
*Thank You and God for
“The Weary Blues”*

OCTOBER 1930–JANUARY 1932

Louise was in New York, and the letter she wrote to Langston, who was touring the South, on October 4, 1930, was largely her description of the ending of her relationship with her patron, Charlotte Osgood Mason, who had hired her a year earlier to serve as secretary to Langston and Zora Neale Hurston. Although both Langston and Hurston called Mason “Godmother,” Louise insisted on using the more formal “Mrs. Mason.”

Charlotte Mason, known for both her generosity and her tendency to patronize and manipulate beneficiaries of that generosity, had evidently decided that Louise was insufficiently appreciative of her patronage and summarily fired her. In an interview she gave years later for a documentary film on Langston,¹ Louise explained the contrast between her reaction and Langston’s to losing the support of Charlotte Mason: “We . . . had the same patron, Mrs. Mason, and his reaction and my reaction were quite different. Langston was sick after that experience whereas I got mad.”²

FROM LOUISE, OCTOBER 4, 1930

[Letterhead: The American Interracial Seminar]

October 4, 1930

My dear Langston:

I tried to get Zora [Neale Hurston] by telephone but the line is disconnected and I haven’t had time to run by there to see if she is back. However,

1. The documentary film was *Langston Hughes: The Dream Keeper*, directed by St. Clair Bourne.

2. As quoted in St. Clair Bourne, “Louise Patterson on Langston Hughes,” *Langston Hughes Review* (Winter 1997): 39–51.

this being Saturday and having the week end I shall try to get a lineup on her whereabouts.

Saw Mrs. Mason a week ago last Monday and it was short but excruciating. I said nothing and she said lots. I had failed utterly, all Negroes had failed utterly and she was through with us. It was all untrue and nothing I could say would make any difference. I offered to pay her for my desk and typewriter,³ and she said that I didn't mean it. So I shut up and let her do all the talking, altho she would throw in such remarks as there was no use to argue and no need to implicate anyone. I didn't quite understand what she was talking about for I said nothing and called no names. But it is all a damn mess and I had quite a bad time. Miss [Cornelia] Chapin threw in her rather nasty amens to everything Mrs. Mason said. I must confess that I don't know what it is all about, and after a very unhappy evening thinking over the whole thing I have tried to forget it—that is the humiliation of it.

The job⁴ is fine, but keeps me busy as hell. Don't you think you would like to come along on this trip of distinguished citizens.⁵ I think that I shall get to go, but it depends on our budget. Pray for me as I would have a grand time getting down to all those places I have never been.

Mother⁶ hasn't been so well. I am thinking of sending her to California if I can find the money somewhere. My cousin Mary [Savage] is here from Kentucky. She is a sweet kid and would make about two of me.

I am very much interested in your play⁷ and hope that things materialize as you would like. Do come back, though, as we miss you lots.

Always,
Louise

3. The desk and typewriter were originally "gifts" to Louise from Mrs. Mason, who was initially generous and considerate to Louise because she knew that her mother was suffering from cancer. Years later Louise would describe Mrs. Mason as someone whose largesse came with heavy strings attached; gifts were never granted without some type of quid pro quo. Leaving Mason's employ was not easy, as it was the Depression. Louise needed the money to care for her sick mother, who was living with her and required constant care and large doses of medication to control her pain.

4. Louise had a new position at the American Interracial Seminars Project. Louise was hired to organize the trips, and she traveled to Mexico herself on at least one tour. There, she met Langston's father, James Hughes, and the three Patiño spinsters, with whom he lived.

5. The distinguished citizens included prominent figures such as Mary McLeod Bethune.

6. "Mother" is Lula Mae Brown Thompson, called "Mother Thompson" by Louise's friends. She worked as a domestic and a pastry cook her entire life. She had metastatic cancer, which she died of in 1933.

7. The play was *Mulatto: A Play of the Deep South*, which Langston wrote in 1930. It was his first full-length piece and was performed on Broadway in 1935.

[Marginal note above letterhead] *I'll see about the other things you mention over the week end.*

In October 1930 Louise was on the road in New England making public speeches about race relations on behalf of the American Interracial Seminar. In one of the speeches she gave before writing the following letter, she read from Langston's book of verse *The Weary Blues*.

FROM LOUISE, OCTOBER 24, 1930

[Letterhead: The American Interracial Seminar]

October 24, 1930

Lang dear:

I thank you and God for "The Weary Blues". What would poor speakers do when they have to talk on the RACE⁸ if it wasn't for you? Since my return from Boston I am thoroughly convinced that you are not only the salvation of the race but of race speakers, too.

I had a grand time up in Boston and didn't get nervous a bit. Those people are so dead and drab and I had the time of my young life prancing up and down on the platform in front of them. I felt like a new-born babe alongside their deadness. Mr. [Hubert C.] Herring and reports from Boston say I did well—but I was satisfied anyway. My only grief is that in my last minute haste of making trains I left my copy of "The Weary Blues" on the ticket window—now what will I do?

I didn't know whether or not you would see the enclosed review from *The New Freeman*.⁹ When are you coming home? I miss you a lot. Bruce [Nugent] gives me splendid reports of you down there. How about the play? I'll be glad to do all I can for you. What's the latest news of Zora [Neale Hurston]? No one in New York seems to have seen her.

Do hurry home—you have been away quite long enough.

Hasta luego,
Louise

8. "Talking on the race" refers to Black speakers addressing white audiences about Black people or matters concerning Black people. Louise had a long public-speaking career and was known to be an inspiring speaker.

9. *The New Freeman* was a short-lived magazine published by the libertarian feminist journalist Suzanne La Follette, a second cousin of US Senator Robert M. La Follette.



FIGURE 2. Louise speaking at a conference in New York, 1928. (Louise Thompson Patterson papers, Special Collections & Archives, Robert W. Woodruff Library, Emory University.)

On January 16, 1931, Louise wrote Neby about her new life in New York. Neby's Christmas present to Louise had been a pair of pajamas. In return Louise sent her friend an issue of the radical journal *New Masses*.¹⁰ She had separated from her first husband, Harlem novelist and playwright Wallace Thurman, and was single in New York and deeply involved in Harlem's cultural and political life. Between the lines of news of family and friends, she confides that she is gradually finding a home in radical Left politics. She had joined the Friends of the Soviet Union¹¹ and wanted Neby to keep up with left-wing thinking as well. Although Louise did not join the Communist Party until 1933, she was already studying Marxism and traveling in a new, interracial circle of leftist friends. She was also struggling with her own "bourgeois" tendencies and was convinced that true change could only take place through revolutionary measures. Although she mocked the social norms of the Black middle class, she acknowledged her own deep ties to highly educated Black professionals. She was on her way to becoming Red, describing herself as "Pink."

FROM LOUISE TO NEBY, [JANUARY 16, 1931]

Neby darling:

Your letter this morning brought home to me with a start how long it had been since I have written and that that letter bringing to you my happiness over the gorgeous pajamas you sent me [[^] *hadn't been written*]. How are you going to turn me into a good proletariat when I get such a luxurious garment? On my side I salved my conscience by sending you *The New Masses*. Don't you love those things Langston is doing? I have hopes, high hopes, that he will become our real revolutionary artist. He is now in the South and I had an amusing letter from him telling of some of his experiences in Dixie.¹² I think that he is planning to come to Calif. in April, so you will have a chance to renew your acquaintanceship. Loren [Miller] is handling his

10. Louise probably sent Neby the December 1930 issue of *New Masses* magazine. In a letter to the editor in that issue, Langston describes a recent message he sent to Russian readers on the publication of his novel *Not Without Laughter* in the Soviet Union: "Greetings to Soviet Workers." See *The Collected Works of Langston Hughes*, vol. 9, *Essays on Art, Race, Politics, and World Affairs*, ed. Christopher C. De Santis (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002), 554.

11. The Friends of the Soviet Union was an organization established in the United States in 1921 to raise money for the new Soviet republic, which was battling a terrible famine as well as armed international intervention and internal armed resistance from Cossacks. The group also aimed to educate and inform people about the USSR.

12. Dixie is a colloquial name for the southern United States.

engagements. Did Matt's group¹³ ever write him about coming to Oakland or Berkeley?

I share your sense of high speeding time. I don't know where the weeks go to—first it is Monday and then before I regain consciousness it is Saturday. And it is Saturday afternoon now. I came right home from work with the avowed intention of writing you first of all, and if I can hold out, dash off a few other notes. Mother and Sue [Bailey Thurman] are down town, so the house is quiet and I am taking advantage of it. It is hard to get time to one's self. In spite of good intentions you get caught with several engagements during the week, and when a free night comes I generally am glad to pile into bed early. And now that I am getting more and more drawn into revolutionary activities I find my weeks very crowded. I am trying to find a place for myself now, as long as I have to work with bourgeois forces, in which I can do something to help the worker's cause along. I have joined the Friends of the Soviet Union, which of course isn't a dangerous thing to do and yet, thru which I hope to interest others, first in Russia and then in the struggle in America. There are also some other plans afoot wherein I may be able to work sub rosa. I have to do it, Nebba. Having studied something of Marxian theory, and finding it a philosophy which I can accept, makes my position more contradictory and difficult. One gets impatient of halfway measures—the hypocrisy of social reform—the ever increasing misery of the mass of people. I can understand your disgust with the Hawaiian affair.¹⁴ We have followed it closely here and have to acknowledge the spread of the old American custom. Even here the daily press has fallen into line and only such publications as The New Republic have recognized that a crime has been committed—and that that crime is MURDER, not rape. You might show the issue of January 20 to your fellow workers. Although I doubt that it will do any good. They have drunk too deeply of the poison of race chauvinism.

13. The group was the Acorn Club, a men's social club in Oakland that Matt belonged to.

14. The "Hawaiian affair" alludes to the infamous Massie criminal trials of 1931 in Honolulu, which were highly charged and infused with racism. In the first trial, Joe Kahahawai, a native Hawaiian man, was accused of raping Thalia Massie, the wife of a US naval officer. After a mistrial was declared, Kahahawai was kidnapped and shot to death at the behest of Massie's mother. She and her coconspirators were convicted of murder, but Lawrence M. Judd, who was the governor of Hawaii at the time, immediately commuted their sentences to only one hour, which they served in the custody of the sheriff.

And I agree with you about the new Alexander Dumas club.¹⁵ I had read of it in the San Francisco SPOKESMAN.¹⁶ It's just the same old philanthropy, and the same diverting of Negroes from the seat of their troubles. I have thrown the whole idea of "Negro art" over board, not that I think that art hasn't a place in life, but that this new fetish of "Negro art" is a lot of hooley. There ain't no sich.

I don't know why we all fell so hard for the thing. Of course I can understand some who have feathered their nests through it, but the rest of us just let ourselves be made asses of—that's all. Having suffered once under the cruel sting of white philanthropy, all I can say is "Never again!" It is so devitalizing—to bow down and worship before a god that is helping to keep us enslaved. And no matter how nice these people may be, it is always patronage, nothing more and nothing less.

It seems very strange to me sometimes, I find that many things I used to enjoy no longer appeal to me at all. I went to one dance during the holidays—a formal sorority affair—and found it particularly odious. The people looked so dull and stupid and artificial in their "dress-up" clothes—and the whole thing was unbearably dull to me. Seeking new revolutionary companions became a necessity, for aside from Marion [Smith] and Sue and a few others I found myself out of harmony with others. And I find these new friends particularly stimulating. They are studying all the time; they are aware of the world in which they live; and above all they have the guts to try to do something about it (which I cannot lay claim to as yet). And then I find the study of Marx, dialectic materialism and the like so fascinating. I know you have heard me rave before, but really this time, Nebby, I think it is real and I feel quite happy about it. I think that that is one of the things that drew me away from Joe¹⁷ completely, and will make it impossible for me to be drawn to anyone except one who is traveling along the same path.

And the march of events is increasing its tempo so rapidly from day to day that I found myself wondering as the new year came in just what may

15. The Alexander Dumas Club was a "colored" social and cultural arts club in San Francisco that had close ties to prominent white socialites such as Noel Sullivan—who would later become a devoted patron and friend of Langston's. Louise was consciously trying to shed the pretensions of bourgeois society and her social ties to it—especially to Black bourgeois society.

16. *The Spokesman* (1931–1934) was a weekly African American newspaper founded in San Francisco by the radical Black journalist John Pittman. It was the primary source of local and national Black community news for residents of the San Francisco Bay Area and Northern California.

17. Joe was a young man Louise was dating.

happen before it runs its course. I know that my course won't be easy—I am saturated in bourgeois ideology and some of it is hard to get away from. I feel the necessity of maintaining a measure of economic security. But beside the march of world events my own seems very insignificant. With war a constant threat, with the poverty of the people on the constant increase, with the breakdown in our own government, municipal government particularly, a reality, and with revolution hovering in Germany, the Orient and elsewhere, one cannot possibly predict for the year. I don't imagine I will be going to Mexico this summer. First, the Committee¹⁸ is particularly hard hit now—the Caribbean Seminar begins next Saturday with a fifth of last year's membership. The Mexican Seminar may share the same fate. Then with the new work I am doing I shall probably remain right here in New York. Aside from seeing you again, I would will it so, too, for I would not care to go to Mexico again with this good will crowd of Americans. In fact I think my days are numbered in this sort of thing but I don't see any other out as yet.

Sue came home full of plans for her coming nuptials and new life. She will marry probably the end of May at her conference in North Carolina. Howard [Thurman] is in California at this time and I told him to look you up, but I suspect he didn't find time to do it. He gave some lectures at the University of California as well as in other schools on the Coast. They plan to move to Washington during the summer, and he will be at Howard University beginning next fall. The engagement is no secret now, so you can tell anyone that Sue is going to marry Howard Thurman. Coincidence in name, isn't it?¹⁹

Marion is still in school and wondering what she will do for the next year. She is in somewhat the same position as I am—necessitating certain economic security. And as with me, she finds there is so little she can do to provide that economic security with which she is in sympathy. I don't believe she is as far gone in communism as I am, but she is extremely sympathetic and the result is the same. One of her friends who recently returned to New York said to me that she had heard that Marion was becoming more radical these days. I answered that I hoped so—what else was there for her to do. I wrote an article on race relations which has been accepted by The Christian Century²⁰ over the grave doubts of the editor

18. The "Committee" refers to the American Interracial Seminars Project.

19. Louise is referring to the fact that her ex-husband, Wallace Thurman, had the same last name as Sue's husband-to-be, Howard Thurman.

20. *The Christian Century* was a progressive Christian magazine affiliated with Louise's employer, the *American Interracial Seminar*, which was sponsored by the Congregational Church.

that this was the thing to do, although he agreed with what I said. It isn't radical, according to a real radical, but I suspect will rain down upon my head the invectives of many dear kind souls that are "giving their lives" for the good of the race. I'll send you a copy for criticism when it comes out. Mr. [Hubert C.] Herring is always after me to write—but it is so hard as you say to stay within the bounds of respectable circles, that often I prefer to keep still.

I shall watch for the Brothers Karamazov.²¹ As I keep up so slightly with what is going on in the movie world I can't say whether it has been here or not. I do want to see Arrowsmith²² as I have heard that it is very excellent. I saw The Five Year Plan²³ when it was here. The only play I have seen recently was "1931"²⁴—a play on unemployment which was very good but lasted exactly nine days—it was too realistic for Broadway's taste. Right now Never No More²⁵ has claimed quite a bit of public applause—a story of a lynching with Rose McClendon. I was invited to go see it last week but refused as I felt that I just didn't want to sit through such a grueling ordeal. I want to see Mourning Becomes Electra and Of Thee I Sing²⁶ if I can ever find the money. I do wish it were going to be possible for us to be together this summer. I should like to go off to some isolated place for the summer with no diversions but sports and reading and studying. Sue is rooting for me to go to Russia in the fall, but it is scarcely a feasible idea. By no stretch of the imagination can I see how it could be done.

Mother will be writing you in her time—you know how she is about writing—but meanwhile she told me to thank you and Matt and convey her love to you for your constant thoughtfulness for her. We had a pleasant Christmas. Katherine [Jenkins], George [Sample], Marion and I gave Mother a radio for Christmas. We had a family dinner, Alta [Douglas] came over, and Mother seemed to enjoy herself very much. But as usual,

21. Louise is referring to *Der Mörder Dimitri Karamasoff*, a German film made in 1931.

22. *Arrowsmith* (1931) is an American film directed by John Ford. It was adapted from the novel of the same name by Sinclair Lewis.

23. *The Five Year Plan* (1931) is a Soviet documentary film that extols the virtues of a planned economy.

24. *1931* is a play by Claire and Paul Sifton. It tells the gritty tale of a young man in the Great Depression who loses his job and, along with millions of others, can't find another one. It was produced by the Theatre Group and featured Lee Strasberg, Clifford Odets, and Stella Adler, but it lasted only twelve performances.

25. *Never No More* is a tragic drama by James Knox Millen. It was produced on Broadway in January 1932.

26. *Mourning Becomes Electra*, a play written by Eugene O'Neill in 1931, is the retelling of an ancient Greek drama. *Of Thee I Sing*, by the Gershwin brothers, is a 1931 Broadway musical that parodies US presidential politics.

during these holidays, we wished for you. I have found the clippings you sent quite useful, as well as interesting. I don't always use everything I get in just for the News Service. I keep my material filed and classified and it is used as source material for articles and the like. Many thanks, dear, for doing this for me.

Well, if I am to write anyone else this afternoon I must stop. It is now nearly five o'clock and the folks will be home soon. I rather suspect they have gone to a show.

Love to you both—tell Matt I am so glad that things are getting better for him.

Always,
Your Squeeze

Langston wrote the following letter from his mother's home in Cleveland, where he had gone to recuperate. The whole conflict with Charlotte Mason had made Langston physically ill, and the continuing debacle with Zora Neale Hurston kept him ill. Louise had recently been in Cleveland on Interracial Seminar work and had seen Russell and Rowena Jelliffe, whom both she and Langston knew personally. Hurston was well known for her ability to be intentionally, flamboyantly, and unreasonably outrageous, as Langston's letter describes. In 1931 Langston copyrighted *Mule Bone*, under both of their names, but by 1934 he had signed over all of his rights to the play to Hurston.

TO LOUISE, [FEBRUARY 7, 1931]

Dear Lou,

As you probably know by now, Zora has been here. And how! There were two conferences, both with the Jelliffe's [Rowena Woodham and Russell W. Jelliffe], one on Monday, another on Tuesday. The Monday one was fairly agreeable, Zora and I went off alone in the front office, settled our private affairs (or so I thought) came out, and she admitted I had had a part in the play, that she would collaborate, and that she and I would both sign the contract for the production here (if the Gilpins²⁷ were going to do the comedy) as they had voted the night before Zora's

27. The Gilpin Players were a prominent Black amateur dramatic repertory troupe. They were the resident company at Karamu House in Cleveland, which was founded and run by the Jelliffes.

arrival to drop it as no one could get a sensible answer from her, or her new agent Elizabeth Marbury. However—overnight the change took place. In the early dawning Zora called up Mrs. Jelliffe and proceeded to attempt to bawl her out by phone for daring to put my name beside hers on the play, for taking your word for anything as you were this-that-and-the-other, etc. Mrs. Jelliffe said you were a friend of theirs that she wouldn't listen to any more over the phone, and that we could all meet again at five. I was in bed with tonsillitis, so every one came to my house. Zora brought a young man, Paul Banks, with her, one of the Gilpin Players who had been in New York and had made the trip back with her in her car. He, of course, was strongly on her side, and had previously written here that I had been stupidly untruthful since he knew I had had nothing to do with the play, and furthermore Zora said that my lawyer was so disillusioned with me that he wouldn't even represent me! Well, anyhow, this young man was with her, the Jelliffe's, my mother, and me. And such a scene you cannot possibly imagine. The young man, of course, said nothing. But Zora pushed her hat on the back of her head, bucked her eyes, ground her teeth, and proceeded to rear. She called Mrs. Jelliffe a dishonorable person, said she, Zora, had not come all the way to Cleveland to be made a fool of, implied that everybody was trying to pull sly tricks on her and she knew it, said who was you that anybody should take your word, (here again Mrs. Jelliffe said you were her friend). I said that you had nothing to do with the point under discussion anyway. Zora then shook [the] manuscript in my face and dared and defied me to put my finger on a line that was mine, and that what had been mine in there, she had changed in her new version, and furthermore, "the whole third act had been written by herself alone while you and I were off doing Spanish." Yes, I had helped some with the characterization—but what construction was there to it? And the story was hers, every line of dialog was hers except one line at the end of the first act, and she took that out. I was just trying to steal her work from her!!! And so on and on until Mr. Jelliffe asked his wife to no longer remain to be further insulted, whereupon they all left, Zora without even saying Goodbye to Mother or I. The whole scene on her part was most undignified and niggerish. Nobody else quarreled. And whenever she was asked to explain her wild statements she would say she hadn't come to be questioned or made a goat of . . . That was Tuesday . . . I have not seen her since, but on Thursday who had the astounding nerve to attend a party given by the Omegas²⁸ for me, but to which I could not go on account of my throat. There Zora, I understand, told everyone that I was stealing her work, as well as saying some very

28. The Omegas are the members of Langston's fraternity, Omega Psi Phi.

unpleasant things about you. She has started a great swirl of malicious gossip here about all of us, the Jelliffes as well. The Gilpins have split up into groups some for the Jelliffes, some against, and the whole thing has developed into the most amazing mess I ever heard of. The Gilpins, of course, had to cancel their downtown date. Mrs. Jelliffe has been terribly upset about the matter, as she and I both had been as nice and as tactful as possible with both Zora and her agents, and with Zora herself when she arrived. Certainly none of us expected such a performance from the lady! It seems that now Zora chose to be not only contrary and untruthful, but malicious and hurtful as well. (I have received the most insulting note I have ever heard tell of from 399.²⁹ How she thinks of such ungodly things to say, I don't know.) . . . Anyway, the Jelliffes feel that something should be done to stop Zora's irresponsible and malicious statements, even to the point of asking my lawyer to threaten a libel suit if she insists further on saying publicly that I have tried to steal her play. Personally, I think Zora must be a little off, as in all my letters to her, or talks here with her, I have been agreeable to further collaboration, and I have made no attempt, nor threatened to make one, to dispose of any part or parts of the play without her knowledge or consent. (She's the one. I kept quiet about it, now she's spreading the opposite tale.) So all that she is saying is crazy and without foundation in fact. She could not prove any of it—but how can people know that? So we all feel that you must be warned against her in New York. She contends that I wanted you to have a large interest in the profits of the play, therefore she withdrew. . . . Can you imagine it? I think I had better tell every one of my friends in New York the story of the play now, because with both [Alain] Locke and Zora on the lying line, God knows what will get about. (I think I wrote you of Locke calling on [Arthur] Spingarn to back Zora up.) I wired him for an explanation and his answer was CONGRATULATIONS ON THE HARMON AWARD³⁰ BUT WHAT MORE DO YOU WANT? I think they all must be quite mad!

Anyhow, Louise, why Zora should be so ungodly sore at you for, is something I don't know. But you certainly have to know all this, at least in self-defense . . . Have you ever seen such amazing niggers or white folks either. I'm glad you have another job and that I have my new book well in

29. 399 Park Avenue in New York City was the address of Mrs. Mason.

30. The William E. Harmon Foundation Award for Distinguished Achievement among Negroes was a philanthropic and cultural award named after William E. Harmon, a real estate developer and philanthropist who was also an important patron of Harlem Renaissance artists. Langston won \$400 and two medals, gold and bronze.

mind. They can all go to the nether regions as far as I am concerned . . . Best of luck to you, and love to Mother. I am going to write her . . . Take care of that cold you said you had, and find yourself a mule-bone because the free-for-all is on.

Sincerely,
Lang

By January 1932 Louise had become even “rosier” and was increasingly fascinated by her study of Marx and dialectical materialism. The following letter was written on a stationary notecard depicting a peaceful oriental garden. She references several current events in Japan, China, and Hawaii, and then goes on to talk about Langston’s work and what was going on in New York. She had a lifelong passion for the theater and believed deeply in the power of dramatic art to deliver a social or political message. In this letter, she brings Langston up to date on the “Negro” plays that were recently in production on Broadway.

FROM LOUISE, [JANUARY 17, 1932]

[Handwritten]

Jan. 17

My darling Lang,

Greetings from the Orient!³¹ However, I must confess that the peaceful demeanor of this scene is a bit deceiving to say the least. And I may go further to say we are not really peaceful over here at all. In Honolulu³² for instance, we are introducing a good old American custom and the back-fire still goes on. We tried to blow up our dear old emperor here in Japan³³—but the old dear decided he would rather not die that way. We have done right well in Manchuria,³⁴ though, and are snuggled in all nice and comfy for the winter!

31. Louise is actually writing from New York.

32. She is referring to the Massie trials, which are described in note 14.

33. Emperor Hirohito of Japan narrowly escaped an assassination attempt by a Korean nationalist on January 9, 1932.

34. In September 1931 Japan used the pretext of a railway bombing to invade Manchuria. It set up a puppet government, which was denounced and refused recognition by the League of Nations. Japan was ordered out of Manchuria. Japan refused to withdraw its troops and resigned from the League. In January 1932 the United States refused to acknowledge the legitimacy of the new Manchurian government.

Your letter was happily received and contents digested. Knowing how busy you have been going from place to place, I realize you don't have much time to write, but I think you have done well by your family. Thanks so much Langston for "Dear Lovely Death".³⁵ It is handsomely done and means a great deal to me as I remember so well when some of the poems were written—back in the good old days (?) when we basked in sun light of white philanthropy.

My last point leads me to Zora's "Great Day"³⁶ performed last Sunday night. I enclose one review of it from today's Herald Trib.³⁷ Others I saw were quite commendatory. There was a note of acknowledgement to Mrs. R. O. Mason and an introduction by our mutual friend Dr. Locke.

"Never No More"³⁸ the new Millen play of a lynching with Rose McClendon starring has also been well received altho as something almost too realistic. There have been a number of other Negro plays of more or less mediocrity. "Sentinal"³⁹ in which Wayland Rudd was playing had a very short run.

I haven't seen any of them—haven't cared to. I am tired of the traditional Negro types in the theatre such as Sentinal or The [illegible] Honey of Comedy. The Never No More [I] am avoiding because of its defeatism. What's the use of seeing something that is going to sap one dry emotionally and show no [way] out. I think it is bad for Negroes for so many are involved with the idea of futility, impossibility of things being any better—the propaganda of submission like the weak and mild Gentle Jesus. But all Broadway wants from us is our primitive spontaneous nature expression or evidence of utter despair and emotional sublimation.

So I shall wait, Lang darling, until you write your revolutionary drama of the black masses, giving it all the rich coloring which our people have given to our common cultural life in this country. But leading the way to a new life, a new hope.

35. *Dear Lovely Death* is a small collection of Langston's poems, published by Troutbeck Press in New York in 1931.

36. *Great Day* is a theatrical musical written by Zora Neale Hurston. It was first performed on Broadway at the John Golden Theatre on January 10, 1932.

37. The *New York Herald Tribune* was a daily New York City newspaper.

38. *Never No More* was written by James Knox Millen and produced on Broadway in January 1932.

39. *Sentinels* is a Broadway drama written by Lula Vollmer, which had a short run in late December 1931 and early January 1932 featuring the African American actor Wayland Rudd. Rudd later became part of the group that Louise organized to travel to the USSR in 1932 to appear in the ill-fated film *Black and White*.

I am sorry you aren't coming back to NY soon, altho I think it will be swell for you to go to California. Gosh: I wish I could join you. Haven't forgotten about our plans and hope we can get together on them. I have just written an article on race relations which I want you to see as soon as it is published to see what you think of it. So let me know where to write to you after Jan. 18. I got the *Contempo*⁴⁰—thanks a lot—and I distributed the extra ones around. I gave Henry [Moon]⁴¹ the devil about publishing your letter as Eddy's. I think he wrote you about it. Henry is a nice boy—but that's his trouble. He's too goddam nice!

Gee Lang, I am having a swell time. My pinkness is gaining a rosier hue from day to day—and maybe some day I will be a real red! I am beginning work with some of the organizations—ILD⁴²—FSU⁴³—sub-rosa of course, as I am not yet ready to give my all—that is, my bread and butter. But I feel so much better being a little bit useful. I am still going to school, too, and it's great stuff—Marxism dialectic materialism—and I feel as if I am learning something for the first time in my life. I wish you were [here] so we could be going together. But never mind—there's Russia beckoning to us!

Chapter II

Sue is home and has spoken of your expeditions together down thru the South. What a lot of fun you must have had. And then all of your experiences must be extremely valuable as well as entertaining. My good friend, Mary McLeod—how is she? And Mr. and Mrs. Sona? And our famous town of Scottsboro—did they meet you with the brass band. You know they even did that for the 9 boys—and they didn't call Christ a nigger. I think your experience at Chapel Hill was rare—and its repercussions more so.⁴⁴

40. *Contempo* (1931–1934) was a radical magazine published in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. It was founded by Milton Abernathy and Anthony Buttitta, students at the University of North Carolina.

41. This is probably Henry Lee Moon, a writer and journalist at *New York Amsterdam News*, a weekly newspaper for the city's Black community.

42. The ILD (International Labor Defense) was a legal and civil rights organization founded in 1925 by the American section of the Communist International (Comintern). The ILD, under the national leadership of Pat, was instrumental in mobilizing national and international support in the Scottsboro case.

43. FSU (Friends of the Soviet Union) was founded in the United States in the 1920s as a relief organization to provide food, clothing, and material support for the Soviet people during a great famine. The FSU published the monthly magazine *Soviet Russia Today*. In 1927 the Comintern coordinated the activities of "friendship" societies in many countries, creating the International Association of Friends of the Soviet Union.

44. A famous incident occurred in November 1931, when Hughes was invited to speak on the campus of the all-white University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. Prior to his visit, he was asked by the progressive editors of *Contempo* magazine to submit a poem for

There is a Scottsboro meeting today of the Nati'l Committee. Eric Waldron is one of the speakers—to my great surprise I was going—but I don't feel a 100 per cent today. So in place of being in the meeting I am propped up in bed listening to the Philharmonic concert over the radio Mom got for X-mas and writing to you.

Well now—for any gossip I know little for I move about in gossip circles with greater rarity all the time. Alta [Douglas] is fine and planning on her trip to Paris this summer. Doug [Aaron Douglas] seems to be making it O.K. from those letters of his I have read. Poor Martelia [Mortelia Womack] wants to go along she says. Alta says it will be over her dead body. She is very fond (?) of her you know, and Doug—I am sure he would leave Paris if he heard Martelia was on her way there.

We now have a smaller family. Emily, Mildred and Helen⁴⁵ have moved into an apartment of their own. Was Doris [DuBissette] back here with us before you left? Katherine [Jenkins] and George [Sample] are still making it. Mother seems to be feeling better—she is under the care of a new doctor. She was very pleased with the box and its contents you sent her—“It's the [illegible]”, says she.

Jesse Fauset's *China Berry Tree*⁴⁶ has blossomed with nice respectable people that [W. E. B.] DuBois loves to read about. Its write ups have been good although [Rudolph] Fisher in today's [New York Herald] Tribune Books takes columns to say nothing about it—maybe diplomacy. Henry Hansen praised it highly—but he has never shown any discrimination about things Negro any way. I shall never forget his review of Paul Robeson Negro.⁴⁷ Countee's book⁴⁸ comes out next month. I hear it is an amusing expose of Harlem's social and literary pretenders.

Our committee gave a dinner for Diego Rivera—I mean the Seminar in Mexico Committee. It was a terrible affair—stupid well fattened bourgeoisie. My dinner partner was an old man who insisted upon trying to pat me

publication. He chose “Christ in Alabama,” an incendiary poem that echoes the plight of the nine Scottsboro Boys, who were imprisoned in Alabama at the time. There was a great uproar in Chapel Hill's white community. Langston escaped the wrath of the ensuing racist attacks and left to continue his tour through the South without speaking on campus.

45. Emily, Mildred, and Helen were friends of Louise's, who had boarded with her and Mother Thompson at their large Harlem apartment

46. *The Chinaberry Tree: A Novel of American Life* was the third novel of Jessie Fauset, published in 1931.

47. *Paul Robeson, Negro*, published in 1930, was a biography of Paul Robeson, written by his wife, Eslanda Goode Robeson.

48. The book is *One Way to Heaven*, a collection of poems by Countee Cullen, published in 1932.

on the knee. Jesus! Diego was more gross than ever in his dinner clothes—and his speech, trying to retain some proletarian phrases but set to the music of Hearts and Flowers. Did you hear about his debacle with the John Reed Club?⁴⁹ He was denounced openly.

I talked with Walt Carmen [Carmon] not so long ago and he said much about you, rejoicing in your new consciousness and expression of revolt. So I emphatically back up Loren [Miller]’s recommendation—keep up the good work. And when we are poor—we can eat beans together Lang—and have a swell time doing it, too. I don’t know how much longer I shall hold out but certainly not so very long—I mean hold out in bourgeois circles. I should fairly love to kick over the traces right now.

I wrote Nebby you were probably coming to California. Did you ever hear from her husband Matt Crawford about an engagement?⁵⁰ He wrote me and I told him to write you in care of The Crisis. Noel Sullivan’s address is 2323 Hyde St., San Francisco.

Let me know your plans and send me your itinerary. Mother sends her love. Everyone in the house sends greetings.

Best wishes for a continued successful tour—but don’t stay away too long for I miss you.

Always your comrade,
Louise

49. The John Reed Club was a Marxist cultural organization named after the American Communist expatriate journalist John Reed. On New Year’s Day, 1932, Rivera spoke before the club’s New York chapter. He was subsequently denounced as a “renegade” and “counter-revolutionist” because he had painted murals for “imperialist” sponsors, such as the San Francisco Stock Exchange. The February 1932 issue of *New Masses* magazine carried a strong statement from the club, stating its regret at having invited Rivera to speak and its intention to return the \$100 contribution he had made to the organization.

50. Louise is referring to Matt’s interest in organizing a speaking date in Berkeley for Langston during the poet’s planned tour of the Bay Area.