
The Negritude Movement in France

Negritude was both a literary and ideological movement led by French speaking black writer's intellectuals from France colonies in Africa and the Caribbean. The movement is marked by its rejection of European colonization and its rule in the African diaspora, pride in 'blackness' and traditional African values and culture mixed with an undercurrent of Marxists ideals.

Negritude was born from a shared experience of discrimination and oppression and attempt to dispel stereotype and create a new black of consciousness. The movement drew its inspiration from Harlem renaissance, which was beginning its decline. The Harlem Renaissance which was alternatively called the 'new Negro Renaissance', fostered black artists and leaders who prompted a sense of pride and advocacy in the black community and a refusal to submit to injustices.

Negritude is the simple recognition of the fact that one is black, the acceptance of this fact and of our destiny as blacks, of our history and culture. Basically, negritude movement is born out of the context of francophone Africans who were responding to stiff, dehumanizing, and cultural and religious disorienting policy of French assimilation-this is a term used to describe the French colonial policy in Africa.

The policy was aimed at turning Africa into 'Frenchmen' through the process of education. This policy was meant to make the Africans culturally French. The French proclaimed that Africans could assimilate French culture and that those who did so could be accepted on terms of full social equality by all Frenchmen. The social equality was however not realistic. Importantly, 'assimilation was not aimed at elevating the African but at devaluing his culture, and that was why it was thought necessary to strip him of his true cultural self and put on him a foreign one which was later to revolt against'.

The assertion of black pride by members of the negritude movement was attended by a cry against this assimilation. In their view, colonization had stripped their culture of not only their uniqueness but also the means of expressing it, via a transportation of a foreign language. Writers did use French and other languages in new ways, using them to express symbolically their connection to traditional African culture, rituals and symbols.

According to Senghor negritude defined the best means of expressing the essence of black identity and he often stressed the existence of a black psychology, this is the acceptance and the pride in being black. They were also disturbed by the world wars in which they saw their countrymen not only dying for a cause that was not theirs but being treated as inferiors on their

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battlefield. They became increasingly aware through their study of history of the suffering and humiliation of black people. First under the bondage of slavery and then under colonial rule.

In this poem Diop talks about how the blacks are being mistreated by the whites. In the poem he talks about being proud of Africa this was before the colonizers came but this changed when the whites came and took over the continent in the poem he says “the sweat of your work, the work of your slavery”, meaning they [blacks] have been enslaved. He goes ahead and says in the poem “this back trembling with red scars” this is the humiliation they get from the whip they are given at their backs when working but are considered to work slowly.

But there is hope this comes when” the movement of negritude is formed at the end of the poem he talks about salvation when he says “that is your Africa springing up a new, springing up patiently”. This means that freedom is coming slowly and that soon they will be free from the colonizers, he continues by saying “whose fruit bit by bit we acquire the bitter taste of liberty”. In the end of the poem there is liberation.

These view inspired many of the basic ideas behind negritude. First, the mystic warmth of African life, gaining strength from its closeness to nature it’s constant contact with ancestors, should be constantly placed in proper perspective against materialism of western culture.

Second African must look to their own cultural heritage to determine the values and traditions that are most useful in the modern world. Third, committed writers should use African subject matter and poetic traditions and should excite a desire for political freedom. Fourth, negritude itself encompasses the whole of African cultural, economic, social and political values. Fifth, the values and dignity of African traditions and people must be asserted.

“We lived in an atmosphere of rejection and we developed an inferiority complex. I have always thought that the black man was searching for his identity and it has seemed to me that if what we want is to establish this identity, then we must a concrete consciousness of what we are, that is, of the first fact of our lives: that we are black, that we were black and have a history that contains cultural elements of a great value, and that negroes were not as you put it, born yesterday, because there have been beautiful and important black civilization”.

Denunciation of the ills of colonization, another tenet of negritude movement was thus borne out of the context of the above quotation. Against slave trade, colonialism, neocolonialism and above all prejudice towards the black race and black people, but before the assertion and subsequent establishment of African historical relevance, her heritage and values, the negroes had to undress themselves of the shackles and constrictive tendencies of assimilation.

“To set our own and effective revolution, we had to first put off our borrowed dresses those of

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assimilation and affirm our being, that is negritude. To be truly ourselves, we ought to embody the Negro African culture, for our negritude to be effective we had to shake off the dust.

This movement was a call to reject assimilation and reclaim their own racial heritage and qualities. Senghor advocates the emergence of “cultural workers” who will reveal black specificity to the world by articulating their experiences, their fortunes and misfortunes. It is only the black that will write about their history and validate their achievements. This will restore the lost humility, dignity, integrity and subjectivity of black identity necessary to confront racism and western imperialism.

Damas in his pigment he provides an ideological perspective, for him, negritude is a categorical rejection of an assimilation that negated black spontaneity as well as a defense for his condition as a black. In his poem “limbe” damas articulate negritude.

In this poem damas criticize racial division, he uses black doll to show that he is African meaning black in the poem. He says “in the darkness of its laws once I have recovered my courage and audacity and become myself once more” this points out that he probably did something that got him in trouble and that’s why he got his dolls taken away. He is trying to feel like himself and feel brave, like he did before this happened.

Negritude was formed by a united in a revolutionary action seeking the liberation of the blacks from whites and colonial power, the recognition of the negro-African culture and civilization. Despite the fact that black power ideology reflected a modernist sensibility, these elements were soon rendered irrelevant. The period directly after the black power movement was a time when major new magazines carried articles with cocky headlines like “what happened to black?” they had at least made it possible for black liberation to be on the national political agenda. In the wake of black movement, after so many rebels were slaughtered and lost.

In conclusion the negritude movement had influenced and still influences African literature. This fact owes to the claim of John and olive that “the spirit of African civilization animates, consciously or unconsciously, the best negro artist and writers today, both in Africa and America. In so far as they are aware of African culture and draw inspiration from it. They rise to international status.

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