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The Harlem Renaissance
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# The Harlem Renaissance as History, Memory, and Myth

The Harlem Renaissance comes down to us today as a braiding of history, memory, and myth. Understood as history, it names a period falling between the early 1920s and the late 1930s when culture came to the forefront of the many-sided debate surrounding African American freedom. These years corresponded with an unprecedented artistic outpouring in the form of plays, novels, poetry, music, and visual art representing black life across many social categories—urban and rural, light skinned and dark, upper and lower class, male and female, heterosexual and homosexual. As the name indicates, the Harlem Renaissance found its physical and spiritual center in New York City, but its reach extended to Boston, Chicago, Philadelphia, Washington, London, Paris, Africa, and the Caribbean.

Conceived of as memory, or as a matter of lived rather than official history, the Harlem Renaissance represents one instance of the larger African American attempt to transform the backward-looking story of slavery and its aftermath into a forward-looking narrative of self-possession and possibility. Toward this end, African American journals and newspapers heralded the birth of a New Negro, who stood in stark contrast to his supposedly shuffling and submissive forebear.[1]

Rather than submit to racism, this new type of black American insisted on full social and political equality and expressed herself in her own terms, often celebrating features of black life that Western culture typically vilified: thus black became beautiful, Africa became an exalted place of origin, and the black voice became a source of cultural and political power. Because it succeeded so well in providing lasting examples of both power and beauty in the form of art, the Harlem Renaissance holds a rightful place in African American memory as a time when freedom began to feel free.

Regarded as memory, the Harlem Renaissance shades ever more into myth. In this broader guise, it reflects the centrality of rebirth in American national ideology. From the Puritan "City on a Hill," to the forging of frontier settlement, to the immigrant ordeal of assimilation, Americans have always believed in transformation and progress. In its attempt to start African American history over again in a time and place unmarked by slavery, the Harlem Renaissance adds a twist to this tradition. In rough agreement with American myths of renewal but against the grain of American racial practice, it represents an enduring hope: that the lowest and most rejected of outsiders, slaves and former slaves in a nation of free people, may rise up and claim their birthright.

Because it reflects the larger aspirations of Americans and African Americans, the Harlem Renaissance comes down to us today as a historical subject with strong contemporary resonance. Consider the aura of magic surrounding the Harlem Globetrotters and *Showtime at the Apollo*, or the attention given to former president Bill Clinton for locating his office in Harlem. Because Harlem is still regarded as *the* symbolic African American cultural space, the Harlem Renaissance is both an intriguing and a daunting subject for historians. A lightning rod for American and African American racial aspiration, it seems to defy dispassionate analysis, as those who would comment on the events and works of the period are inevitably drawn into the vortex of current political debates. Moreover, because the Harlem Renaissance involves so centrally what black Americans have thought about themselves, it requires sympathetic involvement for full understanding. Yet this very requirement, combined with the high-stakes possibility of racial self-creation and regeneration, has often made it more an object of vilification or celebration than a subject of critical analysis.

As a result, the scholarly debate on the Harlem Renaissance centers around a single rather un-nuanced question: Did it succeed or fail? In other words, did a truly self-aware and authentic mode of black



expression arise in this era? Such a question leads to many others regarding origins, legacies, individual artists, the range of participants in the movement, and the proper standards for judging the art it produced. It will be best to approach these questions historically, first by asking how and why the Harlem Renaissance began.

## THE NEW NEGRO

Like any complex historical event, the Harlem Renaissance has many roots, some of which coil deeply into the subsoil of American and African American history. Nevertheless, its immediate origins go back only a decade to the militant "New Negro" movement of the 1910s. In turning the combative political energies of this earlier movement toward a cultural application, the Harlem Renaissance gave the term *New Negro* a new set of connotations.

Originating in the early nineteenth century as a name for newly arrived slaves, the term *New Negro* took on a range of meanings by the early twentieth century that included both violent resistance to oppression and the conservative, anti-protest orientation of Booker T. Washington, the president of Tuskegee Institute and the dominant figure in black American politics from 1895 until his death in 1915. During these years, southern states—where 90 percent of the U.S. black population resided—sought increasingly to exclude blacks socially through segregation laws (Jim Crow), politically by preventing them from voting (disfranchisement), and economically by limiting them to small, heavily indebted cotton farms (sharecropping). Widespread racial violence against blacks by police forces and by ordinary citizens added an element of everyday terror to the litany of racial oppression. Rather than fight for political and social rights under such difficult circumstances, the practical-minded Washington publicly accepted segregation and disfranchisement as immovable realities. He argued that industrial training and individual effort would gradually build black business skill and wealth. And he thought blacks would gain their civil rights in time. Washington's compromise approach became the principal political target of a very different kind of New Negro, one mainly based in northern cities and who refused to trade with racists on what he regarded as basic human rights. Led most prominently by the multitalented intellectual W. E. B. Du Bois, this group served as a harbinger of events to come—but much would have to change in black American life before this direction became apparent.

Among the many changes that would radicalize blacks in the early twentieth century, migration to the North, precipitated by World War I (1914–1918), was the most important. The war in Europe virtually cut off European immigration, forcing Northern industry to turn to black labor from the South at a time when southern blacks were eager to escape the unrelenting racial cruelty and poverty endemic to the cotton industry. Therefore, economic and social influences both "pushed" and "pulled" black migrants toward the North. In deciding to leave familiar surroundings for an inviting but virtually unknown "Promised Land," they transformed their own lives as they altered the course of African American history. Between 1915 and 1918, 500,000 blacks migrated to the North. A second wave of 700,000 followed during the 1920s. Together, these two large migrations urbanized about one-tenth of the black American population within fifteen years.

As the northern black population rose, so did expectations. But the North rarely met them. When blacks began to arrive in northern cities such as Chicago and New York, whites restricted them to segregated neighborhoods that quickly became overcrowded. Many working-class whites feared that black laborers would take their jobs, act as strikebreakers, or accept lower wages. Although blacks did this much less often than whites suspected, such fears sparked racial violence in industrial cities.[2] In 1917, rioting white workers in East St. Louis, Illinois, who claimed to be attacking "scabs" and "strikebreakers," left more than forty African Americans dead and six thousand homeless. In response to the increasingly dangerous racial atmosphere, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) held a Silent March from Harlem to downtown Manhattan. This dramatic protest not only announced the powerful new black presence in urban America, but also protested the government's unwillingness to protect black citizens and, through the silence of its 10,000 participants, the government suppression of dissent through wartime measures such as the Espionage Act (1917). One silent protester carried a sign beseeching President Woodrow Wilson, who promised that the war would "make the world safe for democracy," to make America safe for democracy, too.[3] Clearly, urbanized blacks were beginning to view their situation in national and international terms.

African American soldiers in World War I served in a segregated military that did everything possible to restrict their activities to ditch digging and fence mending. Of the 325,000 black soldiers in the war, only 20 percent served in combat roles; among this 20 percent was



Harlem's 369th Regiment, whom the Germans called the Hell Fighters. For fighting 191 consecutive days in the trenches without a single man captured or an inch of ground lost to the enemy and for spearheading the Allied invasion of the Rhine, the regiment was awarded the Croix-de-Guerre for bravery by the French command, even as American commanders cast aspersions on the courage of black soldiers.[4] Upon its return to the United States in 1919, the 369th marched triumphantly and symbolically up Fifth Avenue in tight French formation (see Figure 1). When it finally reached the adoring crowds of Harlem, the soldiers broke ranks and rushed into the arms of friends and family as the regimental band, led by James Reese Europe, played "Here Comes My Daddy Now." At that bright moment of jubilation, it seemed that the New Negro had arrived in his rightful place of glory. Yet the moment would not last. W. E. B. Du Bois, now editor of *The Crisis*, the journal of the NAACP, described the predicament with singular eloquence in "Returning Soldiers" (see Document 1). Having

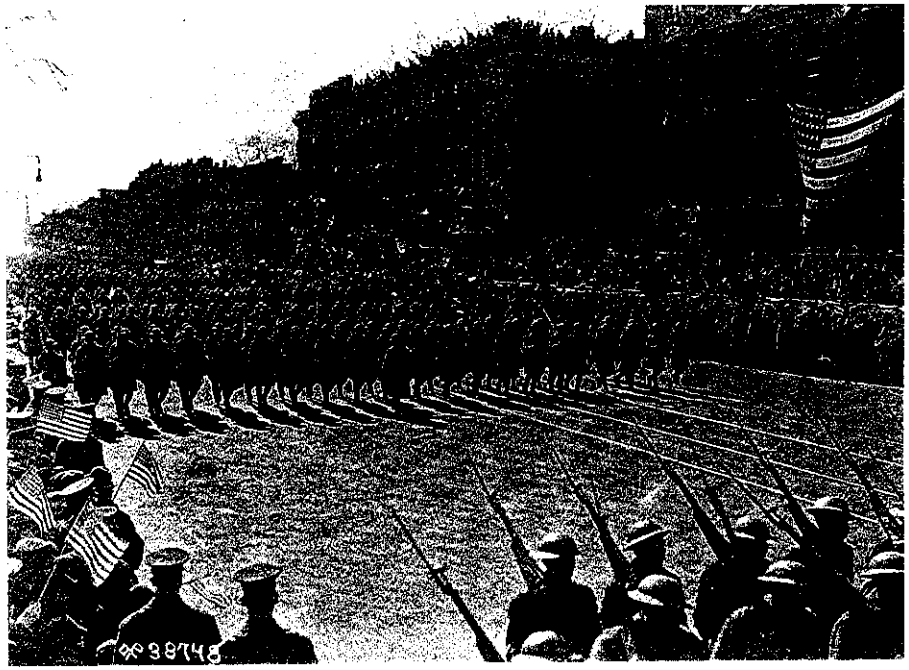


**Figure 1.** *The 369th Regiment Marching up Fifth Avenue, New York City, February 17, 1919.*
National Archives.

fought for the cause of democracy on the battlefields of Europe, black soldiers returned to fight for democracy at home.[5]

"Returning Soldiers" declared Du Bois's dogged resolve to continue the fight for equality, but it also tacitly admitted that his support for war had been too optimistic. Against a vocal minority of black leaders who questioned whether black Americans ought to fight for a country that had done nothing but betray them, Du Bois had urged blacks in 1918 to "close ranks" with whites and put their grievances aside.[6] He had hoped that such a gesture might soften white racism, but it did not, as the return of soldiers after World War I only intensified American race prejudice. Under the pressure of postwar economic readjustment and widespread fear of a new black militancy, a long and bloody series of race riots, collectively referred to as the Red Summer of 1919, broke out in Chicago, Washington, and twenty-four other cities. In the rabid violence of that year, seventy-six African Americans were lynched, including ten soldiers in uniform.[7] In response, the Jamaican writer Claude McKay published "If We Must Die" (see Document 6), a poem seething with the indignation and determination of the political underdog.

Contributing to the heightened racial tensions was a revived Ku Klux Klan, a racist paramilitary organization now dedicated to intimidating not only African Americans, but also immigrants. The Klan quickly gained members and extended its reach to northern states, where it gave voice to white working-class fears.[8] At the same time, the Communist Revolution in Russia (1917–1918) generated fears that outsiders would attempt to overthrow the American political and economic system. This "Red Scare" eventually was used to justify a series of government raids in the early 1920s, led by Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer, against "communist sympathizers"—a broad label that included almost anyone who questioned sharply and publicly the laws and economic practices of the United States.

This included A. Philip Randolph and Chandler Owen, editors of the Socialist journal *The Messenger*, who had campaigned loudly against World War I, denouncing it as a "capitalist war" in which millions of workers sacrificed their lives only to enrich the owners of weapons factories, steel mills, and other war industries. Randolph and Owen also viewed the race problem in economic terms. Ruling-class whites promoted racism, they said, because it divided white workers from black workers. Randolph and Owen urged black socialism, collective ownership of factories, and working-class unity across racial lines. Their "The New Negro—What Is He?" (see Document 2) asserts this program as it roundly denounces the political ideas of an older generation of black leaders.



Although New Negroes such as Randolph, Owen, and Du Bois advocated what they saw as the interest of ordinary black people, they never came close to capturing the mass imagination. This honor went to the Jamaican Marcus Garvey. While the majority of black leaders advocated integration, Garvey secured a large following by promoting a vision of independent black economic and political power. Through his organization, the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), and its shipping fleet, the Black Star Line, he hoped to establish an independent state in Africa that would link black people all over the world economically, politically, and spiritually. The sheer size and energy of the Garvey movement—which exceeded 500,000 members in the early 1920s—alarmed leaders such as Du Bois and Randolph, and its antics embarrassed them. Built in part on the idea of making the dream of an African empire tangible to ordinary blacks, the UNIA held huge conventions (see Document 3) and large, garish parades on the streets of Harlem that put on display the "dukes" and "duchesses" that made up its leadership. Also, by the standards of many black leaders, Garvey's version of "black is beautiful" rhetoric, which urged blacks to rise up as a "mighty race," appeared dangerously chauvinistic and out of place in a racial atmosphere marked by such threats as the Ku Klux Klan and the Red Scare.

Initially, A. Philip Randolph's *Messenger* led the charge against Garvey with a vitriolic "Garvey Must Go" campaign that attempted to turn the tide of black American opinion against the Jamaican. Garvey added to the controversy surrounding himself when he met with Ku Klux Klan leaders in 1922. Although Garvey said he believed in facing the enemy, his explanations did little to help defuse the denouncements of him in black journals and newspapers. The NAACP and Randolph's group then worked together to have Garvey investigated by the federal government. Ultimately tried for mail fraud charges stemming from his sloppy conduct of stock sales for the Black Star Line, Garvey went to jail in 1925. In 1927, he was deported, never to return to the United States. His demise, which placed in bold relief the willingness of New Negro leadership to use the government against one of its own, corresponded with the decline of black political radicalism in the 1920s. This decline would in turn play a decisive role in the rise of the Harlem Renaissance, a cultural movement that preserved some

elements of the earlier radicalism even as it made a less direct and less dangerous assault on racial injustice.

## HARLEM REAL AND IMAGINED

Although debates about the New Negro had national and international significance, they occurred for the most part in a single neighborhood in upper Manhattan (see Figure 2). In 1920, Harlem stretched six blocks from Lexington Avenue on the east side to St. Nicholas Avenue on the west. From north to south it covered about twenty blocks, or approximately one mile, between 125th and 145th streets. In this area, which expanded fifteen blocks to the south and ten blocks to the north by 1930 and grew in population from about 92,000 in 1910 to 328,000 in 1930, one could find the main headquarters of many significant civil rights organizations, including the UNIA and the National Urban League.[9] Here were the homes and offices of many civil rights leaders of national importance, including W. E. B. Du Bois, James Weldon Johnson, and A. Philip Randolph. The major journals connected to important civil rights organizations, such as *Opportunity* (published by Urban League) and *Negro World* (published by the UNIA), and major newspapers such as the *New York Age* and the *Amsterdam News* had offices here. The Silent March originated in Harlem; Marcus Garvey's colorful parades always occurred here; and the victorious 369th Regiment called it home.

Yet Harlem represented much more than a political center in the decade after World War I. Because of its location in New York City, a great entry point for immigrants, Harlem became in the 1920s a primary destination for black people from all over the world. Immigrants from the West Indies and Africa mixed freely with migrants from the South and with black New Yorkers whose families had resided in the city since the colonial period. In Harlem, blacks with college degrees circulated among uneducated people, and the richest resided within easy walking distance of the poor. As New York was the major American center for theater and publishing, Harlem attracted writers and artists of all sorts.[10] It was a center of black intellectual and artistic activity and, as poems by Helene Johnson, Claude McKay, and Countée Cullen demonstrate (see Documents 5, 6, and 8), a constant site of return for the artistic imagination of the 1920s and 1930s.

In his study *Black Manhattan* (see Document 4), James Weldon Johnson, one of the older artists and theorists of the Harlem Renaissance,




**Figure 2.** *Map of Important Harlem Renaissance Locations.*

claimed that Harlem's connection with New York City explained how its concrete realities—its broad streets, brownstones, diverse population, and varied employment opportunities—could produce imaginative dynamism. In "Harlem" (see Document 11), former Rhodes Scholar and Howard University philosophy professor Alain Locke similarly emphasizes Harlem's unique sociological features in casting it as the birthplace of a new black consciousness. These conceptions of Harlem as a place of rebirth and modernization competed with others that construed the "Mecca of the New Negro" in negative terms as an overcrowded ghetto, a site of class conflict, or a place of spiritual destruction. Walking down Seventh Avenue, where well-dressed Harlemites displayed their finery on Sunday afternoons, one might have agreed with Johnson and Locke, but after a brief encounter with overcrowded Fifth Avenue, where the desperate and the homeless of Harlem circulated among ramshackle tenements, one might well have come to the opposite opinion.[11] In the poems "The Harlem Dancer" and "Harlem Shadows" (see Document 6), Claude McKay reflects on this unsavory side of Harlem life by imagining the struggles of women caught in the trap of poverty.

By focusing on suffering prostitutes in these two poems, McKay not only offers an alternative to the most romantic outbursts of the optimistic "race capital" school, he also deflates attempts to view Harlem as a haven of sexual pleasure. During the 1920s, spurred in large part by a booming economy and the widespread desire to enjoy the good life after the war, Americans turned to the pleasures of partygoing, alcohol consumption, and sexual play. Although Prohibition (1919–1933) outlawed the use of alcohol, underground bars, or "speakeasies," turned a heavy profit distributing illegal gin, beer, and whiskey, to the vast enrichment of organized crime. In this new environment of forbidden pleasure, Harlem became one of America's favorite nighttime playgrounds. Although some upstanding intellectuals such as W. E. B. Du Bois decried the nightly traffic of thrill seekers—and the criminal underworld of bootleggers, pimps, and prostitutes that they supported—Harlem's vigorous nightlife contributed to its romantic reputation in the 1920s, which in turn made it an almost irresistible subject for songwriters, dramatists, novelists, poets, and visual artists.

Driven by Prohibition and by a growing rebellion against repressive moral standards, many whites yearned to experience the rush of an outing in the regions north of 125th Street. There they could listen to some of the most innovative jazz and blues music in the world, watch



some of the most energetic dancing, drink illegal gin and whiskey, and dance the night away in places like the Cotton Club and Connie's Inn, which served only whites, and Barron Wilkens' Exclusive Club, which catered to the upper class of both races. The more adventurous visitors to Harlem might hazard a trip to "Jungle Alley," a strip of nightclubs with names like Tillie's Chicken Shack and Pod's & Jerry's that catered predominantly to blacks.[12] Certainly, many whites who toured Harlem's nightclubs viewed blacks as exotic sexual creatures rather than as full human beings. Nevertheless, interracial nightlife also contained undeniably democratic potential. Poet Langston Hughes had something like this in mind in the poem "Harlem Nightclub," in which he celebrated interracial sexual attraction (see Document 9). Although much of Harlem tried mightily to define itself against, or outside of, the white world that surrounded it, such playful experimentation across conventional categories, in the face of American racism, remained throughout the 1920s one of the foundational strengths of this quintessentially racial, but profoundly mixed, crossroads of black creativity.

## BEGINNINGS OF THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE

Events of the New Negro Era such as the black migration to the North, the Silent March, the return of the troops from World War I, and the recognition of Harlem as a "race capital" signaled key economic and political changes in black American life, but they involved cultural transformation as well. The shift from South to North, from rural to urban, and from regional to national political concerns made black Americans more politically assertive, more visible, and more aware of their visibility. Yet few white Americans thought of them this way. Negative black stereotypes emphasizing laziness, stupidity, uncontrolled sexual desire, aggression, and other distasteful characteristics abounded in film, literature, and theater. Minstrel shows, in which actors masked in "blackface" comically projected these stereotypes through humorous dances, songs, and speeches, etched such images in the minds of whites. Stereotypes like the Mammy, a loyal, asexual female domestic; the "tragic" mulatto, an emotionally conflicted mixed-blood; and the black rapist, a violent pursuer of white females, contributed to a veritable arsenal of negative black images that were used to justify racial exploitation.

Invented during the era of slavery, negative black stereotypes found new life during the World War I era in the work of many artists,

including the filmmaker D. W. Griffiths, whose white supremacist movie *Birth of a Nation* (1915) celebrated the rise of the Ku Klux Klan. Playing to record audiences and praised by President Woodrow Wilson after a special viewing at the White House, this film prompted a nationwide boycott by the NAACP. As part of this protest, the Washington-based poet and short-story writer Angelina Weld Grimké produced *Rachel* (1916), the first play in the United States to feature an all-black cast. Its theme—the refusal of its main character to bear children for whites to punish and kill—suited the protest-oriented concerns of the New Negro. Its all-black cast signaled a resolve to make racial grievances the subject of serious theater by contesting the comic distortions that had dominated the black image to that point. In this way, *Rachel* prefigured themes that the Harlem Renaissance would develop more fully.

The next year, three one-act plays written by the white playwright Ridgeley Torrence and performed by all-black casts appeared at New York's Provincetown Playhouse, an experimental theater in Greenwich Village devoted to realistic presentation of contemporary themes. These theatrical presentations generated positive interest, and, two years later, *The Emperor Jones*, playwright Eugene O'Neill's story of the rise and fall of a black dictator on a Caribbean island, opened at the same playhouse before packed audiences. Notwithstanding its unfortunate tendency to depict blacks as primitives, this highly popular play further indicated that whites had begun to take a new and somewhat more hopeful look across the color line.

On Broadway, the musical *Shuffle Along*, opening in 1921, answered through energetic song and dance the postwar desire for cheerful moods exuberantly expressed. Written by the black comedy team Flournoy Miller and Aubrey Lyles, with music by black composers Hubie Blake and Noble Sissle, and featuring an all-black cast, this musical signaled an improving black image, and its extensive run on Broadway incited an explosion of black and black-inspired musicals and reviews throughout the 1920s.[13] Some, such as *Blackbirds* (1928), *Porgy* (1927), and *Showboat* (1927), appeared on Broadway, while many others played in such Harlem theaters as the Lafayette, the Lincoln, and the Alhambra.[14] Among its many achievements, *Shuffle Along* launched the careers of singer and actress Florence Mills, a much-loved performer whose death in 1927 gave rise to the largest public funeral in the history of Harlem, and singer Josephine Baker, who would later be a sensation on the stages of Paris (see Figure 3).



**Figure 3.** *Josephine Baker performing in the Review Nègre in Paris during the mid-1920s.*
Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

While theatrical events signaled the rise of the Harlem Renaissance, literary events stood closer to its center. In the late 1910s and early 1920s, several outstanding writers heightened expectations for a rising generation of black poets and novelists of unprecedented size and talent. Of these, Claude McKay made the earliest mark with the publication in 1917 of "The Harlem Dancer" (see Document 6) in the cutting-edge literary journal *The Seven Arts*. Soon after, McKay became an editor of the Marxist journal *The Liberator*, in which he published much of his poetry, and a member of its Greenwich Village–based group of communist radicals. In 1922, before leaving the United States to attend the Third Communist International in the Soviet Union, the much-traveled McKay published some of his best verse in *Harlem Shadows* (see Document 6), his fourth and most important collection of poetry.

A year before McKay's landmark collection, eighteen-year-old Langston Hughes published his first poem, "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" (see Document 9), a lyric that demonstrates his ability to convey elevated meanings in plain language reminiscent of Walt Whitman and Carl Sandburg, poets who celebrated the ordinary events of American life. This poem reappeared in Hughes's much anticipated first collection, *The Weary Blues* (1926) (see Document 9), which he followed with *Fine Clothes to the Jew* (1927) (see Document 14), a collection featuring some of his most innovative poetry modeled on blues music and lower-class themes.

In 1923, two years after the appearance of "The Negro Speaks of Rivers," Jean Toomer, who spent most of his time in artistic circles in New York's Greenwich Village rather than in Harlem, startled critics with the moving and powerful prose poem *Cane* (see Document 7). Weaving the sounds and imagery of the rural South, *Cane* testifies to the enduring qualities of the black folk spirit. Like the poetry of McKay and Hughes, Toomer's *Cane* reflected a new level of formal sophistication and assertion in black writing. Departing from every known literary genre, it signified the willingness of black writers to reject all preestablished rules in fashioning modes of expression directly around their heritage and racial experience.

The year following the publication of *Cane*, "Shroud of Color," by twenty-one-year-old Countée Cullen, appeared in *The American Mercury*, the leading mainstream intellectual journal of the day. With his first collection of poems, *Color* (1925) (see Document 8), which he quickly followed by *Copper Sun* (1927) (see Document 8) and *Ballad for the Brown Girl* (1927), Cullen became the most celebrated black poet in America. Both his youth and his New York origin made his name synonymous with the expressive potential of a new generation.[15]



Also in 1924, Jessie Fauset published *There Is Confusion*, the first novel of the Harlem Renaissance. Although less celebrated than Cullen and many other male figures of the period, Fauset had a large impact on the direction of literary events not only as a prolific novelist but also as literary editor of *The Crisis*, for which she shepherded young literary talent. Yet the historical importance of *There Is Confusion*, a story of two racially mixed middle-class families, hinges less on its artistic excellence than on the role it played in bringing about further events. As a result of its publication, prominent sociologist Charles S. Johnson—editor of the Urban League journal *Opportunity* and a guiding force of the Harlem Renaissance—arranged a dinner in honor of Fauset at the fancy downtown Civic Club. The event, which took place on March 21, 1924, stands as the greatest symbolic moment of the Harlem Renaissance[16] (see Document 10). Perhaps more clearly than any other figure of the period, Johnson recognized that a combination of black talent, a thick network of white intellectuals and publishers, and the ever-increasing visibility of black Americans in popular culture could positively alter the black image in the national mind-set. With this aim in mind, he worked hard to turn the Civic Club dinner into a special occasion in which the most prominent writers and publishers could make contact with the new generation of black talent. He could not have been more successful.

Together, the various guests at the Civic Club dinner stood at the center of a network of journals and publishers that would promote the writers of the Harlem Renaissance in the upcoming years. They included powerful white publishers and editors such as Horace Liveright of the publishing house Boni and Liveright, editor and dean of American letters H. L. Mencken of the *The American Mercury*, editor and civil liberties activist Paul Kellogg of *The Survey Graphic*, and managing editor Freda Kirchwey of *The Nation*. Prominent white intellectuals such as novelist Sherwood Anderson, art critic Albert Barnes, and Columbia University professor of literature Carl Van Doren also attended.[17] Philosopher Alain Locke of Howard University served as master of ceremonies, while editor W. E. B. Du Bois of *The Crisis*; novelist, poet, and literary critic James Weldon Johnson; and poet Georgia Douglass Johnson represented the so-called older generation of black writers. Countée Cullen and Langston Hughes—both of whom read from their poetry—novelist Zora Neale Hurston, and poet Gwendolyn Bennett, who read the poem "To Usward" (see Document 10), written

just for the occasion, represented a rising group of young writers. So did Walter White, a civil rights activist whose novel *Fire in the Flint* would soon be published. In his address, Carl Van Doren delighted the organizers of the event by testifying to the need for new life and color in American literature through the expression of the "gay and desperate moods" that black American writers could provide.[18]

Of the many important consequences of the Civic Club dinner, the most important was Kellogg's proposal to devote a full issue of *The Survey Graphic*, an influential social reform journal containing illustrated feature essays, to the cultural events centered in Harlem. Guest edited by Alain Locke, this popular and historic issue, which included articles on Harlem life, representative samples from the best young writers, and illustrations by the German artist Winold Reiss (see Document 11), led to the equally historic publication of *The New Negro* (1925) (see Document 12), again edited by Locke, with an expanded list of articles on black life, a wider representation of literary output, and illustrations by the African American artist Aaron Douglas. In both publications, Locke trenchantly stated his version of the New Negro concept, shifting the emphasis from politics to culture. Diverging sharply from the embattled ideas of the New Negro expressed by McKay, Randolph, and Garvey, Locke's pluralist New Negro promoted democracy through the development of an outlook at once internal to the group and radiating outward toward the rest of the world.

## THEMES IN BLACK IDENTITY

Looked at one way, the chain of events from the New Negro movement to the publication of *The New Negro* marks a period of ever-increasing race consciousness. Yet the strong and necessary presence of white publishers and writers at the Civic Club dinner and the enthusiastic waves of white visitors to Harlem nightclubs demonstrate an important irony regarding race in the 1920s: Just when blacks had become most artistically and politically interested in asserting themselves in racially independent terms, they became most interesting to whites. Some scholars of the Harlem Renaissance consider this irony a compromising contradiction, while others have regarded it as an important indicator of the new place of black culture within the larger cultural matrix of the United States in the 1920s.



The Harlem Renaissance occurred at the nexus of a complex racial discussion that went in many directions. Still, it makes sense to see in it an overriding concern with the general question of identity, because the writers and thinkers of the Harlem Renaissance focused intensely on matters of heritage, black culture, black consciousness, and many other issues related to the general questions "Who am I?" "Who are we?" and "Where do we find ourselves?" During the 1920s, many of these writers and thinkers agreed that a new kind of black person had emerged, but hardly anyone could identify him or her exactly. Some writers looked to Africa, some to the American South, some to Pan-African and other global identities. Still others wondered how to balance ideas of racial unity with loyalties within the group, including class, gender, and nation. Ambiguities of every sort attended these reflections—between newness and tradition, sameness and otherness, invention and imitation.

In search of black identity, inspiration, and experience, several black writers of the period, such as McKay and Hughes, traveled constantly. Like their white contemporaries such as the poet Ezra Pound and the novelist Ernest Hemingway, they found Paris an especially attractive destination—but for very different reasons (see Documents 13 and 14). A magnet for intellectuals from various nations, including the French colonies of Africa and the Caribbean, Paris in the 1920s served as a center for Pan-African and anticolonial activism, which gained greater legitimacy after World War I. There, one could find poets such as Aimé Césaire of Martinique and Léopold Sédar Senghor of Senegal, major voices in the negritude movement, which attempted to convey the essence of black pride, beauty, and spirit. One could also find the novelist René Maran of Martinique and Gabon, author of the prize-winning anticolonialist novel *Batouala* (1922).[19] Like New York, Paris went wild over jazz and black entertainers in this period. American singer Josephine Baker flourished there, and African American jazz bands filled the nightclubs with their music. Thus, like Harlem, Paris provided an outpost of sorts for a wide array of displaced blacks from all over the world.

The same fundamental desire for discovery, connection, and identity that led McKay and Hughes to visit Europe in the 1920s also spurred them to visit Africa. They, and many other artists of the Harlem Renaissance who could not make such a visit, regarded Africa as a powerful symbol of origin, destiny, dignity, and hope. The idea of African beauty issued directly from the concepts of black beauty and

pride that dominated the 1920s. It also flowed from the larger intellectual developments of the day. The unprecedented carnage of World War I prompted some thinkers to theorize a decline of the West and others to seek sources of truth and vitality among non-Western peoples formerly regarded as backward. The Spanish artist Pablo Picasso, for example, found inspiration in the abstract, expressive qualities of African painting and sculpture. Such recognition of African genius among Western intellectuals enhanced the symbolic value of Africa for Harlem Renaissance writers and thinkers, even as they gravitated toward it for their own varied reasons. Their ideas ranged from the thoughtful but conflicted confessions of Countée Cullen's "Heritage" (see Document 15), to the romantic affirmations of Gwendolyn Bennett's "Heritage" (see Document 16), to the bohemian primitivism of Richard Bruce Nugent's "Sahdji" (see Document 17).

The search for usable folk origins followed the same fundamental logic, and inspired some of the same ambivalent feelings, as the quest for African cultural connections. Again, the issue reduced to whether black cultural distinctiveness could provide a basis for pride and artistic creativity. In the midst of rapid urbanization, many blacks felt uncomfortable locating this basis in the South that they had gladly left behind. Yet, in the 1920s, 80 percent of African Americans remained in the South, and many of those who had migrated to the North maintained an avid interest in their place of origin, where most of their relatives and friends still lived. This sentiment comes out clearly in novelist Zora Neale Hurston's account of her return home to collect folklore in *Mules and Men* (1935) (see Document 18).

Hurston's autobiographical account also reflects the importance of a new school of cultural anthropology, centered at Columbia University and led by her teacher Franz Boas, which challenged biological conceptions of race.[20] In the hands of such popular theorists as Madison Grant, whose *Passing of the Great Race* (1915) urged so-called Nordic whites to prevent the "inferior" darker races from reproducing, such conceptions reinforced the widely held belief that granting civil rights would never erase gaps in moral, intellectual, and cultural capacity between the races. Boas argued, instead, that race was a cultural conception, providing a scientific basis for artist/researchers such as Hurston to see black folk culture as a product of invention and art rather than of instincts and proclivities. The poet Sterling Brown also advanced this idea in his poetry, employing the language and storytelling forms of folk culture to convey the tragedy, strength, violence, humor, and dignity of black southern life (see Document 19).



The creative exploration of folk origins during the Harlem Renaissance connected naturally with the wide interest in the blues and jazz, whose arrival as foundational American musical forms in the 1920s shaped the atmosphere within which the literature and visual art of the period developed. Although its precise origins remain obscure, the blues began in the South during the 1880s and 1890s, when oppressive laws and social practices began to make a mockery of African American freedom. An invention of the first generation of African Americans born outside of slavery, it captured in its emphasis on tragic turns of fate the devastating ironies of betrayal that characterized black life in this era. Yet the blues most characteristically focused on universal themes of sex and romance, which it used as a metaphor for almost everything else, rather than on politics.

Instead of the standard musical scale, the blues used a series of inflected or "blue" notes, as well as guttural slurs and wails, to achieve its unique musical effect. Often referred to as a healing music, it usually featured an individual singer who seemingly celebrated his or her troubled existence through artful song, thus giving testament to the possibility of spiritual enhancement and self-determination through suffering. The blues gained early popularity in 1914 when the black bandleader and composer W. C. Handy, who became known as "The Father of the Blues," published his "St. Louis Blues" as sheet music. Through the World War I years, black migration and technological innovation in the radio and recording industries created a new mass market for "race records," a category that included both jazz and the blues. In 1920, Mamie Smith recorded the first big blues hit with "Crazy Blues," which sold more than 750,000 copies. Throughout the 1920s, other artists such as Ma Rainey (see Document 20) and "The Empress of the Blues" Bessie Smith (see Document 21) would continue black women's domination of commercial blues. In the 1930s, male blues singers such as Robert Johnson and Huddie Ledbetter (Ledbelly) also rose to prominence.

Jazz became popular in the 1920s for many of the same reasons as the blues. Developed by black New Orleans bands during the first decade of the twentieth century, it combined marching band music, the blues, and ragtime—a piano-based style that altered, or "ragged," the rhythms of existing songs—into a distinctive form that came north with the black migration to Chicago and New York (see Document 22). Typically, jazz involved a band playing a strong but flexible alternating or syncopated rhythm that provided the backdrop for individual performances by its members. In contrast to performers of

classical music, who rarely strayed from a composer's score, jazz musicians invented, or improvised, the song as they played it, thus involving listeners emotionally and intellectually. As dance music, jazz was incessantly promoted by radio stations for the post–World War I party culture, and rose to such prominence that the decade of the 1920s is sometimes called "The Jazz Age." Carried to Europe by black soldiers during World War I, it also made a sensation abroad. During the 1920s, the major figures of jazz included trumpeter Louis "Satchmo" Armstrong, who played mostly in Chicago; bandleader and pianist Duke Ellington, who performed for white audiences at downtown Manhattan's Hollywood Club; and bandleader Fletcher Henderson, who also played in downtown Manhattan, at the Roseland Ballroom. In Harlem, stride piano—where a player's left hand held a strong alternating beat while the right played an improvised melody—dominated the jazz scene under its masters James P. Johnson, Willie "The Lion" Smith, and Thomas Wright "Fats" Waller. Known for their flamboyance, these figures often held "cutting" competitions, or battles to decide the best player, at "rent" parties, where guests paid an entry fee to cover food, entertainment, and the host's rent.

During the 1920s, jazz and the blues had both black and white detractors as well as fans. Some critics found jazz and the blues aesthetically undisciplined and thought that their wild infectious rhythms threatened social order. Others loved them for the same reason. Some black detractors associated these musical forms with the rude simplicity of folk origins or with the dangers of nightlife and the criminal element, associations that made them even more attractive to rebellious artists such as Hughes, Hurston, and Brown. These artists understood keenly that the amazing popularity of jazz and the blues bespoke the power of artistic forms rooted in the black experience to transcend boundaries of class, race, and nation while maintaining the integrity of their origins.[21] For this reason, both Hughes and Brown modeled many of their poems on the spirit and form of this innovative music (see Documents 9, 14, and 19).

Among its many connections, the interest in jazz and the blues during the Harlem Renaissance indicated a much larger fascination with transgressive cultural energies, not only those that ran against Victorian prudery, but also those that tended to complicate simple ideas of black and white. In addition, the emphasis on race pride and racial origins during the Harlem Renaissance practically dictated a corresponding interest in racial intermixture. In many ways, the mere existence of people who were "neither white nor black, yet both" exposed the



hypocrisy of the American "one-drop" rule (that only one drop of "black blood" made a person black) and the absurdity of racist theories that insisted on a natural white aversion to sexual contact with "lower" races.[22] These issues were explored in a literature of "passing" that demonstrated how easily black people who looked white could also fit in with white people socially and culturally. Yet, in order to "pass," these characters had to leave their loved ones behind, live in constant fear of discovery, and sometimes cooperate with racists. By highlighting the dilemmas of mixed blood, the literature of "passing" dramatized the larger psychological costs of American racism, which insisted on an absolute line of separation between the races that it could not maintain.

Passing and the experiences of interracial people already had long standing as major themes in black and American literature. *Clotel or the President's Daughter* (1855), by William Wells Brown; *Iola Leroy* (1892), by Frances Harper; *Pudd'nhead Wilson* (1894), by Mark Twain; and *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912), by James Weldon Johnson helped establish this tradition, but it took on a new significance after World War I when the context for representing mixed-race identity shifted radically. Passing thrived in anonymous urban environments where social and geographical mobility prevailed.[23] In contrast to small southern towns, where most people knew one another, the large cities of the North permitted black people free anonymous interaction with whites, who usually lived only a subway or trolley car ride away. Yet notions of race pride and group loyalty among blacks added tension and drama to the idea of "passing." For those who wanted to make the case for black solidarity, the choice to become white seemed unwise at best and an outright betrayal of the group at worst. Because it symbolized new possibilities and new tensions around race, passing received unprecedented attention in the literature of the Harlem Renaissance. Novelist Nella Larsen in *Quicksand* (1928) (see Document 25) and *Passing* (1929) (see Document 23); Jessie Fauset in *Plum Bun* (1929) (see Document 24), *The Chinaberry Tree* (1931), and *Comedy American Style* (1932); novelist and NAACP activist Walter White in *Flight* (1926); and satirist George S. Schuyler in *Black No More* (1931) each explored trenchantly different sides of this multifaceted theme.

Because it deals so centrally with issues of interracial sex (miscegenation) and reproduction, the theme of passing connects naturally to a wider concern with gender and with relations between and within the sexes. For this reason, Fauset and Larsen regarded the theme of

passing as a crucial entryway into criticism of conventional gender roles and the limitations of black radicalism in the 1920s. Because of its association with submissiveness and other characteristics traditionally considered feminine, racial oppression has always carried with it the implication of deficient manhood. At its core, many blacks held, racism attacked black men more directly than it did black women. By taking away a man's right to an equal political voice, economic opportunity, and the means to defend his family, some argued, it assaulted the fundamental male prerogatives. Thus many New Negroes placed the defense of manhood at the very center of their racial values. Regarded this way, the race problem becomes the special province of the black man, who must reestablish his compromised masculinity through acts of self-assertion and courage. The black woman plays her best role in this narrative by making her endangered and embattled counterpart feel manly. She serves the race, and herself, by serving him. Any personal aspirations or righteous objections to gender inequality open her to charges of disloyalty to the group.

Although it could count many feminists, both male and female, within its ranks, the Harlem Renaissance provided unprecedented impetus to the quest for black manhood. Its dominant rhetoric grouped aggression, pride, anger, intellect, self-awareness, and self-expression together under the celebrated label "New Negro," even as it vilified the submissive, symbolically female characteristics of the old plantation Negro. The resulting equation of manhood and race created significant challenges for women artists, who had to find ways either to oppose or to accommodate the prevailing masculinist orientation of the era without appearing disloyal to the group. Yet, in the course of this difficult task, women artists of the Harlem Renaissance had to show care in avoiding black female stereotypes, such as the supersexual primitive—an aggressive and crass female pursuer of sexual pleasure—that tended to develop the image of the black woman partly along male lines. Nor did it help that racist standards regarded white women as models of feminine daintiness, beauty, and motherhood to the exclusion of black women, whose kinky hair, dark skin, and flat noses marked them as ugly in conventional eyes. Although many other important themes animate their works, the ability of Harlem Renaissance woman novelists such as Nella Larsen (see Documents 23 and 25), Jessie Fauset (see Document 24), and Zora Neale Hurston (see Documents 18 and 34); poets like Georgia Douglass Johnson (see Document 26) and Anne Spencer (see Document 27); and blues singers such as Ma Rainey (Document 20) and Bessie Smith (Document 21) to invent stories, attitudes, and modes of self-fashioning around this difficult predicament contributes to their lasting importance in the era and in the discourse on race and gender in general.[24]



## CONTROVERSIES IN ART AND POLITICS

As the previous section demonstrates, the Harlem Renaissance encompassed many overlapping and opposing perspectives on race. Sometimes these tensions ran below the surface of broad claims of black unity. At others times they expressed themselves in the form of controversies that the artists and thinkers of the period did not so much resolve as bequeath to later generations. Several such disputes emerged immediately on the heels of Alain Locke's anthology *The New Negro*, centering mainly on the question of art and politics: Could black artistic production play a role in advancing the black freedom struggle? Were black artists obligated to protest against racism? Should they attempt "high" art, or should they gravitate toward the artistic forms of the folk? Who should they write for, black or white audiences? Disputes around such questions provide some of the most dramatic moments of the Harlem Renaissance and offer the best guidance in reflecting on its legacy.

In the summer of 1926, not long after the appearance of *The New Negro*, *The Nation* published a controversial essay by *Messenger* editor and satirist George S. Schuyler called "The Negro-Art Hokum," which challenged several bedrock claims of the Harlem Renaissance (see Document 28). Most centrally, it questioned the existence of a separate black culture and accused black artists of pandering to racist white patrons. Schuyler characterized the Harlem Renaissance as false and harmful advertising by misguided members of the black leadership class rather than as an independent movement expressing the black soul. Langston Hughes's rebuttal, prepared at the invitation of *The Nation*'s editor, was less a comprehensive engagement with Schuyler's position than an independent statement that proved to be one of the most important essays of the period. In "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain" (see Document 29), Hughes boldly states the program of the young black artist, whose rooting in the cultural expression of the black masses provides a basis for independent effort that must develop along its own lines in order to reach maturity.

Only a few months after the Schuyler-Hughes debate in *The Nation*, Carl Van Vechten's controversial bestseller *Nigger Heaven* (1926)

made its appearance. Along with Charlotte Osgood Mason, a domineering heiress who offered both her money and her Westfield, New Jersey, home to Hurston, Hughes, and other black artists, Van Vechten made a reputation as a major white promoter and patron of the Harlem Renaissance. A literary adviser of Hughes, Larsen, Hurston, and others, he had also achieved a more dubious notoriety for the parties he gave for the black and white intelligentsia and for the legendary tours of Harlem that he offered white friends.[25] Yet such well-intended efforts did him little good among the majority of black critics when his book *Nigger Heaven* appeared and became an almost instant bestseller. Some members of the black elite, including Du Bois, who called *Nigger Heaven* a "blow in the face," immediately took offense at the title of the novel and at some of its sensationalistic renderings of Harlem's criminal and sexual underworld.[26] Nevertheless, the novel did have its defenders, among them Hughes and Wallace Thurman, editor of the journal *Fire!!*, who saw lower-class black life as an inspiration, not an embarrassment, and who wanted to get beyond what they regarded as narrow and old-fashioned conceptions of black progress.

As the *Nigger Heaven* controversy raged on, late in 1926 a group of young writers led by Thurman and Hughes published the first and only issue of a new journal intended to state in powerful terms their independence from the "civil rights by copyright" wing of the Harlem Renaissance, which, according to them, focused more on the political uses of art than it did on the quality of the art itself. The result of their efforts, which emptied their pockets of what little money they had, contained short stories from Thurman, Bennett, and Nugent; poetry from Hughes and Cullen; a short play by Hurston; and cover art by Douglas. As the title *Fire!!* indicates, the editors intended their new journal to reflect strikingly the crossroads of race, desire, pain, and cultural rebellion—a combination that stood no chance of attracting a stable audience in 1926. *Fire!!* (see Document 30) celebrated jazz, paganism, homosexuality, and bohemianism in a bold fashion calculated to annoy artistic and social traditionalists.[27] Notably, the emphasis on gay themes in *Fire!!* reflected an important aspect of the identity of the Harlem Renaissance, as several of its artists were gay or bisexual, including Thurman, Nugent, Cullen, Locke, McKay, Ma Rainey, and Bessie Smith. One reviewer called the journal "effeminate tommyrot" and claimed to have thrown his copy of *Fire!!* "into the fire."[28] Later, in *Infants of the Spring* (1932), his devastating satire of the Harlem Renaissance, Thurman derided both the high idealism of *Fire!!* and the pragmatic genteelism of its detractors.



From March to November 1926, as each of the above controversies and literary events proceeded in turn, *The Crisis* published a symposium called "The Negro in Art—How Shall He Be Portrayed," in which a remarkably wide range of American writers and publishers answered a series of somewhat slanted questions, most likely composed by Du Bois, concerning white control of the black image and the obligations of black writers. Most of the respondents, whether black or white, tended to resist the bias of the questionnaire by supporting the freedom of black artists to invent as they pleased. Yet some did agree that the existing literature veered from realistic depiction of black life in overemphasizing its tawdry and sensational aspects. In October 1926, near the end of this symposium, *The Crisis* published "Criteria of Negro Art" (see Document 31), Du Bois's address to the annual meeting of the NAACP. At the high point of his address, Du Bois claimed not to "care a damn" for art that excludes propaganda, thus striking a blow at the younger black artists who had so boldly declared their independence in *Fire!!* and elsewhere. In *Harlem* (1928), another short-lived, one-volume attempt by Thurman to launch an independent black literary journal, Locke fired back by denouncing all literary propaganda while emphasizing the need for a wide-ranging and mature black discourse that reached out in all directions (see Document 32).

## THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE: VOGUE OR WATERSHED?

Befitting the contentious cultural politics of the Harlem Renaissance, the end of the era in the late 1930s gave rise to a lively debate over whether it had indeed come to an end. Again, the fundamental issue reduced to the relationship between art and politics. By the mid-1930s, several events had dramatically changed the conditions for producing black art. The Great Depression, a severe twelve-year economic crisis beginning in 1929, had devastating effects on everyone, but it hurt black Americans disproportionately. In the South, it brought on increased racial violence, evictions, rural poverty, and rampant hunger. In the North, industrial contraction brought massive unemployment to a population that had barely begun to establish itself in the region. Moreover, new government programs and agencies aimed at bringing relief, collectively referred to as the New Deal, actively discriminated against black Americans.

In Harlem, the repeal of Prohibition in 1933 brought hardship to the formerly lucrative nightclub scene, which depended heavily on the

trade in illegal liquor. Virtually drained of economic resources and frustrated at the turn of political events, Harlem residents rioted in March 1935 after rumors of police brutality against a black boy accused of stealing from a white-owned store spread throughout the neighborhood. Taking white-owned stores as their main target, Harlemites broke 600 store windows and inflicted millions of dollars in property damage. Such violence in the heart of America's largest and most sophisticated black neighborhood signaled to many black thinkers that the dream of the Harlem Renaissance had come to an end. If the New Negro would rise to his potential in the Promised Land of the North, they thought, it would not occur through cultural means, nor would it happen by convincing whites that blacks could achieve high art.

Some black thinkers claimed that tough economic realities required a new kind of writing rooted in realistic depictions of social conditions affecting ordinary black people. Hughes's reference to the Harlem Renaissance as a "vogue," or passing fad, in his autobiography, *The Big Sea* (1940), indicated his sympathy for this view.[29] McKay expressed a similar sentiment, referring in 1934 to the Harlem Renaissance as "a mushroom growth that could send no roots down into the soil of negro life."[30] Younger writers of the 1930s, such as Richard Wright and Margaret Walker, now looked to Chicago rather than New York as an intellectual mecca.

In fact, black artistic production did decline in the early 1930s. Like most Americans in this period, black writers found mere survival a challenge, so they wrote less. In an effort to revive the artistic spirit of the Harlem Renaissance, the Boston-based novelist and short-story writer Dorothy West started the independent black literary journal *Challenge* in 1934. She kept it alive for three years, but low circulation and poor submissions brought the project to a close. West then joined Richard Wright to launch *New Challenge* in 1937, but this journal published only two issues, the second of which appeared to deal a death blow to the Harlem Renaissance, as it contained Wright's "Blueprint for Negro Writing" (see Document 33). Arguing that the previous generation of black writers was politically shallow, Wright described them as excessively caught up in the ornamental, the foolish, and the flighty.

Also in 1937, Hurston published *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (see Document 34), a novel focused on questions of gender and personal maturation using folklore, mythology, and humor in a rural setting. Wright, a proponent of urban realism and class analysis, excoriated Hurston's novel in a review as smacking of the minstrel stage and almost every other retrograde gesture of black literature that he opposed.[31] Nevertheless, in Hurston, at least, the Harlem Renaissance lived on. In his 1939 retrospective of black American literature published in 1938, "The Negro: 'New' or Newer" (see Document 35), Locke claimed that the developments of the previous decade had made possible the best trends of the 1930s, even the ones that critics such as Wright regarded as departures from the past. Quoting his own words from *The New Negro*, written thirteen years earlier, he challenged the irresponsible typecasting of the Harlem Renaissance as a period lacking in social perspective. Where critics such as Wright saw contrast, he saw development, continuity, and legacy.



In our own age, at least for now, it seems that Locke and Hurston get the last word. Locke keenly recognized the irony of the so-called new generation of the 1930s declaring a total break with their predecessors, for he had done much the same thing in the previous decade. By this measure, the claim to newness had become quite old. Locke also understood that the propensity to denounce the Harlem Renaissance as a vogue or to criticize it for lacking social conscience had originated with the movement itself, which made cultural expression central to the broader debate concerning black American freedom for all future generations. At its best, it gave rise to racially expressive forms of art and thought rooted in the experiences of slavery, colonialism, and segregation and yet intricately intertwined with the larger complexities of modern civilization. In this regard, it serves as an indispensable point of reference for our own age, in which racial identity has ramifications far beyond the simple opposition of black and white. We look back to the Harlem Renaissance, a moment in American racial history when a striking array of artists and thinkers boldly declared themselves new in myriad ways, to see ourselves reflected. By doing so, we preserve the hope that we, too, might one day become new.

## NOTES

[1]For more on the history and use of the term *New Negro*, see Henry Louis Gates, "The Trope of a New Negro and the Reconstruction of the Image of the Black," *The New American Studies: Essays from Representations*, ed. Philip Fisher (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 319–45; and Wilson J. Moses, "The Lost World of the Negro, 1895–1919: Black Literary and Intellectual Life before the 'Renaissance,'" *Black American Literature Forum*, 1–2 (Spring–Summer 1987), 61–84.

[2]Eric Arneson, "The Great American Protest," *Black Protest and the Great Migration* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martins, 2003), 7–18.

[3]Ibid., 13.

[4]William E. Alt and Betty L. Alt, *Black Soldiers, White Wars: Black Warriors from Antiquity to the Present* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2002), 80–82.

[5]David Levering Lewis, *When Harlem Was in Vogue* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 3–5.

[6]W. E. B. Du Bois, "Close Ranks," *The Crisis*, 16 (July 1918): 111.

[7]Arneson, "Great American Protest," 33.

[8]For more on the Ku Klux Klan, see David M. Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism: The First Century of the Ku Klux Klan, 1865–1965* (New York: Doubleday, 1965), and for more on the federal government's attempt to disrupt black radicalism after World War I, see Theodore Kornweibel Jr., *"Seeing Red": Federal Campaigns against Black Militancy, 1919–1925* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998).

[9]Cary D. Wintz, *Black Culture and the Harlem Renaissance* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1996), 14.

[10]George Hutchinson, *The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995), 5–6.

[11]The most notable modern exponent of the "Harlem as ghetto" school is Gilbert Osofsky, *Harlem: The Making of a Ghetto: Negro New York, 1890–1930* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 105–49.

[12]Jervis Anderson, *This Was Harlem: A Cultural Portrait 1900–1950* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1981), 168–76.

[13]In his autobiography, Langston Hughes claims to have based his decision to attend Columbia University on his desire to see *Shuffle Along*. Langston Hughes, *The Big Sea* (1940; New York: Hill and Wang, 1993), 224.

[14]David Krasner, *A Beautiful Pageant: African American Theater, Drama, and Performance in the Harlem Renaissance, 1910–1927* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

[15]Gerald Early, ed., introduction to *My Soul's High Song: The Collected Writings of Countée Cullen, Voice of the Harlem Renaissance* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 15–23.

[16]Lewis, *When Harlem Was in Vogue*, 89–95.

[17]Ibid.

[18]Carl Van Doren, "The Younger Generation of Negro Writers," *Opportunity*, 2 (May 1924): 144–45.

[19]For more on the international dimension of the Renaissance, see Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003).

[20]Hutchinson, *Harlem Renaissance in Black and White*, 62–77.

[21]Ann Douglas, *Terrible Honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1995), 387–433, and Anderson, *This Was Harlem*, 167–217.

[22]For a broad perspective on the whole question of interracial literature and passing in the Harlem Renaissance and beyond, see Werner Sollors, *Neither Black Nor White Yet Both: Thematic Explorations of Interracial Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 247–84.

[23]Ibid., 248–49.

[24]Cheryl A. Wall, *Women of the Harlem Renaissance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 1–32. On the blues women, see Douglas, *Terrible Honesty*, 407–26.

[25]Lewis, *When Harlem Was in Vogue*, 182–85.

[26]W. E. B. Du Bois, "Review of *Nigger Heaven* by Carl Van Vechten," *The Crisis*, 33 (December 1926): 81–82.

[27]A. B. Christa Schwartz, *Gay Voices of the Harlem Renaissance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003).

[28]Cited in Steven Watson, *The Harlem Renaissance: Hub of African-American Culture 1920–1930* (New York: Pantheon, 1995), 92. See also Hughes, *Big Sea*, 237.

[29]The chapter is called "When the Negro Was in Vogue." Hughes, *Big Sea*, 223–33.

[30]Claude McKay, "For a Negro Magazine," a 1934 circular reprinted in *Voices from the Harlem Renaissance*, ed. Nathan Irvin Huggins (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 403.

[31]Wright's review appeared originally as "Between Laughter and Tears" in *The New Masses* on October 5, 1937. It is reprinted in *Zora Neale Hurston: Critical Perspectives Past and Present*, ed. Henry Louis Gates and K. Anthony Appiah (New York: Amistad, 1993), 16–17.