

Harlem Renaissance

Harlem Renaissance was a significant movement in African American literature and other arts during the 1920's and early 1930's. This artistic "renaissance," which means *rebirth*, was set in Harlem, an area in New York City that was the center of African American cultural life during the period.

During the Harlem Renaissance, writers and artists tried to explore black life in the United States in a fresh way. Many of the writers rejected earlier representations of black Americans as being narrow and simplified. One of the leading thinkers of the Harlem Renaissance was Alain Locke, a professor and philosopher, who edited an important anthology called *The New Negro: An Interpretation* (1925). The volume conveyed the new sense of sophistication, dignity, and racial pride that characterized the movement. Several white writers also supported the Harlem Renaissance, notably Carl Van Vechten.

The major African American writers during the Harlem Renaissance included Arna Bontemps, Countee Cullen, Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, James Weldon Johnson, Claude McKay, and Jean Toomer. These writers created works that drew on African American folk culture and addressed such themes as politics, gender, and heritage. Each of these authors has an article in *The World Book Encyclopedia*.

African American painters, sculptors, actors, and musicians also contributed to the Harlem Renaissance. The painters and sculptors gave a new sense of realism in their portrayals of black life. Notable artists were the painters Palmer Hayden and Laura Wheeler Waring and the sculptors Meta Warrick Fuller and Sargent Johnson. Many of the musicians were important jazz figures, such as Louis Armstrong, Eubie Blake, and Duke Ellington. Prominent actors included Charles Gilpin, Paul Robeson, and Bill Robinson.

Several historical factors helped the Harlem Renaissance develop. They included African American migration from the South to the North, civil rights activism, and the growth of black publishing. Critics note that during the 1920's similar movements of African American creativity were occurring elsewhere in American cities, as well as among black populations in other countries.

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