The Harlem Renaissance

A Unit of Study for Grades 9–12

Nina Gifford

National Center for History in the Schools
University of California, Los Angeles

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The National Center for History in the Schools
Department of History
University of California, Los Angeles
6339 Bunche Hall
405 Hilgard Avenue
Los Angeles, California 90095-1473
FAX: (310) 267-2103

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Cover Illustration: Cover from the journal *The Crisis*, June 1920.

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Introduction

Approach and Rationale

The Harlem Renaissance is one of over 60 National Center for History in the Schools teaching units that are the fruits of collaborations between history professors and experienced teachers of both United States and World History. The units represent specific dramatic episodes in history from which you and your students can pause to delve into the deeper meanings of these selected landmark events and explore their wider context in the great historical narrative.

By studying a crucial episode in history, the student becomes aware that choices had to be made by real human beings, that those decisions were the result of specific factors, and that they set in motion a series of historical consequences. We have selected dramatic moments that best bring alive that decision-making process. We hope that through this approach, your students will realize that history in an ongoing, open-ended process, and that the decisions they make today create the conditions of tomorrow's history.

Our teaching units are based on primary sources, government documents, artifacts, magazines, newspapers, films, private correspondence, literature, contemporary photographs, and paintings from the period under study. What we hope to achieve using primary source documents in these lessons is to remove the distance that students feel from historical events and to connect them more intimately with the past. In this way we hope to recreate for your students a sense of "being there," a sense of seeing history through the eyes of the very people who were making decisions. This will help your students develop historical empathy, to realize that history is not an impersonal process divorced from real people like themselves. At the same time, by analyzing primary sources, students will actually practice the historian's craft, discovering for themselves how to analyze evidence, establish a valid interpretation and construct a coherent narrative in which all the relevant factors play a part.

Content and Organization

Within this unit, you will find: Teaching Background Materials, including Unit Overview, Unit Context, Correlation to the National Standards for History Unit, Objectives, Introduction to *The Harlem Renaissance*, A Dramatic Moment; and Lesson Plans with Student Resources. This unit, as we have said above, focuses on certain key moments in time and should be used as a supplement to your customary course materials. Although these lessons are recommended for use by secondary students, they can be adapted for other grade levels.

Teacher Background Materials

I. Unit Overview

In *The Crisis* in 1920, W.E.B Du Bois called for "a renaissance of American Negro literature . . . [for] the strange, heart-rending race tangle is rich beyond dream and only we can tell the tale and sing the song from the heart." [April, 298–99]. By 1925, the New York *Herald Tribune* proclaimed that a "Negro renaissance" was well underway [May 7]. Now known best as the Harlem Renaissance, it was an era of vigorous cultural growth that coalesced around a group of creative young writers, artists, musicians, and powerful social thinkers such as Du Bois and Alain Locke in Manhattan's Harlem around 1920. Critics and historians have struggled to understand the movement and its impact over the years: What were its historical roots? How great is its art? How widespread and enduring is its legacy? Studying the Harlem Renaissance and its role in defining African American cultural identity in the rapidly changing world of the early twentieth century not only helps students grasp that era's complexity, but also helps them develop insights into attitudes that exist in our society today.

Using a variety of documents, plus cooperative and individual instructional activities that emphasize critical thinking, students will examine the attitudes and strategies of a people battling to take their rightful place in American society. Art, literature, music, and film are also used to illustrate key points.

II. Unit Context

The Harlem Renaissance is part of the post-World War I cultural upheaval that found all of American society trying to come to terms with the shift from a rural way of life to an urban and industrialized one. This unit can be taught after studying World War I, as a case study of the kinds of culture clashes that dominated the 1920s, or as a transition to the era of the Great Depression and the New Deal after covering the '20s. In preparation for teaching "The Harlem Renaissance," background on Booker T. Washington, W. E. B. Du Bois and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the agricultural slowdown in the South, Jim Crow laws, the resurgence of the Klu Klux Klan (KKK), and the 1919 race riots would be worthwhile. See the **Annotated Bibliography** for source suggestions.

III. Correlation with the National Standards for United States History

The Harlem Renaissance provides teaching materials that address *National Standards for United States History*, Basic Edition (Los Angeles: National Center for Historyin the Schools, 1996) **Era 7** "The Emergence of Modern America (1890–1930)." Lessons in the unit specifically address **Standard 3C** "Examine the contributions of artists and writers of the Harlem Renaissance and assess their popularity."

Lessons within this unit likewise address the Historical Thinking Standards by providing primary source materials which challenge students to analyze cause-and-effect relationships, to marshal evidence of antecedent circumstances, to consider multiple perspectives, and to draw upon visual data, literary, and musical sources. Students are also expected to draw evidence from historical maps.

IV. Unit Objectives

- To identify social, economic, and political events that affected African Americans in the first decades of the twentieth century
- To describe and analyze the artistic and cultural development of African Americans during the Harlem Renaissance
- To discuss the historical impact of the Harlem Renaissance

V. Lesson Plans

1. Evolution of Harlem (1 day)
2. Art of the Harlem Renaissance (2–3 days)
3. Historical Impact of the Harlem Renaissance (1–2 days)

VI. An Introduction to "The Harlem Renaissance"

The historical roots of the Harlem Renaissance are complex. In part, they lay in the vast migration of African Americans to northern industrial centers that began early in the century and increased rapidly as World War I production needs and labor shortages boosted job opportunities. The target for the move north for African American artists and intellectuals was often New York City, where powerful voices for racial pride such as W. E. B. Du Bois, Marcus Garvey, and James Weldon Johnson were concentrated. By the 1910s, Harlem had become a spirited community that provided continuity and support for a diverse population pouring in from the South and the Caribbean.

The Harlem Renaissance is also rooted in the disappointment that African Americans felt with the limited opportunities open to them as the United States struggled to transform itself from a rural to an urban society. Increased contact between African Americans and white Americans in the workplace and on city streets forced a new awareness of the disparity between the promise of U.S. democracy and its reality. African American soldiers who served in World War I were angered by the prejudice they often encountered back at home, compared to the greater acceptance they had found in Europe. A larger, better-educated urban population fully comprehended the limitations that white-dominated society had placed on them. As African Americans became increasingly disillusioned about achieving the justice that war-time rhetoric had seemed to promise, many determined to pursue their goals of equality and success more aggressively than ever before.

Organized political and economic movements also helped to motivate the Harlem Renaissance by creating a new sense of empowerment in African Americans. The NAACP boasted nearly 44,000 members by the end of 1918. In the early 1920s Marcus Garvey's message of racial pride drew hundreds of thousands of ordinary men and women to his United Negro Improvement Association and its Back-to-Africa movement. Other African Americans, including many intellectuals, turned to socialism or communism. By 1920, large numbers of African Americans of all political and economic points of view were plainly unwilling to settle for the old ways any longer. One unexpected development had an impact on the form their demand for change would take: urbane whites suddenly "took up" New York's African American community, bestowing patronage on young artists, opening up publishing opportunities, and pumping cash into Harlem's "exotic" nightlife in a complex relationship that scholars continue to probe. Fueled by all of these historical forces, an unprecedented outpouring of writing, music and visual arts began among African American artists.

The artistic output of the Harlem Renaissance was dominated by two ideologies, both driven by racial consciousness and pride. The first is represented by W. E. B. Du Bois and James Weldon Johnson of the NAACP, Howard University philosophy professor Alain Locke, sociologist Charles Spurgeon, and others, who extolled the arts as an area where talented and culturally privileged African Americans could lead their race's fight for equality. They believed that works of fine art inspired by the artists' racial heritage and experience would prove the beauty of their race and its crucial contribution to American culture. Artistic successes, they believed, could be counted on to foster pride among all African Americans and prove their educated class to be the equal of the white educated class. In "Criteria for Negro Art," Du Bois argued:

> We have a right, in our effort to get just treatment, to insist that we produce something of the best in human character and that it is unfair to judge us by our criminals and prostitutes. This is justifiable propaganda. [*The Crisis*, 21 (June 1921), 55–56]

Du Bois hailed the "Talented Tenth" and Locke the "New Negro" as thinking persons whose race had survived war, migration, and prejudice, and had the strength and vision to lead the way to social justice.

Opposition to this art-as-propaganda view came from the very same elite vanguard of artists that the older generation was counting on to promote the cause: artists such as Claude McKay, Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, and Aaron Douglas. They took a stand voiced in Wallace Thurman's short-lived journal, *Fire!!*, claiming the need to present the ordinary African American person objectively as an individual simply living in the flesh-and-blood world. They argued against painting and characterizing only "cultured" and "high-class" African Americans who mirrored the standards of white society. In doing so, they spoke for young artists who chose to pursue their art for its own sake. If there was not a bitter feud between these two ideological camps, it was in no small part due to the fact that the young artists still inevitably spoke from their unique experience as African American men and women.

As a discrete historical moment in American history, the Harlem Renaissance came to an end sometime in the 1930s (most authorities place it in the early thirties). The Great Depression sapped the money and energy of white patrons and party-goers as well as that of Harlemites, including the substantial support of journals such as the National Urban League's *Opportunity* and the NAACP's *The Crisis*. Harlem artists drifted to other opportunities, in Washington or Paris or Fisk University in Nashville, with a sense of leaving behind not a defined movement as much as a social phenomenon.

How, then, should we evaluate the Harlem Renaissance? From an aesthetic point of view, one of the main reproaches has been that little significant artistic criticism was written during the Renaissance. There is a sense among many critics and historians today that having art created by African Americans *taken seriously* seemed like such a momentous step forward that it seemed to suffice, and only with hindsight do we see how this may have forestalled synthesis of a Harlem Renaissance movement as such. Some critics argue that much of the work produced during the Renaissance was not of outstanding quality and that the period inevitably has been idealized, but others stress that the real point is the breakthroughs made in two areas: technical mastery and ideological content. Another criticism—that the Harlem Renaissance was an elitist intellectual movement that barely touched the masses—should be put into perspective. According to authority Nathan Huggins:

> [The idea that d]espite a history that had divided them, art and culture would reform the brotherhood in a common humanity . . . was an attitude of cultural elitism. But it is wrong to assume that these black intellectuals, because of it, were not related to the black common man in Harlem. I think . . . most Negroes were apt to agree that [the artistic output] was a good thing. . . . And such an achievement, because it was elite in character, was a source of race pride and an argument against continued discrimination. [*Harlem Renaissance*, 5–6]

Other authorities point to progress in relations between African and white Americans. During the Harlem Renaissance it was acceptable for the first time for Americans of both races—as equals—to make and exploit social contact. Also, the movement articulated some priorities for the achievement of racial equality that have been played out in the modern Civil Rights Movement.

Historical evidence certainly does not show unbroken progress in African American artistic (or political or economic) development since the period of the Harlem Renaissance. But history does support the view that the Renaissance was a liberating step in the search by African Americans for artistic and cultural identity on their own terms. Victor A. Kramer, in his 1987 collection of essays on the subject, makes an important point about the need for continuing historical and social evaluation of the Harlem Renaissance: "At this stage, questions about such a complicated movement may be even more valuable than answers." [*The Harlem Renaissance Re-Examined*, p. 2]

I, Too

Langston Hughes
1926

I, too, sing America

I am the darker brother,
They send me to eat in the kitchen
When company comes,
But I laugh,
And eat well,
And grow strong.

Tomorrow,
I'll sit at the table
When company comes.
Nobody'll dare
Say to me
"Eat in the kitchen,"
Then.

Besides,
They'll see how beautiful I am
And be ashamed,—

I, too, am America.

Lesson One
Evolution of Harlem

A. Student Objectives

- To describe the "Great Migration" of the 1910s and 1920s
- To locate Harlem on a map of New York City and trace the migration of blacks through Manhattan to Harlem
- To analyze the unrest felt by a growing number of urban blacks after World War I and the early years of the "Great Migration"
- To identify several political and economic movements that had an impact on African Americans in the 1910s–1920s
- To identify and categorize events presented in the historical data that culminate in the Harlem Renaissance

B. Lesson Activities

1. Engage students' interest in the Harlem Renaissance by reading **Document 1–A**, the letter to *The Crisis* from "A Southern Colored Woman," describing her mixed feelings about a 1919 riot motivated by racial problems. To connect this historical event to students and their own difficult times, before reading the signature or explaining the circumstances of the letter ask them who they think the writer could be, what sort of riot she is probably discussing, and when it might have taken place.
2. Give students a copy of the map "Percentage of African Americans in Total Population of the United States, 1890" [**Document 1–B**]. Ask them to determine which part of the country nearly all African Americans lived in at that time (the South), then to use their own background knowledge to speculate about whether African Americans would be accustomed to an urban or a rural environment, what kind of jobs most of them would have, and what social conditions would be like for them. This is a good place to discuss Jim Crow laws if students have not already studied them. With this foundation, students are ready to study the "Great Migration" that began around the time of World War I.
3. Let students work in small groups to draw conclusions about the reasons that several million African Americans migrated to Northern cities by examining **Documents 1–C** to **1–L**. In order to interpret documents such as newspaper articles, photographs and posters students should examine all objects or images included in the document, then ask themselves questions such as: Who created the document? Who is its intended audience? What is its historical context? What kind of effects would it be likely to have? With the documents included here, they should recognize such points as:

- Basic civil rights were denied African Americans in the South and their lives were often in danger.
- Wages in the South were low and working conditions poor.
- Education possibilities in the South were limited for African Americans.
- Opportunities for African Americans to achieve prominence were greater in the North (Mr. Abbott, the owner of the Chicago *Defender,* was an African American, as was Oscar DePriest whose election to alderman) is announced in the *Defender* headline).
- Jobs were growing rapidly in Northern factories because of war production.

4. Give students "The Trek Northward" [**Document 1–M**], a map of Manhattan and most of New York City, then ask them to determine where and when African Americans lived there. They should be able to determine that their introduction was into lower Manhattan in the mid-nineteenth century, and that there was a slow migration northward to Greenwich Village, midtown, and the San Juan Hill area southwest of Central Park by the turn of the century, and finally that there was a jump over the park to Harlem (first in 1905) in substantial numbers by 1910. Continue to relate the lesson to today's world by asking students what they know about Harlem now and why they think African Americans developed this largely homogeneous community. Point out the advantages that such a cultural support system has while people get accustomed to a new way of life, and that the tight cultural community in Harlem was vital to the growth of the Harlem Renaissance.
5. Ask a student to read aloud "Save," a 1918 editorial in *The Crisis* [**Document 1–N**]. Explain that *The Crisis* was published by the NAACP, then discuss such questions as:

   - What action does the NAACP advise African Americans to take?
   - What reason does it give that is directly related to World War One?
   - What reason is directly related to conditions for African Americans?
   - How would you expect people to feel if they had sacrificed to fight in World War One, but *were not* treated with respect afterward?

   Tell students they can find out the answer to whether the NAACP strategy worked by examining documents from the period after the war [**Documents 1-O** and **1–P**]. Point out two factors that might have influenced the way African Americans felt about their situation in the United States at this time:

   1) Soldiers and nurses who had gone abroad during World War I returned home angry and frustrated that white strangers in Europe treated them with greater equality than did white Americans.

2) Increasing numbers of young African Americans had become better educated and better informed since migrating to the North.

One thing that students might conclude is that more and more African Americans would probably be demanding changes by the 1920s and be willing to work to achieve them. Note the numbers of African Americans who supported Marcus Garvey, the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) and the Back-to Africa movement, and the flourishing of the NAACP, the National Urban League, and the Socialist Party. Then explain that the Harlem Renaissance, with its unprecedented outpouring of poetry, stories, novels, paintings, sculpture, music, and dance was such a dramatic change fueled by ideas and innovations that had been suppressed or impossible in African American culture until now.

6. In class or for homework, ask students to identify and list the economic, political, or social events or conditions that eventually made possible the Harlem Renaissance. Then have them categorize the events or conditions according to whether they are reactions to life in the South, outcomes of exposure to life outside the South, or direct actions taken by African Americans to improve their lives. Let students know that this assignment, as well as the culminating exercise for the activities of the next three days, will be directly applicable to the final project for the unit, an essay. Their work should look something like this:

Reactions to Conditions in the South

- lynchings and burnings in the South
- better education opportunities in the North
- better pay and working conditions in the North
- more jobs in the North

Outcomes of Exposure to Life Outside the South

- growth of organizations and movements that promoted interests of African Americans
- increased number of educated and informed African Americans
- awareness of whites in the South treating African Americans worse than did many whites elsewhere

Actions Taken by African Americans to Improve their Lives

- Coalescence to demand for change among large number of African Americans

C. Lesson Evaluation

1. Assess group participation, making sure students understand how to analyze documents on many interrelated levels by considering: who created them, who their intended audience is, and what the historical context is, and what effect they would be likely to have, as well as the factual content of the documents.

2. Evaluate written lists and categorizations.

LETTER TO *The Crisis*
November 1919, XIX, 339

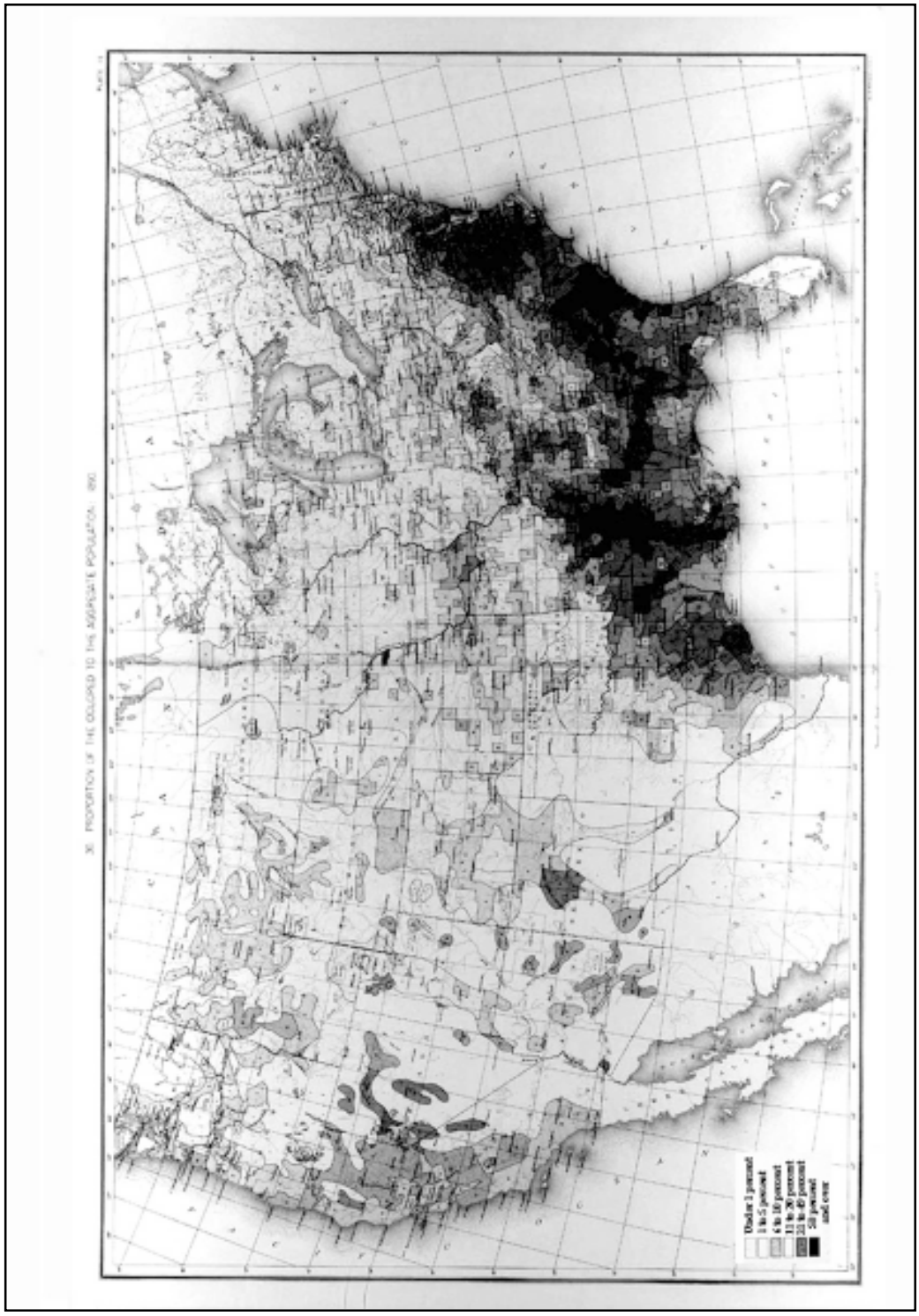
The Washington riot gave me a thrill that comes once in a life time. I was alone when I read between the lines of the morning paper that at last our men had stood like men, struck back, were no longer dumb, driven cattle. When I could no longer read for my streaming tears, I stood up, alone in my room, held both hands high over my head and exclaimed aloud: "Oh, I thank God, thank God!" . . .

We know how many insults we have borne silently, for we have hidden many of them from our men because we did not want them to die needlessly in our defense; we know the sorrow of seeing our boys and girls grow up, the swift stab of the heart at night at the sound of a strange footstep. . . .

God grant that our men everywhere refrain from strife, provoke no quarrel, but that they protect their women and homes at any cost.

—*A Southern Colored Woman*
I'm sure the editor will understand why I cannot sign my name.

Percentage of African Americans in Total Population of the United States, 1890



LYNCHING IN THE SOUTH

A Protest Against the Burning and Lynching of Negros

Within the last fortnight three members of my race have been burned at the stake; of these one was a woman. Not one of the three was charged with any crime even remotely connected with the abuse of a white woman. In every case murder was the sole accusation. All of these burnings took place in broad daylight and two of them occurred on Sunday afternoon in sight of a Christian church.

In the midst of the nation's busy and prosperous life few, I fear take time to consider where these brutal and inhuman crimes are leading us. The custom of burning human beings has become so common as scarcely to excite interest or attract unusual attention.

I have always been among those who condemned in the strongest terms crimes of whatever character committed by members of my race, and I condemn them now with equal severity; but I maintain that the only protection of our civilization is a fair and calm trial of all people charged with crime and in their legal punishment if proved guilty.

There is no shadow of excuse for departure from legal methods in the cases of individuals accused of murder. The laws are as a rule made by the white people and their execution is in the hands of the white people; so that there is little probability of any guilty colored man escaping.

These burnings without a trial are in the deepest sense unjust to my race; but it is not this injustice alone which stirs my heart. These barbarous scenes followed, as they are, by publication of the shocking details are more disgraceful and degrading to the people who inflict the punishment than those who receive it.

If the law is disregarded when a Negro is concerned, it will soon be disregarded when a white man is concerned; and, besides, the rule of the mob destroys the friendly relations which should exist between the races and injures and interferes with the material prosperity of the communities concerned.

A PROTEST AGAINST THE BURNING AND LYNCHING OF NEGROES.

By BOOKER T. WASHINGTON

[The following letter was originally printed in the Birmingham Age-Herald, Monday, February 29, 1904, and was also sent out by the Associated Press to the newspapers of the country.]

Within the last fortnight three members of my race have been burned at the stake; of these one was a woman. Not one of the three was charged with any crime even remotely connected with the abuse of a white woman. In every case murder was the sole accusation. All of these burnings took place in broad daylight and two of them occurred on Sunday afternoon in sight of a Christian church.

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Worst of all these outrages take place in communities where there are Christian churches; in the midst of people who have their Sunday schools, their Christian Endeavor Societies and Young Men's Christian Associations, where collections are taken up for sending missionaries to Africa and China and the rest of the so-called heathen world.

Is it not possible for pulpit and press to speak out against these burnings in a manner that shall arouse a public sentiment that will compel the mob to cease insulting our courts, our Governors and legal authority; cease bringing shame and ridicule upon our Christian civilization.

BOOKER T. WASHINGTON.
Tuskegee, Ala., February 22, 1904.

This letter was originally printed in the *Birmingham Age-Herald*, Monday, February 29, 1904. Reprinted in the Library of Congress, *African American Perspectives: Pamphlets from the Daniel A. P. Murray Collection, 1818–1907.*
http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/aap/aaphome.html

LYNCHING STATISTICS FROM *THE CRISIS* (1920)

According to THE CRISIS records, 77 Negroes were lynched during the year 1919, of whom 1 was a colored woman and 11 were soldiers; 4 white persons and 3 Mexicans also were lynched, —a total of 84 lynchings.

During the year 1918, 64 Negroes were lynched, 5 of whom were colored women; 4 white men were lynched.

Georgia still leads, with an increase of 2 lynchings; Mississippi takes second place, instead of Texas, with 5 more lynchings; Alabama, by an increase of 5 lynchings, ties with Louisiana.

In methods of torture, burnings have increased from 2 in 1918 to 14 1919.

January 18, Shreveport, La., Henry Thomas; murder.
January 20, Hillsboro, Tex., Bragg Williams, burned; murder
January 29, Monroe, La., Sampson Smith; murder.
February 6, Newburn, N. C., John Daniels; murder
February 14, Bossier, La., Will Fortner; murder.
March 2, Belzonie, Miss., Eugene Green; assault on man.
March 12, Greenville, Fla., Joe Walker; shooting.
March 13, Tuscaloosa, Ala., Cicero Cage, cut to pieces; pulling woman from horse.
March 14, Pensacola, Fla., Bud Johnson, soldier, burned; attempt to rape.
April — Blakely, Ga., Wilbur Little, soldier, beaten; wearing U. S. A. uniform too long. . . .

According to States

Georgia	22	Missouri	2
Mississippi	12	Colorado	2
Alabama	8	West Virginia	2
Louisiana	8	Nebraska	1
Arkansas	7	Washington	1
Texas	5	Tennessee	1
Florida	5	Kansas	1
North Carolina	4	Sonora (Mexico)	1
South Carolina	2		

By Race

Negro	77	Mexican	3
White	4		

By Sex

Male	83	Female	1

Alleged Crimes

Murder	28	Shooting and assault to murder	7
Rape and attempted rape	19	Insulting women	7
Trivial causes	9	Labor trouble	1
Intimacy with women	4	Quarrel	1
Bandits	3	Insurrection	1
Unknown	2		
Burglary	2		

Methods of Torture

Hanging	43	Drowning	2
Shooting	23	Beating	1
Burning	14	Cutting	1

Negroes Lynched By Years, 1885–1919

1885	78	1903	86
1886	71	1904	83
1887	80	1905	61
1888	95	1906	64
1889	95	1907	60
1890	90	1908	93
1891	121	1909	73
1892	155	1910	65
1893	154	1911	63
1894	134	1912	63
1895	112	1913	79
1896	80	1914	69
1897	122	1915	80
1898	102	1916	55
1899	84	1917	44
1900	107	1918	64
1901	107	1919	77
1902	86		
		Total	3,052

FIELD WORK IN THE SOUTH

Smithsonian Institution

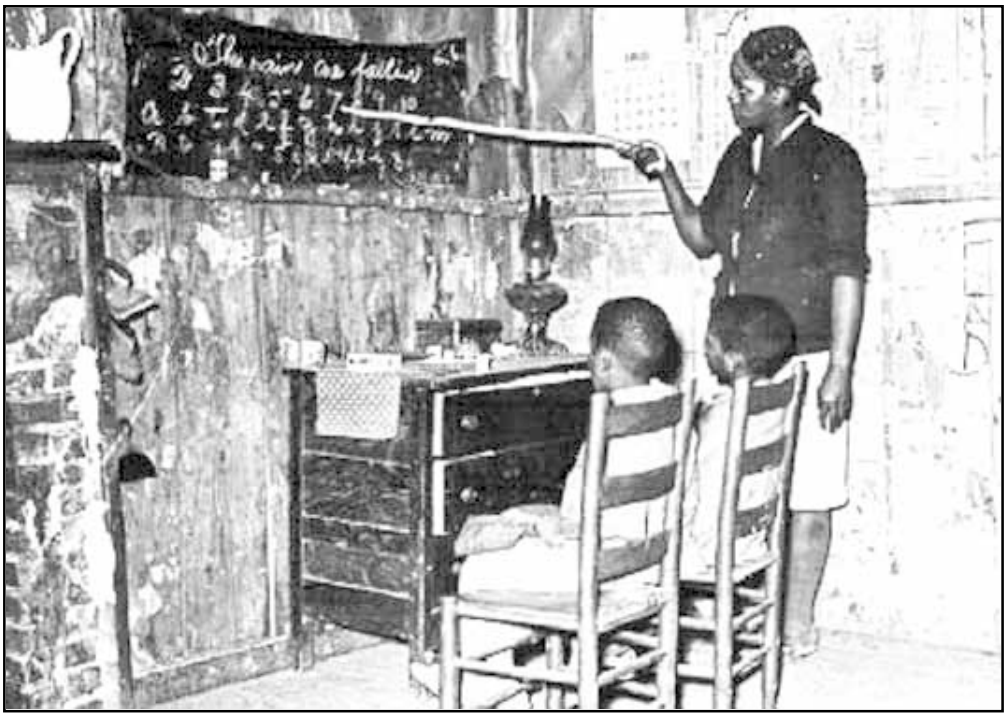
Smithsonian Institution

These pictures were part of the exhibit, "Field to Factory: Afro-American Migration 1915-1940," at the National Museum of American History.

EDUCATION IN THE SOUTH

The education in southern schools was extremely poor. The rooms were overcrowded, they had few resources, and the buildings were very dilapidated. As Hughes Child said, "When I was a boy, the state didn't even give you but three months to go to school. That's all. Three months . . . you could barely learn the alphabet in three months."

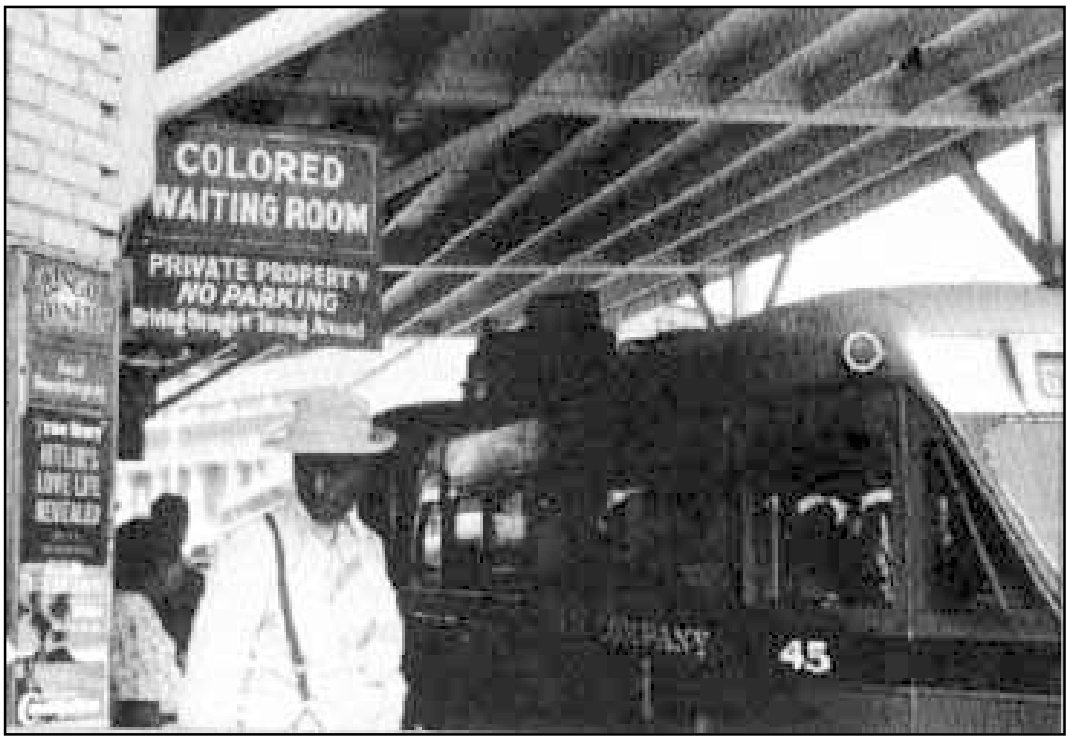
Source: http://otal.umd.edu/~vg/msf95/ms20/education1.html



Smithsonian Institution

This picture was part of the exhibit, "Field to Factory: Afro-American Migration 1915-1940," at the National Museum of American History.

JIM CROW LAWS



National Park Service

Colored Waiting Room at the train station, n.d.
Presented by Martin Luther King, Jr., National Historic Site
http://www.nps.gov/malu/documents/jim_crow_laws.htm

Farm Security Administration

Farm Security Administration

Farm Security Administration

Segregated drinking fountains and a colored only waiting room, examples of the segregated facilities in the South that persisted into the 1960s.

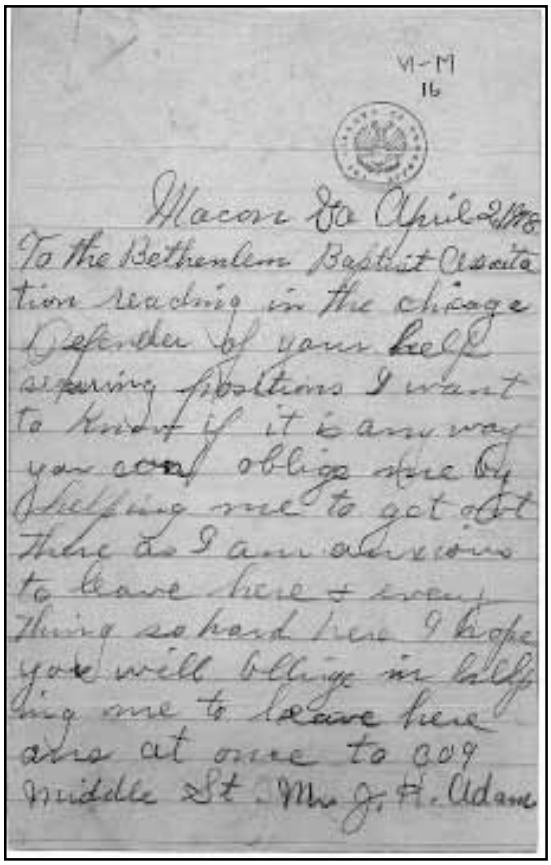
LETTERS TO THE CHICAGO DEFENDER

Mobile, Ala., 4-26-17

Dear Sir Bro:

. . . I am writing to you for advice about comeing north. I am a brickmason an I can do cement work an stone work. . . . if there nothing there for me to make a support for my self and family. My wife is seamstress. We want to get away the 15 or 20 of May so please give this matter your earnest consideration an let me her from you by return mail as my bro. in law want to get away to. He is a carpenter by trade. so please help us as we are in need of your help as we wanted to go to Detroit but if you says no we go where ever you says. There is nothing here for the colored man but a hard time which these southern crackers gives us. We has not had any work to do in 4 wks. and every thing is high to the colored man so please let me hear from you by return mail. Please do this for your brother.

Source: Deirdre Mullane, ed. *Crossing the Danger Water: Three Hundred Years of African-American Writing* (New York: Anchor Books, 1993), p. 458.


VI-M
16

Macon Ga April 2 1918
To the Bethenlem Baptist Associa-
tion reading in the chicago
Defender of your help
securing positions I want
to know if it is any way
you can oblige me by
helping me to get out
there as I am anxious
to leave here & every
thing so hard here I hope
you will oblige me in help
ing me to leave here
ans at once to 309
Middle St. Mrs J. H. Adams

Macon, Ga. April 2, 1918

To the Bethenlem Baptist Association reaching in the *Chicago Defender* of your help securing positions I want to know if it is any way you can oblige me by helping me to get out there as I am anxious to leave here & everything so hard here I hope you will oblige me in helping me to leave here ans[wer] at once
to 309 Middle St.
Mrs. J. H. Adams.

Letter from Mrs. J. H Adams, Macon, Georgia, to the Bethlehem Baptist Association in Chicago, Illinois, 1918 Holograph, Carter G. Woodson Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

LETTER TO THE CHICAGO DEFENDER

Granville Miississippi, May 16, 1917

Dear Sir: This letter is a letter of information of which you will find stamp envelop for reply. I want to come north some time soon but I do not want to leve here looking for a job where I would be in dorse all winter. Now the work I am doing here is running a guage edger in a saw mill. I know all about the grading of lumber. I have been working in lumber about 25 or 27 years. My wedges here is $3.00 a day 11 hours a day. I want to come North where I can educate my 3 little children also m**y** *wife*. Now if you cannot fix me up at what I am doing down here I can learn anything any one else can. also there is a great deal of good women cooks here would leave any time all they want is to know where to go and some way to go please write me, at once just how I can get my people where they can get something for their work. There are women here cookeing for **$**1.50 and $2.00 a week. I would like to live in Chicago or Ohio or Philadelphia. Tell Mr. Abbott that our pepel are tole that they can not get anything to do up there and they are being snatched off the trains here in Greenville and a rested but in spite of all this, they are leaving every day and every night 100 or more is expecting to leave this week. Let me here from you at once.

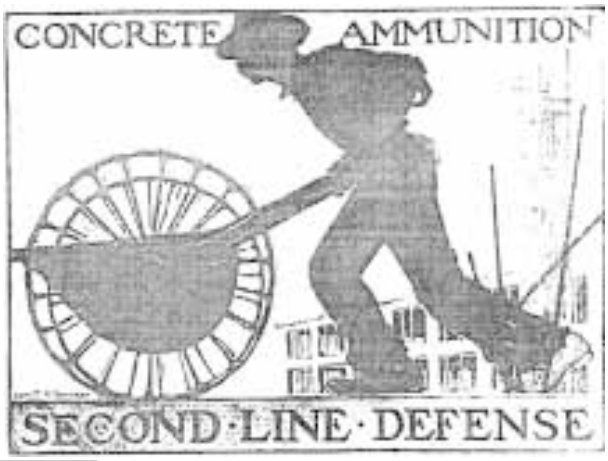
Emmett J. Scott, "Letters of Negro Migrants of 1916–1918*," Journal of Negro History,* 4 (July, 1919), p. 435.

[The "Mr. Abbott" referred to is the African American owner of the *Chicago Defender* who encouraged the migration.]

FACTORY WORK IN THE NORTH

Ads for Laborers

Photographs by Spencer R. Crew in *Field to Factory: Afro-American Migration 1915–1940* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1987).



Smithsonian Institution

Smithsonian Institution

Northern Factories

These pictures were part of the exhibit at the National Museum of American History, entitled "Field to Factory: Afro-American Migration 1915–1940." They were used to illustrate factory life in the north.

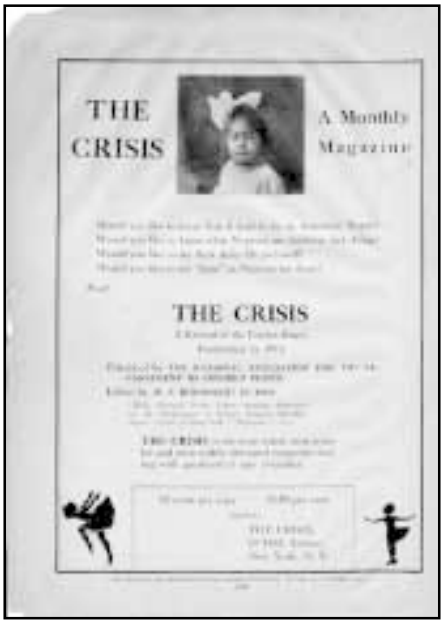
THE CRISIS

"The Crisis is the official monthly publication of the NAACP. It began in 1910 with William Edward Burghardt DuBois as editor, and became a leading periodical for African Americans. It was known for its radical position against lynching and racial prejudice and reflected the ideology of Dr. DuBois. Until 1919 it sold for 10 cents a copy and boasted a monthly circulation of 80,000 copies. In the 1920s, literary contributions to the magazine increased in keeping with the cultural explosion known as the Harlem Renaissance."

Source: http://www.si.umich.edu/CHICO/Harlem/text/NAACP.html

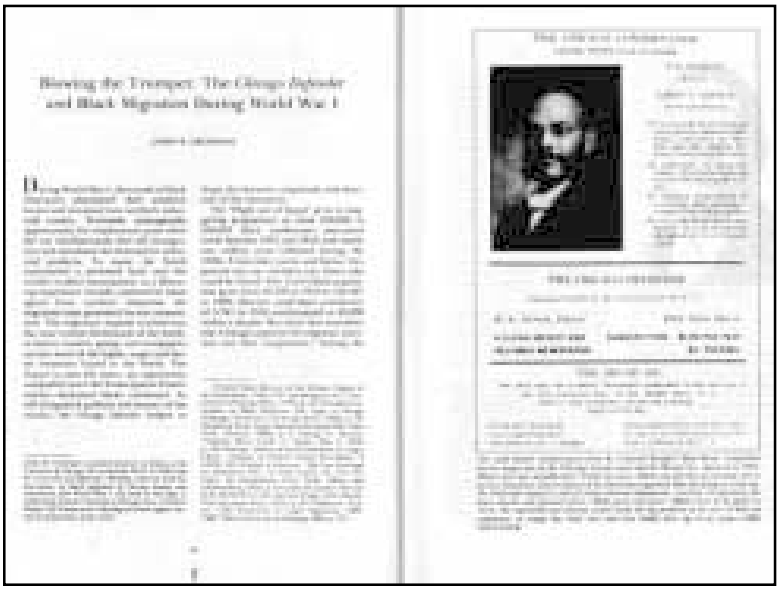
The Crisis:
A Record of the Darker Races

W. E. B. DuBois was the first African American to receive a Ph.D. from Harvard University (1896). He founded *The Crisis*.



Advertisement for *The Crisis* which appeared in *Survey Graphic* Harlem Number (March 1925) Vol. VI, No. 6.
This historic issue is presented digitally by the University of Virginia Library's Electronic Text Center:
http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/harlem/index.html

THE CHICAGO DEFENDER



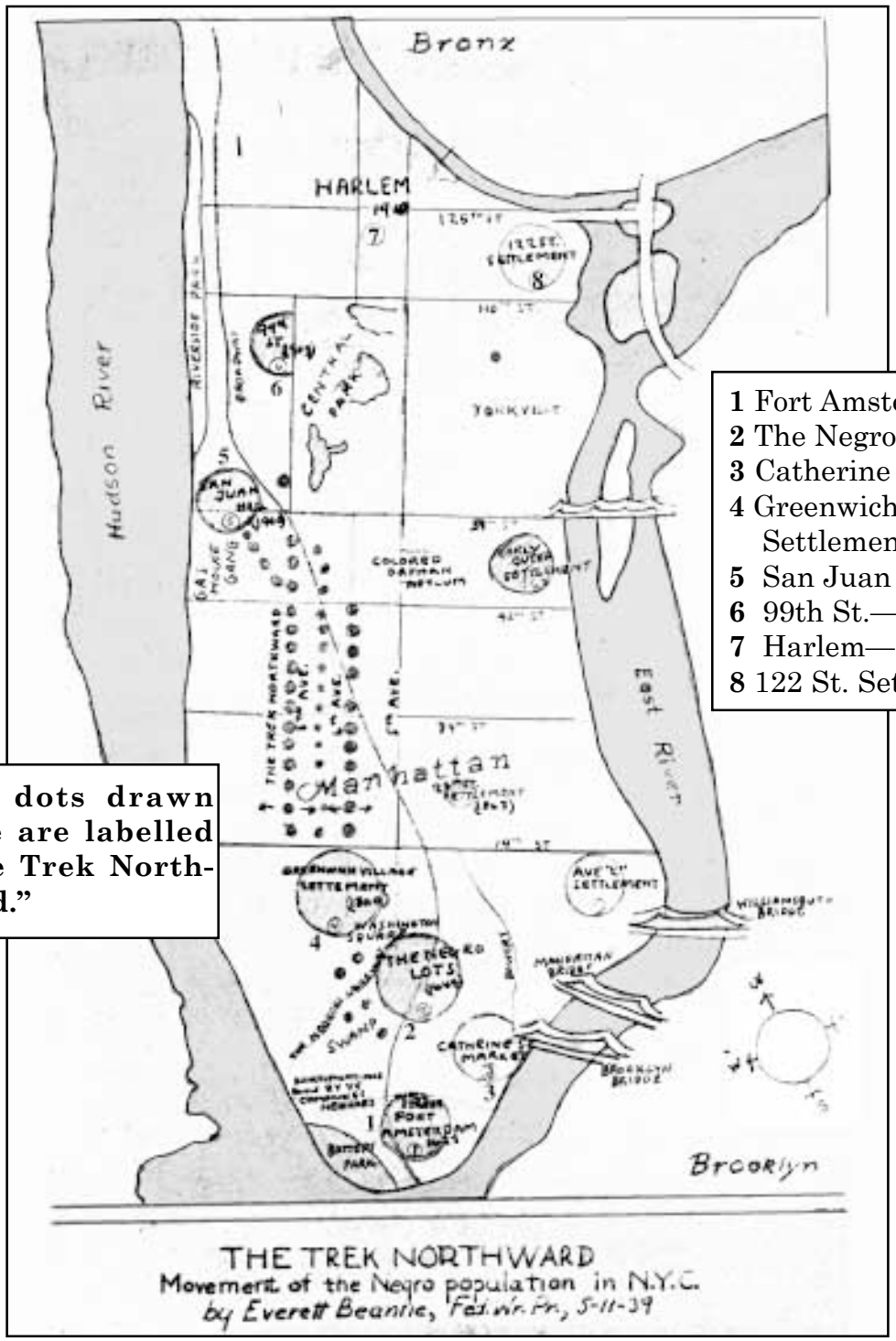
African-American journalist Robert Sengstacke Abbott (1868-1940) founded the *Chicago Defender* on May 6, 1905, with a capital totalling twenty-five cents. His editorial creed was to fight against "segregation, discrimination, disenfranchisement . . . ." The *Defender* reached national prominence during the mass migration of blacks from the South during World War I, when the paper's banner headline for January 6, 1917, read "Millions to Leave South." The *Defender* became the bible of many seeking "The Promised Land." Abbott advertised Chicago so effectively that even migrants heading for other northern cities sought information and assistance from the pages of the 'World's Greatest Weekly.'

Kenneth L. Kusmer, ed. *The Great Migration and After, 1917-1930*, vol. 5, p. 4 *Black Communities and Urban Development in America, 1720-1990* (New York: Garland, 1991) Reprinted by the Library of Congress: http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/african/west.html.

This headline announces the election of Oscan DePriest to alderman. Later, on November 6, 1928, Oscar DePriest became the first African American to win a seat in the United States House of Representatives in the twentieth century.

Source: Ernest R. Rather *Chicago Negro Almanac and Reference Book* (Chicago: Chicago Negro Almanac Publishing Co., 1972).

THE TREK NORTHWARD



1 Fort Amsterdam—1627
2 The Negro Lots—1644
3 Catherine St. Market
4 Greenwich Village Settlement—1800
5 San Juan Hill—1900
6 99th St.—1903
7 Harlem—1910
8 122 St. Settlement

The dots drawn here are labelled "The Trek Northward."

This map was drawn by Everett Beanne for the Federal Work Project, May 11, 1939. Reprinted in Roi Ottley and William J. Weatherby, eds. *The Negro in New York* (New York: New York Public Library, 1967), frontispiece. Enhanced for this unit by Marian McKenna Olivas.

EDITORIAL IN *THE CRISIS*

THE CRISIS

Vol. 16—No. 1 MAY, 1918 Whole No. 91

Editorial

SAVE

I BELIEVE that this is Our War and not President Wilson's War and that no matter how many blunders the administration makes, or how many obstacles it puts in our way we must work the harder to win the war.

I want to urge the importance of advertising in every way you can the campaign for War Savings—savings of money, of food, of labor. In doing so you kill three birds with one stone:

1. Promote the success of the war.
2. Increase the individual wealth of your constituency.
3. Put them on a common footing with other patriotic American citizens and promote those common bonds that gradually break down prejudice.

If the colored citizens of the country seize this opportunity to emphasize their American citizenship by effective war activities, they will score tremendously. When men fight together and work together and save together, this foolishness of race prejudice disappears.

GEORGE G. BRADFORD.

THE NEGRO AND THE WAR DEPARTMENT.

IT seems to be necessary to insist upon justice toward the Negro from the War Department. We are well aware that much of this injustice is incidental and not intentional. As Negroes, we propose to fight for the right, no matter what our treatment may be; but we submit to the public that intentional injustice toward colored soldiers is the poorest investment that this nation can make just now.

First, let us recall the position of Colonel Young: he is still imprisoned in Ohio on full pay with nothing to do. The Examining Board recommended that Colonel Young be "retained in *active service*." The Secretary of War approved this recommendation and directed that "Colonel Young be placed on *active duty*." The Adjutant General, knowing the difference between "active service" and "active duty" immediately retired Colonel Young from active *service* and placed him on active *duty* with nothing to do.

Twelve million Negroes demand that Colonel Young be restored to "active service!"

Again, the Ninety-second Division of Negro troops was established by the Secretary of War and approved by President Wilson over the protest of the General Staff: but no effort was made to secure for this division certain necessary persons of technical training. The colored officers at Fort Des Moines were given no artillery training. Farmers from the South, largely illiterate and without mechanical skill or education, were assigned to the artillery in the first draft. This, however, could easily have been remedied by transferring from other regiments in this division and from other divisions, educated and technically trained colored men. *The permission to make such trans-*

7

PROTESTS 1917–1925

Library of Congress

TheKu Klux Klan parading in full regalia in 1925 down Pennsylvania Avenue from the capitol to the White House.

Library of Congress

At its headquarters, 69 Fifth Avenue, New York City, the NAACP flew a flag to report lynchings, until, in 1938, the threat of losing its lease forced the association to discontinue the practice.

PROTESTS 1917–1924

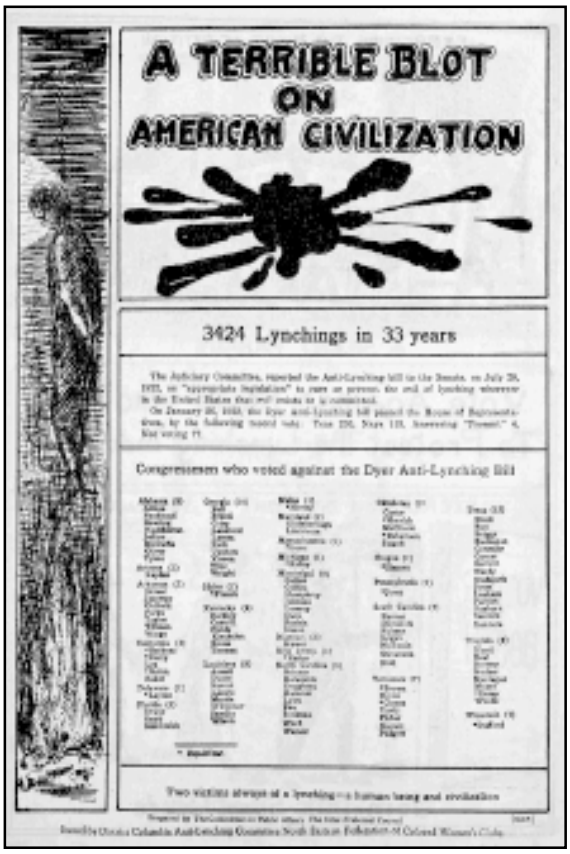
Smithsonian Institution

UNIA parade organized in Harlem, 1924
The sign reads: "THE NEW NEGRO HAS NO FEAR."

Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture

The Silent Protest parade organized by Harlem religious and civic leaders and the NAACP, 1917.

ANTI-LYNCHING BILL



A terrible blot on American civilization. 3424 lynchings in 33 years. . . . Prepared by the Committee on Public Affairs, the Inter-fraternal council. Issued by District of Columbia anti-lynching committee, Northeastern Federation of Colored Women's Clubs. [1922]

This pamphlet was one of many publications by anti-lynching crusaders.

The Dyer Anti-Lynching Bill

The Dyer Anti-Lynch Bill passed the House of Representatives but was killed in the Senate.

NORFOLK, VIRGINIA. SATURDAY
DECEMBER 17, 1921
Lynchings Continue
As Congress Debates
Anti-Lynch Bill

Lesson Two
Art of the Harlem Renaissance

A. Student Objectives

- To examine literature, visual arts, and music produced by African Americans during the Harlem Renaissance
- To identify major themes in the art of the Harlem Renaissance
- To recognize the extra burden that being members of a minority group in the United States placed on African Americans while they tried to cope with the nation's shift from a rural to an urban society

B. Lesson Activities (Two Days)

Day One

1. Provide students with examples of poetry from the Harlem Renaissance [**Documents 2–A** to **2–L**] which reveal three main themes that recur throughout the artistic works created during this era. The first three poems, which are followed by questions that will help students figure out the point of each, can be used as a model for discussing the other poems. Let students work in small groups to read the remaining poems and briefly describe their main point (for example, protesting the lynching of African Americans).
2. When finished, bring students together as a whole group, list their points about the poetry on the board, categorize them into three groups of similar poems, and help students formulate the three major themes:
   - Harlem life and culture
   - Establishing an identity as African Americans
   - Feelings of anger and frustration about white America
3. In class or for homework, have students do a Quick-Write (referring to handouts or notes as little as possible) in which they state:
   1) what the Harlem Renaissance is and when it occurred;
   2) the three main themes found in the writing and other artistic work of the period;
   3) an example of each theme occurring in poetry, naming a poet and the poem in which it occurs.

Day Two

Note:
Greyscale reproductions of the art work discussed are provided in this unit. To enhance this unit, online sources with color reproductions of the art work are noted in the captions. See the **Annotated Bibliography** for additional art work from the period.

1. Show students examples of paintings, sculptures, and other works created by Harlem Renaissance artists [**Documents 2–M** to **2–S**]. Ask them to identify which of the three main themes (see **Day One**, **#2**) are illustrated by each, and discuss the evidence for their conclusions. Regarding themes, students should be able to distinguish: the search for identity as an African American in Aaron Douglas' *Song of Towers*, Sargent Claude Johnson's *Forever Free*, Palmer Hayden's *Fetiche et Fleur*, and William H. Johnson's *Self-Portrait with Pipe* (ca. 1937); feelings of anger and frustration in Douglas' *Weary as I Can Be* and *Into Bondage*; an emphasis on Harlem life and culture in Archibald Motley, Jr.'s *Cocktails* and *Blues*, Jacob Lawrence's *Dust to Dust (The Funeral)*, Elizabeth Olds' *Rhythm Band—Harlem*, Allan Rohan Crite's *School's Out*, and Johnson's *Café*, *Street Life—Harlem*. Students should also be able to show a combination of themes in a number of works, such as Harlem life and culture combined with the search for African American identity in Augusta Savage's *The Harp*, Hayden's *The Janitor who Paints*, and Winold Reiss' *African Fantasy: The Awakening*.

Optional Activities or Homework

1. Play samples of Harlem Renaissance music. The compositions suggested below are in chronological order to illustrate how the music developed over time. The selections represent some of the greatest musicians and singers of the period, and document the progress from ragtime to blues and jazz. Most of the works represent Harlem life, though Billie Holiday's "Strange Fruit" is a classic treatment of the theme of anger. Have students read "Music in the Harlem Renaissance," (**Document 2–T**) which covers some of the main points. See the Annotated Bibliography for complete citations and source suggestions.

   "Smashing Thirds," Fats Waller on piano
   "Thou Swell," James R. Johnson
   "Reckless Blues," sung by Bessie Smith, Louis Armstrong on cornet
   "Contrary Motion," Willie "The Lion" Smith
   "A Handful of Keys," Fats Waller on piano

"Mood Indigo," Duke Ellington
"Strange Fruit," sung by Billie Holiday

2. In class or for homework, have students pick two or three works of art, one or two poems, and two or three pieces of music that affect them the most. Have them name the works and the creators/performers, then explain why they chose those pieces.

C. Lesson Evaluation

1. Assess group participation, making sure students understand each poem well enough to generate a succinct description of it.

2. Evaluate quick-writes.

The Negro Speaks of River

Langston Hughes

I've known rivers:

I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than the

flow of human blood in human veins.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.

I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.

I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.

I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln

went down to New Orleans, and I've seen its muddy

bosom turn all golden in the sunset.

I've known rivers:

Ancient, dusky rivers.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

Langston Hughes, "The Negro Speaks of Rivers," in *The Weary Blues* (New York: Knopf, 1926).

Questions

1. What is the mood of this poem?

2. Does the poem suggest weakness or strength in the black person? How does it suggest this person will deal with his or her life—as a winner or a loser?

3. What is the overall theme of the poem?

Jazzonia

Langston Hughes

Oh, silver tree!
Oh, shining rivers of the soul!

In a Harlem cabaret
Six long-headed jazzers play.
A dancing girl whose eyes are bold
Lifts high a dress of silken gold.

Oh, singing tree!
Oh, shining rivers of the soul!

Were Eve's eyes
In the first garden
Just a bit too bold?
Was Cleopatra gorgeous
In a gown of gold?

Oh, shining tree!
Oh, silver rivers of the soul!

In a whirling cabaret
Six long-headed jazzers play.

Langston Hughes, "Jazzonia" in *The Weary Blues* (New York: Knopf, 1926).

Questions

1. What is the setting of this poem? What are people doing?

2. Does Hughes approve of the "dancing girl" described in the second stanza? Your evidence?

3. Which lines show that cabarets, jazz and dancing are vital to the life of the people of Harlem?

4. What is the overall theme of this poem?

Dream Variation

Langston Hughes

To fling my arms wide
In some place of the sun.
To whirl and to dance
Till the white day is done.
Then rest at cool evening
Beneath a tall tree
While night comes on gently,
Dark like me—
That is my dream!
To fling my arms wide
In the face of the sun,
Dance! whirl! whirl!
Till the quick day is done
Rest a pale evening. . . .
A tall, slim tree. . . .
Night coming tenderly
Black like me.

Langston Hughes, "Dream Variation" in *The Weary Blues* (New York: Knopf, 1926).

Questions

1. With what does the poet identify himself?

2. To what does the poem compare whites? What does this suggest about the place of whites in the poet's world?

3. What is the poet's attitude toward whites—is it simply negative or is there evidence of aggressiveness? Which lines show this?

4. What is the overall theme of this poem?

She of the Dancing Feet Sings

Countee Cullen

And what would I do in heaven, pray,
Me with my dancing feet,
And limbs like apple boughs that sway
When the gusty rain winds beat?

And how would I thrive in a perfect place
With not a man to love my face,
Where dancing would be sin,
Nor an arm to hold me in?

The seraphs and the cherubim
Would be too proud to bend
To sing the faery tunes that brim
My heart from end to end.

The wistful angels down in hell
Will smile to see my face,
And understand, because they fell

Countee Cullen, "She of the Dancing Feet Sings," in *Color* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1925).

Countee Cullen

A photograph of Wingold Reiss's drawing of June 1, 1941. National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

From that all-perfect place.

The Lynching

Claude McKay

His spirit in smoke ascended to high heaven.

His father, by the cruelest way of pain,

Had bidden him to his bosom once again;

The awful sin remained still unforgiven.

All night a bright and solitary star

(Perchance the one that ever guided him,

Yet gave him up at last to Fate's wild whim)

Hung pitifully o'er the swinging char.

Day dawned, and soon the mixed crowds came to view

The ghastly body swaying in the sun.

The women thronged to look, but never a one

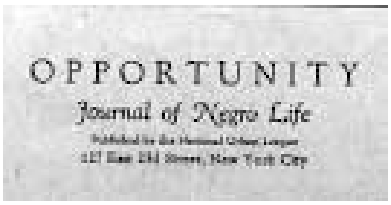
Showed sorrow in her eyes of steely blue.

And little lads, lynchers that were to be,

Claude McKay, "The Lynching," in *Selected Poems of Claude McKay* (New York: Bookman Associates, 1919).

Claude McKay—poet, novelist, short story writer
http://www.si.umich.edu/CHICO/Harlem/text/mckay_slide.html

Danced round the dreadful thing in fiendish glee.



My Race

Helene Johnson

Ah, my race,
Hungry race, Throbbing
and young Ah, my race,
Wonder race,
Sobbing with song Ah,
my race, Laughing race,
Careless in mirth Ah,
my veiled
Unformed race,
Fumbling in birth.

Helene Johnson, My Race, in *Opportunity* (New York: National Urban League, July 1925).

The Lynching

Dorothea Mathews

He saw the rope, the moving mob,

And suddenly thought of quiet things;

The way the river-ripples sob,

The silver flight of pigeon's wings

Free in the blue September air;

And that the night was warm and brown—

Under the trees the shadows hung;

Dorothea Matthews, "The Lynching," in *Opportunity* (New York: National Urban League, April 1928).

The little stars of God looked down.

I, Too

Langston Hughes

I, too, sing America.

I am the darker brother.

They send me to eat in the kitchen

When company comes,

But I laugh,

And eat well,

And grow strong.

Tomorrow,

I'll sit at the table

When company comes.

Nobody'll dare

Say to me

"Eat in the kitchen,"

Then.

Besides,

They'll see how beautiful I am And

be ashamed,—

I, too, am America.

Langston Hughes, "I, Too" in *The Weary Blues* (New York: Knopf, 1926).

Lenox Avenue: Midnight

Langston Hughes

The rhythm of life
Is a jazz rhythm,
Honey.
The gods are laughing at us.

The broken heart of love,
The weary, weary heart of pain,—
Overtones,
Undertones,
To the rumble of street cars,
To the swish of rain.

Lenox Avenue,
Honey.
Midnight,
And the gods are laughing at us.

Langston Hughes, "Lennox Avenue: Midnight" in *The Weary Blues* (New York: Knopf, 1926).

Harlem Night Song

Langston Hughes

Come,
Let us roam the night together
Singing.

I love you.

Across
The Harlem roof-tops
Moon is shining.
Night sky is blue.
Stars are great drops
Of golden dew.
In the cabaret
The jazz-band's playing.

I love you.

Come,
Let us roam the night together
Singing.

Langston Hughes, "Harlem Night Song," in *The Weary Blues* (New York: Knopf, 1926).

The White Ones

Langston Hughes

I do not hate you,
For your faces are beautiful, too.
I do not hate you,
Your faces are whirling lights of loveliness and splendor, too.
Yet why do you torture me,
O, white strong ones,
Why do you torture me?

Langston Hughes, "The White Ones," in *The Weary Blues* (New York: Knopf, 1926).

From the Dark Tower

Countee Cullen

We shall not always plant while other reap
The golden increment of bursting fruit,
Not always countenance, abject and mute,
That lesser men would hold their brothers cheap;
Not everlastingly while others sleep
Shall we beguile their limbs with mellow flute,
Not always bend to some more subtle brute'
We were not made eternally to weep.

The night whose sable breast relieves the stark,
White stars is no less lovely being dark,
And there are buds that cannot bloom at all
In light, but crumple, piteous, and fall;
So in the dark we hide the heart that bleeds,
And wait, and tend our agonizing seeds.

Countee Cullen "From the Dark Tower" in *Copper Sun* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1927).

Excerpt from *Heritage*

Countee Cullen

What is Africa to me:
Copper sun or scarlet sea,
Jungle star or jungle track,
Strong bronzed men, or regal black
Women from whose loins I sprang
When the birds of Eden sang?
One three centuries removed
From the scenes his fathers loved,
Spicy grove, cinnamon tree,
What is Africa to me?
. . .
So I lie, who find no peace
Night or day, no slight release
From the unremittant beat
Made by cruel padded feet
Walking through my body's street.
Up and down they go, and back,
Treading out a jungle track.
So I lie, who never quite
Safely sleep from rain at night—
I can never rest at all
When the rain begins to fall'
Like a soul gone mad with pain
I must match its weird refrain'
Ever must I twist and squirm,
Writing like a baited worm,
While its primal measure drip
Through my body, crying, "Strip!
Doff this new exuberance.
Come and dance the Lover's Dance!"
In an old remembered way
Rain works on me night and day.
. . .
All day long and all night through,
One thing only must I do:
Quench my pride and cool my blood,
Lest I perish in the flood.
Lest a hidden ember set
Timber that I though was wet
Burning like the driest flax.
Melting like the merest wax,
Lest the grave restore its dead.
Hot yet has my heart or head
In the least way realized

Countee Cullen, "Heritage," in *Color* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1925).

They and I are civilized.

"Race Pride"

Our friends are hard—very hard—to please. Only yesterday they were preaching "Race Pride."

"Go to!" they said, "and be PROUD of your race. . . ."

Today Negroes, Indians, Chinese, and other groups, are gaining new faith in themselves; they are beginning to "like" themselves; they are discovering that the current theories and stories of "backward" peoples are largely lies and assumptions; that human genius and possibility are not limited by color, race, or blood. What is this new self-consciousness leading to. . . .

No sooner do whites see this . . . than they point out . . ., "You spurn our knowledge." "You need our wealth and technique. . . ."

Very well. Some of the darker brethren are convinced. They draw near in friendship; they seek to enter schools and churches; they would mingle in industry—when lo! "Get out," yells the White World. . . .

Can you wonder, Sirs, that we are a bit puzzled by all this and that we are asking gently, but more and more insistently, Choose one or the other. . . .

1. Leave the black and yellow world alone. Get out of Africa, Asia, and the Isles. Give us our states and towns and sections and let us rule them undisturbed.

Or—

2. Let the world meet as men with men. Give utter justice to all. Extend Democracy to all and treat all men according to their individual desert. Let it be possible for whites to rise to the highest positions in China and Uganda and blacks to the highest honors in England and Texas.

Here is the choice. . . .

—W.E.B. DuBois, *The Crisis*, Vol. XIX (1920)

Aaron Douglas (1899–1979)

Song of Towers
Mural, 1934
Aaron Douglas (1898–1979)
with Arthur Schomburg

Into Bondage
Aaron Douglas, 1936; Oil on canvas (color)
Institute of International Visual Arts
Available for online viewing:
http://www.iniva.org/harlem/aaron.html

Weary As I Can Be
Illustration for *Lonesome Place,* by Langston Hughes. In *Opportunity*, October 1926. Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library

Palmer Hayden (1890–1973)

The Janitor who Paints
Oil on canvas (color)
The National Museum of American Art,
Smithsonian Institution,Washington, D.C.

Color reprint for online viewing:
http://www.cc.colorado.edu/Dept/EN/Courses/
EN370/EN3707117Garcia/VisualArt/Janitor.html

Fetiche et Fleurs (1932-33)
Oil on canvas (color)
Samella Lewis *African American Art and Artists* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), 70.
Color reprint for online viewing:
http://newmedia.cgu.edu/jackson/frigo/image6.htm

Sargent Claude Johnson (1887–1967)

Forever Free, 1933
Sculpture (color). Wood with lacquer on cloth.
Displayed in the
San Francisco Museum of Modern Art
Available for viewing online in color:
http://www.cc.colorado.edu/Dept/EN/Courses/EN370/EN3707117Garcia/VisualArt/ForeverFree.html

Archibald Motley, Jr. (1891–1981)

Blues
1929
Oil on canvas (color)
Available for viewing online in color:
http://www.iniva.org/harlem/motley.html

Augusta Fells Savage (1882–1962)

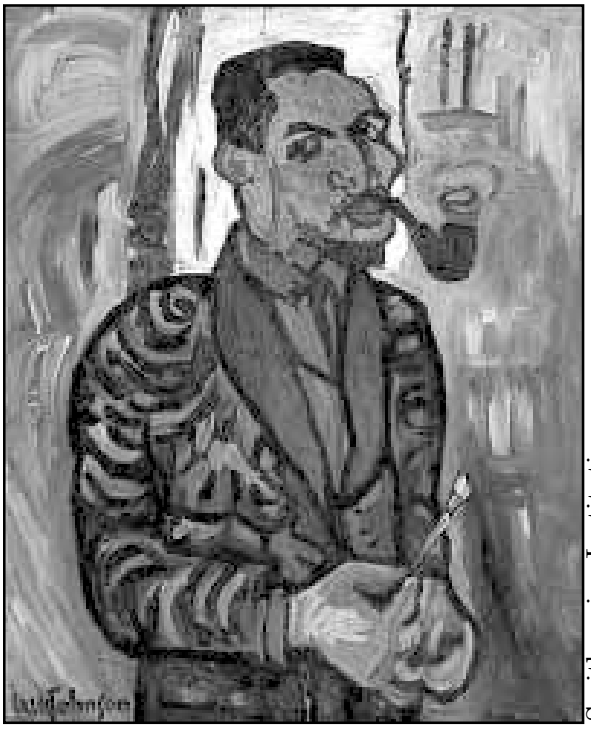
Augusta Savage in her studio with "The Harp"
Based on 'Lift Every Voice and Sing' by James Weldon Johnson
Available for viewing online: http://www.si.umich.edu/CHICO/Harlem/text/asavage_slide.html

Green apples
Works Project Administration
Augusta Savage

William H. Johnson (1882–1962)

Smithsonian Institution

Café
1939-1940
oil on paperboard (color)



Smithsonian Institution

Self-Portrait with Pipe
ca. 1937, oil on canvas (color)
Available for viewing online in color:
http://nmaa-ryder.si.edu/images/1967/
1967.59.913_1b.jpg

Smithsonian Institution

Street Life, Harlem
ca. 1939–40, oil on canvas (color)
Available for viewing online in color: http://nmaa-ryder.si.edu/images/1967/1967.59.674_1b.jpg

Jacob Lawrence (1917–)

Dust to Dust (The Funeral)
Gouache on paper (color), 1938 © the artist
Available for viewing online in color:
http://www.iniva.org/harlem/jacbl.html

Winold Reiss (1886–1953)

African Fantasy: The Awakening
ink, watercolor, and gouache on paper sheet, ca. 1925

Available for viewing online:
http://nmaa-ryder.si.edu/images/1989/1989.3_1b.jpg

Elizabeth Olds (1896–1991)

Archives of American Art; Smithsonian Institution

Rhythm Band—Harlem
serigraph on paper, 1937
Available for viewing online:
http://nmaa-ryder.si.edu/images/1984/1984.31.6_1b.jpg

Allan Rohan Crite (1910–)

Smithsonian Institution

School's Out
oil on canvas, 1936 (color)
Available for viewing online in color: http://nmaa-ryder.si.edu/images/1971/1971.447.18_1b.jpg

Music in the Harlem Renaissance

In *Black Music in the Harlem Renaissance*, Samuel A. Floyd, Jr., tries to put spirituals, blues, and jazz into perspective, quoting from Nathan Huggins' interview with musician Eubie Blake:

> *N.H.* You are saying that white people were coming uptown following the music. And it was the sense of the music that was at the center of the Renaissance?
>
> *E.B.* The music and the entertainment. [Nathan Huggins, ed. *Voices from the Harlem Renaissance* (New York: Oxford University Press,1995), pp. 339–40.]

Floyd's main point is that the Harlem Renaissance is seen mainly as a literary movement, but, in fact, no aspect of it was more important than the music: "In the New Negro's attempt to define and build a culture, music provided much of the movement's color, spirit, and quality. . . . This is not surprising, since music had always been a critical part of the existence of all individual Afro-Americans, while literature had not."

The reason for music's lack of recognition, Floyd argues, is that, while spirituals had wide respect as a traditional folk genre, blues and jazz were scorned by African American leaders (and much of their middle and upper classes) as representing a stereotyped African American culture. Leonard Neil, in *Jazz and the White Americans*, contends that the tribal roots and supposed "primitivism" in blues and jazz were precisely what attracted cosmopolitan whites to the music. Struggling to break free of newly discovered Freudian constraints, whites were drawn to music (and dance) created by presumably unspoiled, uninhibited African American artists. Leaders such as Du Bois, who wanted to prove that African Americans could produce music in the European mold, cringed at any acceptance of blues and jazz. Floyd pursues these contradictions:

> Apparently, Renaissance leaders did not understand, or would not acknowledge, the fact that all of the black musical genres belonged to a single cultural and aesthetic tradition, that they were all bound together by a common body of musico-aesthetic principles and characteristics. By 1920 it was certainly clear that polymeter, multimeter, call-and-response patterns, certain pitch collections and inflections, and all of the sound devices and techniques of Afro-American music performance practices were common traits, to some degree, of all the music that had emanated from black culture in the United States, and that these traits defined this body of music as Afro-American. Being of the culture, this music mirrored and expressed Afro-American life-styles—the struggles and the fulfillments of living in a land and an environment that was both hostile and promising, binding and free. Apparently, however, the elements that defined the music of the black folk communicated the very stereotypes and values that Renaissance leaders wanted to eradicate.

In spite of such contradictions, Renaissance thinkers believed that the building of a culture required a foundation. . . . For this foundation, black thinkers and artists reached back to the artistic forms of the "old Negro" and his forebears in Africa. This approach was reasonable and appropriate. . . . [5-6]

Library of Congress

Abyssinia, with music by Will Marion Cook and lyrics by Alex Roger, was both written by, acted by, and published by African-Americans. The publishing house, Gotham-Attucks, was named, in part, for Crispus Attucks, black victim of the Boston Massacre.

Library of Congress

Songwriters for this theater included James Weldon Johnson (later Executive Secretary of the NAACP), J. Rosamond Johnson, and Will Marion Cook. Cook was among the first black Americans to have his songs published by a major American "legitimate" (as opposed to popular song) publisher; the Johnson Brothers, with Bob Cole, were the first black song composers to be accepted as part of the standard popular music scene, writing ballads for general singing ("The Maiden with the Dreamy Eyes") as well as racial material ("Under the Bamboo Tree").

Source: Libarary of Congress: http://lcweb.loc.gov/rr/perform/guide/musamer.html

Lesson Three
Historical Impact of the Harlem Renaissance

A. Student Objectives

- To relate the major themes in the art of the Harlem Renaissance to social, economic, and political problems that faced African Americans of the period
- To formulate a picture of life in Harlem during the Harlem Renaissance
- To assess the impact of the Harlem Renaissance with respect to artistic achievement and political, economic, and social achievement

B. Lesson Activities

1. Place students in balanced groups of 4–6 and instruct them to complete the "Harlem Renaissance Worksheet" (**Student Handout 1**). This will require them to review and synthesize the material they have learned.
2. Lead a group discussion of student responses to the chart. In answering question three, make sure students see that progress can occur even if all problems are not completely solved.
3. Give students the following essay question, either to prepare at home to write in class the next day, or to write for homework.

   Harlem Renaissance Essay Prompt

   The period of the 1920s through the early 1930s is known for the achievements made by African Americans during the Harlem Renaissance. Write an essay incorporating responses to the following questions in your answer. What were the causes of the "Great Migration" of African Americans from the rural South to northern industrial cities such as New York around this time? Which historical events led to more assertive behavior and demands for change among African Americans during this period? How did African American artists show this assertive behavior in their work? In conclusion, what impact do you think the Harlem Renaissance has had on the United States?

C. Lesson Evaluation

1. Assess group participation, making sure students develop much of their chart from group discussion,rather that relying mainly on notes
2. Evaluate essays.

Harlem Renaissance Worksheet

1. Which problems (social, economic, or political) that African Americans faced during the early twentieth century are illustrated by each of the 3 major themes we have seen in the works of Harlem Renaissance artists?

Theme	Problems Faced by African Americans

2. Describe the picture you get of life in Harlem during this period:

3. What impact do *you* think the Harlem Renaissance has had on the United States? To answer the question, consider points such as these:

   1) The effect that achievement has on people

   2) The value of assertive behavior, or problems associated with it

   3) The contributions that diverse peoples can make to a society

   4) The political, economic, and social pressures that affect people living their everyday life

Annotated Bibliography

Against The Odds: The Artists of the Harlem Renaissance. Public Broadcasting Station, VHS, 60 minutes.

This PBS documentary tells how black artists triumphed over the prejudice and segregation that kept their work out of the mainstream galleries and exhibitions. Over 130 paintings, prints, photographs, and sculptures are included along with rare archival footage of artists at work.

Bontemps, Arna. *The Harlem Renaissance Remembered*. New York: Dodd, Mead, 1972.

Critical essays on the period, plus a memoir.

Cooper, Wayne F. *Claude McKay: Rebel Sojourner in the Harlem Renaissance.* Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1996.

This detailed biography of Claude McKay stresses his role in the Harlem Renaissance.

Davis, Arthur P. *From the Dark Tower: Afro-American Writers 1900-1960*. Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1974.

Discusses not only fiction and non-fiction writers, but also the social history of the period.

Dover, Cedric. *American Negro Art*. New York: New York Graphic Society, 1960.

Covers Harlem Renaissance visual art, plus its roots from the time of slavery.

Early, Gerald, ed. *My Soul's High Song: The Collected Writings of Countee Cullen, Voice of the Harlem Renaissance.* New York: Anchor Books, 1991.

A superb collection of one of the leading figures of the Harlem Renaissance. The editor's introductory chapter on Countee Cullen places the entire cultural movement in perspective.

Floyd, Samuel A. *Black Music in the Harlem Renaissance: A Collection of Essays.* Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1993.

The author examines African American music during the Harlem Renaissance and includes a comprehensive bibliography of music composed during this era.

Harlem Renaissance Art of Black America. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1994.

The African American experience as illustrated through the works of prominent Black artists during the Harlem Renaissance. The work includes painting, sculpture, and photography Aaron Douglas, Meta Warrick Fuller, Palmer Hayden, William Henry Johnson, and Van Der Zee.

Haskins, James. *Black Music in America: A History Through Its People.* New York: T. Y. Crowell, 1987.

A survey of the history of black music in America, from early slave songs through jazz and the blues to soul, classical music, and current trends. Chapter 5, "Black Renaissance, 1920-1940," examines the Harlem Renaissance musicians Duke Ellington, Billie Holiday, and William Grant Still.

Huggins, Nathan Irvin, ed. *Voices from the Harlem Renaissance.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.

This anthology provides 120 selections form political writings, literature, and art of the Harlem Renaissance.

Hughes, Langston. I *Wonder As I Wander.* New York: Hill and Wang, 1993.

A lucid autobiography that brings to life one of the great writers of the Harlem Renaissance and the twentieth century.

Johnson, James Weldon. *Along the Way: The Autobiography of James Weldon Johnson.* New York: Da Capro, 1973.

This autobiographical account of James Weldon Johnson, a major figure in the Harlem Renaissance, gives a vivid picture of events which helped shape his life. Johnson gives a personal account of the historical events of the era.

Lewis, David L. *When Harlem was in Vogue.* New York: Knopf, 1981.

A detailed history of the "Golden Age" of Harlem. Lewis's work is an ideal reference on individuals and events associated with the Harlem Renaissance.

Locke, Alain, ed. *The New Negro: An Interpretation.* New York: A. and C. Boni, 1925.

Alain Locke,the central literary promoter of the Harlem Renaissance, first published this book in 1925 as a collection of the first fruits of the Renaissance. The nation's first black Rhodes Scholar, Locke's anthology is filled with short stories, poetry, social commentary, and art of the early Renaissance.

Martin, Tony. *Literary Garveyism: Garvey, Black Arts and the Harlem Renaissance.* Dover, Mass.: Majority Press, 1983.

The author argues that Marcus Garvey should be included as one of the major contributors to the Harlem Renaissance and discusses Garvey as both a political and literary figure.

Rampersad, Arnold. The Life of Langston Hughes. 2 vols.; New York: Oxford University Press, 1986–88.

This wonderful biography of one of the key figures of the Harlem Renaissance introduces the reader to nearly every figure of importance, from painters and poets, to musicians and novelists, to dancers and photographers, and also to white patrons of the Renaissance. Though long, it is a finely crafted biography that rewards the reader's time.

Rodgers, Marie. *The Harlem Renaissance: An Annotated Reference Guide for Student Research*. Englewood, Colo: Libraries Unlimited, 1998.

A good place for class research to begin.

Rose, Lorraine Elena and Ruth Elizabeth Randolph. *Harlem Renaissance and Beyond: Literary Biographies of 100 Black Women Writers, 1900–1945.* New York: Macmillan, 1989.

As the title indicates this monograph contains 100 short biographies of African American women authors. It is an excellent companion to a study of the Harlem Renaissance.

Wall, Cheryl. *Women of the Harlem Renaissance*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995.

A critical look at writers such as Zora Neale Hurston and Jessie Fauset.

Wintz, Cary. *Black Culture and the Harlem Renaissance.* Houston, Texas: Rice University Press, 1992.

This is an examination of the relationship between the writers of the Harlem Renaissance and their community.

Zuber, Shari Lyn. "The Harlem Renaissance," *Cobblestone Magazine,* Vol. 12, No. 2 (February 1991).

This short collection of three easy-reading biographies chronicles the lives of Countee Cullen, James Weldon Johnson, and Claude McKay. Through his choice of subjects, the author conveys to the reader an understanding of what it meant to be black in the 1920s.

Web Sites

Tip: Since the exact addresses of pages on the Web site can change, if you do not find the page you want, use a standard search service to search for the name of sponsoring organization.

Cultural Heritage Initiatives for Community Outreach (CHICO) School of Information, University of Michigan. *Harlem 1900–1940. An African American Community.*

The Shomburg Center for Research in Black Culture at New York Public Library sponsors this online exhibition which includes photographs, art work, a database of writers, artists, and musicians in Harlem, as well as resources for teachers.
http://www.si.umich.edu/CHICO/Harlem

International Institute of Visual Arts, *Rhapsodies in Black. Art of the Harlem Renaissance.*
http://www.iniva.org/harlem/

"This Web site provides an introduction to the exhibition Rhapsodies in Black:Art of the Harlem Renaissance, curated by David A. Bailey and Richard J. Powell and organised by the Hayward Gallery, London in collaboration with the Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington DC., and the Institute of International Visual Arts (inIVA). The Web site combines images and text to elaborate on some of the key themes in the exhibition: The Harlem Renaissance, Representing the New Negro, Modernism and Modernity, A Blues Aesthetic, Imaginging Africa, Haiti and Images of Black Nationhood."

Library of Congress.

The American Memory Project includes many exhibitions with material relevant to the Harlem Renaissance:

1) African American Perspectives: Pamphlets from the Daniel A. P. Murray Collection, 1818-1907
http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/aap/aaphome.html

2) African American Odyssey
http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/aaohtml/aohome.html

3) Creative Americans: Portraits by Carl Van Vechten, 1932-1964.
This site features nearly 1,400 photographs of famous literary figures, artists, and celebrities many of whom were prominent in the Harlem Renaissance.
http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/vvhome.html

The African American Mosaic: A Library of Congress Resource Guide for the Study of Black History and Culture.

http://lcweb.loc.gov/exhibits/african/intro.html

University of Virginia Library's Electronic Text Center, *Harlem: Mecca of the New Negro*.

A digital preservation of the March 1925 edition of the *Survey Graphic*. "*Survey Graphic* was the monthly illustrated number of Survey magazine, the premier journal of social work in America in the 1920s. In November of 1924, the Survey's chief editor, Paul Kellogg, asked Alain Locke (then a professor of philosophy at Howard University) to design and edit a special issue devoted to the African American "Renaissance" underway in Harlem. Locke agreed, and the magazine that resulted was the first of several attempts to formulate a political and cultural representation of the New Negro and the Harlem community."
http://etext.virginia.edu/harlem/index.html

Some exhibitions by teachers and/or students:

Harlem Renaissance Art
http://www.cc.colorado.edu/Dept/EN/Courses/EN370/EN3707117Garcia/
(February, 1999).

Lawrence, Jacob. *Great Migration Series.*
An online exhibition of paintings depicting the migration north that preceded the Harlem Renaissance.
http://www.tezcat.com/~juanyen/artsy2.html (February, 1999)

Reclamation of Africa 1925–1935
http://newmedia.cgu.edu/jackson/frigo/index.htm (February, 1999)

Reuben, Paul P. "Chapter 9: Harlem Renaissance—An Introduction." *PAL: Perspectives in American Literature—A Research and Reference Guide.*
http://www.csustan.edu/english/reuben/pal/chap9/9intro.html (February, 1999)

Music Sources

[Selections are from the Harlem Renaissance period; dates below are recording dates only.]

"Smashing Thirds," Fats Waller on piano [3:08], 1929, on *Classic Jazz Piano*, copyright 1988 BMG Music, New York, New York.

"Thou Swell," James P. Johnson on piano, with Jabbo Smith (cornet), Garvin Bushell (reeds), Fats Waller (organ) [2:59], 1928, on *Classic Jazz Piano*, copyright 1988 BMG Music, New York, New York.

"St. Louis Blues," Bessie Smith, vocal, with Louis Armstrong (cornet), Fred Longshaw (organ) [3:11], copyright 1989 CBS Records Inc., New York, New York.

"Contrary Motion," Willie "The Lion" Smith on piano [2:35], 1966, on *Classic Jazz Piano*, copyright 1988 BMG Music, New York, New York.

"A Handful of Keys," Fats Waller on piano [1:42], 1935, on *The Definitive Fats Waller: His Rhythm, His Piano, Volume One*, Stash Records, Inc., New York, New York.

"Mood Indigo," Duke Ellington on piano, with Bubber Miley, Arthur Whetsel, Freddy Jenkins (trumpets), Joe "Tricky Sam" Nanton (trombone), Barney Bigard (clarinet), Johnny Hodges (alto sax), Harry Carney (baritone sax), Fred Guy (banjo); Wellman Braud (bass), Sonny Greer (drums) [2:52], 1929, on *Duke Ellington and His Orchestra, The Jungle Band, The Brunswick Years, Volume Two, 1929-1931*, copyright 1990 MCA Records, Inc., Universal City, California.

"Strange Fruit," Billie Holiday, vocal [2:21], from the video *Lady Day: The Many Faces of Billie Holiday*, copyright East Stinson Inc., Toby Byron/Multiprises.