



Richard Wright and *Black Power*

Richard Nathaniel Wright (1908 - 1960), one of the most influential African-American authors of this century, wrote novels, short stories, poetry, and essays. He was the first African-American novelist to write about urban ghettos and of the rage fostered by racism in America. Wright was self-educated and had little formal schooling. His first story was published when he was sixteen. He developed a Marxist perspective and belonged to the Communist Party from 1932 - 1944, but resigned because of the narrow-mindedness and Soviet political devotion exhibited by party members. He wrote for the Federal Writers' Project in the 1930s.

Until 1938 Wright's work appeared only in left-wing journals such as *New Masses* and *Left Front*. Wright published his group of four stories known as *Uncle Tom's Children* in 1938 and he won the *Story* prize for the best book submitted by an FWP writer. In 1939 he received a Guggenheim Fellowship which allowed him to complete *Native Son* (1940). In 1945 he published an autobiography, *Black Boy*.

In 1947 Wright moved to Paris against racism and brutality in the U.S.; he resided there until his death. Existentialist writers such as Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir influenced his next major work, *The Outsider* (1953), as well as later writings. He also turned to writing non-fiction.

In 1953 he traveled to the African Gold Coast (now Ghana), one of the first British colonies to be granted self-government. He describes his experiences in *Black Power* (1954) and forecasts the future for the continent under native rule. His suggestion that military regimes and rigid social structures replace tribal traditions sparked controversy, but his reporting of the society and events was considered excellent. His later books, *The Color Curtain* (1956) and *White Man, Listen* (1957), also deal with colonialism and Asian and African nationalism. He also published other novels about life in the U.S. He died in Paris on November 28, 1960.

This collection consists primarily of the original typescript for *Black Power*. It contains corrections, additions, and deletions, including long holograph passages. Much of the material in this draft was never published, so it is significant for documenting Wright's original intentions in recording his experiences in Ghana. Besides the typescript, there are some fifty pages of material perhaps intended as a supplement to the book. Included are an interview with Ghana radical Dzenkle Dzenku; a detailed account of a political meeting in 1950 which resulted in several arrests; a discussion of Kwame Nkrumah; and a four-page sheet, "Memorandum submitted to the Executive of the Convention People's Party in Protest against its Present Policy--6th Jan. 1952," which is bitterly anti-Nkrumah. This collection was acquired by Northwestern University Library in 1968 from a New York dealer.

