

NAACP Reaps Royalties from Dorothy Parker's Works

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Sometimes the disposition of a copyright can be a surprise.

Dorothy Parker (1893–1967), an American writer of poems, short stories, criticism, and Hollywood screenplays, was a founding member of the Algonquin Round Table in the 1920s, a group of writers who met in the Algonquin Hotel in New York City, mainly to exercise their wit.

Well known during her life, Parker associated with many of the most famous writers of the 1920s—Fitzgerald, Hemingway, Lardner, and others. For a time, she lived in Europe and experienced Paris as an expatriot. Her wit could be sarcastic, cruel, and pointed, but frequently humorous and memorable, such as her saying “Men seldom make passes at girls who wear glasses.”

Parker had a longstanding interest in, and participation with, liberal and civil rights causes. As a young woman, she supported the Actors' Equity Association strike of 1919; demonstrated against the 1927 execution of Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, Italian-born anarchists who were convicted of murder in Massachusetts; raised funds for Loyalist Spain during the Spanish civil war; and chaired the national Joint Anti-Fascist Refugee Committee. She contributed to the communist *New Masses* magazine and

was eventually blacklisted in Hollywood. The FBI compiled a lengthy dossier on her.

Upon her death, her will gave her estate, including her copyrights and royalties, to the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, a man whom she admired but had never met. King was murdered a few months after Parker's death, and the will stipulated that the literary estate would pass to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in the event of his death.

Parker's ashes remained in a file drawer in her lawyer's New York City office until 1988, when the *New York Daily News* publicized Parker's lack of a dignified final resting place. The NAACP offered to create the Dorothy Rothschild Parker Memorial Garden, where the ashes are now interred, at its national headquarters in Baltimore and NAACP president Benjamin Hooks dedicated the site on October 20, 1988. ©



Dorothy Parker about 1917

A selection of quotes from Dorothy Parker

The first thing I do in the morning is brush my teeth and sharpen my tongue.

Don't look at me in that tone of voice.

Take care of the luxuries and the necessities will take care of themselves.

You can't teach an old dogma new tricks.

Living well is the best revenge.

Never complain, never explain.

I think that the direction in which a writer should look is around.

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