Observateur" on 27 April 1951. Enclosed is a report of the conference and a translation of an article by WRIGHT which appeared in the 3 May 1951 issue of L'Observateur, a Neutralist weekly, edited by Claude BOURDET.

2. Daniel Eugene Edmond GUERIN, who spoke at the conference also, was born in Paris on 19 May 1904. He came to the United States in 1946 to study American labor unions and he is reported to have taken part in Communist activities in this country. In 1937 he was a leader of the French Communist Party and in 1940 he was reported to be a member of an anarchist group. His last application for a U. S. visa was refused.

3. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Attachments - 2

[REDACTED]

CC: Assistant Chief of  
Staff, G-2  
Department of the Army

RECORDED - 30

INDEXED - 30

EX - 48

JUL 20 1951

AUG 7 1951

(b)(3)  
(b)(6)

(b)(1)  
(b)(3)

(b)(3)

Dinner-conference, Club de l'Observateur, April 27, 1951

Subject: La question noir et les perspectives de la littérature aux Etats-Unis

Speakers: Daniel Guerin and Richard Wright

34486

At the dinner, which preceded the dialogue between Daniel Guerin and Richard Wright, there were approximately seventy people and later more came, making the audience total well over eighty. Although it was too late at the end of the evening to have more than a few questions from the floor, the group seemed to me to be a good deal more intelligent and interested than at the last meeting I attended. Although the audience was primarily French, there were quite a few Americans present, including four negroes.

Although the conference was ostensibly on the question noir et les perspectives de la littérature aux Etats-Unis, more emphasis was placed on the negro problem in the United States and France rather than on the discussion of American literature. Both M. Guerin and Mr. Wright seemed to be very angry and angry at the American system and at the white American abroad. While it is true that Mr. Wright, in answering the questions posed by Mr. Guerin, gave numerous examples and cited figures, he went out of his way to paint a dismal picture of life in America and made a few questionable generalizations. M. Guerin obviously was more interested in the negro problem as such than in American literature. He did, however, ask several questions about Native Son which resulted in a lengthy discussion about the soul of a negro. The way he worded his questions on the Communist Party and on the relationship between the Party and the negro led me to suspect that he was trying to present the Communist Party in America in the best light.

The questions at hand were not particularly stimulating. Various concrete examples of racial prejudice in America were brought up and one man ventured the opinion that while there was no negro problem in France comparable to the situation in the United States, there was some difficulty with the Arabs. One person asked why the negroes in America and those in Africa did not get together and Mr. Wright replied that up to the present time, the American negro has not thought very much about his African brother. Finally the question was raised as to the attitude of the French Church towards the negro and we learned here, the policy was definitely racial.

Summary of the dialogue between Daniel Guerin and Richard Wright

M. Guerin: Introduced Richard Wright by giving a short biographical sketch. He asked Mr. Wright to explain the background of the Franco-American Fellowship and to say a few words on the problem of the American negro in France, his relationship with the white American and with the French.

Mr. Wright: Began by pointing out the fact that there were about 500 negroes in France representing many different professions. He went on to say that in France, unlike in America, the negro lives with the Frenchman. The negro comes to France to escape the racial atmosphere of the United States, but over here he meets the same old prejudices, segregation and the fear of assault. In short, the American negro looks on France as a land of refuge.

French acceptance of Marshall Plan aid and her inclusion into the North Atlantic Pact have, however, raised certain questions on the part of the American negro living in France. To what extent, they ask, will the French attitude change with the acceptance of American aid.

With each additional American aid in France.

-2-

secure for, according to Mr. Wright, it is well known that Americans are more violently race conscious once they get outside their own shores. Moreover, the American negro cannot find any trace of liberalism in the American colony here and certainly not in American governmental agencies.

The dispute, therefore, is not with the French but with the white Americans. To quote Richard Wright directly, "the Americans who came to France don't French culture and practice their own favorite brand of racism".

Mr. Wright gave the following examples of racial prejudice here.

1. No single American commercial firm in France employs negroes although some of these firms do so in the United States. Among the firms he listed were the American Express, Guarantee Trust, Chase National, Kodak, Shell and Standard Oil Companies.

2. Prior to eighteen months ago, American governmental agencies did not employ negroes. Now this situation has changed.

3. In the 20 years that the American Hospital in Neuilly has been in existence, no negroes have ever been employed.

4. Last summer there were reports that many of the large hotels in Paris, run by the French, had refused to admit negroes. This was done because wealthy white Americans had complained.

5. Clashes between American G.I.'s and civilian negroes have become more frequent in the last few months.

The Franco-American Fellowship was formed, Mr. Wright concluded, to "keep alive" the spirit of confidence between the French and American people. Its purpose is not to meddle in French politics however.

M. Guerin: With reference to the movie 'Lost Boundaries', Daniel Guerin brought up the problem of segregation in the armed forces and asked Richard Wright to comment on this.

Mr. Wright: By President Truman's directive, segregation in the armed forces is officially abolished. Mr. Wright feels that this directive was issued not so much 'out of the goodness of the nation's heart', but rather because of the cold war. He admitted that progress has been made in the Navy and Air Corps but that in the Army segregation still exists.

M. Guerin: Asked about the rumors that Richard Wright had made a movie out of Native Son in Argentina.

Mr. Wright: Admitted that the rumor was true. He said that at first he did not want the movie to be produced in Argentina, but he realized that he could not produce it in the United States or elsewhere. He added that as Argentina doesn't like the United States very much, this was a good way for Argentina to aim criticism at the United States.

Mr. Guerin: Asked who was found to play the leading role in Native Son. He felt that it must have been very difficult to find the right person because the leading character is so extraordinary.

Mr. Wright admitted that he played the leading role.

Mr. Guerin: Asked Mr. Wright to tell something about the Communist Party in America in the 30's and of his experiences as a member of the Party.

Mr. Wright: Said that he joined the Party because he was - and is - a revolutionary and, like all revolutionaries, sought a political instrument. In the 30's the Communist Party was an militant organization which championed, among other things, the cause of the negro. After joining the party, Richard Wright found out that the Communist Party was primarily interested in the things and not in the negro problem. However, he remained a member until the end of World War II when

-3-

he could no longer sustain certain of the policies of the Party. For example, he said that during the war, the Communist Party endorsed the segregation of blood plasma and urged the negroes to give blood. Also, when the negroes brought their grievances to their union leaders, the Communists paid no attention to them.

After the war, the Communists admitted that they had made a mistake, but at the time if anyone had pointed this out to them, he would be branded as a "counter-revolutionary". The war policy of the Communist Party, Mr. Wright concluded, was unfortunate for because of it, the Party lost the support of the negro population. For example, he said, when Wallace ran for the Presidency, he did not capture the negro vote in any single precinct.

M. Garin: Asked Richard Wright to point out the beneficial things the Communist Party did for the negro prior to the war. He also suggested that the reason why Wallace did not get the negro vote was because Mr. Truman cleverly presented his Civil Rights program at that time.

Mr. Wright: Contended that the Communist Party had the choice to champion civil rights themselves if they had wanted to. He pointed out that prior to the war, the Communist Party had helped the negro in such fields as labor and law (the Scottsboro case). He concluded by saying that there was, as there is today, a need for a revolutionary party in the United States. He said that the world has heard of the cases of Coplin, Elias, Romington and the eleven Communists. There was no instance, he said, where a Communist stood up and said, "yes, I am a Communist and I have done what I have done because your system is wrong."

SECRET

From L'Observateur, May 3, 1951.

### AMERICAN NEGROES AND FRANCE

As a result of the absence of "negro settlements" in France, permitting a census of individuals on a racial basis, no official figures are available as to the exact number of American negroes in France. According to estimates, more than 500 American negroes live in France, half of whom have a permanent or temporary residence in Paris, while the remainder are in the provinces. Socially speaking, they belong to various callings: students, veterans, journalists, doctors, government employees, musicians, music-hall artists, artists and independent writers, all of whom earn a living and bring their contribution to France's daily life.

The living conditions of an American negro in France are considerably different from those he has in America, where he is compelled by law and custom to live in special districts known as "negro settlements", while he is lost in France amongst 40 million French citizens who are unconcerned about the color of his skin.

An American negro in France attends to his daily pursuits without the disquieting prospect of facing arbitrary racial attacks, concerning the location of his home, the nature of his work, or even his social or cultural activities.

The fact remains, however, and may well be understood,

that ...

- 2 -

that the painful memories of the racial prejudices from which he suffered prior to his arrival in France stand in the mind of the American negro. France is a place of refuge, the only place in the world which gives him the chance of living in a normal human atmosphere. To him, France represents a human civilization in the midst of which he is not subject to special attention, but is simply allowed to "live in peace". The American negro realizes that France has its social, political and economic problems. He knows that France is not Utopia; but the contrast between his life in France and that he leads in America is so great that he has a feeling of gratitude for being allowed to live as a man amongst men.

A new element, however, is beginning to come to light in the life of American negroes in France; a new form of uneasiness is born which has nothing to do with the French or with their attitude towards them. With the Marshall Plan and the Atlantic Pact, the American negro has been witnessing the development of American influence in France. The disturbing racial atmosphere from which he had fled seems to get closer to him across the Atlantic. For the first time since he landed in France as a "visiting refugee", the American negro wonders to what extent some French citizens may, in order to please the Americans, accept those racial doctrines which are contrary to the traditions and customs of their country?

Had the negro to be concerned only over the attitude of the French community, he would have no anxiety. Every day,

- 3 -

however, world events indicate that France is no longer just France. It is a nation, the position of which varies under pressure, on the one side from the growing industrial and military power of America, and, on the other side, from Russian provocations. American negroes have found that living conditions in France oscillate under the shock of either one of these nationalist blocks. They have heard the French people express fear and concern over the fate of French freedom and the national humiliation which France now suffers, and American negroes have made their sympathy known to the French. They were rightly entitled to do so, both as guests of France and as supporters of freedom. American negroes - as if they were induced to do so by an instinct of self-preservation - have felt the urge of joining in a common cause with the French to an extent of which the white Americans do not see the necessity or the need.

establishments: The Guaranty Trust Company of New York; J.P. Morgan and Company; Commercial Cable; The American Express Company; The Chase National Bank; Bank; Standard Oil; U.S. Steel; Western Union; International Harvester, etc.

2) Up to a year ago, governmental agencies in Europe seldom employed negroes;

3) Not one American negro has been employed by the American hospital of Paris during the twenty-five years it has existed.

of course, that American assistance to France is necessary, under present conditions, but who, better than American negroes, who, for three hundred years were the victims of American "generosity", can say when the danger line of "generosity" is passed, and when "to give" gradually becomes "to take", and when "assistance" leads to domination.

Our quarrel, really, as American negroes, is only with our fellow citizens, those white Americans who pride themselves on criticizing French life and culture every hour of the day; those white Americans who, while they throw to the winds the words of freedom and democracy make a constant practice of racial exclusionism.

Let us give some examples:

1) Not one American commercial firm in the whole of France employs a single American negro. These firms include, ~~some of the branches of leading American industrial~~ Each time a new white American

soil, the American negro feels less and less secure from the racial point of view. The American negro, moreover, notices that American spokesmen in France are mostly officials of the American government, who are strong nationalists, and represent governmental political tendencies. These officials do not display that liberalism or those humanitarian feelings which are those of the average middle-class American.

American negroes, who feel very close to the French ideals of freedom, have reacted violently. They know,

4) Some white American tourists, loaded with dollars and racial psychology have compelled some French hotels to adopt racial practices for the first time in the history of France;

5) A growing number of incidents have occurred in Paris during recent months between white American soldiers and American negro civilians.

The above examples give only a limited picture of the attitude and behaviour of certain Americans in France - an attitude which has led many French citizens to turn to American negroes and ask for an explanation of such virulent nationalist displays on the part of their white compatriots.

In order to protect their freedom, and as a gesture of friendship and solidarity towards the French, American negroes have formed a group. To assist both the French and themselves, they have organised the French-American Fellowship, the aim of which are to develop the principles of freedom, generosity, dignity and respect of the individual.

While keeping scrupulously out of all problems of French internal policy, the French-American Fellowship testifies in favor of freedom, and extends a hand to those who join in a common desire to keep alive man's creative ideals. The French-American Fellowship welcomes the recent campaign of French intellectuals in favor of

William ...

William Nathan, to save him from the legal lynching  
prepared by Mississippi mobs.

To Frenchmen of good-will, to Frenchmen who love  
freedom, the French-American Fellowship confirms its  
solidarity with those who hold freedom as  
their sacred trust, and who seek the preservation of  
the proud traditions of French culture and history.

Richard WHITNEY