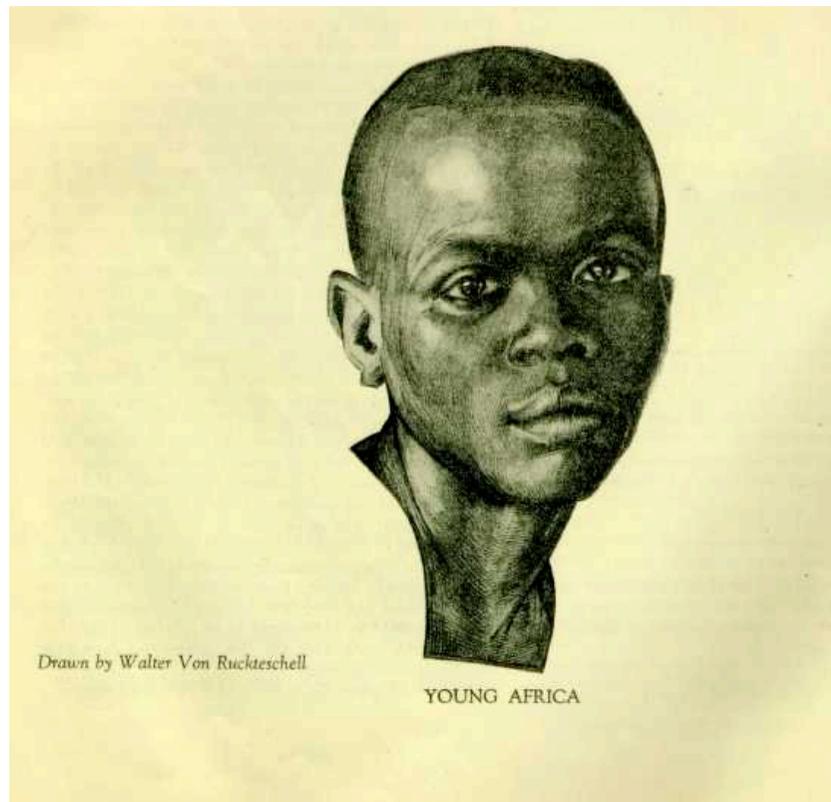


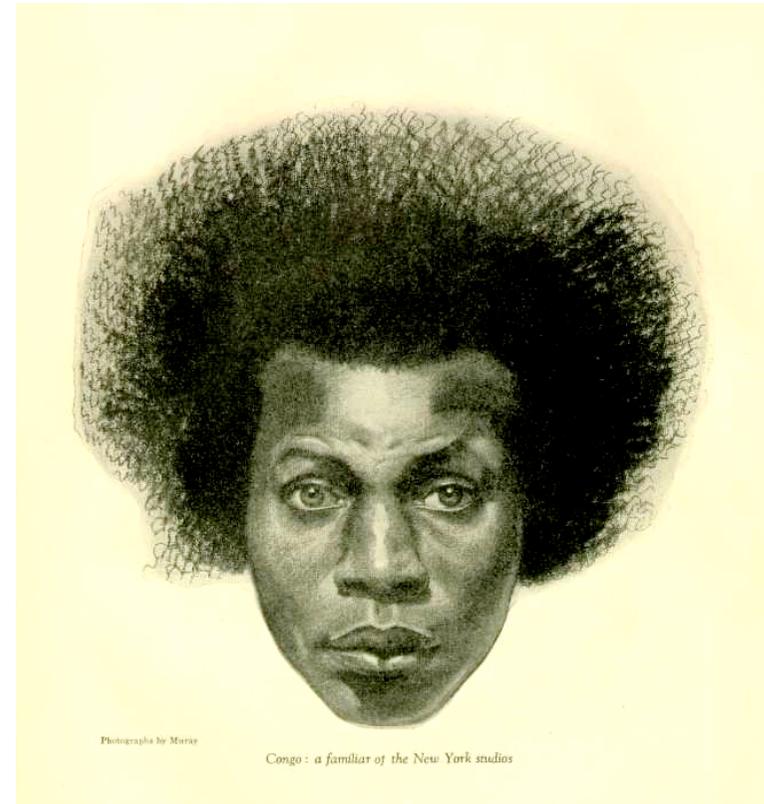
Handout & Topics for Class Discussion

Keywords: Identity, Representation, Mask

1. What is a Mask?
 - Functions?
 - Concepts?
2. Two Images:
 - Walter v. Ruckteschell and Winold Reiss
3. Two Texts:
 - Booker T. Washington and James Weldon Johnson
4. Claude McKay "If We Must Die" (1919)
5. Final Discussion:
 - Form as Mask/Mask as Form



Walter von Ruckteschell
in "Harlem, the Mecca of the New Negro." *Survey Graphic* (March 1925)



Winold Reiss
from the „Harlem Types“ Section of *The New Negro*
(1925)



Young America: native-born

CONVENTIONS stand doubly in the way of artistic portrayal of Negro folk; certain narrowly arbitrary conventions of physical beauty, and as well, that inevitable inscrutability of things seen but not understood. Caricature has put upon the countenance of the Negro the mask of the comic and the grotesque, whereas in deeper truth and comprehension, nature or experience have put there the stamp of the very opposite, the serious, the tragic, the wistful. At times, too, there is a quality of soul that can only be called brooding and mystical. Here they are to be seen as we know them to be in fact. While it is a revealing interpretation for all, for the Negro artist, still for the most part confronting timidly his own material, there is certainly a particular stimulus and inspiration in this redeeming vision. Through it in all likelihood must come his best development in the field of the pictorial arts, for his capacity to express beauty depends vitally upon the capacity to see it in his own life and to generate it out of his own experience.

As the great day [of emancipation] drew nearer, there was more singing in the slave quarters than usual. It was bolder, had more ring, and lasted later into the night. Most of the verses of the plantation songs had some reference to freedom. True, they had sung those same verses before, but they had been careful to explain that the “freedom” in these songs referred to the next world, and had no connection with life in this world. Now they gradually *threw off the mask*; and were not afraid to let it be known that the “freedom” in their songs meant freedom of the body in this world.

Booker T. Washington *Up From Slavery* (1901)

We wear the mask that grins and lies,
It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes,—
This debt we pay to human guile;
With torn and bleeding hearts we smile,
And mouth with myriad subtleties.

Why should the world be overwise,
In counting all our tears and sighs?
Nay, let them only see us, while
We wear the mask.

We smile, but, O great Christ, our cries
To thee from tortured souls arise.
We sing, but oh the clay is vile
Beneath our feet, and long the mile;
But let the world dream otherwise,
We wear the mask!

Paul Lawrence Dunbar (1895)

IF we must die—let it not be like hogs
Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot,
While round us bark the mad and hungry dogs,
Making their mock at our accursed lot.
If we must die—oh, let us nobly die, 5
So that our precious blood may not be shed
In vain; then even the monsters we defy
Shall be constrained to honor us though dead!
Oh, Kinsmen! We must meet the common foe;
Though far outnumbered, let us still be brave, 10
And for their thousand blows deal one death-blow!
What though before us lies the open grave?
Like men we'll face the murderous, cowardly pack,
Pressed to the wall, dying, but—fighting back!

Claude McKay (1919)



Bert Williams in „The Ziegfeld Follies“ (1910)



Al Jolson in *The Jazz Singer* (1927)



Melvin Gray Johnson *Self-Portrait* (1934)