Indonesian Notebook  A Sourcebook on Richard Wright and the Bandung Conference
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publication, except when we are using a later edition to discuss aspects of a particular text. When this is the case, the spelling of the title follows that of the later edition. Place-names are in post-1972 spelling, unless they occur in quotations.

The spelling of Indonesian personal names follows the spelling preferred by the individuals concerned, or the spelling generally found during the period under discussion. In some cases, variations found in the spelling of an individual's name result in different spellings in different sources, most notably in the name of Indonesia's first president, generally known as "Soekarno" but sometimes also as "Sukarno." In these cases, we use the preferred, or usual, spelling of the name in reference to the person, with an occasional variation when the person's name is spelled differently as the author of a particular publication.

Until very recently, when international usage became more influential, Indonesian personal names have not included a family name. In most cases, Indonesians are known formally by the first component of their name, which depending on context may be preceded by an honorific or kinship term. In this book we have adopted Indonesian naming practice, which means that individuals are normally referred to by the first component of their name (e.g., "Pramoedy,") not "Toer," in the case of "Pramoedya Ananta Toer"). In the list of works cited and the index, names of authors are listed according to the form in which they are cited in the text, with international practice also acknowledged in the form of cross-references (e.g., "Toer, Pramoedya Ananta. See Pramoedya Ananta Toer"). We have only varied this practice in the case of names that include a European personal name as the first component (e.g., "Martin Aleida") or where the first component of the name is an inherited or honorary title (e.g., "Sultan Takdir Alisjahbana"). In the latter case, the title is normally elided in the text, but cross-references are provided in the list of works cited and the index.

INTRODUCTION. Richard Wright on the Bandung Conference, Modern Indonesia on Richard Wright

In December 1954, while living as an expatriate in France, the famous American novelist Richard Wright picked up an evening newspaper and gazed in awe when he read that in April 1955 the government of Indonesia would host a meeting of twenty-nine "free and independent" Asian and African countries (Wright, Color 437). Gathering in the Indonesian city Bandung, as Wright learned from the newspaper, representatives from these countries were to discuss "the position of Asia and Africa and their people in the world of today and the contribution they can make to the promotion of world peace and cooperation." The representatives planned "to consider problems of special interest to Asian and African peoples, for example, problems affecting national sovereignty and of racialism and colonialism" (Color 439).

Although Wright had published the popularly and critically successful novel Native Son in 1940, and although his 1945 autobiography Black Boy had been a number one best seller for three months, he had left the United States in 1946 to escape continuing and virulent race prejudice. Now, in Paris, after reading about the conference to be held in Bandung, Wright told his wife, Ellen Poplar, that his life had "given [him] some keys" for understanding this gathering of Asian and African representatives (Color 440). He explained,

I'm an American Negro; as such, I've had a burden of race consciousness. So have these people. I worked in my youth as a common laborer, and I've a class consciousness. So have these people. I grew up in the
Methodist and Seventh Day Adventist churches... and these people are religious. I was a member of the Communist Party for twelve years and I know something of the politics and psychology of rebellion. These people have had as their daily existence such politics. These emotions are my instruments. They are emotions, but I'm conscious of them as emotions. I want to use these emotions to try to find out what these people think and feel and why.

As Wright recalled, Ellen replied, “If you feel that way, you have to go” (Color 440–41).

With these emotional keys in hand, Wright arranged to travel to Southeast Asia, where he visited Indonesia for over three weeks (12 April through 5 May 1955) and reported as a member of the press on the Bandung Conference, which convened from 18 through 24 April. Based on his three-week sojourn in Indonesia, Wright published his Indonesian and Asian-African travelogue, The Color Curtain: A Report on the Bandung Conference, in 1956. This travelogue ranks among the first substantial accounts of the Asian-African Conference. And it has emerged as a touchstone in the conference’s scholarly treatments, which have frequently looked toward the Bandung Conference’s world-historical significance and traced the “Bandung Spirit” as evolving into the Nonaligned Movement (founded in 1961) and more generally inhabiting “the political formation of postcoloniality” (Young 11). Indeed, recent scholarly work has observed that “Bandung produced something: a belief that two-thirds of the world’s people had the right to return to their own burned cities, cherish them, and rebuild them in their own image” (Prashad, Darker 32–33). Moreover, the conference has come to crystallize the “idea of the Third World... as a unity of Asian, African, and Latin American peoples on the basis of a common experience of colonialism and racism” (Espiritu 175). As Dilip M. Menon observes, Bandung has attained present-day status as the “condensation of many aspirations: Afro-Asian solidarity, the idea of decoloniality, and the possibility of new alignments in the world following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of... a unipolar world” (Menon 241).

**Mythologies of Bandung and The Color Curtain**

In attaining this explanatory power in relation to postcoloniality’s late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century cultural conditions, the Bandung Conference that Wright reported on has concomitantly taken on a mythic dimension, in the sense of myth outlined by Wright’s Parisian contemporary, Roland Barthes. Appearing a year after Wright’s The Color Curtain and finding frequent recuperation in the context of postcolonial studies, Barthes’s 1957 book Mythologies offers a classic discussion that frames myth as the project of “giving an historical intention a natural justification... making contingency appear eternal” (142). In Mythologies’ famous example, Barthes illustrates this process through the case of “a young Negro in a French military uniform” (115) who had appeared on the cover of a prominent French weekly magazine of the day. As Barthes observes, this image required putting “the biography of [this individual] Negro in parentheses” (116) in order to “naturalize” the logic and coherence of the French Empire (131). If on the one hand the “young Negro” appearing on the magazine cover functioned to naturalize European empire, then the Bandung Conference (on the other hand) has worked at cross-purposes with the French “Negro,” emerging in some scholarly and popular narratives as an equally mythic image but standing resolutely against European and American empire, as a naturalization of postcolonial ideals and conditions during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

The Bandung Conference’s mythic quality found commentary just eleven years after it convened in 1955. A decade after Wright published The Color Curtain, the India-based British journalist G. H. Jansen wrote in his book Nonalignment and the Afro-Asian States that “two conferences were held at Bandung in April 1955. One was the real conference, about which not very much is known. The other was a quite different conference, a crystallization of what people wanted to believe had happened which, as a myth, took on reality in... the Bandung Spirit” (182). Nearly a half century after Jansen’s observations on the two conferences, scholars have increasingly observed—and sought correctives for the fact—that while we know very little about the Bandung Conference, the Bandung myth has continued to grow. Historian Lorenz Lüthi has framed the conference as a mythic stand-in for a much more complex—and as yet undocumented—history of the development of Asian-African solidarity and “cooperation among countries from the Global South” (1), and political scientist Robert Vitalis has critiqued a sometimes superficial narrative of Bandung as the “birthplace of not one but two global ‘solidarities’”—“non-alignment” and “global racial consciousness” (261). Vitalis calls on scholars to undertake “the work that is required to learn what we don’t know about” the relevant historical circumstances (271), arguing that scholars should take as their “primary analytical terrain” the conference’s “competing national state-building projects and regional state-systemic logics” (271). Historiographically allied with Vitalis and Lüthi, historian Christopher J. Lee’s introduction to the 2010 Making a World after Empire: The Bandung Moment and Its Political Afterlives seeks to move beyond Bandung’s airy importance
to “theory-driven conventions of postcolonial studies” and rather to promote scholarship that, “armed with evidence, begin[s] to think more concretely and extensively about how to sharpen our reconception of postcolonial history” (32). In the epilogue to Making a World after Empire, Antoinette Burton praises Lee's collection for going a long way toward rejecting “the romance of racialism that haunts many accounts of Bandung… in favor of going to [the] ground, through a purposeful return to the complex and uneven geographies of the postcolonial cold war world” (“Sodalities” 352-53). With its aspirations toward “refus[ing] all of Bandung’s pieties and romances” (358), Making a World after Empire pushes Bandung scholarship away from theoretical treatments of a mythic Bandung and toward a heightened valorization of engagement with historical archives. Such a tack will indeed be crucial for scholars of postcolonialism, the Third World, and nonalignment, given the way intellectuals in many arenas have frequently taken the Bandung Conference’s mythic meaning as more important than its archivally verifiable history, as has been vividly illustrated by a recent survey of the persistent repetition of the false commonplace that Gold Coast prime minister Kwame Nkrumah was among the important world leaders who attended the conference.

Unlike Kwame Nkrumah’s counterfactual appearance at the Bandung Conference, Richard Wright’s conference attendance has been extensively documented in a primary historical text, namely, The Color Curtain. And yet Wright’s attendance, like the Bandung Conference itself, has been mythic to varying degrees. Of course, as readers will well understand, we are not asserting a facile dichotomy between myth and history in which that which functions as myth is necessarily ahistorical while engagement with historical archives brooks no mythologizing component. Rather, we are asserting that Wright’s conference attendance and his narrative in The Color Curtain have been taken up by numerous scholars as an un-narrative in an array of cultural and disciplinary arenas. Along these lines, several transnationally oriented scholars of American and African American literary and cultural studies have framed The Color Curtain as evincing a commonality—or in some cases simply a desire to see commonality—between African American experiences with racism and decolonizing nations’ experiences with colonialism and empire. Similar to transnational American and African American studies, the field of postcolonial studies has also been invested in The Color Curtain. Bret Benjamin, for instance, points toward Wright’s book as illustrating, “often more clearly than do the conference documents themselves,” the Bandung participants’ “bond forged from a common history of colonial exploitation, their shared status as noncolonials” (Benjamin 125). And even as he historicizes The Color Curtain by placing it in dialogue with the Bandung Conference memoir of Roeslan Abdulgani (the Indonesian secretary general of the conference), Dipesh Chakrabarty has framed some of Wright’s positions in The Color Curtain as anticipatory of the “globalization as liberation” discourse in a world after empire (“Legacies” 61) and as a key element in considering “the question of the role that the humanities should play in a globalizing world” (64). Meanwhile, the third edition of Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin’s Postcolonial Studies: The Key Concepts (2013) has added an article on the Bandung Conference and has framed Wright’s Color Curtain commentary on the new Asian and African governments as prescient of “the themes for much postcolonial writing in the years to come” (24). Yet even as postcolonial studies has sometimes taken The Color Curtain as prophetic of its major concerns, and even as transnational American and African American literary and cultural studies have taken Wright’s Indonesian travels as an important moment of transnational exchange regarding racial questions, no area of study has asserted larger implications for Wright’s Indonesian travels than has the emerging field of Afro-Asian studies. Consider the foreword to this field’s landmark 2006 collection, AfroAsian Encounters, which has Vijay Prashad offering an opening paragraph asserting: “The book that Wright produced from his [Indonesian travels], The Color Curtain, inaugurates our tradition of AfroAsian studies” (“Foreword” xi). Here The Color Curtain attains genesis status and hence mythic status in the most conventional sense of the term.

In advancing this book, we share the widely held view that Wright’s Indonesian travels and his travelogue The Color Curtain ought to maintain a significant position in historical narratives and present understandings of transnationalism, postcolonialism, and Asian-African relations. However, like the historians and political scientists who are wary of the ways a mythic Bandung Conference has supplanted an archivally verifiable Bandung Conference, we are wary of the ways The Color Curtain, as the purveyor of a certain narrative of Wright’s Indonesian sojourn, has come to supplant the largely unknown historical archive that surrounds Wright’s travels. Indeed, we are concerned that The Color Curtain, as a single primary historical text, has sometimes come to function as a stand-in for broader primary historical research on Wright’s attendance at the Bandung Conference and that, in the process, this travelogue has tended to be taken as documentary evidence for historical claims that it cannot verify. As a case in point, consider Robert J. C. Young’s assertion that Wright’s conference attendance and “presence helped to consolidate identifications between African-Americans and Third World nations” (11). In substantiating this assertion, Young in a note directs readers toward Wright’s “analysis of the conference” in The Color Curtain (20, n2). With this note, then, Young assigns Wright’s analysis in The Color Curtain the task of attesting to the
ways Wright's attendance at the conference helped solidify global racial consciousness. Such a claim, if it were historically documented, would require evidence, including African American and third world testimonies about Wright's presence in Bandung as forging cross-cultural identifications. Instead, readers are directed to consider The Color Curtain. To be clear, we are not suggesting that Wright's presence at the conference did not play a certain role in the workings-out of a global racial consciousness. Rather, we are suggesting that such deployments of The Color Curtain are emblematic of a larger scholarly trend that sometimes takes The Color Curtain as a mythic stand-in for relevant or substantial historical evidence regarding the place of Wright's travels in transnational, postcolonial, and Afro-Asian histories and presents.

No doubt Harilaos Stecopoulos's comments on Wright's interactions with one of his Indonesian hosts, together with Bill V. Mullen's illuminating explorations of Wright's positions in relation to Bandung Conference delegates, have evinced important historicizing impulses vis-à-vis The Color Curtain. And yet we would argue that the place of The Color Curtain in Bandung scholarship has remained, by and large, similar to what Chakrabarty has described as the place of European philosophy and terminology in the "postcolonial Calculus" of his youth and student years (Provincializing ix). In this environment, according to Chakrabarty, European philosophies had a life that operated according to "Roland Barthes' idea that a myth works by making the historical seem 'natural'" (ix), attaining status as "a piece of truth" rather than as "something that was originally invented in the workshop of the Scottish Enlightenment" (xi). Like Chakrabarty in his work in demythologizing European thought's status as natural by rendering it parochial (and indeed provincialized) in its historical contingency and embeddedness (x), we are dedicated to a project of demythologizing The Color Curtain and Wright's Bandung Conference attendance, dislodging them from the realm of what Chakrabarty terms the "simply 'true'" (xi) and moving them toward a new critical and historical embeddedness in what Burton refers to as the Bandung moment's "cross-hatchings, outcroppings, and tendrils" ("Sodalities" 353).

At first glance, marshaling historical documentation regarding the significance and ramifications of Wright's Indonesian travels and conference attendance may seem simple enough. After all, Wright's life and writings have been some of the most thoroughly documented among twentieth-century US writers. He has been the subject of at least nine significant biographies. And his writings—published, unpublished, and translated—have been extensively catalogued in Charles T. Davis and Michel Fabre's 232-page Richard Wright: A Primary Bibliography (1982). Adding to this already substantial biographi-
of exile more generally, facilitating critical engagement with his 1957 book of lectures, White Man, Listen!, as well as with his still unpublished novel of the late 1950s, "Island of Hallucination," which references Indonesia repeatedly (75, 224, 422). More generally, Indonesian Notebook's significance extends far beyond the realm of author studies. Challenging the mythic status of both the Bandung Conference and Wright's Indonesian travel writings, this book sets out to historicize and consequently reframes a major moment that has been pivotal in the disciplinary narratives of transnational American and African American studies, postcolonial studies, and Afro-Asian studies. Complementing and adding ground-level texture to Bandung's state-level histories, such as that rendered by Prashad in his compelling book The Darker Nations (31–50), Indonesian Notebook corresponds to Burton's recent assertion that "the time has come for new histories of Afro-Asian solidarity" (Brown 1). Indeed, this book's intense and overarching investments in conveying translations of on-the-spot Indonesian source texts position it as a preliminary yet crucial answer to Dilip M. Menon's 2014 insistence that historical approaches to the Bandung Conference must "engage with entangled local histories that may not be accessible through literature in English alone" (244).

Beyond The Color Curtain

Intriguingly, in spite of The Color Curtain's importance within an array of scholarly fields, Wright's conference travel and travelogue have received very little attention in Indonesian studies and Southeast Asian studies. Speculating on a logic for this absence is revealing with regard to how scholars might responsibly reassess The Color Curtain in light of Indonesian Notebook's new documentation of Wright's travels in Indonesia. One is tempted to attribute this lack of attention to a scholarly iteration of a sentiment expressed by one of Wright's Indonesian interlocutors, as relayed in The Color Curtain. This young and well-known poet explained, "The Dutch, the Americans, and the English do not know us.... And our experience in meeting these Europeans has always turned out badly. When they leave Indonesia, they write false things about us. We are exotic children to them. Why, one white woman journalist went away and wrote an article saying that we grew banana trees in our homes! Can you imagine that?" (583). Indeed, ever since the late colonial era, observations of Indonesia by travelers or resident foreigners have often been characterized by a level of exoticizing and Orientalizing that frequently obscures and distorts as much as it reveals and explains about the Indonesian peoples' cultural practices and everyday realities. Both short- and long-term visitors have imparted views of Indonesian cultures that focus on their refinement and otherworldli-

ness, but at the same time their irrationality and, at times, propensity for violence. Quite similar to non-Indonesian representations of Indonesia in creative literature and the visual arts, seemingly nonfictional travel writing of this type can be seen as a series of reconstructions that owe as much to the observers' own cultural and ideological perspectives as to the people, places, and circumstances that are the subjects of their observations.

Although some might expect this substantial body of travel writing by foreign visitors to Indonesia to become fodder for numerous analyses informed by a regionally tailored understanding of Orientalism, the observations of travelers and visitors to Indonesia have so far not attracted the sustained attention of Indonesian studies scholars. The reasons for this lacuna in the Indonesian studies literature are not entirely clear, but it can be said that the appeal of an Orientalist framework of analysis, which might provide a key to unlocking the significance of this body of travel writing, has been much more limited in Indonesian studies than in other regionally based fields of inquiry, especially South Asian studies. Indeed, very few scholars have attempted to extend the reach of Said's conception of Orientalism as "mainly... a British or French cultural enterprise" (4) to a Southeast Asian context. In the absence of this or similar analytical frameworks, it appears that travel writing has been largely disregarded by scholars of Indonesia, easily dismissed as popular literature with little to offer a specialist audience. As such, it seems likely that Wright's observations on Indonesia have been seen as unremarkable, being merely the jottings of a first-time visitor who spent just three weeks in socially restricted surroundings in and around Jakarta and Bandung. Considered in this light, there is perhaps no reason for The Color Curtain to have been assigned the level of importance in Indonesian and Southeast Asian studies that it has received in other fields of inquiry.

Beyond the realm of scholarly inquiry, Indonesians have found reasons to suspect that Wright's writings lie within the tradition of inaccuracy and misrepresentation that they see in the way foreign visitors have tended to represent Indonesia to the world. Consider the reaction Wright received after publishing his article "Indonesian Notebook" (which later became part of The Color Curtain) in the August 1955 issue of the UK-based magazine Encounter. Appearing shortly after Wright returned from Southeast Asia, the essay generated a brief dialogue between Wright and his former host, the Indonesian novelist, newspaper editor, and PEN Club member Mochtar Lubis. Encounter's March 1956 issue published the following letter from Mochtar:

With great interest I read Mr. Richard Wright's "Indonesian Notebook" in Encounter No. 23. Mr. Wright wrote with great feeling and passion,
but I am afraid while he was here in Indonesia he had been looking through "coloured-glasses," and he had sought behind every attitude he met colour and racial feelings. The majority of the people with whom Mr. Wright had come into contact in Indonesia (one of the best-known novelists, and others) belong to the new generation in Indonesia, and are the least racial and colour conscious of the various groups in Indonesia. They are all amazed to read Mr. Wright's notebook in which Mr. Wright quotes them saying things which they never had said, or to which they did not put meaning as accepted by Mr. Wright.

I do not want to imply that there is no colour feeling in Indonesia, but I want to protest Mr. Wright's allegation that "this racial business" has become a way of life in Asia. This is just not true. While Mr. Wright's notebook makes interesting reading, I am afraid he failed to present a true and balanced picture of the intellectual situation in Indonesia today.

Colour or racial problems are just not our problems. ("Through")

Alongside Mochtar's protestations, Encounter published Wright's reply, which denied Mochtar's suggestion that he had looked at Indonesia through "coloured-glasses" and asserted that for the three weeks Wright stayed in Jakarta and Bandung, "all the talk [he] heard was of race and religion," with the speeches at the Bandung Conference "loaded with race and religion." Wright continued:

I would commend to Mr. Lubis's attention the full and definitive account of my Bandung report which will be published in the United States in March of this year under the title: The Color Curtain. There I discuss in detail the nature of the racial feeling I found not only in Indonesia, but in the Asian personality as a whole.

Think hard, my friend Lubis, and you will recall the discussions that took place in your car as we drove through the Java mountains. ("Mr. Wright")

Had Mochtar taken Wright's advice to read The Color Curtain, he would have been still more bewildered by Wright's account of his Indonesian sojourn. In writing to Encounter, Mochtar was irritated at Wright's apparent misattribution of quotations to one of Indonesia's "best-known novelists," but in The Color Curtain, Mochtar would have found a scene regarding this novelist that might have added to his irritation with Wright's account. As Wright tells it in The Color Curtain, before he leaves Europe for Indonesia, he prepares a questionnaire that he uses as the basis for some interviews he conducts with

Asian informants who are currently living in Europe. He undertakes these interviews to prepare himself for his upcoming travels. Strikingly, one of these informants is described in so much detail that he can only be identified as the famous Indonesian linguist, novelist, and intellectual Sultan Takdir Alisjahbana (Color 465–72), and in fact the interview as narrated in The Color Curtain corresponds point-by-point to Wright's narrative of interviewing Takdir in his unpublished Indonesian travel journal ("Jakarta" 195–98, 202–6). In the face of these similarities, however, the two accounts harbor a jolting difference: whereas the account in Wright's travel journal depicts the Takdir interview as taking place in Indonesia after the Bandung Conference, The Color Curtain's narrative avers that Wright interviewed Takdir in Europe, thousands of miles from where Wright privately recorded the meeting as having taken place.

Beyond offering Mochtar a misplaced scene depicting Wright's interview with Takdir occurring in Europe before the conference, The Color Curtain might have caused Mochtar much confusion with regard to Wright's counsel (as conveyed in Encounter) that Mochtar ought to "think hard" about the conversation he and Wright had while driving through the mountains between Jakarta and Bandung. Indeed, a reading of The Color Curtain would have given
Yet in spite of the fact that an analogous representation of Indonesia takes place in The Color Curtain, Indonesian and Southeast Asian studies scholars (particularly those invested in tracing cultural traffic between Southeast Asia and the North Atlantic) have begun to consider the significance of Wright's Indonesian travels, now reading Wright's own account in conjunction with the historical texture offered in Indonesian accounts of Wright's visit. Drawing on these Indonesian sources on Wright's Indonesian sojourn is possible because attending the week-long Bandung Conference was far from Wright's only activity in Indonesia. During his three weeks in and around Jakarta and Bandung, he not only spoke with Bandung Conference attendees and Indonesian governmental figures but also interacted with a number of important arbiters of the Indonesian cultural and literary scene, associating closely with a highly visible subset of Indonesian modernists whose aesthetic philosophy had been designated a few years earlier as "universal humanism." This current in modern Indonesian literary and cultural history had its origins in 1948, when a group of writers, artists, and intellectuals with an interest in the development of a modern Indonesian culture came together around a cultural column and supplement entitled Gelanggang (The Arena), which was printed in the weekly news journal Sinetar. In 1950, this group of like-minded individuals had issued a credo under the title "Surat Kepercayaan Gelanggang" (Gelanggang Testimony of Beliefs), which became the founding document of the Indonesian universal humanist ideology. It described Indonesian artists as the "rightful heirs to world culture," and it was essentially a statement of confidence about full and equal participation as Indonesian artists and intellectuals in international cultural trends and debates (Asrul, "Surat" 3). The document's author was a prominent writer and cultural figure named Asrul Sani (Asrul, "Surat" 3), who in 1955 at the age of just twenty-four was an editor of the Gelanggang column. While in Jakarta, Wright granted Gelanggang an interview on his own work and his views on literature, which was published just after his departure under the title "A Conversation with Richard Wright." But this was only one aspect of Wright's contact with Asrul in April and May 1955. Through his Indonesian host, Mochtar Lubis, Wright was introduced to another universal humanist forum in which Asrul took an active part, the Studioclub Konfrontasi (Konfrontasi Study Club). This study group was an extension of the cultural, political, and literary journal Konfrontasi, which had been founded in 1954 under the editorship of, among others, the well-known intellectual and cultural figure Sutan Takdir Alisjahbana, the "best-known" Indonesian novelist that The Color Curtain has Wright interviewing in Europe.

Takdir, who like Wright was born in 1908, was of a different generation from Asrul, Mochtar, and most of the other universal humanists Wright met and
interacted with during his time in Indonesia. He had come into prominence as a pro-Western but Indonesian nationalist-oriented modernizer during the last years of Dutch colonial rule, and he had founded Konfrontasi as a post-independence successor to his famous 1930s cultural journal Pujangga Baru (New Poets). At the time of Wright's visit, Taksir was a highly respected senior figure in the world of the modern Indonesian arts, ideologically in sympathy with the outlooks of the universal humanists, though he himself was less of an aesthetic modernist than a cultural modernizer, impatient with the legacy of Indonesia's traditional cultures, which he saw as the main impediment to the development of a dynamic and forward-looking modern Indonesian culture. He was also a successful and wealthy businessman, and after making contact with Wright he invited the entire Konfrontasi Study Club to spend a weekend at his family bungalow in the mountains between Jakarta and Bandung in the company of this famous international visitor. On Sunday, 1 May 1955, Wright gave a lecture to the group on African American literature, and in the informal interactions that preceded and followed the lecture, he engaged in conversation with a representative sample of Indonesia's most prominent cultural figures of the time. Apart from Taksir, Moctar, and Asrul, he associated with the older generation novelist and PEN Club leader Achdiat Karta Mihardja and the young and ambitious poet and short story writer Sitor Situmorang, who between 1952 and 1954 had been cultural attaché at the Indonesian Embassy in Paris. Also among Wright's interlocutors were several other writers and artists belonging to the Konfrontasi Study Club, including its secretary, the Dutch-Indonesian writer and essayist Beb Vuyk, the essayist and member of the Konfrontasi editorial group Hazli Tanzil, and the young poet and translator Siti Nuriaini. Back in Jakarta, and just two days before he left Indonesia, Wright continued circulating among many of these same contacts even as he also reached a wider Indonesian constituency through a lecture to a combined audience of members of PEN Club Indonesia and Indonesia's Council for Deliberations on National Culture (Badan Musyawarat Kebudayaan Nasional; BMKN) at the cultural center Balai Budaya. Wright's lecture on this occasion, on problems confronting Indonesian and Western writers, was later covered in Moctar Lubis's newspaper Indonesia Raya. Similar to his lecture at Taksir's mountain bungalow, Wright's lecture at the Balai Budaya receives no mention in either The Color Curtain or his unpublished travel journal, but it nevertheless represents an important though largely unknown window on the cultural traffic that Wright engaged in with his Indonesian counterparts.

At this time, the lectures sponsored by the BMKN and held in the Balai Budaya attracted a broad spectrum of the Indonesian cultural scene, and we can assume that on this occasion Wright and his views reached a wider range of...
floors and woven bamboo walls, because he believed Americans ought to get a feel for how ordinary Indonesians in Jakarta were living (Ajip, Interview). It is possible that Pramoedya Ananta Toer also attended this lecture. A member of the original Gelagang group who by this time was distancing himself from the universal humanist camp, Pramoedya would later become a vociferous proponent of the opposing cultural ideology of Indonesian-style "socialist realism." Pramoedya was an admirer of Wright, and in an essay of 1953 he had held up the "bitter realism" of Wright's style as a model for the alternatives to "beauty" to which modern (Indonesian) writers should aspire.32 As a figure central to generating content for the BMKN's newspaper balance, he would have been well aware of the circular's publication of a 1956 review of the French translation of The Color Curtain, which provided Indonesian readers with Indonesian translations of large excerpts from Wright's travel writings. Yet there is no known documentary or oral history record of Pramoedya interacting personally with Wright, either before or after the Balai Budaya lecture or during Wright's three-week sojourn more generally.

Pramoedya was an important writer and a prominent cultural figure in Jakarta during the 1950s, so this lack of documentation is surprising, and it serves as a reminder that Wright's interactions were culturally limited. To be sure, Wright spoke with a variety of cultural and governmental figures,34 but his sustained and close association with Indonesia's universal humanists in and around Jakarta and Bandung undoubtedly made him less likely to forge close relationships (hence relationships more likely to be documented) with cultural figures whose stances did not resonate with universal humanism. Consequently, Wright's experiences and impressions remained substantially untouched—and undocumented—by a wider spectrum of Indonesian cultural thought and creative practice that included the more radical nationalist alternative being espoused by left-wing cultural activists (such as Bujung Saleh and A. S. Dharta), as well as by those writers associated with specifically Islamic-oriented Indonesian art and literature (such as Rahmat Rangkuti and Hamka) and the varieties of cultural practice under way in some of the capitals of Indonesia's outer provinces, such as Medan in North Sumatra and Makassar in South Sulawesi.35

The fact that Wright's impressions of Indonesian writers and intellectuals were formed largely through his interactions with those associated with the universal humanist outlook had to do in large part with the way his trip to Indonesia was funded and orchestrated. Although his source of funding remains debated in The Color Curtain and in his travel diary, Wright's article "Indonesian Notebook" offers at least an oblique gesture. Of the airplane ride to Indonesia from Europe, he explains, "It had been arranged for me to pick up the plane in Madrid" (25). These and other arrangements were made on Wright's behalf by the Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF). After deciding to attend the Bandung Conference, Wright began searching for funding and soon wrote to his literary agent that the CCF had told him that they wanted him to travel to Indonesia and "cover the conference for them."36 During the 1950s, the CCF alleged that it was an independent organization dedicated to peace and intellectual freedom in opposition to Soviet-style totalitarianism.37 But Wright believed it was a semiofficial organization with indirect support from the US State Department. By agreement with the CCF, he was "officially . . . not covering" the conference for the CCF but would in a putatively unaffiliated way write several articles on the conference to be published in the CCF's internationally distributed English-, French-, Spanish-, and German-language magazines.38 The terms of the agreement also permitted Wright to publish these articles in book form.39 Making arrangements for Wright's trip, CCF director Michael Josselson told Wright that an Indonesian journalist and PEN Club member, Moctar Lubis, would meet him at the airport in Jakarta. Josselson wanted to do more than finance Wright's travels to the Bandung Conference. He wanted to orchestrate Wright's interactions with specific arbiters of Indonesian culture. The director wrote, "I am sure that Mr. Lubis will be delighted to be of assistance to you and on the other hand you will find him charming, interesting, and well informed. I have suggested to Mr. Lubis that while you are in Djakarta you may want to give a talk at the Pen Club there."40 Since the late 1960s, it has been clear that Wright was correct in his belief that he was making these agreements with and through a semiofficial agency. What he did not know, however, was that the CCF was backed not by the State Department but by the CIA. Indeed, Josselson was both the CCF's director and a CIA agent.41

This intersection between Wright and the CCF has been acknowledged and minimized by biographers and scholars, with Wright normally represented in scholarly narratives as a freelance reporter able to speak and write freely, without interference from the CCF.42 Even so, the Cold War United States was strategically invested in its black citizens speaking freely, or at least in an image of its black citizens speaking freely. From this perspective, The Color Curtain and its surrounding Indonesian archive become relevant to an exploration of the contours of a specific approach that the United States took in attempting to intervene in the Bandung Conference and its representation to an international readership. Tellingly, the CCF published a handful of Wright's articles on Indonesia (which later became part of The Color Curtain) in its internationally distributed magazines, Encounter in English, Preuves in French, Der Monat in German, and Cuadernos in Spanish.43 Furthermore, in paying for
his travel and orchestrating his contacts, the ccf was inserting Wright into a community of Indonesian universal humanist writers who were specifically interested in cultural exchange with the rest of the world. As stated in the “Gelanggang Testimony of Beliefs,” they not only considered themselves to be heirs to world culture but envisioned “Indonesian culture [as] determined by a multitude of stimuli coming from all corners of the world, hurled back to the world in our own voice” (Asrul, “Surat” 3).

This dedication to world culture prompted these Indonesian writers to seek out exposure to other cultures, and, intriguingly, they often engaged in cultural traffic with the rest of the world via the same organization that funded Wright’s Indonesian travels. In 1954, for instance, Achdiat Karta Mihardja (who was later Wright’s host with PEN Club Indonesia) reached out to poet and founding Encounter editor Stephen Spender, inviting him to make a side trip to Indonesia to meet with Indonesian writers during his upcoming travels to Australia.42 The following year, just a few months before Wright’s visit, his hosts Mochtar Lubis and Taidir Alijsjahbana attended and made comments at the ccf’s Conference on Cultural Freedom in Asia, held in Burma in February 1955.43 A year after Wright’s ccf-sponsored visit of 1955, Taidir and Mochtar again came together under the auspices of the ccf, now becoming interim heads of the ccf’s Indonesian Committee, and holding a meeting in Jakarta at which the ccf representative for Asia, Prabhakar Padhye of India, spoke on the meaning of freedom in cultural life (“Pantiya”).44 It was around this time that Taidir’s journal, Konfrontasi, began publishing translated articles from the ccf magazine Preuves (Foulcher, “Bringing” 51).

In 1963, Mochtar published his novel Twilight in Djakarta, with copyright assigned provisionally to the ccf before being returned to the author in 1968.45 Also in the 1960s, Mochtar was in contact with Michael Josselson, discussing a new Indonesian magazine called Horizon (modeled “somewhat along the lines of Encounter”) and expressing hope that Horizon would “have close relations with the Congress’ publications—helping each other with editorial material, etc.”46 Taken in this context, Indonesian Notebook becomes a crucial tool not only for understanding the Bandung Conference as a touchstone moment within multiple arenas of study but also for accessing a moment when a major African American writer’s travel for the conference emerged as a vehicle for furthering the ccf’s CIA-funded work in cultural diplomacy. Wright’s trip offered Indonesia’s universal humanists an experience with world culture that they could (to draw language from the Gelanggang Testimony) subsequently rearticulate, “hurled back to the world in [their] own voice.” Hence, the unwieldy vicissitudes of transnational cultural exchange among literary and cultural modernists intersect with what Jason Parker has described as the United States’ uneven efforts at shaping the Asian-African Conference’s geopolitical outcomes.47

Offering a window on the complex event of Wright’s travels to Indonesia, this collection takes the first component of its title from the title of Wright’s 1955 Encounter essay, “Indonesian Notebook,” which, as we have previously mentioned, Wright published shortly after returning from Indonesia. During the half century since Mochtar rejected “Indonesian Notebook” and Wright counseled him to give serious consideration to the forthcoming The Color Curtain, Wright’s book-length Indonesian travelogue has indeed emerged as the univocal account of his encounter with questions of race during his Indonesian travels. But our collection, complementing and sometimes countering The Color Curtain’s cryptic and often highly constructed mediation of the ways Wright’s travels for the Bandung Conference prompted exchanges with Indonesian intellectuals, offers an alternative notebook on Indonesia, problematizing Wright’s implication that Mochtar and his Indonesian colleagues had simply refrained from thinking “hard” enough. Rather, Indonesian Notebook presents a view of several Indonesian intellectuals thinking in sustained and deep ways about Wright specifically and the West more generally. It offers documents that will help scholars reconceive Wright’s visit not as a unidirectional incident but rather as an event requiring narration from multiple and sometimes competing perspectives.

Accounting for these multiple perspectives—together with their cultural contexts and their legacies—will help scholars begin to adequately assess the significance of Wright’s Bandung Conference attendance not only for transnational, postcolonial, and Afro-Asian studies but also for a global intellectual history of modernity. Here, recent calls for broader and deeper tracings of modernity’s cultural traffic become key. Indeed, in this book, Indonesian studies scholar Jennifer Lindsay’s call for investigating “Indonesia’s cultural traffic abroad” (“Heirs” 7) meets African American studies scholar Kennell Jackson’s emphasis on “systematic discussion of black cultural traffic” (13), under the umbrella of modernism/modernity scholar Susan Stanford Friedman’s framing of the project of documenting “planetary cultural traffic” (483) as a means of piecing together a “planetary epistemology of modernity” (477). To borrow from Friedman, Indonesian Notebook’s translations—linguistic and cultural—permit a tracing of the “enmeshments of the local and global” (490), a crucial delineation of the ways global Asian-African consciousness and US cultural diplomacy precipitated a set of otherwise unlikely interpersonal relationships whose mutual misrecognition have profound implications for how the Bandung Conference is taken up as a watershed event in narratives of global history.
On the Ground in Modern Indonesia

In offering these multiple and competing perspectives, Indonesian Notebook is divided into three parts. Part I showcases documents illustrating intersections between Wright and modern Indonesian culture that preceded the 1955 face-to-face dialogue between the famous author and representatives of mid-twentieth-century Indonesian modernism. Part II offers primary historical sources that reveal Wright's interactions with the individuals, cultural organizations, and larger cultural milieux that helped mediate his access to the Bandung Conference and Indonesian society. Part III presents a selection of sources illustrating Wright's Indonesian reception since the Bandung Conference. Each of these parts is concerned with three major arenas of subject matter: Richard Wright, modern Indonesia, and the Bandung Conference. Even as some documents may be more relevant to Wright than to modern Indonesia, or more relevant to modern Indonesia than to the Bandung Conference, or more relevant to the Bandung Conference than to Wright, each document is in some way relevant to understanding all three categories. Certainly, these categories are interdependent, even if they have for too long been studied in ways that have been less than ideally integrated. Bringing them together in one volume, contextualized with substantive introductory essays and notes that draw on a multitude of other sources, including Brian Roberts's 2013 interviews with some of Wright's interlocutors and their descendants, presents readers with some of the complex cultural dynamics that must be acknowledged and taken into account when attempting to evaluate the significance of Wright's travel to mid-twentieth-century Indonesia for the Asian-African Conference.

Part I, "Transnational Crosscurrents," offers a view of modern Indonesia in dialogue with European and American culture generally and, occasionally, with Richard Wright in particular. The first document contained in this part is an excerpt from a booklet published in 1951 by the Indonesian Embassy in Washington, DC. This booklet, titled Cultural Life in Indonesia: Religion, the Arts, Education, features a "Language and Literature" section offering a 1950s-era narrative of Indonesian literary history that mentions Wright—among others—as a source of inspiration for the emerging writer Pramoedya Ananta Toer. Next are two other documents related to Pramoedya's interest in Wright: a 1953 essay by Pramoedya on the topic of beauty in literature, which takes Wright's autobiography Black Boy as one of its sources of inspiration, and a newspaper article of the same year that mentions Wright as a favorite author of Pramoedya and marks Pramoedya's departure for the Netherlands, funded by a scholarship from the Dutch Foundation for Cultural Cooperation. Certainly, these three initial documents are significant because they mention Wright's admiration for Wright, but they are perhaps more important because of the way they offer readers a picture of the modern Indonesian literary scene that Wright would enter during his visit in 1955.

Following the Pramoedya-related items of 1951–1953, part I offers two documents that were published during the months leading up to Wright's visit. These are two book reviews drawn from newspapers; the first is a review of Wright's 1953 novel The Outsider, and the second is a review, by Bambang Vuyk, of the 1953 Partisan Review anthology Stories in the Modern Manner. In reviewing this anthology of short fiction, Vuyk frames the Partisan Review as the largest of the "little magazines" and weaves Wright's emergence as a writer into the narrative of the Partisan Review's emergence as a periodical.

Part II, "An Asian-African Encounter," offers press documents and other news items related to many of Wright's interactions with Indonesian intellectuals and the larger public. Among these interactions were a series of public and semipublic lectures that are not mentioned in either The Color Curtain or Wright's travel journal. In Wright's own record of his Indonesian travels, they appear only in a brief handwritten note, which is held in the Richard Wright Papers at Yale University's Beinecke Library. Here we see a cursory

FIGURE 1.3. Brian Roberts with Gulkam Situmorang, May 2013, discussing his father Sitor Situmorang's interactions with Richard Wright during a May 1955 meeting of the Konfrontasi Study Club. Used with permission of John McGlynn.

Richard Wright on the Bandung Conference
nod to his speaking activities. Wright notes that he found himself giving talks on “Negro literature and industrialization” to at least five groups, which he described as a gathering of divinity students, a cultural organization, an art league, a writers’ group, and the Pen Club. In the same note, Wright mentions that Indonesia’s daily press, using both English and the Indonesian language, reported fairly extensively on his remarks (“Retreat”). The record of Wright’s lecturing activities may always remain incomplete, but the material published in this book affords readers documentary evidence related to four of Wright’s lectures.

Two days after arriving in Jakarta, Wright attended a gathering in support of Indonesian artists, hosted by the city’s mayor at his private residence. At some point during the evening, Wright spoke to the group at large, and some of his words during this speech, together with broader tableaux of the event, were recorded in two newspaper articles (included in chapter 6). After the Bandung Conference, Wright traveled to Takdir’s mountain villa to give a lecture to the Konfrontasi Study Club, which was almost certainly the writers’ group to which Wright refers in the handwritten note. Evidently, Wright provided the study club’s leadership with a written copy of his lecture (titled “American Negro Writing”), because shortly thereafter, the editors of Konfrontasi published the lecture’s full English-language text in the magazine’s May–June 1955 issue, together with an editorial introduction and a loose Indonesian-language synopsis. Wright’s Konfrontasi lecture is highly significant because it is the first known English-language publication of his White Man, Listen! lecture titled “The Literature of the Negro in the United States.” However, what is perhaps more significant is the lecture’s synopsis as it appeared in Konfrontasi, which relayed to a wider audience the study club’s understandings (and sometimes misunderstandings) of Wright’s lecture at Takdir’s villa. The following day in Jakarta, Wright lectured at the Balai Budaya for a combined meeting of Pen Club Indonesia and the BMKN (the latter most likely being the cultural organization Wright mentions in his handwritten note). This lecture appeared in Indonesian translation in Mochtar Lubis’s newspaper Indonesia Raya, together with a photograph of Wright, picturing him immediately prior to a lecture he gave at another point during his visit to an audience of university students.

Whereas three of Wright’s talks can be dated (14 April for the art organization, 1 May for Konfrontasi, and 2 May for the BMKN/Pen Club), Indonesia Raya’s undated photograph of Wright’s introduction to the university students, is the only known documentary evidence of his lecture for a student group. This may or may not have been the lecture that Wright noted he gave to a group of divinity students, an event that almost certainly would have been orchestrated by Jakarta-based American Presbyterian missionary Winburn T. Thomas, with whom Wright stayed for a week and a half after the Bandung Conference and who was connected to Jakarta Theological College’s Bachelor of Divinity program (Thomas, “Reminiscences” 151). The two had met while rooming together in Bandung, and in a letter to a colleague dated 21 April 1955, Thomas wrote from the conference that he had “spent hours in conversation” with Wright, and that Wright “awoke me last night to make a confession. ’In my book on Africa,’ he said, ’I painted the missionary in a very bad light. He was a person who came to help but stood apart. He sought to draw near the Africans but his white prejudices and sense of inferiority got in his way. I now see that it is possible for the missionary to identify himself with his people, to lift their burdens, to make their life his life. I will hope to redeem myself in some later writing.’” It may be that Wright’s speech before the Indonesian divinity students addressed similar themes.

In addition to documenting a handful of Wright’s lectures or talks while in Indonesia, part II offers a look at Wright’s more day-to-day activities, together with the cultural milieu in which these activities took place, as mediated through the daily press as well as culturally oriented news outlets. Chapter 6 offers glimpses of Wright’s hotel room on his arrival in Jakarta, his meetings with Indonesian politicians, his appearances on the street during the Bandung Conference, his commentary on the role of African countries at the conference, and other issues. Also in part II we see an article based on Wright’s interview for Siasat’s Gelanggang column, as well as an article reporting on his visit in the pages of the monthly arts magazine Seni.

Part III, “In the Wake of Wright’s Indonesian Travels,” spans the period from June 1955 through the Bandung Conference’s fifty-year commemoration in 2005 and thus documents the wake of an event that has generated controversy, animosity, admiration, and inspiration among Indonesians for over half a century. From 1955 through 1960, the year of Wright’s death, his visit and writings seem to have prompted more controversy than admiration among his former hosts. Interestingly, it appears that this is precisely the way the ccf wanted things to play out. As is mentioned in the minutes of a meeting for a CCF gathering of 23 May 1955, the editors of the ccf’s Europe-based magazines visited Wright at his home in Paris shortly after his return from Indonesia. The CCF at the time was especially attuned to “the attractiveness of controversial articles, or articles made controversial by inviting discussion and counterattack,” and Wright’s lengthy report on “his impressions of the rise of Asian nationalism and especially a ‘new and dangerous racism’ with strong mystical-religious elements” seems to have played a part in the editors’ feeling “that the Richard Wright treatment of Bandung and Indo[n]esia might provide the proper point of departure” (Lasky). Richard Wright on the Bandung Conference
Indeed, even before the CCF could publish Wright’s Indonesian travel writing, Bep Vuyk (an editor of Konfrontasi and a writer for Mochtar’s Indonesia Rayu) published a pair of book reviews dealing with Wright, including a contentious review of Wright’s Black Power, a copy of which apparently fell into her hands as a result of Wright’s visit. Shortly thereafter, Wright’s “Indonesian Notebook” appeared in Encounter, which of course elicited Mochtar’s letter, something that the CCF editors would have approved of as an internationally visible counterattack. Following the appearance of Wright’s book-length Indonesian travel writings, the BMKN (which had cohosted Wright’s lecture at the Balai Budaja) and Asrul Sani (who had edited and probably conducted Wright’s interview for Gelanggang) both published commentary on Wright. The BMKN offered measured and implicit critique in its biweekly newsletter, while Asrul in Gelanggang discussed Wright’s 1953 novel The Outsider and pointedly framed him as an artist who had betrayed his calling to become a mere purveyor of ideas. Finally, in November 1960, during the week and a half before Wright died, Bep Vuyk published a controversial two-part article in the Dutch weekly news magazine Vrij Nederland. Five and a half years after Wright’s Indonesian travels, Vuyk now offered an extensive outline and sometimes biting commentary on the events of Wright’s visit, as seen from the perspectives of those associated with the Konfrontasi and Gelanggang groups. When Wright’s friend and Dutch translator Margrit de Sablonière told him about Vuyk’s article, Wright was upset, and de Sablonière was poised to publish a counter-attack. However, Wright’s death a few days later brought those plans to a halt.53

Since his death, Wright has continued to find discussion in Indonesian circles, but Indonesian recollections of firsthand experiences with Wright have been less frequent. He has sometimes been mentioned without any reference to his visit, with Indonesian writers and commentators either unaware of or disinclined to remark on his three weeks of close interaction with prominent representatives of the cultural and literary life of mid-twentieth-century Jakarta. For instance, in the 1970s the creative writer and professor Ayatrohadi (brother of Aji Rosidi, who attended Wright’s Balai Budaja lecture) published a number of translations of African American and black diasporic poetry. In a commentary appended to a selection of this poetry, Ayatrohadi stated that among Indonesians Wright was the best known of African American writers but did not mention Wright’s visit to Indonesia. Later, in the 1980s, as Mochtar compared the social consciousness of his own writing to that of Wright, he also refrained from mentioning Wright’s trip to Indonesia. When Wright’s Indonesian travels have been taken up by Indonesians, these discussions have tended to rely on the narrative that Wright himself offers in The Color Curtain. In 1977, Goenawan Mohamad (a prominent Indonesian poet and journalist and founder of the influential Indonesian weekly Tempo) took the contours of Wright’s life as a template for addressing Indonesian political conditions, at one moment looking to The Color Curtain as a report on “an event [Wright] may not have fully understood, but whose significance he attempted to evaluate properly.”54 In 2005, however, during the commemorations of the Bandung Conference’s fiftieth anniversary, a twenty-first-century Tempo journalist found no cause for skepticism and drew uncritically on The Color Curtain as a window on the conference’s history. In 2015, during the conference’s sixtieth anniversary, Tempo again drew on Wright and The Color Curtain as authoritative historical sources for commentary on the conference.55

Toward a Polyvocal History of Asia-Africa

In narrating a personal exchange Wright had with another reporter during the Bandung Conference, Wright’s travel journal depicts him speaking with an African American woman from Chicago, who approaches him at noon and desperately requests his help in finding some Sterno (a jellied alcohol product, burned directly from the can in which it is sold) so she may heat her straightening comb. In the journal, Wright promises to help but reflects on the racial shame felt by black women in the United States, who, even while they are among people of color in Asia, still believe that their hair will look better if it is straightened to look like the hair of white women ("Jakarta" 150). But this narrative as offered in Wright’s journal differs substantially from the narrative he published in 1956. In The Color Curtain, Wright’s story of the Sterno incident represents the black US reporter not as a Chicagoan but as "a Negro girl from Boston" (578). And The Color Curtain does not depict Wright speaking directly to her but depicts him talking with her roommate, a reporter who is described as "a tall white woman" from the United States (577). Here, he listens patiently to the white woman, who earlier has overheard her African American roommate on the telephone, "begging some Negro reporter to try to find a can of Sterno for her" (582). The white reporter explains to Wright that she had wondered earlier, as she saw the African American woman late at night bent over in a corner using a blue flame, if her roommate were "practicing voodoo, or something?" (579). In The Color Curtain, Wright uses this perhaps embellished incident to illustrate, again, racial shame: in Asia, "where everybody was dark, that poor American Negro woman was worried about the hair she was born with" (580). Wright explains to the white reporter the meaning
behind her black roommate’s straightened hair: “Every day that woman commits psychological suicide” (581). In contrast to Wright’s two ominous narrations of the Sterno incident, African American reporter Ethel Payne (a Chicagoan who met Wright at the Bandung Conference) offered yet a different story of the Sterno can. In a 1987 interview, Payne remembered unintentionally crossing paths with Wright and then complaining to him that her Sterno supply had run out. According to Payne, Wright said, “Well, don’t worry. If there’s any Sterno in Bandung, I’ll find it for you.” Then, after Payne had gone to bed for the evening, she was awakened at “about 3:00 o’clock in the morning,” with Wright making “this anguished cry outside”: “Ethel! Ethel! Please answer me! Ethel! Are you all right?” (Payne 69). Wright couldn’t find any Sterno so he brought “some pure alcohol” and the two of them cooperated, apparently that very night, to heat the straightening comb over the alcohol as it burned in a saucer. Rather than recalling this event as psychological suicide, Payne recalled with laughter: “But that was a hilarious moment, because he was trying so hard to help me out” (70).

Our point in juxtaposing these three versions of the Sterno incident is not to present Wright’s travel journal, or the Payne interview, as a necessarily accurate or authentic rendering. To be sure, this book is committed to the verifiable materiality of certain facts: for example, Wright did not interview Takdir in Europe; he would not have seen bare-breasted women walking along the roads of Muslim Java; he indeed lectured multiple times in Indonesia, though his book and travel journal elide these events. But Indonesian Notebook is also committed to advancing multiple versions of events, with this multiplicity permitting many events (to take the Sterno incident as a metaphor) to find representation simultaneously as voodoo, psychological suicide, and a hilarious moment. Of necessity, this collection is not doctrinaire in its reprinting of primary historical sources; agnostically, it reprints or relays primary sources that contradict each other and do not necessarily offer authoritative versions of events. Rather, if it is doctrinaire on any point, it is in its commitment to the rich polyvocality of narratives regarding Wright’s interactions with modern Indonesia and the Bandung Conference. Hence, this book emerges as an attempt at accurately representing the contested readings of the incidents associated with Wright and modern Indonesia’s mutual misreadings, with these misrecognitions generating more interest than any monological history. At one point, Wright’s elision of his lectures might be answered with Konfrontasi’s locally specific adaptations of his lecture in its synopsis. At another point, his representation of himself interviewing Takdir in Europe might find a corollary in a 2005 Tempo article’s puzzling representation of one of Wright’s daugh-

ters visiting a museum in Bandung. Answering Wright’s curious memory of bare-breasted women on the drive to Bandung is an article by Beb Vuyk that mistakenly has Wright giving his Konfrontasi lecture before rather than after the Bandung Conference. We could continue listing such moments almost indefinitely.

If, as Amritjit Singh has accurately observed, The Color Curtain’s narrative and ethical grappling are in pivotal ways “defined by [Wright’s] interaction with the Indonesian people and landscape” (619), then Indonesian Notebook (narrated as it is from the perspectives of those Indonesian personalities and cultural landscapes with which Wright interacted) becomes a crucial complement to The Color Curtain, as another volume of constructed, conflicted, and sometimes puzzling narratives. This book offers translations, translations of translations, translations of calculated and good-faith mistranslations and misrepresentations, and, inevitably, our own mistranslations, whether linguistic or cultural. In this way, it is our attempt, to borrow from Chakrabarty, to trace “that which resists and escapes the best human effort at translation across cultural and other semiotic systems,” in a world imagined not as flattened by Euro-American modernity but rather reimagined “as radically heterogeneous” (Provincializing 45–46). Indeed, this book builds on and intensifies the project showcased by Lee and his contributors in Making a World after Empire, that of interrogating the Bandung Conference “through a purposeful return to the complex and uneven geographies of the postcolonial world war” (Burton, “Sodalities” 352–53). In this world, representatives of twenty-nine Asian and African countries came together in 1955 to discuss their significant points of commonality in the face of their unwieldy heterogeneities, heterogeneities not only among the representatives themselves but also among their nationalizing constituencies. It was this heterogeneous convening of the Bandung Conference that brought Richard Wright into an unwieldy and until now little-known dialogue with an equally heterogeneous modern Indonesia. Much more than a case study of the quandaries and misrecognitions involved in global intellectual exchange, this book highlights various counter-narratives that call out for a reassessment of Wright’s narratives of modern Indonesia and the Bandung Conference as offered in The Color Curtain. And because of The Color Curtain’s mythic status within multiple arenas of inquiry, Indonesian Notebook’s complications and contestations in turn call out for reassessments of the Bandung Conference’s place in histories and theories of postcoloniality, the global South, nonalignment, and US investments in transnational cultural exchange.
Notes

1. On Black Boy and Native Son, see Ward and Butler 271 and 42. On Wright’s relocation to Paris, see his “Choose Exile” 4–6.
2. For other significant early accounts, see Romulo; Rowan 381–414; and Kahin.
3. On the Bandung Conference’s “spirit” and role in the development of the Non-aligned Movement, see Amptah 214–58.
4. On Barthes’s fundamental contributions to anticolonial resistance and postcolonial studies, see Sandoval; and Hargreaves. For a view of Barthes’s deployment in these areas, see Chakrabarty, Provincializing 18–31; and Collins 109–11.
5. For allied scholarship that also seeks a deeper historical grounding for the Bandung Conference and its place in Asian-African and postcolonial history, see Mackie; McDougall and Finnane; and Tan and Acharya.
6. For this survey, see Vitals 266.
7. See for instance Hakutani 69; Ahmad 179; and Stecopoulos 148.
8. For Chakrabarty’s treatment of Roosian Abdulganis’s memoir, see Chakrabarty, “Legacies” 44–53.
9. For other work in Afro-Asian studies that frames The Color Curtain (and Wright’s Indonesian travels) as a major event, see Mullen 59–71.
10. See Stecopoulos 149 and Mullen 59–67. We also admire Virginia Whalley Smith’s “Richard Wright’s Passage to Indonesia,” with its archival work that uncovered preliminary evidence of Wright’s lectures in Indonesia (110).
11. See Bakish; Fabre, Unfinished; Gayle; Rickles; Rowley; Walker; Wallach; Webb; and Williams.
12. The Indonesian lacuna in Kinnaman’s bibliography reminds us that even this one-thousand-page bibliography remains less than comprehensive in relation to what Kinnaman calls the “global dimensions” of Wright’s reputation (34).
13. Other work attesting to scholars’ extraordinarily thorough efforts in documenting Wright’s life includes Fabre, Richard; Ward and Butler; and Kuachi and Hakutani.
14. Biographers and scholars have largely relied on The Color Curtain and Wright’s unpublished Indonesian travel journal. The only Indonesian source that has regularly figured in discussions has been Mochtar Lubis’s response to Wright’s Encounter article “Indonesian Notebook” (Rowley 468–69; Fabre, Unfinished 443; Stecopoulos 149; and Kuachi 196).
15. For some examples of writing about Indonesia and Indonesians by short-term visitors or resident foreigners, from different eras and demonstrating different levels of insight, see: from the 1950s Stryker; from the 1960s M. Williams; from the 1970s Lucas; from the 1980s Naipaul 277–373; from the 1990s Lewis; from the 2000s Gilbert 215–338; and from the 2010s Pisani.
16. An exception is Vickers, 77–130. Outside of Indonesian studies, see F. Jensen 106.
17. See Carandang, who in 2009 suggested that in Philippine and Indonesian studies, “the out-in-the-open exchanges on Said’s Orientalism” belatedly started and have yet to peak, if at all moving” (2). In a 2013 interview, one of the most internationally prominent and highly respected Indonesian studies scholars, Benedict Anderson, commented that despite his admiration for Edward Said’s courage, he was “not a big fan of Said’s work on Orientalism,” finding it “biased and too polemical” (Gonzalez 664).
18. For Wright on his conversation with Mochtar as they drove through the mountains, see The Color Curtain, 534–35.
19. On the questionnaire and interviews, see Color 445–48.
20. For just a few of the correspondences, see Wright’s two narratives on Taldir’s bookshelves, his family, and his opinion on the relation between the state and religion (Color 464–65, “Jakarta” 195); on Taldir’s stance on feelings of racial inferiority appearing in literature, see Color 466; and “Jakarta” 197.
21. The earliest draft of The Color Curtain (typed, with Wright’s handwritten corrections) offers a frank explanation of the interviews that Wright recounts in the book before narrating his travel to Indonesia: the interviews, Wright explains, are not included in the order in which they occurred (“Color” 22), and the first interview recounted (with a young Indonesian-born Dutch journalist) occurred in Jakarta (21). However, Wright’s handwritten revisions reveal his decision to simplify the narrative: he strikes out the acknowledgment that he is not recounting the interviews in the order in which they occurred (22), and he strikes through the explanation that the first interview took place in Jakarta (21). With these strike-throughs, Wright alters the narrative so that in the published version of The Color Curtain he may claim to interview both the Dutch journalist and Taldir in Europe before leaving for Indonesia. In the published draft, the first draft’s Dutch journalist in Jakarta becomes “an Asian-born European who had once lived in Asia” (Color 449). In the same move, Wright’s published narrative transports Taldir to Europe (Color 449, 464–72).
22. In his Indonesian travel journal, Wright comments on Indonesia’s ubiquitous human faces, but he does not describe any women during the drive (“Jakarta” 125). However, in Black Power, Wright includes the following scene, narrating a ride through the African countryside: “I stared down at a bare-breasted young girl who held a huge pan of oranges perched atop her head” (56–57).
23. For a reproduction of Wright’s Color Curtain account of bare-breasted Javanese women, see Rowley 405, and for reproduction of Wright’s claim to have interviewed the unnamed Taldir figure before arriving in Indonesia, see Hakutani 69; Smith 94; and Reilly 512.
24. In offering this provincialized view of Euro-America, we are inspired by Dipesh Chakrabarty’s Provincializing Europe.
25. See for instance Day 166; Foucault, “Bringing”; and Roberts and Foucault, Outside of Indonesian studies, Roberts draws extensively on Indonesian sources (145–72).
26. The term “humanisme universel” (universal humanism) appears to have been first used in Indonesian in 1951, by the literary critic H. B. Jastin, in reference to the beliefs of a group of writers originally centered on the revolutionary modernist poet Chairil Anwar, who died in 1949 (Foucault, “Bringing” 34, 74). Their outlooks were founded on notions of secularism and individualism, while their commitment to political equality opposed colonialism; and looked to the realization of a common and universal humanity. This stance superficially resembles a survey question Wright prepared before traveling to Indonesia: “Do you feel that man needs a universal humanism that can bind men
together in a common unity?" (Wright, Color 448). Yet by 1955, Indonesian discussions of universal humanism had acquired specific connotations—associated with domestic cultural debates—that were distinct from the way Wright was using the term.

27. Throughout this book, the term "Gelanggang" sometimes appears in italics and sometimes appears in roman script.Appearances of the term in italics refer to the supplement Gelanggang as published in the magazine Siasat. Appearances of the term in standard roman script refer to the Gelanggang group, which was affiliated with Siasat's column.


29. Throughout this book, the term "Konfrontasi" sometimes appears in italics and sometimes appears in roman script. Appearances of the term in italics refer to the journal Konfrontasi. Appearances of the term in standard roman script refer to the Konfrontasi Study Club and others affiliated either with the group or the journal.


31. See Wright's "The Artist and His Problems" in part II.

32. See Toer's "The Definition of Literature and the Question of Beauty" in part I.

33. Given that Pramoedya wrote the content for over one-fourth of all the issues of this circular, he seems to have had an editorial role, but we are unable to say so definitively. For more on Pramoedya's connection to this newsletter, see Roberts 169 and 196, 143.

34. See narratives in Wright, "Recreat"; and "Who's Doing What" (4 May 1955), in "A Sheaf of Newspaper Articles," in part II.

35. On the divides between Indonesian universal humanists and left-wing cultural figures, see Poulter, "Literature." On Indonesian cultural production beyond Jakarta and surrounding regions, see Hatley, "Creating"; and Plomp. On the Islamic-oriented writers at the time, see Salim HS; and Kratz.

36. Wright to Paul Reynolds, 4 Feb. 1955 (MPF, box 31, folder 2). This sentence and subsequent sentences in this paragraph draw their narrative and some specific language from Roberts 148–49.

37. See Congress for Cultural Freedom, "Manifesto."


41. On the CCF's exposure as a CIA front, see Coleman 213–34. On the CIA's involvement in the arts via the CCF, see Cowen 78–79. On CCF director Michael Josselson as a CIA agent, see Saunders 153–56; and Coleman 6.

42. Apparently based on a 4 February 1955 letter from Wright to his literary agent, Paul Reynolds, scholars have repeatedly represented Wright as triumphantly indepen-
Notes

Mochtar Lubis, "A List of Indonesian Writers and Artists." Reproduced with the permission of Iwan Lubis. Italics indicate Mochtar's handwritten annotations to the typed list.

1. Thanks to David Hill for sending the handwriting samples that helped us identify the handwriting on the list as Mochtar's. The note on Takdir's Western orientation matches Wright's handwriting as preserved in RWP. Though not included in our representation of the list, this handwriting appears on the top portion of the original list, next to Takdir's name.

2. In 1976, Jassin's personal documentation collection became the H. B. Jassin Center for Literary Documentation, Jakarta.

3. See Ardan's "Pramoedya Heads Overseas" in part I.

4. On Wright and Césaire's relationship, see Ward and Butler 69–71.

8

Gelanggang's "A Conversation with Richard Wright" (1955)

After attending the Bandung Conference, Richard Wright returned to Jakarta, where he spent the remainder of his time in Indonesia as the houseguest of the Presbyterian minister and missionary Winburn T. Thomas (Thomas, "Reminiscences" 151). At some point during this period, Wright participated in a conversation or interview for the prominent cultural affairs publication Gelanggang. With its masthead announcing it as a "Cahier Seni dan Sastera" (Cahier for Art and Literature), Gelanggang was a column for news and debates related to the modern Indonesian arts in the news magazine Siasat, which was aligned with the Indonesian Socialist Party (PSI). It began publication in 1948 with editors Chairil Anwar, Rival Apin, and Asrul Sani at the helm, and in 1949 it gave its name to the cultural manifesto discussed in this book's introduction, the Gelanggang Testimony of Beliefs. By the time of Wright's visit, Asrul Sani was continuing with the column, while his wife, the poet Siti Nuriati, was working as the group's secretary. Asrul's coeditor of Gelanggang at this time was Soedijatmoko, a prominent political and publishing figure who had represented Indonesia in the United Nations and had helped found
The "Conversation" opens as the interviewer provides readers with an indication of Wright's stance on the world-historical significance of Asia's and Africa's decolonization. Notably, Wright's opinion seems to be a response to one of his own questions, as it appeared on the questionnaire he developed in preparation for his attendance at the Asian-African Conference. With the ambition of "getting to know the Asian personality," Wright's questionnaire included the query "What was the single most important event of the twentieth century?" (Wright, *Color* 445, 447). As if his interviewer had asked Wright to respond to this component of his own questionnaire, the "Conversation" begins by conveying Wright's opinion that the "rise of the peoples of Asia and Africa" is "one of the most important events" of the twentieth century.

After this opening, the conversation quickly begins tracing Wright's development as a writer. Here we see a comparison between Wright's oeuvre and the 1852 novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, written by the white American author Harriet Beecher Stowe. Stowe's popular and widely influential novel, with its emotionally charged condemnations of slavery, added fuel to antislavery sentiment in the run-up to the US Civil War. According to legend, when Stowe met President Abraham Lincoln, he exclaimed, "So this is the little lady who made this big war?" (Sizer 49). *Gelanggang*'s comparison of Wright to Stowe—together with its vague reference to the opinion of "one essayist"—suggests that the author of the "Conversation" article was familiar with James Baldwin's 1949 essay "Everybody's Protest Novel," which famously and scathingly compares Wright's 1940 *Native Son* to Stowe's nineteenth-century novel: "Below the surface of [Native Son] there lies, as it seems to me, a continuation, a complement of that monstrous legend it was written to destroy. Bigger [Native Son's protagonist] is Uncle Tom's descendant, flesh of his flesh, so exactly opposite a portrait that, when the books are placed together, it seems that the contemporary Negro novelist and the dead New England woman are locked together in a deadly, timeless battle" (100). Discussing both *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *Native Son* as protest novels, Baldwin concludes: "The failure of the protest novel lies in its rejection of life, the human being" (100). Whereas Baldwin's comparison between Stowe and Wright constitutes a sharp jab at Wright, *Gelanggang*'s "Conversation" seems to misunderstand Baldwin, stating that Baldwin sees in the progression from Stowe to Wright "a cause for optimism about the progress of humanity."

Further discussing Wright's development as a writer, his Indonesian interlocutor asks about Wright's ideal readers and his stance on the function of literature. Wright's answers to these questions confirm that when he had this conversation with *Gelanggang*, he was in the process of thinking through and drafting the talk he was planning on giving for a *Pen Club BMKN* event that
was scheduled for 2 May at Jakarta's Cultural Affairs Center, Balai Budaya. In the Gelanggang conversation Wright is quoted as saying that “writers only have a ‘public,’ not an ‘audience.’ We try to reach everyone, we try to win them over, to call out to people, to touch the heart of anyone who will listen.” Later in the conversation, on the topic of literature’s function, he delineates his thinking further: “One function among others is the moral function. Then there’s the possibility of taking part in some form of enjoyment. An active process of convincing the reader about the truth of something.” Clearly, these statements indicate that Wright was working through the ideas he expressed in his 2 May lecture, shortly before his departure from Indonesia, especially as showcased in the sections of the talk titled “The writer and his audience” and “Morality and art.”

In further discussing Wright’s development as a writer, the Gelanggang article turns toward the subject matter that took place in Wright’s writing when he published his 1953 novel The Outsider. According to Gelanggang, this shift involved moving away from preoccupations with racism and toward broader preoccupations pertaining to human existence, inspired by Wright’s interest in existentialism. Whether through dialogue or narrative commentary, the conversation intersects several times with the question of existentialism. The Gelanggang author points out that Wright’s apparent change in subject matter owes something to his associations with the writers Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir. His new thematic interests are explained in the article by recourse to an allusion to Sartre’s series of novels Les Chemins de la Liberté. The conversation’s preoccupation with existentialism continues as Wright comments, toward the article’s conclusion, that in his opinion Sartre—like the West in general—is so distracted by left-right politics that he has overlooked the importance of events in Asia. As an antidote for Western disregard, even among existentialist philosophers, Wright suggests that Gelanggang might invite Albert Camus to Indonesia with the hope that Camus would intelligently relay to the West something about the importance of Asia.

The Gelanggang conversation’s focus on existentialist writers and philosophers, and its interest in Wright’s 1953 novel, are readily understandable in terms of an existing Indonesian preoccupation with existentialism at this time. In his spirited description of the health of Indonesian literature at the end of 1954, H. B. Jassin had vigorously defended the interest Indonesian writers had shown in existentialist themes against accusations that existentialist philosophy “severed the relationship between human beings and God” and so robbed human life of its depth and meaning. He pointed to existentialism’s origins in the thought of both Protestant and Roman Catholic philosophers and suggested that even the great Muslim poet Muhammad Iqbal was in essence “an existentialist in his way of thinking” (Jassin 3:23). Acknowledging that Sartre and Heidegger represented an atheistic strand of existentialist thought, Jassin nevertheless argued that whether theistic or atheistic, existentialism spoke to a spiritually rich notion of humanity and a responsible approach to human life and behavior (3:24).

Jassin’s 1954 remarks reflected an interest in the humanist implications of existentialist thought that was consistent with the evolving Indonesian aesthetic philosophy of universal humanism. This interest extended into Indonesian understandings of absurdist thinking, as can be seen in the attention given to Albert Camus during this period as an embodiment of the humanist vocation of the writer’s grappling with matters of religion, ethics, and the meaning of human life. In May 1953, the literary and cultural monthly Zenith, edited by Jassin with occasional help from the editors of Gelanggang (Tecuw, Modern 115), published an Indonesian translation of an essay by the Dutch critic Pierre H. Dubois under the title “Buah-tangan Albert Camus” (The Literary Works of Albert Camus). Considerable effort must have gone into the translation of this philosophically dense and linguistically complex argument concerning Camus’s confrontation with the human condition as he found it in his own times and circumstances. Like other reports on contemporary developments in modern European literature and culture, it was published in Zenith for its perceived relevance to Indonesian concerns and discussions of the day.

In the following year—and exactly one year before Wright’s arrival in Indonesia—another essay in the same magazine noted the Indonesian interest in Camus and suggested it was understandable, “because Camus is a representative of a particular kind of Europe, a Europe that places importance on human dignity and freedom” (Lemaire 117). Once again, the emphasis is on the humanist connection and its universal implications. In a discussion of Camus’s L’Homme révolté, the writer here asserts that “in the ’no’ of revolt, the human being says ‘yes’ to the world and his fellow human beings. Here we have the assertion of the humanist ideal” (122).

This theme was pursued the following month, with an Indonesian translation of Jean-Paul Sartre’s 1946 lecture “La responsabilité de l’écrivain.” Here, Zenith’s readers considered Sartre’s assertion that language “brings the person face to face with his responsibilities” (“Responsibility” 169). Sartre observes, “We held every German who did not protest against the Nazi regime responsible for that regime, and should there exist among us, or in any other nation, any form of economic or racial oppression, we hold responsible all those who do not denounce it” (165). Giving flesh to this principle, the essay explains, “The oppression of Negroes is nothing, so long as no one says,
Negroes are oppressed. Until then, nobody realizes it, perhaps not even the Negroes themselves; but it only needs a word for the act to take on meaning" (169). The writer "must demand plainly and above all else ... the liberation of all oppressed people, proletarians, Jews, Negroes, colonial subjects, occupied countries, and so on" (181). Given this acquaintance with the stances of one of the most prominent existentialist philosophers, some of Wright's Indonesian interlocutors may well have seen existentialist thought as the framework Wright was using to make analogies between African American and Asian-African populations. Of course, as Wright's friend C. L. R. James later recalled, Wright felt his experiences had acquainted him with existentialist thought before he ever encountered existentialist writings. Speaking with James, Wright once pointed to a collection of volumes on a bookshelf and stated, "Look here, . . . you see those books there? They are by Kierkegaard . . . I want to tell you something. Everything that he writes in those books, I knew before I had them." In retracing this recollection, James remarked, "What he was telling me was that he was a black man in the United States and that gave him an insight into what today is the universal opinion and attitude of the modern personality." James continued: "What there was in Dick's life, what there was in the experience of a black man in the United States in the 1930s that made him understand everything that Kierkegaard had written before he had read it . . . is something that I believe has to be studied" (196).

If Wright sensed that his experiences as a black man in the US South permitted his independent arrival at the existentialist thought of Søren Kierkegaard, then his Indonesian travel journal reveals that he also believed that Asians—in, as Wright alleged, their ability to see the world of things outside of time, and to see things without looking—had arrived independently at the phenomenological thought of Edmund Husserl. He felt so strongly about this that he wanted to reread Husserl in light of what he was learning from the Asians with whom he spoke as he prepared to travel to Indonesia ("Jakarta" 80).

A Conversation with Richard Wright from Gelanggang, edited by Soedjatmoko and Asrul Sani

"One of the most important events of this century has been the rise of the peoples of Asia and Africa." Such is the conviction of Richard Wright. And it was his interest in matters arising from this opinion that brought Wright to Bandung to visit the Asia-Africa conference.5
Richard Wright was one of the contributors to The God That Failed, a collection of articles by writers who had once been members of the Communist Party, but who gave up their party membership out of a sense that its aims conflicted with their humanity. The "consciousness of risk" he spoke of seems to have been an important factor behind that decision. In The Outsider this matter again comes to the fore. In this book he writes that being a member of the Communist Party means "negating yourself, blotting out your personal life and listening only to the voice of the Party" (Molotov once said, "I have no will of my own. My will is that of the party"). Wright's comment on this was "... its victim would deny its reality perhaps more vociferously than those who controlled this system of power." 8

I asked him what it was he wanted to bring out in The Outsider.

"A situation that gives rise to other situations," was the reply.

"What would you regard as the most important time in your life?"

"When I was weighing up whether to stay in Chicago or go to New York." Seeing my surprise, he laughed. "Yes, it's strange," he said. "What was so important about deciding whether to stay in Chicago or go to New York? Yet for me, at that time, it was a crucial decision. It was a choice between remaining in Chicago as a post-office clerk, with all the security that position affords, or taking the risk of heading to New York and having to live by my pen. At that moment, I chose freedom."

"Who are the historical figures that you admire, or that you respect?"

"The heroes of thought, like Marx, Freud, and Nietzsche."

"You know that Stendhal was an admirer of Napoleon . . .?"

"Admiring warmongers is a childish and immature trait, in my opinion."

"What books did you read as a child? What books influenced you at that time?"

"First of all was the Bible. Then came Dreiser, who gave me a feeling for realism. After that it was Conrad, because he told such a good story."

"What's your opinion of Uncle Tom's Cabin?"

"Well. It doesn't say anything. It's nothing more than a document human. 9 For the people for whom it was written—the Negro race—it is completely meaningless. It offers them nothing. The feelings and problems of the Negro can only be written about by Negroes themselves."

"Among all the people you have met, who has made the deepest impression on you?"

"People rarely make an impression on me. I'm more affected by places and what I find in books. 10 Moreover, my education didn't go beyond elementary school. No professors ever taught me, so all the knowledge I have comes from books. That's the reason books make a deeper impression on me than people do."
“In your opinion, can the position of the Negro race in America be influenced by events outside America?”

“Definitely! I could give you lots of examples. Let’s start with one close to home, the conference that’s just been held in Bandung. When the first reports of this conference reached American newspapers, the St. Louis Post sent a cable to its correspondent in Bandung, asking him whether he thought that in these circumstances it wouldn’t be better to discontinue those columns in the paper that were set aside for Negroes. So even in faraway corners of the country there is an impact. Of course this conference isn’t going to come up with something to solve the problem altogether. But it does have an influence.”

“When did you develop an interest in the Asia-Africa question?”

“I have an interest because I’m a Negro. Don’t forget that I too am a victim of the Western world. People in Europe don’t see the importance of events here in Asia. For them, the big issue is the struggle between left-wing and right-wing groups. Even Sartre is not immune to this. They don’t see the potential and the aspirations of the newly awakened nations. It would be wonderful if you here in Indonesia could one day invite someone like Albert Camus to visit. There’s a great deal that he would be able to explain to the world of Western thought about events here. And I’m sure he would be extremely enthusiastic about developments here.”

“Your country is very beautiful, and your people are very friendly.”

I thanked him for these words of appreciation. “And what about America?” I asked.

“America?” he asked. “All I know about America is what I read in the same newspapers you probably read as well. I haven’t been there for a long time, and at the moment I have no intention of going there. I love France, and I enjoy Paris. The climate in Paris is ideal for working.”

Notes

1. On Gelanggang, see Tceuw, Modern 115. On Soedjatmoko, see Kahn and Barnett.
2. Other articles in Gelanggang during this time almost always bore the author’s name along with this standard editorial acknowledgment, hence this particular article should be considered as published anonymously.
3. Wright’s handwritten note, clearly scrawled in haste, indicates that his lectures, including for the art league, occurred after the conference (“Retreat”). Yet elsewhere in this book we have suggested that Wright’s brief speech to the Issasen Impresurat Indonesia, delivered before he attended the Asian-African Conference, corresponds to his reference to the art league. Certainly, this is the moment during which we most clearly see Wright speaking at an event dedicated to the visual arts. And yet, in consideration of Wright’s indication that he spoke to the art league after the conference, we are here suggesting that he might possibly have conceived of Gelanggang as an arts group. However, it is speculation to suggest that Wright gave a lecture for Gelanggang.
4. Corroborating The Color Curtain’s narrative, the questionnaire itself offers this as its fifty-fourth question (Wright, “Questionnaire” 5).
5. See Wright’s “The Artist and His Problems,” also in part II.
6. The editorial attribution to Soedjatmoko and Asrul Sani is from 1953.
7. Here, Wright’s Indonesian interlocutor is likely referring to Hans de Vaal’s 1953 interview with Wright, originally published in Dutch in Litterair Paspoort. See de Veal 159.
8. The reference here is to Vyacheslav Molotov, a historical Soviet politician and diplomat who is discussed in The Outsider (248, 258). The phrase negating . . . the Party appears in English in the Indonesian-language “Conversation” article. For its original publication in the novel, see Wright, Outsider 248. The phrase its victim . . . power appears in English in the “Conversation” article. For its original publication in the novel, see Outsider 270, which has a slightly different version of the quote.
9. Here, Wright is using a catchword of French naturalism that was in common use in discussions of literature in Indonesia at this time. An example occurs in Asrul Sani’s “Richard Wright: The Artist Turned Intellectual,” in part III.
10. In the source text, this sentence is jumbled and incomplete, pointing to an error in typesetting. Based on context, we have pieced together the sentence’s likely meaning.
11. In his travel journal, Wright noted that the St. Louis Post-Dispatch had contacted its correspondent in Indonesia to ask whether it was time to stop using the term Negro in its columns (“Jakarta” 199).
During the weekend of 30 April through 1 May, Wright left Jakarta at the invitation of the Konfrontasi Study Club, traveling to the cool slopes of the mountains between Jakarta and Bandung, to lecture at the villa of Konfrontasi leader Sutan Takdir Alisjahbana in the village of Tugu. This type of lecture-discussion event in Tugu was part of the group’s regular docket of gatherings, an outcome of the ambition Takdir had harbored since the early 1950s to turn his Tugu villa into a literary or artists’ salon on the European model (Asril, "Sebuah" 70). Another of Wright’s associates in Indonesia, Achdhat Karta Miharja, who had met Wright as a PEN Club representative at the airport in Jakarta, described one of these events in Tugu in a 1951 article, noting that it brought artists, writers, and intellectuals together in a relaxed and convivial environment that was conducive to a productive exchange of ideas on issues of topical concern. Indeed, Achdhat’s article “Pertemuan Kebudayaan di Tugu” (A Cultural Meeting in Tugu) suggests that the 1951 gathering he attended even managed to bring ideological opponents face-to-face on grounds of mutual tolerance and trust (241–44). Giving insight into what these meetings looked like by the time of Wright’s arrival in the mid-1950s, Beb Vuyk recalled, “The discussion would take place after dinner on Saturday and sometimes last well into the night. The next morning we would take a dip in the ice-cold water of the swimming pool and then sit in the sun to get warm. Little groups of people would form on the terraces and lawns around the pool, keeping up the discussions and cementing personal contacts.” This would be followed by a feast: “Takdir would always have a goat slaughtered on these occasions, and the sate [skewered barbecue meat] lunches became a tradition.” The study club would stay at the villa until about four o’clock on Sunday afternoon before “we all piled into the pickup for the trip back to the heat of Jakarta.”

In Vuyk’s account of Konfrontasi’s April 1955 weekend at Tugu, the study club scheduled Wright’s lecture for the standard time slot on Saturday evening, but between the time of the scheduling and the time of Wright’s arrival at Takdir’s villa, Takdir had felt compelled to accept an invitation (apparently on behalf of the entire study club, including Wright as their guest) to a dinner party on the Saturday evening in question at a nearby villa occupied by a white American family. Hence, Wright’s lecture was rescheduled for the following morning, Sunday, 1 May. At the dinner party, members of the study club who had read about US race prejudice were “interested in observing firsthand how white Americans acted in the company of one of their black compatriots.” While Vuyk reported that the party “took on the air of a rather tense display of racial goodwill,” Wright in his travel journal did not mention questions of race in his description of the Americans he met in the mountains but rather focused on their concerns about the spread of communism in Asia (“Jakarta” 126).

The next morning, after apparently staying in one of the several rooms in Takdir’s villa, Wright gave a lecture titled “American Negro Writing” for an audience that included the study club and other interested individuals. Wright took several photographs at Takdir’s villa, presumably during the weekend of his lecture, and the figures in these photographs suggest that his Indonesian audience included some writers whom he had already met during his trip: Siti Nuraini, Achdhat Karta Miharja, and Sutan Takdir Alisjahbana. Also present were some members of the Konfrontasi circle whom he may have been meeting for the first time, including the poet and short story writer Sitor Situmorang, the essayist and editor Hazil Tanzil, and the future documentary filmmaker Yazir Marzuki. Vuyk also recalled that “a number of Americans” (perhaps some of the guests at the dinner party of the previous evening) were present for Wright’s lecture, though they left before lunch was served and the real discussion began. Describing this weekend gathering at Takdir’s villa, Mochtar Lubis wrote that Wright “was an animated speaker, and... we talked with him about Indonesian literature and the position of American Negroes in the United States” (qtd. in Kiuchi and Hakutani 326).

FIGURE 9.2. Patio view of Takdir Alisjahbana's villa in Tugu, the setting for a postlecture discussion between Wright and the Konfrontasi Study Club. Photograph by Brian Russell Roberts (May 2013).


FIGURE 9.4. Wright's photograph, set on the patio with members of the Konfrontasi Study Club, portrays (left to right): Siti Nurnaini, Fedja (daughter of Siti Nurnaini and Aarul Sani), Sitor Situmorang, and Yazir Marzuki. Reprinted by permission of John Hawkins & Associates, Inc., and the Estate of Richard Wright. Courtesy of the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.
During the months preceding the lecture and discussion, Siti Nuraini (now sitting among Wright’s audience at Takdir’s villa) had been giving special attention to questions related to race and African Americans’ situation in the United States. Though she had long been exposed to racially suspect representations of blackness such as the Dutch Christmas tradition of Zwarte Piet or Black Pete (Nuraini), in 1955 she had spent time studying and translating a representation of blackness excerpted from the 1940 novel *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*, by US southern writer Carson McCullers. This was a work that Wright himself had celebrated, describing it as a novel whose “white writer . . . hand[ed] Negro characters with as much . . . justice as those of her own race” (“Inner”). Nuraini’s chosen excerpt focused specifically on the character Benedict Copeland, described in her translation’s introduction as “a Negro doctor, who wants to see an improvement in the lives of his people and devotes himself to this cause, only to become alienated and isolated from his people and his family because they do not understand him” (Redaksi March–April 1955). Now, observing Wright speak at Takdir’s villa, Nuraini may well have wondered how Copeland’s intellectualism-induced isolation corresponded to Wright’s exile in Paris. In any case, as she later recalled, the Konfrontasi Study Club was aware that Wright was one of the few black writers in whom white Americans seemed interested, and she had the impression that somehow the United States wanted to claim credit for Wright’s accomplishments (Nuraini).

Following the weekend retreat, Wright’s lecture “American Negro Writing” appeared in apparently complete form in the May–June 1955 issue of the study club’s journal, *Konfrontasi*, which was edited at the time by Takdir, Vuyk, and Hazil. In a highly unusual move, the editors opted to publish the lecture in English. As they explained to *Konfrontasi’s* readers,

*In this issue we are including the text of a lecture on “American Negro Literature” [sic] which was given by the famous American Negro writer, Richard Wright, to a meeting of members of the Konfrontasi Study Club and a number of other interested persons. We are publishing the lecture in English, because most of the poems and the characteristics of the language quoted in it make the lecture very difficult, if not impossible, to translate.* However, at the end of the discussion we are including a short summary of its contents in Indonesian. (Redaksi May–June 1955)

*Konfrontasi’s* stance on the difficulties of translating poetry from English to Indonesian gave rise to what is the first known English-language publication of the lecture that Wright published two years later in *White Man, Listen!* as “The Literature of the Negro in the United States.”

The fact that “American Negro Writing” was delivered and indeed found its first English-language publication in Indonesia prompts questions that promise a reconsideration and reevaluation of *White Man*. Wright dedicated this volume to “the Westernized and tragic elite of Asia, Africa, and the West Indies—the lonely outsiders who exist precariously on the cliff-like margins of many cultures—men who are distrusted, misunderstood, maligned, criticized by Left and Right, Christian and Pagan—men who carry . . . the best of two worlds” (vii). Intriguingly, from Wright’s own perspective, his lecture for the Konfrontasi Study Club was given for members of the very group to which he dedicated his book of lectures. Wright at one point described this “elite of Asia, Africa, and the West Indies” as generally “more Western than the West” (White 56), and, as already noted, he used this same language in his caption for a photograph of Takdir Alisjahbana that was included in the British edition of *The Colour Curtain*.

Given that Wright delivered this lecture to and discussed this lecture with members of the same “tragic elite” to whom he dedicated *White Man*, it is strange to consider that his introduction to *White Man* elides Indonesia from the list of countries where he presented the lectures contained in the book. Indonesia receives no mention as a lecturing venue, but Wright does not neglect to mention that his lectures were given in Italy, the Netherlands, Germany, France, and Sweden (15). Certainly, the book’s framing as addressed specifically to the *White Man* is enhanced by Wright’s opening list of European venues, while this same framing does not accommodate the image of Wright delivering the volume’s lectures to an Indonesian or more generally Asian-African audience. And yet this observation on the book’s title further begs the question of why Wright would frame his published lectures as directed toward white people when he specifically chose to deliver at least one among the four to Indonesians. (No doubt the Indonesian venue is also a reminder that in September 1956 Wright gave another of his *White Man* lectures, “Tradition and Industrialization,” to another group of seemingly tragic elite at “a kind of second Bandung,” the First International Congress of Negro Writers and Artists in Paris [Baldwin, “Princes” 25, 46–48].) In what ways has Wright’s framing of *White Man*, as a book of lectures directed toward white people and delivered in Europe, stymied our understanding of his commentary on and interactions with the elite to whom he dedicated his book? In what ways has this framing unnecessarily—and ahistorically—limited our approaches to Wright’s exilic commentaries on the postcolonial world? Access to *Konfrontasi’s* synopsis of “American Negro Writing” offers the opportunity to consider how a few of the postcolonial elite grappled with Wright’s commentary after the Bandung Conference.
Also contributing to this opportunity is the background and commentary on Wright that the Konfrontasi editors provided in their editorial introduction to the May–June issue in which the lecture was published. On one level, this introduction may be seen as a simple effort to offer Indonesian readers, many of whom would have been unfamiliar with Wright, a set of basic contexts for understanding the lecture. Such may be the case with the Indonesian editors’ explanation that Wright was born in one of the Southern states of the United States of America, where discrimination against the Negro race is more overt than in the North, and where a Negro, if he wants to survive and earn a living, must adopt a servile and self-effacing disposition, or pretend to do so. Like tens of thousands of other colored people, Richard Wright moved to the North, because his inner self would not allow him to accept all the restrictions that white society in the South placed on his people. (Redaksi May–June 1955)

Yet other portions of this introduction extend to commentary that is revealing in relation to the place of the concept of race in modern Indonesia and the universal humanist assumptions held by members of the study club. The editors remark that Wright and Bigger Thomas, the tragic protagonist of his Native Son, are very similar in the following respects: neither of them will surrender to the harsh realities of the time, and they both seek revenge in the form of an open and honest situation that values all human beings. Bigger fails in his struggle with fate, but Richard Wright has succeeded. Despite his poverty, his tenacity when it came to reading enabled him to amass the knowledge that made it possible for him to explore his rebellious feelings through his intellect. The most important thing was that he was able to channel himself into writing, thus freeing himself from his inner complexities through writing. (Redaksi May–June 1955)

Here we see the universal humanist preoccupation with understanding the types of creative processes that result in mature works of literature. “Rebellious feelings” are mediated by the intellect, and “inner complexities” are resolved in the act of writing, producing a state of clarity that appears to transcend the confusion of emotional fixation. Only in this way, it is implied, does the writer overcome the “harsh realities of the time,” seeking to overcome injustice not through rebellion or overt activism but by bringing into being—through one’s own writing—an open and honest situation that values all human beings. These issues are especially apparent in the final sentence of the editors’ introductory remarks: “Even though he gained control over his problems in a rational sense, it is clear that in all his writing, as also in this lecture, he is still emotionally fixated on the problem of racial differences” (Redaksi May–June 1955). From the universal humanist point of view, Wright’s inability to free himself emotionally from “the problem of racial differences” is an impediment to a breakthrough into genuine humanism in his writing.

The lecture itself as published in Konfrontasi is very similar to “The Literature of the Negro in the United States” as it appeared two years later in White Man. Indeed, the two versions of this lecture often match up verbatim. The main difference is that the Konfrontasi version is somewhat shorter than the version that appears in White Man; a handful of passages of poetry and Wright’s accompanying commentary are absent from the Indonesian publication. These changes would be consistent with Wright’s desire to accommodate suggestions he may have received regarding a preferred time limit for the lecture. And, as would be expected, the Konfrontasi lecture is aware of its different rhetorical position in Indonesia. For instance, whereas Wright in White Man refers to the United States’ first president as “the Father of Our Country” (114), in the Konfrontasi lecture he simply refers to him as “Washington” (“American” 7). Similarly, while the White Man lecture argues that “the lives of American Negroes closely resemble your own” (108), the Konfrontasi lecture argues that “the lives of American Negroes closely resemble those of the other Americans” (“American” 3). Perhaps less expectedly, the Konfrontasi lecture elides references to Soviet Russia and communism with such consistency that these elisions can only be considered purposeful, whether on the part of Wright himself or the Konfrontasi editors. For instance, while the White Man lecture recounts that “Soviet Russia rose and sent out her calls to the oppressed” (141), the Konfrontasi lecture credits others: “Trade Union Leaders send out their calls to the oppressed” (“American” 22). Elsewhere, when the White Man lecture lists Russians among the groups who have been curious to know more “about the American Negro” (145), the Konfrontasi lecture replaces the word “Russians” with “Italians” (“American” 24). It is difficult to ascertain who made the decision to elide references to Soviet Russia from the speech. Might Wright have done so because he knew from previous conversations that his audience members (while largely socialist) were strongly opposed to Soviet-style communism? If so, Wright would have gone out of his way to accommodate this aversion, given that the earliest printed version of the lecture (which appeared in French in Jean-Paul Sartre’s journal Les Temps Modernes in 1948) conforms to the 1957 White Man version in including these references to Soviet Russia (Wright, “Littérature” 218, 220). There is also a possibility that Wright made these changes in response to an overt suggestion
by the editors of Konfrontasi, who may have been uncomfortable about the publication of positive endorsements of Russian communism in the magazine. This possibility is brought into doubt, however, by the fact that Konfrontasi's "Synopsis" of the lecture credits "the workers' movement of Western Europe and Russia" with energizing African American social engagement.

While the lecture itself is significant to the degree that it represents the first known English-language publication of the lecture Wright later included in White Man, it is Konfrontasi's "Synopsis" that is most important to understanding Wright's engagements with and reception by the "tragic elite" to whom he dedicated White Man. The synopsis condenses and arranges Wright's words in a way that would have made them seem quite recognizable to an audience familiar with the Indonesian literary debates of the day, and indeed in a way quite germane to the peculiar stance the Konfrontasi Study Club was advancing in relation to the challenge that was being mounted by the Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakjat (LEKRA, Institute of People's Culture). Founded on 17 August 1950, LEKRA was an association of engaged artists, writers, and intellectuals with institutional links to the Partai Komunis Indonesia (PKI, Indonesian Communist Party). Within a year of its founding, on the first anniversary of the declaration of Indonesian independence commemorated in the sovereign new nation, LEKRA affiliates were actively contesting H. B. Jassin's claim that the spirit of the Indonesian revolution was embodied in the work of the Gelanggang-associated writers and their aesthetic ideology of universal humanism. In reply to Jassin's stance, key LEKRA theorists asserted that the "individualism" of the Gelanggang worldview needed to be replaced by an attitude of people-mindedness and an exposure of social ills and revolutionary aspirations through an uncompromising realist aesthetic (Akustia). In July 1955, LEKRA issued a revised version of its original 1950 Manifesto, adding a progressive internationalism to its fundamental outlooks and welcoming all Indonesian artists and cultural workers regardless of class background to its ranks, provided they shared an "emotional commitment to a free and self-reliant Indonesia, formed from a society based on justice and equality" (Foulcher, Social 29). Reflecting the Indonesian Communist Party's growing influence over national politics, LEKRA and its spokespeople were soon pursuing a vigorous anti-imperialism, directed primarily against Dutch cultural influence through the activities of sticasa and against the United States for its perceived promotion of the "American way of life" through commercial cultural exports such as film and popular music (Foulcher, Social 34–36).

In this climate of LEKRA's increasing ascendancy, the outlooks associated with universal humanism and groups like the Konfrontasi circle were increas-

ingly being criticized as the expression of an unhealthy bourgeois cultural nationalism. These accusations were keenly felt, and journals like Konfrontasi were already under pressure to defend their cultural outlooks through argument and example. Hence, when Konfrontasi printed Wright's English-language description of the rise of class consciousness in recent African American literature and Wright's illustration of his "identification with the workers of other lands" in his own poetry (Wright, "American," 23), the journal could well have been seen as endorsing the arguments being put forward at the time by the study club's own ideological opponents. The trajectory of Wright's lecture was potentially particularly troubling for his Konfrontasi audience because his remarks on the origins of African American literature in the shift from "a pre-individualistic culture" to a culture of "stolid individualism" (4) established distinct parallels with the way cultural development was conceived in Indonesian thinking at this time. In tracing the ways individualism did not guarantee the African American writers admission into "the culture of their nation" and obliged them to hurl "pleading words again[st] the deaf ears of white America" before turning to a collective identification and outright revolt (13), Wright was suggesting that a writer who identified with the sufferings of his or her people could not turn away from writing that maintained the interests of those people in mind. Rather, a writer must strive to be a part of the people's struggle for justice. This was precisely the call that LEKRA was issuing to Indonesian writers at this time, so in the context of his Konfrontasi lecture, Wright could well have been seen as endorsing the Communist Party/LEKRA aesthetic that his Indonesian hosts had assumed he had abandoned, given what they knew of Wright's anti-Communist statements in The Outsider and his contribution to the anti-Communist essay collection The God That Failed.

In the Indonesian-language synopsis of Wright's lecture, we see Konfrontasi's response to the challenge the lecture represented. This challenge is met head-on, with an opening reference to Wright's "political-sociological" approach and the suggestion that this "rather limited" viewpoint will provoke a question in the mind of readers as to the true "value" of African American literature. Yet Wright is clearly recognized as an internationally regarded figure. Her own center of Western Europe's culture, so the content of his lecture is framed in terms that make it amenable to universal humanist aesthetics. This is achieved first by the suggestion that the value of a work of literature is determined by its honest mirroring of "the life of humankind" and the vicissitudes of human experience. As these qualities are undeniably present in the examples of African American literature Wright quotes in his lecture, the synopsis argues, the reader can be confident that Wright is speaking
of the real thing, literature that comes from the heart of the individual author, not programmed according to external demands, as was the case—in the Konfrontasi view—with the “realism” LEKRA was espousing.

When the synopsis reaches the conclusion of Wright’s lecture, it is brought face-to-face with Wright’s endorsement of engaged writing in defense of an oppressed people. And Konfrontasi acknowledges Wright’s valorization of African American writers’ confrontation with racial oppression and the need for collective action, even though this acknowledgment clearly reveals the lecture’s ideological alignment as heading in the direction of LEKRA’s stance. However, in a final twist, Wright’s description of the call for action to end racial oppression in recent African American writing is recouped in the name of universal humanism (Foulcher, “Bringing” 36). In the words of the synopsis, African American writers are coming to realize that the African American struggle is “the struggle of humanity that was being fought out all over the earth.” From the universal humanist viewpoint, the common struggle of humanity is the proper preserve of the writer, even though it may take a specific form according to the writer’s honest engagement with his or her own specific experiences. In this way, Wright’s defense of politically engaged writing is effectively brought within bounds consistent with Konfrontasi’s outlook, in a way that evokes an image of Wright belonging to the universal humanist camp rather than to the Konfrontasi group’s opponents.7

The “Synopsis” made Wright’s lecture seem ideologically familiar enough that when Tukidir Alijahbana shortly thereafter published his study Sejarah Bahasa Indonesia (History of the Indonesian Language), the book’s back cover included an advertisement for Konfrontasi that mentioned Wright. The advertisement stated, “This young country of ours is faced with a range of issues all at one time, covering political, economic, cultural, social, educational, and legal matters, as well as various other questions.” Until now, it explained, “there has been little real effort to make any in-depth study . . . of these issues in relation to . . . Indonesia as well as the world.” Pointing toward Konfrontasi’s attempt to “fill this gap,” the advertisement named six articles it had published during its first year of existence, including “American Negro Writing” by Richard Wright (“Tiga”). The inclusion of Wright’s lecture, the only text on the list written by a non-Indonesian, was likely intended to show potential readers that Konfrontasi’s concern with issues facing “this young country” also incorporated international perspectives.

Intriguingly, the very issue of perspective had surfaced prominently at the closing of Konfrontasi’s “Synopsis,” although there would have been some confusion as to how Wright’s statements on perspective ought to be interpreted. In both the 1955 Konfrontasi lecture and the later version of the same lecture included in his 1957 White Man, Wright concludes by quoting material from his 1941 book 12 Million Black Voices. In the 1957 version, one of Wright’s excerpts from 12 Million Black Voices appears as follows: “Look at us and know us and you will know ourselves, for we are you, looking back at you from the dark mirror of our lives!” (Wright, “Literature” 146; Wright, 12 Million 146). Though this quote does not appear in the text of Wright’s Konfrontasi lecture, it appears in Konfrontasi’s “Synopsis,” as a concluding and apparently informally delivered “rallying cry”: “Lihatlah kepada kami, kenalah kami dan saudara akan kenal diri sendiri, karena kami adalah saudara, kami jang memandang kepada saudara dari katja gelap kehidupan kami!” (“Synopsis” 28). This is a direct translation of Wright’s English-language excerpt from 12 Million Black Voices. Yet in this case, even a direct translation introduces distortions. When he wrote these words in 12 Million Black Voices, Wright was speaking to white Americans, asking white Americans to see themselves in the faces and lives of black Americans. Yet the Indonesians in his 1955 audience (whether auditors in Tugu or readers of Konfrontasi) would likely have understood Wright to be asking Indonesians to see themselves in the faces and lives of African Americans. This interpretation may indeed have been what Wright intended, given that in the more formal portion of his lecture he had stated that the “voice of the American Negro is rapidly becoming the most representative voice of oppressed people anywhere in the world today” (“American” 24). However, Wright certainly did not intend a second discrepancy in the quotation’s interpretation. Whereas Wright’s English-language rallying cry has Wright and other African Americans “looking back at you [white Americans or Indonesians] from the dark mirror of our lives,” Konfrontasi’s literal translation of “dark mirror” (i.e., “katja gelap”) may evoke either the image of a dark mirror or a dark pane of glass, such that some of Konfrontasi’s readers would have walked away from reading Wright’s rallying cry with the understanding that Wright was asserting that there existed a dark pane of glass between himself and his hosts. According to this understanding, the dark pane of glass might permit his hosts to see only an obscured and incomplete image of Wright while reciprocally permitting Wright to see only an obscured and incomplete image of his hosts. This would have been a misunderstanding of Wright’s intentions, but, as demonstrated later in this collection by Indonesian commentary on Wright after his visit, the image of colored or distorting glass became a recurring metaphor for the ways some Indonesians understood Wright’s views on Indonesia.8
In the above essay, the famous American writer Richard Wright lays out the development of Negro literature, which he sees mainly from a political-sociological angle.

Although this rather narrow viewpoint will raise questions and some hesitation in the reader—what really is the value of Negro literature?—we are certain that after reading this strong and convincing account, the reader will feel satisfied. Richard Wright's analysis portrays the life of his community with all its hardships, as reflected in the quotations of poetry and other examples of Negro literature. And isn't the value of a literary creation partly determined by the work's honesty or otherwise, its faithful mirroring of the life of humankind and the vicissitudes of life experienced to the full?

The author, who delivered this essay as a lecture to an evening meeting of "Konfrontasi" in early May, began with a comparison between a society he called "an entity" and a society that had begun to assume the individualist characteristics of "identity." The "original" Negro communities (referring to Africa, before Negroes were sold as slaves to America) were actually no different from, for example, French settler communities in Quebec (Canada). They were both holistic and integral communities in which there was no difference between the life of an individual and that of his group as a whole, no difference between life, culture, and politics.

We can add here that this type of holistic community was also familiar in Indonesia in former times. The organic community was shattered and dispersed in the United States by the forces of modernization in almost all fields in the course of the last two centuries.

The lines of division between the American people in this connection can be termed "Jim Crowism," or, in everyday language, white vs. colored. The causes of this "split" can of course be discussed further, but because this subject has been covered in books by both American and non-American writers, the author did not pursue it here. A discussion of this type would also take him too far away from his exposé.

A phenomenon that is readily apparent in other countries is that a Negro, because of his ability to adapt to his surroundings, can integrate into the culture of the country and the people around him wherever he finds himself living. The author offered the examples of Alexander Dumas and Alexander Pushkin, figures whose names are familiar in the world of literature, as a French writer and a Russian poet.

It is a different matter in the United States.

There it is possible to find a few Negroes who have integrated into white American culture, but these Negroes are exceptions to the rule. In general, the Negroes live separately from their white-skinned compatriots. They are separate, because they have been segregated from the rest of society by white people, both during the time when slavery was rampant and also after it was abolished. They are not allowed to assimilate, nor allowed to mix with white people because it is forbidden by law and as by customary practice within American society. Segregation still exists.

This leaves the Negro to ponder on his unhappy fate, living with suffering and hardship that he can only express in his poetry, in his song and music, and in his church. And even though there have been attempts by the central government to introduce desegregation (especially in recent times), the old law that says "nature is stronger than nurture" still applies.

Richard Wright gave many examples drawn from poetry to show the suffering of the Negro, portraying the Negro's love for the land where he lived, but also the feelings of hatred and resentment that burn within him toward his tyrannical Great White Master. Negroes have fled from the interior to the cities in the southern United States, and from the cities in the South to the cities of the North. In wave after wave they have fled the misfortune, the suffering, the lash of the whip, and also rape, in search of safety and protection. But it has all been in vain.

The abolition of slavery, emancipation, and later industrialization, have not changed the fate of Negroes generally. On the contrary, they too have been divided up into stratified groups: rich alongside poor, advocates of one cause alongside advocates of another. Negro writers have also been subject to this kind of stratification. The group the author labels "the Narcissists" continue to wade in the mire of their degradation by writing poetry and prose that merely describes how the Negro suffers, how he finds pleasure, how he indulges his passions, and the like.

Alongside this whimpering group there are other groups; from among these we may mention the group that is really still looking for its own forms, which the author calls "The Forms of Things Unknown."

Among them are those who pursue material concerns, but there are also those with spiritual ideals, because they realize that through (Christian) religion, they have entered Western culture. And truly, in religion they feel as though they are crossing the threshold into the culture of their country and
people, the American people! But neither can religion bring these two different skin colors together, because for them it is a Negro church, just as their schools are Negro schools, their hotels and restaurants are Negro establishments, and so on and so on.

Unification with the lives and culture of their compatriots is forever out of reach, even though in times of crisis or war they have stood together with whites to defend their country and people. .......... 11

There came a point, however, when the socialist movement, the workers' movement of Western Europe and Russia seemed to beckon them, invite them to stand shoulder to shoulder in defense of the oppressed and downtrodden. 12 That call received a warm welcome among the Negroes, as it did also among writers. The Negro began to realize that he was not alone in his suffering, that in other countries as well there was still a great deal of oppression and exploitation of colored peoples by white people, and even of their fellow white people in weak economic circumstances.

And so, on the other side of the literary world from Phyllis Wheatley, there appeared Margaret Walker and dozens of other poets who began to realize that the suffering of their people, the suffering of the Negro, was the struggle of humanity that was being fought out all over the earth. 13 And Richard Wright closed his essay with a rallying cry: "Look at us and know us and you will know yourselves, for we are you, looking back at you from the dark mirror of our lives!"

Notes

1. In the conclusion to his report on this 1951 gathering, Achdát suggested that ideological tensions between participants were dissipated by the close personal interactions these weekend meetings encouraged (244). Although by 1955 such relaxed interaction between ideological opponents was no longer the norm, Achdát's comments aptly portray the camaraderie that these meetings generated among those who took part in them.

2. See Vuyk's "A Weekend with Richard Wright" in part III.

3. Unless otherwise noted, quotations and narratives in this paragraph are drawn from Vuyk's "A Weekend with Richard Wright," included in part III.

4. Wright's description of this particular trip to the mountains is not the same event as the weekend of his lecture for Konfrontasi. Wright spoke to the study club toward the end of his stay in Indonesia, on Sunday, 1 May. But his journal records an earlier trip, occurring before the Bandung Conference, probably on Saturday, 16 April, or Sunday, 17 April, while on route to Bandung from Jakarta. The 16 or 17 April visit to the mountains may be the same as the visit during which Wright spoke with Mochtar, Nuraini, and Vuyk, as recorded in Vuyk's "A Weekend with Richard Wright."

5. Nuraini's excerpt was the fifth chapter of The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter and was published in Konfrontasi's March-April 1955 issue, immediately prior to the issue containing Wright's lecture (McCullers).

6. The Indonesian text here is not completely clear. It appears that a word such as bahasa (language) has been omitted after sifat (characteristics).

7. It is true that Wright himself provided the cue for this interpretation of his lecture in his comment, "I know that many of you are shaking heads and wondering what value there is in writing like that . . . ." and his explanation, "We write only of what life gives us in the form of experience. And [there] is a value in what we Negro writers say" (24).

However, the Indonesian synopsis gives these remarks a centrality that is out of proportion to their place in the lecture as a whole, in order to position Wright's words firmly within the universal humanist argument.

8. For further discussion of the difference between dark mirror and kata gelap, see Roberts 155-69.

9. Here, the "Synopsis" suggests that Wright gave his lecture in the evening, seemingly as a standard Sunday evening lecture at Taksir's villa, as was the typical program for Konfrontasi. This suggestion is inconsistent with Bob Vuyk's memory of the event, in which Wright's place in the standard procession of events gets pushed to the following morning due to a dinner party on Saturday night. Given that it is confirmed that Wright gave his lecture on Sunday, 1 May 1955 (see "Who's Doing What," 4 May 1955, in A Sheaf of Newspaper Articles, included in part III), it is clear that Wright's lecture was not delivered in a way consistent with Konfrontasi's standard Saturday-evening program. It may be that in the "Synopsis," Konfrontasi decided to refer to an "evening meeting" because this phrase best conveyed to its audience the genre of meeting (one of the well-known Tugu meetings at Taksir's villa).

10. In the source text, this sentence includes the ironic term Sang Kafir Pathi, which we have translated as "Great White Master."

11. These extended ellipses are present in the source text.

12. Notably, even though Konfrontasi discusses Soviet Russia here, it functionally denies that a concern with workers' movements is confined to Communist countries. Consistent with the approach of the CCF, this rhetorical position emphasizes the importance of left-oriented politics that are distinctly non-Communist.

13. The appearance of the spelling Phyllis (rather than the correct spelling Phillis) occurs in both the Konfrontasi synopsis and Wright's English language lecture ("American" 7).
Richard Wright's "The Artist and His Problems" (1955)

On the evening of the day following his mountainside lecture for the Konfrontasi Study Club, Wright was back in Jakarta, at the Balai Budaya, or Cultural Affairs Center, administered by the BMKN. Incorporating a large meeting hall that also functioned as an exhibition gallery, the Balai Budaya was at this time a popular meeting place for Jakarta's young artists and writers (Aji, Anak 103). During Wright's few weeks in Indonesia, the building had been the venue for an Indonesian art exhibition, the screening of a British and a Russian film, and, at the very end of April, an evening commemorating the sixth anniversary of the death of the great Indonesian poet Chairil Anwar (Program), whose short life had galvanized the universalist ideals of Wright's main interlocutors. But tonight, at the beginning of May, the Balai Budaya was the venue for a lecture by Wright himself.

Organized by PEN Club Indonesia and the BMKN, Wright's 2 May lecture was published in Mochtar Lubis's newspaper Indonesia Raya on 22 May 1955, two-and-a-half weeks after Wright left Indonesia. It appeared as an article titled "Seniman dan Masaalahja" (The Artist and His Problems) in the newspaper's regular cultural and literary column, Kebudayaan-Kesusastraan.1
Whereas Wright's lecture for the Konfrontasi Study Club was published in English in the club's bimonthly magazine, his PEN Club/BMKN lecture was published only in Indonesian. And whereas Wright's Konfrontasi lecture eventually found its second English-language publication in White Man, Listen! as "The Literature of the Negro in the United States," his PEN Club/BMKN lecture has until now never been republished, in either Indonesian or English.

We have prepared this version of "The Artist and His Problems" based on two source texts: the article "Seniman dan Masaalajnja" as it appeared in Indonesia Raya in May 1955 and a set of more extensive typescript notes that Wright made in preparation for the lecture, which are held among the Richard Wright Papers in Yale University's Beinecke Library. The Indonesia Raya article, which has the quality of polished prose, provides the bulk of the material and is highly valuable for providing a primary account of what Wright said during the lecture and what his Indonesian audience understood of it. And though the Indonesia Raya version excludes about a third of the material that Wright included in his notes (and, less often, the notes do not contain some of the material published in Indonesia Raya), the two versions of the lecture usually match up sentence for sentence, on the level of ideas, if not word for word. However, the differences between the two versions—ranging from passages in the notes that are missing from Indonesia Raya to sentences in Indonesia Raya that are missing from the notes and to word-level mismatches between the two versions—provide useful, if inevitably speculative, insight into the process that gave rise to the version of the lecture Wright gave on 2 May 1955 as well as the version of the lecture published by Indonesia Raya later that same month.

Reading through Wright's typescript lecture notes, one is struck that they frequently address issues that may not have been well suited for an Indonesian audience of the day. Much of this material is absent from the lecture as published in Indonesia Raya. At times, for instance, the notes reference names, ideas, and nuances that only a very cosmopolitan Indonesian audience (or a highly educated European or American audience, for that matter) would have understood in the 1950s. Some of the more involved portions of Wright's notes include remarks on the stark contrast between Gertrude Stein's aesthetics and nuclear-age physics, the question of synthesizing subjective and objective modes of aesthetic expression, and the topic of phenomenology as advanced by Jean-Paul Sartre and Edmund Husserl. Other portions of the notes seem a bit out of tune with Indonesian cultural conditions. At one point, the notes reference Chinese premier Zhou Enlai's Bandung Conference affirmation of his disbelief in God, and Wright subsequently discusses the idea of physics and a godless universe. At another point, Wright singles out the contributions of specifically Jewish writers to the project of integrating morality and art. In Indonesia, where Muslim-based political parties were a part of every ruling coalition during this period of parliamentary democracy, and where acknowledgment of religious faith had been enshrined in the state philosophy (Pancasila), atheism and Jewish aesthetic contributions may have been seen as inappropriate topics for publication in a popular newspaper. Despite Indonesia Raya's own secular nationalism and the open debate encouraged by the lecture's venue at Balai Budaya, these references may well have seemed uncomfortably controversial.

Given that these types of passages were excluded from the version of the lecture that was published in Indonesia Raya, one can imagine the following and necessarily speculative scenario occurring at some point between the Bandung Conference's conclusion on 24 April and Wright's 2 May delivery of "The Artist and His Problems." During this time, Wright would have written notes for his lecture and then showed them to his host, Mochtar Lubis, in preparation for the PEN Club/BMKN event. Mochtar may have suggested portions to cut from the lecture, based on his knowledge of audience interest and level of understanding. Importantly, Mochtar also would have been thinking about the lecture's potential for translation into Indonesian as he suggested sections to cut. As Mochtar knew, the Indonesian English-speakers in Wright's audience would speak English as a second or more likely third or fourth language (with English following their regional languages, the national Indonesian language, and—among the older generation—the Dutch language), and some in the audience would speak very little if any English. It is likely that Mochtar suggested it would be best if he himself provided a running Indonesian translation of the lecture as Wright gave it. Based on these suggestions from Mochtar, Wright may have prepared a second set of simplified notes, shorter than the original, to hand over to Mochtar for translation ahead of time. Though obviously speculative, this scenario would be consistent with the recollections of Ajip Rosidi, who attended Wright's PEN Club/BMKN lecture as a young Indonesian writer at the age of seventeen. As Ajip recalled during a 2013 conversation with Brian Roberts, he himself could not follow all of the lecture because Wright delivered it in English, but, looking back on it, Ajip believed Mochtar Lubis translated it into Indonesian so that non-English-speakers could understand it (Ajip, Interview). This scenario, involving two sets of lecture notes (one to hand over to Mochtar and one that Wright kept and that eventually found its way into the Beinecke collection), would also explain the differences between the extant notes and the Indonesia Raya version of the lecture, including the sections from the notes that are elided from Indonesia Raya and also the sentences included in Indonesia Raya (on Wright's trip to the Gold Coast and issues of temporality in The Outsider) that are nowhere to be found in the lecture notes.5
Whatever the scenario, as we have prepared this English-language version of "The Artist and His Problems," we have relied primarily on "Seniman dan Masaalahnja" as a means of giving readers access to how Wright's Indonesian audience would have understood him in 1955. Based on Ajip Rosidi's 2013 recollections of the event, Wright probably delivered his lecture to about thirty people, but the spoken lecture (even as it was likely supplemented by Mochtar's translation at the event itself) would have been difficult for many audience members to understand or fully absorb, so the translated version as published in Mochtar's newspaper would have helped solidify the understanding of those who were in the audience while also providing a wider Indonesian readership with access to Wright's stance on artists generally and writers in particular.

Yet even as we have been concerned with how Wright's Indonesian audience understood him, we have also been concerned with Wright's intentions. To this end, in back-translating the published version of the talk, we have carefully compared our English-language translation with Wright's typescript notes, working to integrate Wright's English words and phrases whenever this course of action also permits us to convey the meaning of the lecture as it was documented in Indonesia Raya. Throughout, we have used explanatory notes to discuss where and how the two versions depart from each other in significant ways at the sentence or phrase level. Finally, wherever the Indonesia Raya version of the lecture does not contain material that is included in the notes, we have reinserted the elided material and designated these reinsertions by placing the text in italics. In reinserting this material based on sometimes rough notes, we have followed Wright's own ethic, which he stated in reference to his preparations to publish his White Man, Listen! lectures: "In these pages,...I've deliberately preserved the spoken tone" (16).

Wright delivered "The Artist and His Problems" in Jakarta at a stage in his public life when he was giving many lectures. From 1950 through 1956, he lectured for the Italian Cultural Association in Genoa and Rome, for STICUSA in Amsterdam, for the CCF and the German publisher Claassen Verlag in Hamburg, for Présence Africaine in Paris, and for the Swedish publisher Bonnier in Stockholm, Uppsala, Oslo, Gothenburg, Lund, and Copenhagen. These talks found their way into Wright's four-lecture collection White Man, Listen!, as Wright explains in his introduction to that publication (15). Taken together, Wright stated, the four lectures "made a comment, connected and coherent, upon white-colored, East-West relations in the world today" (16). Bringing "The Artist and His Problems" into the orbit of Wright's other lectures from this period—as a sort of lost fifth lecture from the era of White Man, Listen!—permits a greater view of his East-West thematic, as this lecture was of course prepared and given specifically for an Indonesian audience in the wake of the Asian-African Conference in Bandung.

While Wright's lecture reflects the larger synthesis he was arriving at through previous travels and writings on Africa and Spain, "The Artist and His Problems" is also distinctly of the time and place of its presentation: modern Indonesia during the months surrounding the Bandung Conference. Notably, Wright refers to his discussions with several Indonesian writers with whom he had been speaking throughout his visit and not simply during his Konfrontasi lecture of the previous day.¹ He reminds his Indonesian interlocutors that the genre of the novel emerged out of specific class conditions in the West. Indonesian writers, Wright suggests, will do well to remember that because of the novel's genesis from within these particular class conditions, the notion of time as showcased in the traditional novel may not resonate with Indonesian senses of temporality. Hence, Indonesia's writers will need to evoke senses of time in their fiction that correspond to Indonesia's specific conditions. Wright predicts that if Indonesian writers work with passion, they may be able to develop new senses of time and new forms. When Wright mentions his "discussions with several Indonesian writers" and his "impression that there are a lot of people in Indonesia asking why the novel is not as developed here as it would like it to be," we have a view of Wright's encounter with a debate that had dominated much of the discussion among literary circles in Jakarta in the previous year or two. At issue was a "crisis" evoked by the supposed loss of the creative élan of the years of national revolution, when both poetry and fiction had blossomed under circumstances of high national drama and optimism about the Indonesian future. Some of the most vocal proponents of the notion of "crisis" in Indonesian literature at this time were associated with the Konfrontasi circle, so it is most likely that Wright's understanding of the debate was mediated through this connection, perhaps even through his recent discussion "about Indonesian literature" with the study club in Tugu (Kiuchi and Hakutani 326). If so, his comments on the problems of form and time at this point in the lecture can be seen as a response to issues that this particular group had raised with him.² Wright's direct engagement with specific debates and concerns among Indonesian literary figures seems sharper in the lecture's Indonesia Raya version than in the typescript, an effect produced by the elimination (whether by Mochtar's or Wright's own design) of some of the potentially distracting discussions contained in the notes.

In weighing in on the ongoing "crisis" discussions of Indonesian literature, and in discussing Zhou Enlai's recently delivered comments at the Bandung Conference, Wright was in the process of integrating his Indonesian travels into a larger synthesis regarding the international situation and
the postcolonial world, bringing these experiences into dialogue with what he had previously experienced in Africa. The Bandung Conference's impress on and integration into his larger synthesis became clear after he returned from Indonesia. Prompted by what he had witnessed in Southeast Asia, he delivered a lecture titled "The Psychological Reactions of Oppressed People," which conceives of the two continents of Asia and Africa as a unitary bloc, as "Asia and Africa" (White 31), home to "Asian-African minds" (38). This lecture speaks of the "Western-educated" political figures Wright had met "in Asia and Africa"—Nkrumah, Nasser, Soekarno, and Nehru—and discusses their "negative loyalty" to the West in tandem with African Americans' negative loyalty to the United States (41). And in another White Man lecture, "Tradition and Industrialization," Wright again turned to Soekarno, Nehru, Nasser, and Nkrumah, saying that they "will necessarily use quasi-dictatorial methods to hasten the process of social evolution and to establish order in their lands." Here, Wright reminds readers that these Asian and African leaders are only doing what the West has done repeatedly (White 101). Wright remarks that "this elite in Asia and Africa constitutes islands of free men, the freest men in all the world today" (97). Perhaps not coincidentally, Wright's metaphor of postcolonial leaders as a planet-spanning island chain emerged in a lecture given after he witnessed Asia and Africa's convergence on the Indonesian archipelago for the Bandung Conference.

On the same day that Wright delivered "The Artist and His Problems," Michael Josselson, back in Paris, wrote a letter to Moctar Lubis, asking, "How did Richard Wright's visit work out?" A week after Wright's departure and a week and a half before publishing the lecture in Indonesia Raya, Moctar replied: "We enjoyed Richard Wright's visit very much. He gave lectures to a small group of Indonesian writers, and to an audience organized by the Indonesian Cultural Association [and] the PEN Club."6

The Artist and His Problems 6
by Richard Wright

SOURCE LANGUAGES: INDONESIAN AND ENGLISH

Editors' Introduction: This article is a lecture given by the famous American Negro writer, Richard Wright, at an event organized by the Council for Deliberations on National Culture (KMKN) and PEN CLUB INDONESIA in the Cultural Affairs Center (Balai Budaya), Jakarta, on the evening of 2 May last.7

In discussing these issues confronting the artist, I would like to explain first of all that the artist I have in mind in this lecture is the writer. I am a writer, and I feel that in speaking about the artist and his problems, it would be bet-

The writer and his audience

In the contemporary world, one problem is the relationship between the writer and his audience. This is vastly different from the situation in former times, when stories were told among small groups of people who received the stories directly from the mouth of a storyteller, and experiences were passed on to listeners close at hand. Today we see that the connection between the writer and his audience has become distant, and has lost the personal dimension. Now the writer writes not solely to tell listeners about his experiences, but more to convey something to his readers. Modern society has splintered into various different fragments, and the artist is searching for human unity, a unity which economics and politics have sundered.8 In today's world we also see that the writer cannot know in advance what responses his work might evoke. Every time he writes, it is like a spark flying into darkness. He hurries noise out and waits for the echoes to come back. In fact, we might observe that in our world, the artist is someone who exists in solitude. This is very different from the position of the artist in the past; now he does not have people supporting and helping him.9

Today, the artist has no personal relationship with his public.10

The increasing modernization of human life and the new experiences humanity is undergoing make it impossible for the sensitive artist to accept the old forms of expression.11

For example, Walt Whitman, the American poet, left the old forms behind and sought his own new forms. Similarly in France we find that poets have gone in search of new forms. In my opinion, the search for new forms isn't simply experimentation for its own sake. On the contrary, it is motivated by a real necessity. But new forms quickly became accepted; and this made Gertrude Stein say that classics were what had been classified.12 I myself fully accept these innovations, and the search for new forms conforming to new experience. However, I also believe that these new forms of expression must be driven by a passion that the writer wholeheartedly feels, not just by a need to display his technical ability.13

Time as an element in art

When I visited the Gold Coast in Africa some time ago, I noticed how time occupied a position in the outlooks of the Negro people there that was quite different from Western people's view of time.14 Africans, whose way of thinking...
is calm and static, have a different conception of time. For them, living in a world of tribal allegiances, time is cyclical. This differs, for example, from the Western conception of time, which is linear and progressive, moving from a point in the past toward a point in the future.

The society and religion of a particular region or nation is built on a sense of time. In Indonesia, I feel there are still lingering remnants of the sense of time I just described, making many times exit in your land. A writer who is not faced with this problem of time is blessed indeed. I myself, when I was writing The Outsider, felt very much aware of it. The main character in that book belongs to a social class whose sense of time is not dynamic and progressive, because it has little hope for the future. In my discussions with several Indonesian writers, I gained the impression that there are a lot of people in Indonesia asking why the novel is not as developed here as people would like it to be. Perhaps one of the reasons is that Indonesia has not yet seen the rise of a middle class, a class that has freed itself from the structures of a feudal society and launched itself on a path toward a new future, consciously in search of experience.

Even though the novel is a form of art, it must not be forgotten that the novel is a distinct form of expression of a particular social class, and that the novel is a form of expression belonging to that class. Perhaps in Indonesia the artist still needs to seek a conception of time that is right for his art, and as long as Indonesia is still in a time of transition, the majority of novels being written will be novels dealing with problems. Nevertheless, who knows? If Indonesian writers are able to perceive their situations keenly, and full of passion, it is possible that they will be able to create a new sense of time, and also new forms of expression attuned to the society around them and its sense of history.

What should the writer write about?

What should a writer write about? What subject matter should he use? There are writers who believe that it is they who choose what they will write about. However, it is actually more often the case that the work itself chooses the writer who will compose it. I'm speaking here of the writer who composes a work on the basis of his emotions, and these emotions are the products of his experiences. In fact, experience constitutes any artist's subject matter.

However, a given experience can mean different things to different people. Someone who seeks experience freely will find that he not only encounters a variety of experiences but also experiences from different levels of human life. The outlook of a Jack London is not the same as the outlook of a Marcel Proust, for example. As is reflected in our modern world, when an artist has no direct connection with his audience, he has to depend more on the way facts imprint themselves on his senses. In relying on his experiences, a writer hopes that what he writes will resonate in the hearts of others. Here we see how subjectivity, when it is thrown forth in art and moves other people, proves the oneness of mankind.

In fact, it is not true to say that a writer who is a genuine artist is able to choose a range of political material and just shape that material into an art form. What actually happens is that the political material takes hold of the artist in the form of his own experiences. For example, a writer may travel all over the world, a journey of thousands of miles, only in the end to write of what concerns him most personally. And that is as it should be.

The professional writer and the part-time writer

These days there are no longer wealthy patrons or royalty who underwrite writers. And except in Spain, there are no longer churches prepared to support an artist. For that reason, in our world the writer has to make a living from his writing, or, if he is unable to exist solely as a writer, he is forced to make a living as a journalist while he continues to write, or to write while working in some other job. Many of my friends have expressed their surprise that I am able to live just from my writing. Actually, this is not because of the way I write; it is possible because of the system of distribution and sale of books that operates at present in the United States. Book clubs, well-financed magazines, and so on make it possible for someone to live as a member of the middle class in America just by writing. In fact, the sale of just four stories to the Saturday Evening Post, for example, gives someone the ability to send his son or daughter to a university—Harvard University. To be able to write the kind of stories popular with magazines of this type, however, is harder than you might think.

The writer must produce stories he knows will be liked by the magazines' editors and also by their readers. His personal emotions have very little, if anything, to do with this type of writing. Some writers succeed in writing this way throughout their lives. They are probably very lucky.

It is very rare for a writer to be able to give expression to his deepest emotions and in doing so, to make a living from his writing. There are many who have to work as teachers or journalists and write at night, or on Sundays, when they don't have to go to work. Only those writers who are able to decide for themselves about the really important things in life can avoid the temptation of making a lot of money by writing in the way that those well-financed
magazines require. A true artist must be aware that art is a jealous queen. An artist cannot worship her and go picking other flowers at the same time.  

A part-time writer has an advantage over the professional writer. Being part of the workforce, he has a connection with society and with humanity. There is no danger he will be out of step with current affairs. 

In the end, a genuine and serious writer comes to realize that his subjects are only the outer dress of the emotions he wants to convey. As such, he writes not primarily to make more money, but with the intention of conveying to others the promptings of his heart. When he does this, there is the possibility that he will perform that rare miracle: he will say what he wishes and make money too.

Politics and art

I would like to make it clear that I in no way oppose writers taking sides in political affairs, or writers making use of their art as a vehicle for political ideas. In saying this, it is also not my intention to speak against what people call art for art's sake. There is such a thing as art for the sake of art, and it has its place. To say that one should not delight in the world as it is, nor write to convey such truth of the world, is to take away from human beings a vital part of existence. Some writers, Gautier, Stein, and a host of others have tried to do this. Stein wanted to make us aware, with words, of what simple existence meant, what it was. This is what I'd call the aesthetic component in life. The universe itself is a spectacle in which one can take endless delight. But to have such a diet of eternal sweetness is to do violence to life; we have also other and deeper needs. Men make theories about the world in which they live; they act to test those theories; and in doing so they learn about the exact nature of the environment. Knowledge of this sort is based on theory. At a time in history when Newton and others started discovering the laws of matter, a split came to be in man's consciousness: there was a public world and a world which was valid only for physics and science. The former was and is the world of our senses, the world we share with our fellow man, etc. This is a world of smiles and immediate beauty; men have made religions out of working out relations of harmony with it . . . Then there is the world which the atom bomb represents, the hydrogen bomb is the apex of. That world came into being slowly, with mathematics and physics as the tools to unearth and discover it. What is the relation between the cold and bleak world of the physicist and the world of the rose is a rose is a rose . . . ?

One thing is certain: the more that physics reveals that this world contains laws but not for us, that it is neutral, the more we find all concepts from God down to the concept of marriage to be simply man-made artifacts.  

Chou En-lai told us a few days ago that he did not believe in God; well, it was stating but a fact that millions suspect deep in their hearts and have acted upon. Meanwhile, in human life there are times when tradition, custom, and the old values can no longer provide people with the guidance they once did. At moments like this, leaders arise with new ideologies, and through the use of violence these leaders construct a new society by force. At such times, the position of the writer becomes terribly important. He may find himself in the role of a priest charged with producing replacements for holy scriptures like the Bible, the Qur'an, and so on. In these circumstances, he is hired by those in power to write in a way that leads the people to follow the will of the new government.

For this reason, it is not surprising that writers in Russia constitute the new elite and are the richest class in Russia. But where God reigns, where marriage is sacred, where traditional values rule, the writer is reduced to writing ads for Lux soap . . .  

I wonder such writers do not respect themselves; and when a writer must write copy to sell the painted beauty of Hollywood movie stars, he must hate himself, and the society in which he lives rightly despises him . . .

However, if there are readers who would proclaim how lucky the writer-made-priest is, they should remember that there is a great deal of danger in occupying such a position. Suppose, as a writer, you support the man in power in 1950, only to find that in 1955 a new man comes to power. In 1955 you might be shot for having supported the leaders who were in power in 1950. A friend of mine, Louis Adamic, was found murdered some years ago. He was a popular left-wing author, but he wrote for the side that . . . lost. Now he is dead. Two thousand years ago Aristotle said that literature is dangerous work. This is still true today. So, young writers, enter the political arena, go in search of glory and money, but don't be surprised if you end up losing . . . your head.

Subjective and objective and synthetic modes of expression

I'd like to begin by talking about subjectivity, objectivity, and what we'd call mystic visions or synthetic visions which are found in art by telling you a recent, personal experience. Not many weeks ago I was in Toledo and I sat in the Church of St. Thomas before El Greco's great painting, The Burial of Count Orgaz. I had before my eyes a plastic series of images of how the world looked to one man according to the Catholic relations' [religion's] interpretation of life. I was looking at art and ideology, art and mysticism blended into one declaration thrown up from one man's passion . . . Was it objective or subjective or only mysticism?  

I think from what I've said up to now that you know that I feel that the origins of all art are subjective; if that is so, how can one account for the blazing glory of El Greco's subjective vision being so real and urgent today . . .? Obviously, we are dealing with relations between
the aspects of one central fact. If a writer or an artist, for that matter, chooses to represent what he feels only in terms of the tiny movements of his consciousness, as in the so-called stream of consciousness methods made so famous by Joyce, he can do so; he leaves himself open to vagueness, to many interpretations. Or if he chooses to be objective, to give us a picture of life only in terms of the "facts," as he might call them, he cannot escape choosing his facts, and that gesture alone betrays the bias which he tries to hide but which cannot be hidden. Mysticism is generally such a vision as that painted by El Greco but without the support and sanction of the State or Church; it is a personal vision. The drawback of such visions is that they are mostly held together by arbitrary elements selected by the artist, and not agreed upon or approved by the society. Sometimes such visions carry great validity, such as the visions of Blake; at other times they are just simply the dull daydreams of men out of touch with reality. The moral of all of this is: if you are going to be a mystic, then be sure to get somebody to agree with you beforehand. A church, some government, or you will have a hard row to hoe . . .

Morality and art

There has been much, too much nonsense written on this topic. Art, some people say, ought to be moral; morals, say others, must be artistic. In fact, as a form of knowledge, art is an instrument of the truth, and as such, it is amoral. This does not mean the goal of art is only to affirm moral codes, because this would severely restrict its efforts to expose the truth of human experience. A while back I referred to the theoretic and aesthetic components of the human outlook. I think that there can be a union of the theoretic and aesthetic components. Many works of art have demonstrated this: I refer to Marcel Proust's Remembrance of Things Past, which is a truly enchanting, magical piece of work, a series of novels whose appeal to the senses excludes any message; yet it does carry a deep and meaningful moral lesson. I'd say that it is the East that stresses the aesthetic claim and the West that stresses the moral or theoretic claim. And the fact is that Jews, Proust, Kafka, Stein, have made brilliant contributions in the realm of combining the aesthetic and the moral in great art. In short, beauty is used to float hard facts of life to us. Such art is, of course, close to the pagan ideal. (I'm not talking now of a belief in God, but of the ability of some peoples to admit beauty into their moral notions, beauty such as one sees and feels in Spanish churches—and Spain I claim is the most pagan country of all Western Europe.) The other extreme is to be seen in the stern, bare, bleak Protestant churches of America, especially in the South, Midwest, and New England . . . And it is where these churches exist that industrialization is at its apex of development; and it is where Gothic cathedrals, compelling in their beauty, exist where you find no industrialization at all. Obviously, it takes a temperament that can stand outside of these two streams and appropriate the essentials of each and make something that is needed by the human heart, for the heart needs industry as much as it needs beauty, needs moral notions as much as it needs to exercise a delight in the world around it.

The last point

The last point I'd like to touch upon is something that came out of Europe, out of Germany and France. And that is the phenomenology of Sartre, Husserl, and others. William James as much as any of the Europeans called our attention to the fact that we could view the world as innocent people, and Husserl developed a method to make the world be for us something that we could "let be," something which we could contemplate.

Notes

1. The Indonesian title of Wright's lecture, "Seniman dan Masalahannya," uses gender-neutral language, but Wright's English-language lecture notes have Wright discussing the artist as a he. Consistent with Wright's own language, which was consistent with the conventions of mid-twentieth-century English, we have preserved the gender of Wright's idealized artist.

2. While "The Artist and His Problems" has not previously been republished, Michel Fabre's Richard Wright: Books and Writers (1990) published three brief excerpts from some notes that Wright wrote in preparation for the lecture (Fabre, Richard 34, 76, 128). Wright left these notes untitled, but the Beinecke has titled the typescript "On Writers and their Art." This typescript has remained virtually unreferenced, and when it has been cited, it has been misunderstood as either "a lecture in Bandung" (76) or an "interview [Wright] gave to a young Indonesian at Bandung" (Miller 178). Thanks to Tom Kuchi for alerting us to the existence of a copy of these typescript notes in Fabre's personal collection, and for sending us his photographs of the copy held by Fabre; based on the photographs, it is clear that Fabre's brief transcriptions relied on the same typescript as is held in the Beinecke Library.

3. Both the lecture notes preserved in the Beinecke collection and the Indonesia Raya version of Wright's lecture have an unfinished feel, with no sense of a conclusion. The Beinecke notes conclude with six lines beginning "The last point I'd like to touch upon . . ." which are struck out in a typewritten deletion, while the Indonesia Raya version ends six lines into "Morality and art," the penultimate section of the Beinecke notes. Both written texts thus suggest that Wright extemporized a conclusion to his lecture. The version as printed in Indonesia Raya is consistent with our suggestion that the lecture, as delivered at the Balai Budaya, was based on a redacted version of Wright's notes, adapted for an Indonesian audience, which did not include a written conclusion.
4. On Wright's conversations with Indonesian writers, see Wright, "Jakarta" 213–14, 120, 190.

5. In December 1954, H. B. Jassin made a decisive contribution to the "crisis" debate with a challenging address to a symposium in the Faculty of Literature at the University of Indonesia, titled "There Is No Crisis in Modern Indonesian Literature" (Teater, Modern 141; Jassin 3:1–25). Jassin’s address, which was in part a response to the views expressed by Asral Sari at the 1953 Amsterdam symposium on modern Indonesian literature (Asral, "Indonesische"), was contested by Beb Vejak, among others, in an article published in Indonesia Raya two weeks later (Jassin 3:29–32). The debate raged in both printed and spoken forums until the end of 1956, and Wright’s mention of the problems facing the development of the novel in Indonesia is a measure of its centrality in literary discussions at this time.


7. This editorial attribution is from 1955.

8. These introductory remarks, In discussing ... as a writer, appear in Indonesia Raya but are absent from Wright’s notes.

9. Indonesia Raya uses the phrase menyampaikan sesuatu pada pembatuan (which we have translated as to convey something to his readers), but Wright's notes use the verb to launch and use the word appeals in place of the vague word something.

10. While the Indonesia Raya lecture uses the phrase menyampaikan sesuatu (which we have rendered as searching for), Wright’s notes use the term reaffirm.

11. Wright’s notes make it clear that when, in Indonesia Raya, he references “people supporting and helping [the artist],” he is referring to the patronage system that artists formerly participated in.

12. The sentences This is very different ... with his public are included in Indonesia Raya, but the concepts do not appear as smoothly or in the same order in Wright’s notes.

13. At this point in the lecture as it appears in Indonesia Raya, a confusing misprint appears, with the Indonesian word for artist (seniman) mistakenly typeset as sentiment, a word which roughly equates to the English cognate sentiment but may also mean grudge. In the version of the lecture appearing in this book, the sentence is clarified based on Wright’s lecture notes.

14. For Wright’s source, see Stein, "Composition" 454.

15. Whereas the Indonesia Raya article uses the term seniman (which we have translated as wholeheartedly), Wright’s notes use the term organically.

16. The sentence When I visited ... view of time appears in Indonesia Raya but does not appear in Wright’s notes.

17. The Indonesia Raya article uses the term orang Afrika (which we have rendered literally as Africans), but Wright’s notes use the term African figures, which may refer to African people but alternatively may refer to African sculpture.

18. This paragraph, translated from Indonesia Raya, corresponds to a section of Wright’s notes that is quite rough. The Indonesia Raya version provides connections and exposition that bring greater coherence.

19. The sentences I myself ... the future appear in the Indonesia Raya article but do not appear in Wright’s notes.

20. Wright’s remarks on the difficulty of making a living as a writer would certainly have struck a chord with his Indonesian audience. According to Aji Rosidi’s recollections of 2013, only he himself and Pramoedya were able to survive solely based on their writings in 1950s Jakarta. They accomplished this by living very frugally (Aji, Interview).

21. Indonesia Raya uses the phrase majulah jang kaja (which we have translated as well-financed magazines), but Wright’s notes use slick magazines, a term that came into common use in the United States around 1930, alluding to “the newly invented glossy paper on which the slicks [such as Vanity Fair] were printed” (Murphy 67).

22. Wright’s notes use the term mistress rather than queen. Our use of queen reflects Indonesia Raya’s use of the Indonesian term ratu, which in modern Indonesian usage refers to a royal sovereign who is a woman. Whereas the Indonesia Raya article extends the metaphor of art as a queen by imagining the artist leaving her side to pick flowers, Wright’s notes extend the mistress metaphor by imagining the artist leaving her side to seek sexual companionship elsewhere.

23. Wright’s notes use the phrase is smile, which does not fit with the sentence. We have replaced this phrase with of smiles, based on the context.

24. Here Wright alludes to Gertrude Stein’s famous phrase “Rose is a rose is a rose” (Geography 187).

25. The phrase the more we find ... artifacts was previously published in Miller 178.

26. During an address at the Bandung Conference, Chou En-Lai discussed the topic of “freedom of religious belief.” He stated, “We Communists are atheists, but we respect all those who have religious belief” (Ministry 65).

27. Wright’s notes convey the image of leaders forcing change at gunpoint.

28. The sentence But where ... soap was previously published in Miller 178.

29. For another of Wright’s descriptions of viewing this painting, see Wright, Pagan 276.

30. Fabre's Richard Wright published the phrases/sentences it is a personal ... of Blues (14).

31. Fabre's Richard Wright published the sentence I think that ... moral lesson (128) Probably for stylistic reasons, Fabre's transcription of Wright's notes uses the term theoretical rather than Wright's own term theoretic, but we have relied on Wright's typescript for the term theoretic, which when spoken during a lecture would have been important to Wright for its rhyme with the term aesthetic.

32. Fabre’s Richard Wright published the phrase the fact is ... art (128). In Fabre’s transcription of the phrase, it is Joyce, Proust, Kafka, Stein, but relying on the typescript we have replaced Fabre's mistranscribed Joyce with Wright's actual word, Jews (4). Fabre's error in transcription most likely resulted from a rust mark left on the notes by a paperclip, which would cause Jews to appear as Joyce if read casually or from a low-quality copy of the transcript.

33. This sentence, as it appears in Fabre’s Richard Wright, mistranscribes the phrase as we could not “let be” (76), adding a not, while Wright's notes use the phrase we could “let be.” We have relied on the notes to correct this point.
Anas Ma'ruf's "Richard Wright in Indonesia" (1955)

On the heels of Wright's visit, the Jakarta-based monthly cultural magazine Seni published in its July issue an article titled "Richard Wright di Indonesia" (Richard Wright in Indonesia), which offered an overview of Wright's travels and also reported on a few conversations with him. Written by Anas Ma'ruf, a prominent translator and contributor to a number of cultural magazines, and appearing as a news item in Seni's regular column Kronik Kesenian (Arts Chronicle), this article is intriguing in its awareness of Wright's plans to publish material on Indonesia and also in its suggestion that Wright's lectures at Tugu and Balai Budaja were "part of Richard Wright's attempts to collect material for an article he was planning to write." Wright himself makes no mention of these lectures, either in The Color Curtain or in his travel journal. However, in both records he frequently includes statements by Indonesian informants, almost all of them unnamed. In Wright's accounts, the context for these statements remains unspecified, but Anas's comment suggests that they may well derive from discussions that took place during and after the lectures Wright gave for the Indonesian PEN Club, the BMKN, and the Konfrontasi Study Club, as well as his conversation with Gelanggang. If this is indeed the case, the documentary record of these events takes on added importance, as a guide to a more complete understanding of The Color Curtain and its depictions of Wright's Indonesian informants.

Anas's observation on Wright's project of collecting material on Indonesia is also significant on another level, because it gives a view of the sense Wright's interlocutors had of being observed. Even as Wright's insights and experiences were on display during lectures with audiences who were listening closely and perhaps taking notes, at least some of the Indonesian audience members were conscious that they themselves were being observed, as Wright seemed to be taking notes on their comments and questions during the discussions.

According to Anas's article, one of these events of apparently mutual note-taking took place at "Taman Siswa," most likely a reference to the Central Jakarta Meeting Hall of the Taman Siswa national educational movement. Originally founded in Yogyakarta by the Javanese nationalist educator and politician Ki Hajar Dewantara in 1922, Taman Siswa was a pan-Indonesian institution, influenced by progressive educational thinkers like Montessori and Tagore, that sought to combine modern European-style education with training in indigenous Indonesian arts. While it played a significant part in the prewar nationalist movement, by the time of Wright's visit internal divisions and increasing competition from the government's own education system had reduced Taman Siswa's influence and left it struggling to maintain a nationwide system of schools and training institutions based on Dewantara's principles (Lee K.). Nevertheless, the organization's reputation was such that Taman Siswa's Central Jakarta Meeting Hall would have been a popular venue for meetings dealing with cultural and educational matters, and the specific venue may well have figured in the schedule of lectures and meetings that followed Wright's return to Jakarta after the conference in Bandung. Anas's article is the only known source that mentions a Taman Siswa venue for one of Wright's meetings, so what is known about this event remains at the level of speculation. Taman Siswa may have been the venue for the conversation Wright had with Gelanggang, it may have been the venue for Wright's speech to the divinity students, or it may have been the venue of another event that is only cryptically recorded in The Color Curtain or Wright's travel journal.

It is possible that Anas attended the events at Takdir's villa in Tugu and Taman Siswa, but he almost certainly was involved in coordinating and attending Wright's PEN Club/BMKN lecture at the Balai Budaja, as in 1955 he was secretary of the BMKN (Rustapa, Agus, and Bambang 242). As Aji Rosidi recalled, Anas was a driving force in the organization from the early 1950s
through the mid-1960s (Mengenang 192–93). Hence, when his article refers to “the conclusions we reached from conversations with him,” we should be aware that at least some of the conversations in question took place between Wright and his audience after the delivery of his pen Club/IKMN lecture. One imagines the audience at this lecture hearing Wright delivering the following words, as documented in Indonesia Raya: “What should a writer write about? ... In fact, experience constitutes any artist’s subject matter.” Struck by such an idea in relation to the question of Wright’s own experiences as a black man in America, an audience member may have, as is suggested by Anas, “asked [Wright] about Negro culture in the United States” during the postlecture discussion, receiving an answer from Wright on the topic of jazz, the development of the New Negro Renaissance, and the 1949 anthology The Poetry of the Negro: 1746–1949, edited by Langston Hughes and Arna Bontemps.

Notably, in writing “Richard Wright in Indonesia,” Anas clearly had at his hand a copy of the Hughes-Bontemps anthology, whose preface says this on the topic of people of African descent in Louisiana:

[In] Louisiana free men of color ... sent their youth to Paris to study drama, music, and fencing, and to hobnob with the friends of Alexandre Dumas; to Rome to devote themselves to sculpture and singing. Many of these young people were not inclined to return to their native state, with its oppressive racial attitudes. ... Their influence in literature was strong enough to produce an anthology of poetry in 1845. The volume was called Les Cerelles, and it contained verse by a dozen of the younger French-speaking poets among the free Negroes writing at that time, including Victor Séjour. (viii–ix)

Readers will note that in setting up his analogy between Wright and the Séjour circle, Anas translates nearly directly from the language of Hughes and Bontemps. His analogy, then, sheds a certain amount of light on Wright’s self-imposed exile but still more on the ways international texts in general and African American texts in particular were circulating in modern Indonesian literary and cultural circles.

**Richard Wright in Indonesia**

by Anas Ma’ruf

**SOURCE LANGUAGE: INDONESIAN**

In early April, a Negro writer arrived in Indonesia to make a visit triggered by the Asian-African Conference in Bandung. Richard Wright, the famous writer in question, made use of his visit to meet with a number of prominent Indonesian and to conduct meetings with the arts community. Among these meetings were events held at Tugu, Taman Siswa, and Balai Budaya, all part of Richard Wright’s attempts to collect material for an article he was planning to write.

The conclusions we reached from conversations with him were that he had moved from regionally defined issues pertaining to the Negro, via issues that were national in character, toward wider, more broadly based perspectives. For that reason, the issues he presents in his more recent books have to be evaluated according to different criteria. Along with this, he does not deny that discrimination exists in the United States, even though all trace of it has been removed from the laws. He describes himself as an American citizen who happens to be married to a white woman, something that is still unusual among Negroes, and consistent with his outlook, he will not take the risk of returning to the world of the 48 states. Paris is set to become his second homeland, and a place that offers him the possibility of unencumbered development.

His exile reminds us of those cases of Negroes in Louisiana who sent their sons to Paris to study drama and music and interact with independent artists, to Rome to explore the details of artistic life in fields like sculpture and singing. Many of them never returned to America, because the country was not yet free of the accursed practice of racial discrimination. Those who studied in Europe had a great impact on Negro literature, and in 1845 they compiled an anthology of their work under the title Les Cerelles. It includes poetry by dozens of young Negro writers, among them the well-known Victor Séjour.

When Wright was asked about Negro culture in the United States, he mentioned the element of jazz in music and other familiar contributions by the Negro race to American life. More than 200 years of traditional Negro literature in the form of poetry, for example, can be examined in the anthology compiled by Langston Hughes and Bontemps. This is a collection of the work of 150 writers from the time of America’s revolution right up to the peak of its strength in 1950. Langston himself produced the words of the manifesto that was adopted by the New Negro movement, or the Negro Renaissance, which was famous in the years around 1920–1927. Names associated with it are those like Claude McKay, Jean Toomer, Countee Cullen, and others.

Bearing in mind the circumstances they face and the achievements they have attained, we get the impression that if the white race regards them as competitors, then it is clear that this competition is offered in a spirit of
honesty and seriousness. If their circumstances were equal, it is very likely that the white race would find itself under pressure from the colored race, whose numbers are declining in comparison with white Americans.

Note

1. See Wright's "The Artist and His Problems," also in part II.

Part III In the Wake of Wright's Indonesian Travels
According to Beb Vuyk's essay "A Weekend with Richard Wright," during his visit to Indonesia, Wright at one point spoke with a group of cultural figures at Mochtar Lubis's villa in the mountain town of Tugu. Wright stated, "I always feel immediately at home among colored people," and Vuyk replied, "Though not so with everyone in Ghana, surely?" Sensing that Vuyk was referring to certain scenes in his 1954 Gold Coast travelogue, Wright asked, "You've read Black Power?" Vuyk replied, "You sent it to Mochtar, and he lent it to me so I could write a review of it for Indonesia Raya." Wright may or may not have sent a copy to Mochtar (perhaps Michael Josselson helped Mochtar obtain Black Power), but Vuyk clearly acquired the book in her capacity as a book reviewer for Mochtar's newspaper. The document provided here is Vuyk's review, which appeared in the newspaper's literary and cultural column on 1 June 1955, less than a month after Wright left Indonesia.

By this time, Wright was back in Paris, and his recent Indonesian travels had become a topic of discussion among editors of the Europe-based CCF magazines Encounter, Preuves, and Der Monat. The editors, together with CCF director Michael Josselson and other CCF members, met on 23 May, and the
"main emphasis" during the discussion "was on the attractiveness of controversial articles, or articles made controversial by inviting discussion and counter-attack." The ccr had hoped to organize a symposium on the topic "Asia Hating the West." The symposium had not materialized, but the editors "felt that the Richard Wright treatment of Bandung and Indon[esia] might provide the proper point of departure." Hence "all the editors paid a call on Richard Wright who had just returned from South-East Asia. He reported at length on his impressions of the rise of Asian nationalism and especially a 'new and dangerous racism' with strong mystical-religious elements. His manuscript is likely to run to some two hundred pages, with each of the editors free to make such selections as they like for one or more articles" (Lasky).

Before the 1956 publication of Wright's The Color Curtain, Encounter, Peruses, Der Monat, and the Spanish-language ccr magazine Cuadernos would publish a total of six of Wright's Indonesia-related articles. As we mentioned in this book's introduction, Wright's Encounter article did indeed prompt a "counter-attack" from Mochtar Lubis, whose 1956 letter to the magazine spoke on behalf of several of the artists and intellectuals with whom Wright had associated. Mochtar wrote:

I am afraid while [Wright] was here in Indonesia he had been looking through "coloured-glasses," and had sought behind every attitude he met colour and racial feelings. The majority of the people with whom Mr. Wright had come into contact in Indonesia (one of the best-known Indonesian novelists, and others) belong to the new generation in Indonesia, and are the least racial and colour conscious of the various groups in Indonesia. They are all amazed to read Mr. Wright's notebook in which Mr. Wright quotes them saying things which they never had said, or which they did not put meaning as accepted by Mr. Wright. ("Through")

Of course, these sentiments came to a head in Indonesia after Wright's articles appeared in the ccr magazines, and nothing of the sort had been published by June 1955 when Vuyk published her review of Black Power. Indeed, less than a month earlier, Takdir's wife, Margret, had written of Wright without indicating any perturbation. In a letter to a relative in Bonn, Germany, Margret wrote that the Alsijabana family planned to spend "probably the whole of July" in Paris, as a side trip in conjunction with Takdir's attendance at a PEN Congress in Vienna: "All depends on getting a house. We have asked Richard Wright to help us rent a house. He is a black American writer who lives in Paris and has just returned from [Indonesia] to Paris. He attended the Asia Africa Conference here and spent several weekends with us. I hope that he will find something that would fit us." Whatever may have happened with Wright's efforts to find Parisian housing for the Alsijabanas, one sees in Vuyk's review of Black Power the seeds of later strife already beginning to sprout.

Vuyk's distrust of Black Power's premise becomes a refrain in the review. She avers that although Wright feels an emotional draw based on "skin color," blood and ethnicity provide him with "absolutely no connections" to the Gold Coast. This perceived lack of connection resonates strongly with African American writer George Schuyler's 1936 assertions that the African American is merely a lamplacked Anglo-Saxon," and "your American Negro is just plain American," "subject to the same economic and social forces that mold the actions and thoughts of the white Americans" (25). Indeed, according to Vuyk, the way Wright "reacts to these things [in Africa] is no different from the way a white American would react." She views the seemingly unanticipated connections between Africans and African Americans that Wright describes in Black Power with a degree of skepticism, suggesting that Wright is "wearing glasses that frame the way he sees things." Her use of the "wearing glasses" metaphor seems to set the stage for Mochtar's later criticism of Wright for "wearing "coloured-glasses" in Indonesia. In this review, however, Vuyk makes use of the metaphor to suggest that Wright's particular pair of glasses—involving "special feelings for Africa"—have not permitted him to see the "dangerous and frightening path" along which Gold Coast prime minister Kwarere Nkrumah is leading his country. According to Vuyk in "A Weekend with Richard Wright," she and Wright had discussed this topic at Mochtar Lubis's villa in Tugu while Wright was in Indonesia. Vuyk had suggested to Wright that Nkrumah's efforts "to give the masses a sense of fulfillment through a national super-belief and a sense of allegiance to party leaders" was "fascism." Wright replied, "It can lead to fascism . . . but you have to take that risk . . . . There has to be something to bring about a new national unity, and that's Nkrumah's goal." In the closing lines of her review of Black Power, it seems, Vuyk continued her discussion with Wright, claiming that his glasses interfered with his vision to such a degree that he could not "notice the dangers and problems inherent in such ideals."

Black Power
by Beb Vuyk

SOURCE LANGUAGE: INDONESIAN

The latest book by Richard Wright, the well-known American Negro author, is not a novel but a travelogue. Written on the book's cover below the title is "An American Negro views the African Gold Coast." Richard Wright is both a
He learned things in Bristol, where slave hunters were outfitted after the
slave trade passed from the Portuguese to the British. He learned things along
the route that the empty slave ships traveled, south through the Canary
Islands to the Gulf of Guinea, where the Gold Coast is located. In coastal towns
Richard Wright visited old forts, where the slaves were kept in underground
chambers before they were taken away on ships. He was not aware of the
place or district his ancestors came from, nor their tribal origins, but when he
saw black-skinned women pounding corn in front of their huts, he thought of
his forebears, who were probably just like any one of them. Black and white
Americans are both foreigners in their lands of origin, but the memory of the
way they left that land gives a unique perspective to this black American's
report.

"Aren't you an American?" a shop assistant asked him, after he'd only
been there a day. Then the African Negro asked the American Negro what
part of Africa he came from.

"I don't know."

"Didn't your mother or grandmother ever tell you what part of Africa you came
from?"

I did not answer. I stared vaguely about me. I had in my childhood asked my
parents about it, but they had no information, or else they had not wanted to speak
of it.

I remembered that many Africans had sold their people into slavery; it had been
said that they had no idea of the kind of slavery into which they had been selling
their people, but they had sold them . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . I suddenly didn't
know what to say to the man confronting me.

"Haven't you tried to find out where in Africa you came from, sir?"

"Well," I said softly, "You know, you fellows who sold us and the white men
that bought us didn't keep any records." Silence stood between us. We avoided each
other's eyes.

Richard Wright visited the Gold Coast as the guest of Kwame Nkrumah,
the prime minister of the Gold Coast, whom he had come to know in America
some years previously. As we understand it, the relationship between the two
men was not cordial. Nkrumah is the leader of the Convention People's Party,
a grassroots party that is presently in government. Wright was invited on
several occasions to attend demonstrations and party meetings, and he had
one long conversation with Nkrumah. But it was clear that Nkrumah only
wanted to show him and tell him as much as he thought was necessary.

His contact with opposition leaders, members of the intelligentsia who had
been educated in England, went more smoothly, although the author was very
critical in his approach to them, deploring their unwillingness to identify with the common people. He also visited tribal leaders, the reactionary elements in this society who had held power for centuries. Walking around the markets he made contact with ordinary people and everywhere he went he encountered suspicion, reticence, and deceit. Although there are many pages in the book that indicate his disappointment with the people and conditions in this country, his conflicted feelings urged him to keep on studying the things he saw, to be able to understand and analyze them. The way he felt these things was not based on racial commonality, but rather on the upshot of his specific position as a member of the black minority in America. Through talent and hard work he managed to escape, and this self-liberation is the basis of his sympathy for colored peoples who are struggling for their independence, or have only achieved it in the last few years.

The Gold Coast is a relatively small country, with a population of four and a half million, most of whom still live in tribal communities. Ruling over these communities are kings who hold magical-religious power. They are the intermediaries between this world and the world of the ancestors. They have the knowledge of all the secrets and hidden forces, and in their funeral ceremonies, human sacrifice is still practiced clandestinely. The Gold Coast is a country rich in timber and minerals. It will only be able to develop and establish an economy free from the West if it is able to exploit its minerals itself. However, intertribal relations make technical development impossible. Intertribal relations don’t recognize private property, and anyone with money has to share it with members of his own tribe. So any impetus for the accumulation of wealth just doesn’t exist. These things are more familiar to us than they are to Richard Wright, as are matters concerning taboos. The only difference is that the percentage of people still tied to the old ways in the Gold Coast is much greater than here, and among 80% of the people, there is still no movement toward integration with modern civilization.

The author sees Nkrumah and his party as a solution in the short term. Nkrumah is trying to capture the emotional vacuum at a time when relations between tribespeople are loosening, not by defending the old beliefs but by giving the people a national superbelief, and a close connection between the party and its leaders.

It is a dangerous and frightening path. It appears to indicate that Richard Wright’s special feelings for Africa don’t allow him to notice the dangers and problems inherent in such ideals.


1. See Vuyk’s "A Weekend with Richard Wright," also in part III.
2. See Davis and Fabre 89-90.
4. According to Vuyk, as related to Constance Webb by Margrit de Sblonière, one of Wright’s Indonesian interlocutors was furious about Wright’s representations and at some point confronted Wright during a visit to Paris (de Sbloniere to Webb, 3 Nov. 1966, and de Sbloniere to Webb, 12 Dec. 1966). It is possible that this unnamed interlocutor was Takdir Alisjahbana, who, as indicated by the 7 May 1955 missive that is quoted above by Tamalia Alisjahbana, planned to be in Paris in July 1955. In this scenario, Takdir may have seen one of the articles Wright published in the CCP magazine around that time (see Davis and Fabre 89-90). According to de Sblonière, Vuyk reported that Wright’s wife, Ellen Poplar, had taken the side of the unnamed Indonesian in this encounter.
5. See Vuyk’s “A Weekend with Richard Wright,” also in part III.
6. For contemporaneous Indonesian commentary on African American music, see Manik.
7. Vuyk’s commentary here quotes almost directly from the lecture Wright gave at Takdir’s villa, which speaks of African Americans migrating “from the Southern towns and cities” to “the northern industrial cities,” where “they moved recklessly amidst the highest industrial civilisation the world has ever known” (“American” 14).
8. We have added quotation marks to this sentence.
9. This excerpt from Black Power, which is marked in italics in this translation, appears in Vuyk’s article in English with Vuyk’s Indonesian translations in parentheses. Vuyk’s English-language quotations from Black Power differ from Wright’s English in minor ways (Wright, Black Power 54).
11. We have translated Vuyk’s phrase perhubungan antara suku literally, as intertribal relations. However, the context (which points toward relations among people within the same tribe) suggests that Vuyk meant to use a phrase that could be translated as intratribal relations.
12. We are grateful to Paul Tickle for pointing out that Vuyk’s reference to a superbelief or super geloof alludes to a Soekarnoist concept being discussed in Indonesia Raya at this time, in which the term super geloof signified a form of nationalism that was used as a foil against more sectarian and regionalist ideologies in the run-up to the 1955 general election.
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