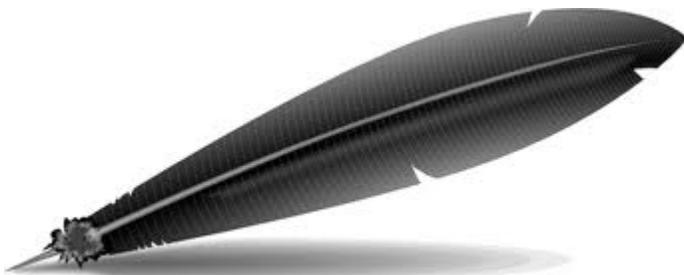


THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE



OVERVIEW

The Harlem Renaissance was a period in which black intellectuals, poets, musicians and writers explored their cultural identity. In a society where racism was prevalent African Americans lacked economic opportunities. The creation of art, music and poetry was not only a way to economically uplift the race but also to demonstrate racial pride.

The cultural movement started at the end of the First World War and ended in the middle of the Great Depression in the 1930s. Many argue that the War expanded economic opportunity in Northern cities because of industrialization and the decrease of European immigrants coming into the United States. The Great Migration in the beginning of the 20th century also played a big role in the birth of the cultural movement. African Americans in the South were experiencing social, cultural and economic oppression so when they found opportunities to escape Jim Crow laws they took their chances.

The lack of a political voice and the prevalent racial hatred led many African Americans to express themselves via artistic means. Alain Locke, an African American writer, was the first to come up with the term “New Negro” talking about a spur of young black artist who were going to change the African American culture by demonstrating that their people were not subservient, good for nothing cretins. Other intellectuals such as W.E.B. Du Bois and James Weldon Johnson aided in the expansion of the movement by being spokespeople for the literary youth. Another important actor of the Harlem renaissance is Marcus Garvey who believed in the importance of racial pride and the African heritage.

The Harlem Renaissance was not only about politics rather it was a way for writers like Nora Zeale Hurston , jazz artists like Louis Armstrong and entertainers like Josephine Baker to demonstrate that the African American culture not only belonged in American history but proved

that the idea about black inferiority was a social construction. It also gave the opportunity to some black theater actors to perform among whites and which in turn aided in the rejection of blackface and minstrel shows.

The Harlem Renaissance came to an end during the Great Depression mostly because the African American community counted on wealthy white patrons (who were hurt by the recession) to contribute to the success of their shows. Nevertheless, the movement inspired new authors, musicians and black intellectuals during the civil rights movement. Furthermore, many believe that the movement has paved the way towards social equality in the arts and within the American society.



TIMELINE ¹



1919

- *First Pan African Congress organized by W.E.B. Du Bois, Paris, February.
- *Race riots in Washington, D.C., Chicago, Charleston, Knoxville, Omaha, and elsewhere, June to September
- * Race Relations Commission founded, September.
- * Marcus Garvey founded the Black Star Shipping Line.



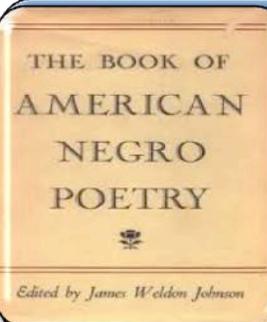
1920

- * Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) Convention held at Madison Square Garden, August.
- *Charles Gilpin starred in Eugene O'Neill, *The Emperor Jones*, November.
- *James Weldon Johnson, first black officer (secretary) of NAACP appointed.
- * Claude McKay published *Spring in New Hampshire*.
- * Du Bois's *Darkwater* is published.
- *O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones*, starring Charles Gilpin, opens at the Provincetown Playhouse



1921

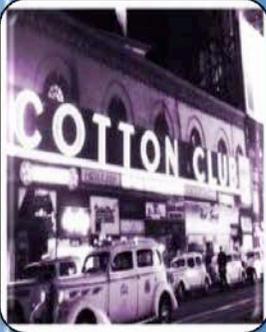
- * *Shuffle Along* by Noble Sissle and Eubie Blake, the first musical revue written and performed by African Americans (cast members include Josephine Baker and Florence Mills), opened, May 22, at Broadway's David Belasco Theater.
- * Marcus Garvey founded African Orthodox Church, September.
- *Second Pan African Congress.
- *Colored Players Guild of New York founded.
- *Benjamin Brawley published *Social History of the American Negro*



1922

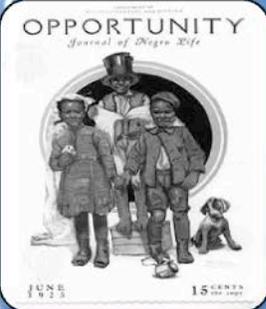
- *First Anti-Lynching legislation approved by the House of Representatives.
- *Publications of *The Book of American Negro Poetry* edited by James Weldon Johnson; Claude McKay, *Harlem Shadows*.

1923



- * Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life is founded by the National Urban League, with Charles S. Johnson as its editor.
- * National Ethiopian Art Players staged *The Chip Woman's Fortune* by Willis Richardson, first serious play by a black writer on Broadway, May.
- * Claude McKay spoke at the Fourth Congress of the Third International in Moscow, June.
- * The Cotton Club opened, Fall.
- * Marcus Garvey arrested for mail fraud and sentenced to five years in prison.
- * Third Pan African Congress.
- * Publications of Jean Toomer, *Cane*; Marcus Garvey, *Philosophy and Opinion of Marcus Garvey*.

1924



- * Civic Club Dinner is sponsored by Opportunity. This event is considered the formal launching of the New Negro movement.
- * Paul Robeson starred in O'Neill's *All God's Chillun Got Wings*, May 15.
- * Countee Cullen won first prize in the Witter Bynner Poetry Competition.
- * Publications of Du Bois, *The Gift of Black Folk*; Jessie Fauset, *There is Confusion*; Marcus Garvey, *Aims and Objects for a Solution of the Negro Problem Outlined*; Walter White, *The Fire in the Flint*.

1925



- * Survey Graphic issue, "Harlem: Mecca of the New Negro," edited by Alain Locke and Charles Johnson, devoted entirely to black arts and letters, March.
- * American Negro Labor Congress held in Chicago, October.
- * Opportunity holds its first literary awards dinner; winners include Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, and Zora Neale Hurston.
- * The first Crisis awards ceremony is held at the Renaissance Casino; Countee Cullen wins first prize.
- * Publications of Cullen, *Color*; Du Bose Heyward, *Porgy*; James Weldon Johnson and J. Rosamond Johnson, eds. *The Book of American Negro Spirituals*; Alain Locke, *The New Negro*; Sherwood Anderson, *Dark Laughter (a novel showing Black life)*.

1926



- * Countee Cullen becomes Assistant Editor of Opportunity; He begins to write a regular column called "The Dark Tower."
- * Savoy Ballroom opened in Harlem, March.
- * Publications of Wallace Thurman, *Fire!!*; Langston Hughes, *The Weary Blues*; Carl Van Vechten, *Nigger Heaven*; Eric Walrond, *Tropic Death*; W. C. Handy, *Blues: An Anthology*; and Walter White, *Flight*.

1927



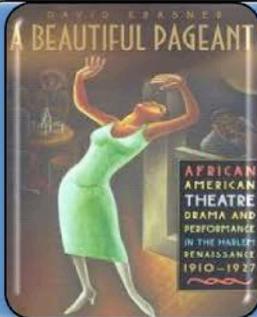
- * In Abraham's Bosom by Paul Green, with an all-black cast, won the Pulitzer Prize, May.
- * Ethel Waters first appeared on Broadway, July.
- * Marcus Garvey departed.
- * Louis Armstrong in Chicago and Duke Ellington in New York began their careers.
- * Harlem Globetrotters established.
- * Charlotte Mason decides to become a patron of the New Negro.
- * A'Lelia Walker opens a tearoom salon called "The Dark Tower."
- * Publications of Miguel Covarrubias, *Negro Drawings*; Cullen, *Ballad of the Brown Girl, Copper Sun, and Caroling Dusk*; Arthur Fauset, *For Freedom: A Biographical Story of the American Negro*; Hughes, *Fine Clothes to the Jew*; James Weldon Johnson, *God's Trombones: Seven Negro Sermons in Verse* and *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (reprint of the 1912 edition); Alain Locke and Montgomery T. Gregory, eds. *Plays of Negro Life*.

1928



- * Countee Cullen marries Nina Yolande, daughter of W.E.B. Du Bois, April 9; described as the social event of the decade.
- * Publications of Wallace Thurman, *Harlem: A Forum of Negro Life*; Du Bois, *The Dark Princess*; Rudolph Fisher, *The Walls of Jericho*; Nella Larsen, *Quicksand*; Jessie Fauset, *Plum Bun*; Claude McKay, *Home to Harlem*.

1929



- * Negro Experimental Theatre founded, February; Negro art Theatre founded, June; National Colored Players founded, September.
- * Wallace Thurman's play *Harlem*, written with William Jourdan Rapp, opens at the Apollo Theater on Broadway and becomes hugely successful.
- * Black Thursday, October 29, Stock Exchange crash.
- * Publications of Cullen, *The Black Christ and Other Poems*; Claude McKay, *Banjo*; Nella Larsen, *Passing*; Wallace Thurman, *The Blacker the Berry*; and Walter White, *Rope and Faggot: The Biography of Judge Lynch*.

1930

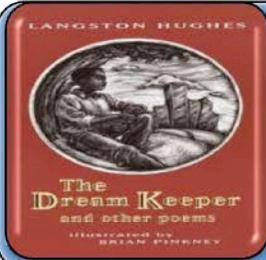


- * *The Green Pastures* (musical), with an all-black cast, opened on Broadway, February 26.
- * Universal Holy Temple of Tranquillity founded; Black Muslims opened Islam Temple in Detroit.
- * Publications of Randolph Edmonds, *Shades and Shadows*; Charles S. Johnson, *The Negro in American Civilization: A Study of Negro Life and Race Relations*; James Weldon Johnson, *Black Manhattan*; Langston Hughes, *Not Without Laughter*



1931

- * Scottsboro trial, April through July.
- * A'Lelia Walker dies, August 16.
- * Publications of Arna Bontemps, *God Sends Sunday*; Jessie Fauset, *The Chinaberry Tree*; Langston Hughes, *Dear Lovely Death*, *The Negro Mother*, *Not Without Laughter*, *Scottsboro Limited*; Vernon Loggins, *The Negro Author: His Development in America to 1900*; George S. Schuyler, *Black No More*; and Toomer, *Essentials*.



1932

- * Twenty young black intellectuals travel to Russia to make a movie, *Black and White*, June.
- * Mass defection of blacks from the Republican Party began.
- * Publications of Sterling Brown, *Southern Road*; Cullen, *One Way to Heaven*; Rudolph Fisher, *The Conjure Man Dies*; Hughes, *The Dream Keeper*; Claude McKay, *Ginger Town*; Schuyler, *Slaves Today*; Thurman, *Infants of the Spring*.



1933

- * National Negro Business League ceased operations after 33 years.
- * Publications of Jessie Fauset, *Comedy*, *American Style*; James Weldon Johnson, *Along This Way*; McKay, *Banana Bottom*.



1934

- * Rudolph Fisher and Wallace Thurman die within four days of each other.
- * W.E.B. Du Bois resigns from The Crisis and the NAACP.
- * Apollo Theatre opened.
- * Publications of Arna Bontemps, *You Can't Pet a Possum*; Randolph Edmonds, *Six Plays for the Negro Theatre*; Hughes, *The Ways of White Folks*; Zora Neale Hurston, *Jonah's Gourd Vine*; James Weldon Johnson, *Negro Americans: What Now?*; George Lee, *Beale Street: Where the Blues Began*.



1935

- * Harlem Race Riot, March 19.
- * *Porgy and Bess*, with an all-black cast, opens on Broadway, October 10.
- * *Mulatto* by Langston Hughes, first full-length play by a black writer, opens on Broadway, October 25.
- * 50 percent of Harlem's families unemployed.
- * Publications of Cullen, *The Medea and Other Poems*; Zora Neale Hurston, *Mules and Men*; Willis Richardson and May Sullivan, *Negro History in Thirteen Plays*.

ACTIVITIES

- 1) Read the book *Harlem Stomp: A Cultural History of the Harlem Renaissance* by Laban Carrick Hill.
 - The student should write a short summary about the book
 - The students should get into groups of three or four and discuss the piece (main themes, what stuck out to them, what they learned...)
 - Have the students come up with one or two questions (from each group) and share with the class.
 - Discuss with the students the lives of African Americans during that time period. Why was the movement so important to them? What did it bring to the community?
- 2) Have students make their own timeline of the Harlem Renaissance emphasizing either on music, art, literature, politics, education, religion... Have them describe how and why the particular theme chosen was important during the time period.
- 3) Provide the children with the list of prominent Harlem Renaissance musicians, writers, poets, dancers... and ask them to chose one of them and make a poster board about that personality.
 - The poster board should include a background of that famous person, why he/she was important, how he/she contributed to the cultural movement...
 - The students should also have a pamphlet including the person's most famous piece(s) of work.
 - The student should organize a fair at the school and present their project to their middle and upper school peers.
- 4) Ask the student to pick a famous play or musical. The class should be made into two groups. Allow the students to learn their part and do research on their characters and then have them act out the play in front of the other group.
- 5) Have the students do research on black magazines during the Harlem Renaissance (e.g: The Crisis, the Opportunity...) and write a three (3) pages essay about it.
 - students should write a clear and concise background about the magazine (Who created it? why was it founded, what struggles did the founders have to go through in order to guarantee its success...)
 - What were the main purposes of these magazines?
 - What type of rubrics was incorporated (e.g.; politics, education, current affairs, musical events...)?
 - Put the students in groups of two (2) or three (3) and ask them to make their own Harlem Renaissance black newspaper (encourage them to use pictures, clipart, poetry, literature contests...)

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