

as cause for Van Vechten's erasure from the Harlem Renaissance. Yet several African Americans, in addition to Hughes, came to Van Vechten's defense, including James Weldon Johnson, the executive secretary of the N.A.A.C.P. as well as writers Nella Larsen and Zora Neale Hurston. Today there are a growing number of scholars of the Harlem Renaissance, including Bernard, who argue that Van Vechten is ignored by some not because of a controversial book or his "white patronage" but because of his homosexuality.

Later in their friendship Van Vechten questions Hughes' leanings toward communism and his trip to Russia to make a film about American race relations. Most revealing is their debate about Hughes' poem "Advertisement for the Waldorf-Astoria," the composition of which was influenced by Hughes' participation in the workers rights movement. In a letter of April 3, 1933 Van Vechten writes:

"Why attack the Waldorf? This hotel employs more people than it serves and is at present one of the cheapest places any one can go to who wants to go to a hotel... I think it is possible (though difficult) to be a good revolutionist and a good artist, too, but I think you'll have to ask yourself more questions (more searchingly) in case you decide to carry on this program."

In his response over six-weeks later (May 23, 1933) Hughes writes:

"About the Waldorf, I don't agree with you. At the time I wrote the poem it was one of the best American symbols of too much as against too little. I

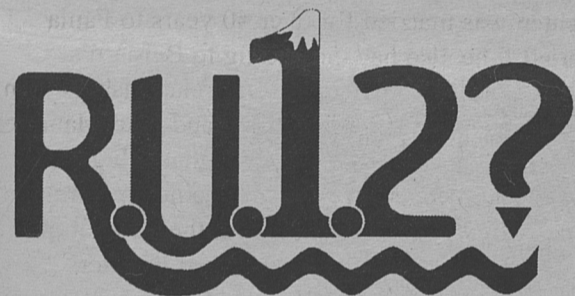
Although their relationship changes over time, with Hughes becoming the celebrity and Van Vechten slowly losing his cache, they maintain a close friendship to the very end.

believe you yourself told me that the dining room was so crowded that first week that folks wouldn't get in to eat \$10.00 dinners. And not many blocks away the bread lines I saw were so long that other folks couldn't reach the soup kitchens for a plate of free and water soups..."

This exchange illustrates some of the underlying issues of difference (class, political, etc.) each man brought to the friendship. Bernard's careful selection of letters demands the reader to examine this unique relationship through a variety of lenses. Although their relationship changes over time, with Hughes becoming the celebrity and Van Vechten

slowly losing his cache, they maintain a close friendship to the very end.

Remember *Me to Harlem* leaves one wondering about a number of things: from Hughes' sexuality to the demise of the art of letter writing. Yet more importantly, and perhaps more profoundly, the book begins to fill a gap of American history, with a queer twist, particularly in regards to Van Vechten. Bernard's research is an important resource for understanding both the complicated lives of Van Vechten and Hughes and the society in which their friendship endured. ■



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