



Sykes & Ransom

**\$500 SMILES**—Billy Eckstine (second from right) has just presented a \$500 check to aid the NAACP fight for civil rights. Left to right: Conchita Nakatani, of the Philadelphia branch; Dr. J. Sheperd Smith, also of the Philadelphia branch; Mr. Eckstine; and Dr. Harry Greene, who accepted the check on behalf of the NAACP. The presentation was made in Philadelphia, Pa. **BOTTOM:** Walter White, second from left, looks pleased as he accepts a check for \$1,000 for the NAACP from Frank Summers of the East St. Louis, grand polemarch of the Kappa Alpha Psi fraternity. Last year the fraternity took out a \$500 life membership.

■ The author says that American racism reaches out even to France

## American Negroes in France

By Richard Wright

**B**ECAUSE there are no Black Belts in France which would enable heads to be counted in a racial manner, there are no official figures on the number of American Negroes in the French community. Rough estimates claim that there are more than 500 American Negroes in France, about half of which reside permanently or temporarily in Paris, the rest being scattered throughout the provinces. Occupationally, they comprise a diverse and varied lot, ranging from GI students, journalists, doctors, governmental employees, musicians, entertainers, independent artists and writers who are self-supporting and make their contribution to the daily life of France.

The U. S. Negro's status in France differs greatly from his status in America mainly in this: In America he was forced by law and custom

**RICHARD WRIGHT**, the well-known American novelist, now lives in Paris, France.

to live in areas designated as "Black Belts," while in France he is lost amidst 40,000,000 Frenchmen who are indifferent to the color of their skin. The American Negro in France goes about his daily routine with no anxiety of having to cope with arbitrary racial assaults directed against him on residential, occupational, social, or educational grounds.

Yet, and understandably so, there lies uneasily in the background of the U. S. Negro's mind the memory of racial wrongs which he suffered before coming to France which, to him, is a land of refuge, the only spot on earth which allows him the chance to live in a normal human atmosphere. France to him represents a state of humane civilization in which he is not coddled or singled out, but just simply "left alone." The U. S. Negro realizes, of course, that France is rent with social, political, and economic problems; he knows that France is no Utopia; but the difference in his life in France as compared with that of America

is so vast and deep that there is in his heart a feeling of gratitude for being allowed to live as a man among men.

#### NEW ANXIETY

But something has begun to happen to the U. S. Negro in France; a new kind of anxiety has entered his consciousness; and this new worry has nothing to do with Frenchmen or their behavior towards him. With the advent of the Marshall Plan and the Atlantic Pact, the U. S. Negro has witnessed the spread and deepening of American influence in France. The constricting racial influences from which he had fled seem to be coming nearer to him across the Atlantic. For the first time since he landed in France as a refugee visitor, the U. S. Negro is asking himself: To what extent will some Frenchmen, eager to please Americans, accept racial doctrines alien to French traditions or customs?

If the Negro had only the French community to contend with, they would have no concern. But each day world events are showing that France is no longer just *France*; France is a nation whose attitudes are being modified on the one hand by America's growing military and industrial might, and on the other by the challenge of Russia. Daily, U. S. Negroes have watched French conditions of life sway and retreat under the impact of one or the other of these nationalistic blocs.

In the neighborhoods in which they live, Negroes have heard Frenchmen voice fear and concern about the fate of French freedom, about the national humiliation to

which France is being subjected, and on these occasions U. S. Negroes have expressed their sympathy to the French and they had a double right to do so, both as guests of France and as partisans of freedom. To an extent that white Americans do not feel the capacity or the need, the U. S. Negroes have sought a solidarity with French attitudes as though for protective coloration, and they have caught, as if by contagion, the French apprehension of the loss of their freedom, of the fear of America and the dread of Russia.

With the advent of each new white American GI on French soil, the U. S. Negro feels that his immunity from American racism was that much less secure. Also, the U. S. Negro observed that American spokesmen in France come almost exclusively from U. S. governmental officials of a stridently nationalistic type representing governmental or political plans. There is no voice of liberalism, no humane tone to echo the deeply humanistic yearning of average Americans.

#### DEEP KINSHIP

Feeling a deep kinship with French ideals of liberty, U. S. Negroes have reacted sharply. They well know that the status of France today makes it necessary for her to accept American aid, but who better than American Negroes, victims of 300 years of American "kindness," can best tell when the danger line of "kindness" has been passed, when "giving" ceases to be giving and passes insensibly into "taking," when "help" is no longer help but domination?

Our quarrel, frankly, as U. S. Ne-

groes, is with our fellow countrymen, those white Americans who take pride in damning French life and culture 24 hours a day; white Americans, who, while speaking out of one side of their mouths about freedom and democracy, continue to practice racial exclusiveness.

I cite a few examples:

1) Not a single American commercial firm in all France employs a single American Negro, and among these firms are the following American industrial giants: The Guaranty Trust Company of New York; J. P. Morgan and Company; Commercial Cables; The American Express Company; The Chase National Bank; Kodak; Standard Oil; Shell Oil; U. S. Steel; Western Union; International Harvester; etc.

2) Until a year ago, U. S. Government agencies in Europe rarely employed Negroes.

3) The American Hospital in Paris, in 25 years of its existence, has never employed an American Negro.

4) White American tourists, laden with dollars and racist psychology, have forced a few French hotels to enforce racial practices for the first time in recent French history.

5) An increasing multiplicity of clashes between white GI's and U. S. Negro civilians in Paris have been witnessed in recent months.

6) The barbarous and drunken behavior of white Americans in Paris has been observed by Frenchmen with pain and embarrassment.

7) In the press (Perry Miller's article in the recent issue of *The Atlantic Monthly*) and in private,

white Americans have continuously attacked the culture and the national qualities of French character.

#### EXPLANATIONS DEMANDED

The above are but a few highlights of American attitudes and behavior in France which have caused many Frenchmen to turn to American Negroes to demand explanations for such rigorous nationalistic manifestations on the part of their white fellow countrymen.

American Negroes, in defense of their liberty and as a gesture of friendship and solidarity toward their French neighbors, organized themselves into a group. As much to aid Frenchmen as themselves, they launched the Franco-American Fellowship whose aim is to raise again the concept of freedom, generosity, the dignity and sanctity of the individual.

While keeping scrupulously clear of French domestic politics, Franco-American Fellowship stands as a witness for freedom, offering an outstretched hand to others who are likewise concerned about keeping alive a creative concept of man. Franco-American Fellowship hailed with pride the campaign among French intellectuals to save the life of William McGee from the legal lynching of Mississippi mobs.

To Frenchmen of good will, to French lovers of liberty, Franco-American Fellowship declares its willingness to stand in solidarity with those Frenchmen who place freedom before all else, who feel the need to reassert the proud traditions of French culture and history.