



# The Harlem Renaissance

# Important Features

- Harlem Renaissance (HR) is the name given to the period from the end of World War I and through the middle of the 1930s Depression, during which a group of talented African-American writers produced a sizable body of literature in the four prominent genres of poetry, fiction, drama, and essay.

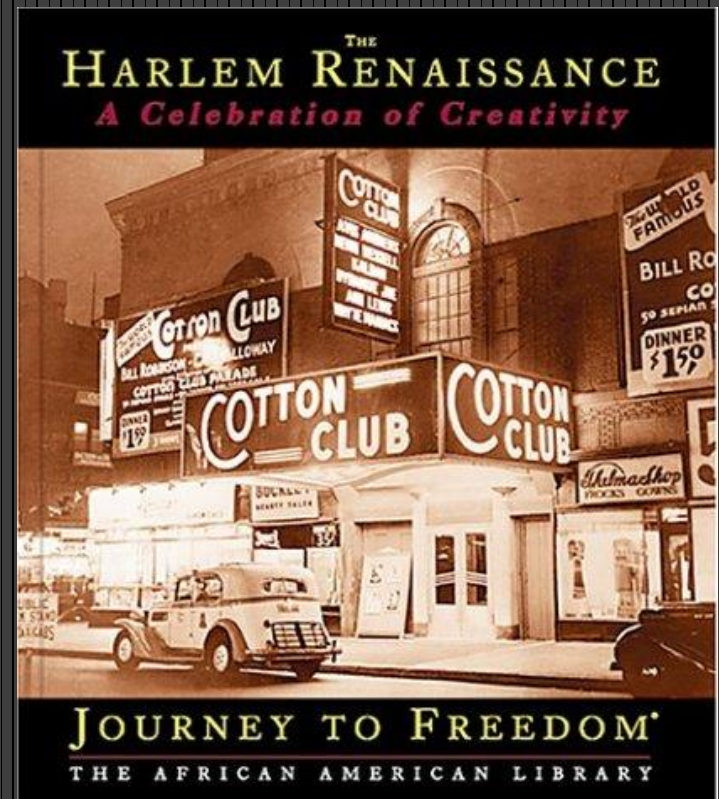


# Important Features

- The notion of "twoness" , a divided awareness of one's identity, was introduced by W.E.B. Du Bois, one of the founders of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).and the author of the influential book *The Souls of Black Folks* (1903): "One ever feels his twoness - an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled stirrings: two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder."

# Important Features

- Common themes: alienation, marginality, the use of folk material, the use of the blues tradition, the problems of writing for an elite audience.



# Important Features

- HR was more than just a literary movement: it included racial consciousness, "the back to Africa" movement led by Marcus Garvey, racial integration, the explosion of music particularly jazz, spirituals and blues, painting, dramatic revues, and others.



# A Chronology of Important Events and Publications

# 1919

- 369th Regiment marched up Fifth Avenue to Harlem, February 17.
- 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.
- Benjamin Brawley published *The Negro in Literature and Art in the United States*.



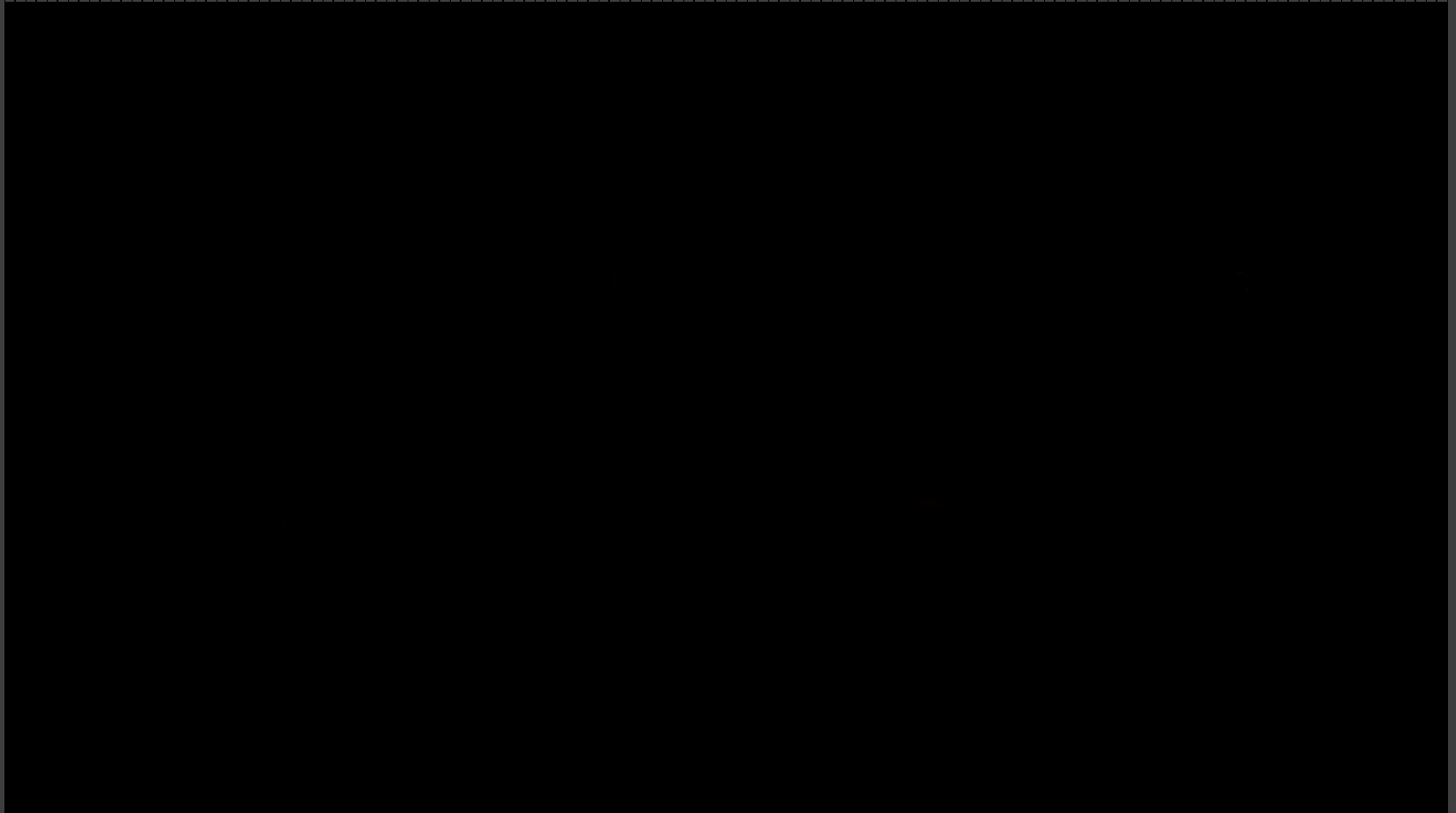
# 1920

- 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.
- Du Bois's *Darkwater* is published.

# 1921

- Marcus Garvey founded African Orthodox Church, September.
- Colored Players Guild of New York founded.
- Benjamin Brawley published *Social History of the American Negro*.

*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.



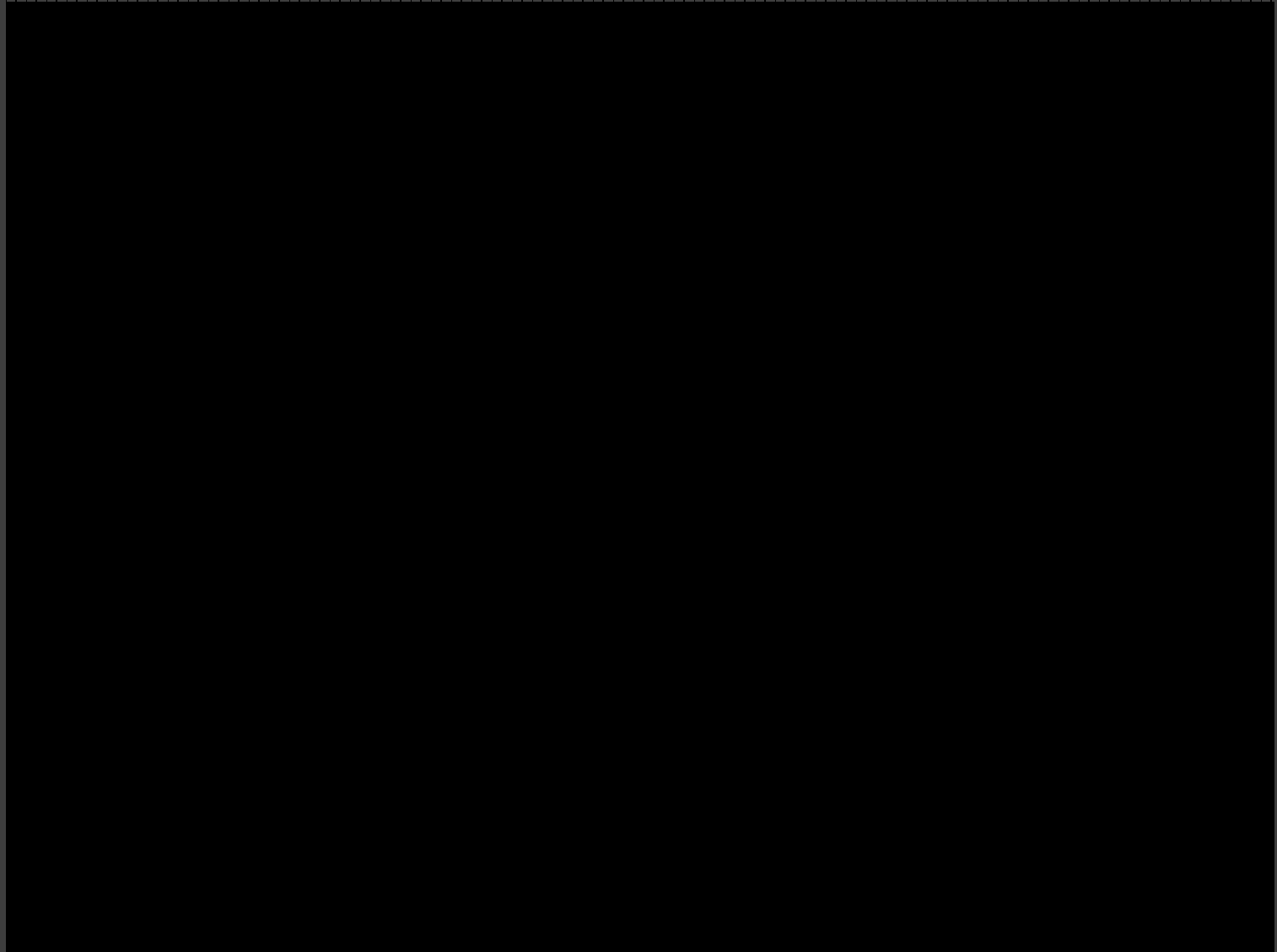
# 1922

- First Anti-Lynching legislation approved by 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.
- Publications of Jean Toomer, *Cane*; Marcus Garvey, *Philosophy and Opinion of Marcus Garvey*. 2 vols.

The Cotton Club opened, Fall.



# 1924

- Civic Club Dinner, sponsored by Opportunity, bringing black writers and white publishers together, March 21. 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.
- 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.
- 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*; begins to write a regular column "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.
- Marcus Garvey deported.
- Louis Armstrong in Chicago and Duke Ellington in New York began their careers.
- 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*.

Harlem Globetrotters established.



# 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.
- 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 Tranquility 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.

On March 25, 1931, a train from the city Chattanooga, Tennessee going through northeastern Alabama was carrying homeless hobos and people looking for work. After the train had entered the area of Alabama, a fight started between the white hoboes and a group of African-American teenagers. Subsequently, the train was stopped by an armed posse in the town of Paint Rock, Alabama, and two white women got out making an accusation that they had been raped by nine black teenagers, the Scottsboro Boys, on the train. Despite the fact that no evidence was presented, the case was allowed to go to trial, and the Scottsboro Boys were later quickly convicted and sentenced to death. The verdict by Alabama courts was later overturned twice by Supreme Court. After the third time the case went to trial, the charges against four of the defendants were ended, while long prison sentences decision remained for the other five black boys. In 1943, on the condition that the imprisoned Scottsboro boys promised to behave well, the state of Alabama began to allow the five men to leave prison one by one.

- 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

- W.E.B. Du Bois resigns from *The Crisis* and NAACP.
- 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*.

Apollo Theatre opened.



# 1935

- *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*.

# 1937 - 1940

- Publications of McKay, *Long Way From Home*; Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.
- Publication of Hurston, *Moses: Man of the Mountain*.
- Publications of Hughes *The Big Sea*; McKay, *Harlem: Negro Metropolis*.

## Harlem Renaissance brought the Black experience clearly within the general American cultural history.

- a. Remarkable coincidences and luck, provided a sizable chunk of real estate in the heart of Manhattan.
- b. The Black migration, from south to north, changed their image from rural to urban, from peasant to sophisticate.
- c. Harlem became a crossroads where Blacks interacted with and expanded their contacts internationally.
- d. Harlem Renaissance profited from a spirit of self-determination which was widespread after W.W.I.

# Harlem Renaissance could not escape its history and culture in its attempt to create a new one.

- a. The "renaissance" echoed American progressivism in its faith in democratic reform, in its belief in art and literature as agents of change, and in its almost uncritical belief in itself and its future.
- b. The creation of the "New Negro" failed, but it was an American failure, similar to other frustrated promotions.
- c. The future of the "New Negro" was accepted without question.
- d. Just as the Whites, Black intellectuals were unprepared for the rude shock of the Great Depression; the HR was shattered by it because of naive assumptions about the centrality of culture, unrelated to economic and social realities.

## Still the Harlem Renaissance had its significance

- a. It became a symbol and a point of reference for everyone to recall.
- b. The name, more than the place, became synonymous with new vitality, Black urbanity, and Black militancy.
- c. It became a racial focal point for Blacks the world over; it remained for a time a race capital.
- d. It stood for **urban pluralism**. Alain Locke wrote: "The peasant, the student, the businessman, the professional man, artist, poet, musician, adventurer and worker, preacher and criminal, exploiter and social outcast, each group has come with its own special motives ... but their greatest experience has been the finding of one another."
- e. The complexity of the urban setting was important for Blacks to truly appreciate the variety of Black life. The race consciousness required that shared experience.



## Harlem Renaissance's legacy is limited by the character of the Renaissance.

- a. It encouraged the new appreciation of folk roots and culture.
- b. Peasant folk materials and spirituals provided a rich source for racial imagination and it freed the Blacks from the establishment of past condition.
- c. Harlem Renaissance was imprisoned by its innocence. The Harlem intellectuals, while proclaiming a new race consciousness, became mimics of Whites, wearing clothes and using manners of sophisticated Whites, earning the epithet "dirty niggers" from the very people they were supposed to be championing.

