

HARLEM RENAISSANCE

by William R. Nash



The term “Harlem Renaissance” refers to the efflorescence of African-American cultural production that occurred in New York City in the 1920s and early 1930s. One sometimes sees Harlem Renaissance used interchangeably with “New Negro Renaissance,” a term that includes all African Americans, regardless of their location, who participated in this cultural revolution. Followers of the New Negro dicta, which emphasized blacks’ inclusion in and empowerment by American society, were undeniably spread throughout the nation, and most major cities had pockets of the African-American elite that W. E. B. Du Bois dubbed the “Talented Tenth.” Nevertheless, New York City was, arguably, the most crucial site of this movement’s development and Harlem was its nexus.

The early years of the Harlem Renaissance coincided with the heyday of the Great Migration, the mass movement of African Americans from southern rural homes into major northern cities during and immediately following World War I. Blacks left the South in record numbers to escape oppression and to take advantage of urban economic opportunities. In places like Detroit and Chicago, this meant jobs in automobile manufacturing, steel, and meatpacking. In *Terrible Honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s* (1995), Ann Douglas argues that in New York City, which lacked heavy industry, the main capital that migrants could accrue was cultural.

This era did see a marked increase in output by African-American writers, visual artists, and musicians in New York City; this sparked interest in black culture, especially among upper-middle-class white New Yorkers, who came uptown to “experience” black life. Their cultural tourism led to significant relationships between black artists and whites like Carl Van Vechten, who sought to promote their work. It also sustained nightclubs like the Cotton Club, a whites-only club where blacks were the staff and the entertainment. The Cotton Club, where the floorshows often portrayed blacks as primitives, expanded opportunities for individual artists who performed there. In some senses, it also limited the black community

through its emphasis on blacks’ exoticism and otherness. The nightclub’s example demonstrates the complexity of assessing this crucial moment in the evolution of African-American culture, as it suggests the intricate relationships between aesthetics and racial politics that have long plagued black Americans. As Harlem Renaissance artists articulated individual and collective visions of black identity, they were beset by conflicting demands that they use their art either to distance themselves from or bind themselves to white American culture.

THE DEBATE OVER “NEGRO ART”

Perhaps the most famous examples of these conflicts came in a pair of essays that appeared in consecutive issues of *The Nation* in 1926: George Schuyler’s “Negro-Art Hokum” and Langston Hughes’s “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain.” In the first, Schuyler argues that aside “from his color, which ranges from very dark brown to pink, your American Negro is just plain American.” For artists, this assertion assumes a uniformity of work based on commonality of influence; in Schuyler’s view, black artists cannot vary substantially from their white peers. As a result, claims to some sort of uniquely racial creative perspective are specious at best. As Jeffrey B. Leak notes in *Rac(e)ing to the Right: Selected Essays of George S. Schuyler* (2001), this position presages the commentary of Ralph Ellison and Albert Murray, and like them, Schuyler leaves himself open to accusations of assimilationism, charges that led many students of the period to overlook him and his adherents in their study of the period.

In contrast, Hughes argues the uniqueness of African-American culture and a corresponding need for blacks to cultivate a sense of racial pride. He describes “the mountain standing in the way of any true Negro art in America—this urge within the race towards whiteness, the desire to pour racial individuality into the mold of American standardization, and to be as little Negro and as much American as possible.” For Hughes, the foundations of this assimilationist urge lie firmly in the black middle class that Schuyler praises. In order to escape their

HARLEM RENAISSANCE



The Cotton Club. (© Bettmann/Corbis)

influence, Hughes encourages artists to embrace the values of “the low-down folks,” the masses of common people who “furnish a wealth of colorful, distinctive material for any artist because they still hold their own individuality in the face of American standardizations.” Only by doing this, he argues, can the Negro artist treat the most complex and sensitive subjects in a manner that distinguishes him individually and serves the race collectively.

This interpretation of the Renaissance, which celebrates African-American art and life, and particularly several prominent elements of the folk tradition—for example, blues, jazz, spirituals, and vernacular speech—has long held sway among students of the era. In subsequent explosions of black creativity, such as the Black Arts Movement of the 1960s, Hughes’s “Negro Artist” is cited as a sacred text. To be sure, Hughes makes many valid claims in his essay; however, Schuyler’s argument also accurately reflects elements of the black artist’s condition in Harlem of the 1920s and 1930s. One major shortcoming of scholars of the Renaissance until relatively recently has been an unfortunate tendency to fall into either the Schuyler or Hughes camp. To do so is, in effect, to divorce the art of the Harlem Renaissance from its historical and cultural context.

As Ann Douglas notes, the black writers of the Harlem Renaissance who tried to distance themselves from white American culture were, in a sense, fleeing

from a moving target. African Americans’ declaration of aesthetic independence from the dominant society came at the same time that white American artists were struggling to extricate themselves from a set of historical connections to Europe. Chronologically, the artists of the Harlem Renaissance coexisted with the white writers of what F. Scott Fitzgerald labeled the Jazz Age. In this period of modernism, writers like Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, T. S. Eliot, Eugene O’Neill, Edna St. Vincent Millay, and Hart Crane adopted the dictum “make it new,” and worked to separate contemporary American literature from the stultifying influence of late-nineteenth-century American culture. The primary example of the Victorian attitudes that the modernists vilified was the white middle-class matriarch, who privileged reserve and decorum over precision and forthrightness.

The notion that white and black artists found a common enemy in the nineteenth-century American matriarch lends some credence to Schuyler’s argument. One can reasonably assert the power of common cultural influences that leads to similarities in works by artists from different racial groups. At the same time, however, one also finds textual evidence that supports Hughes’s claims for a true African-American art. Strikingly, there is a noticeable difference in tone between the black and white canons of the period. On the white side one finds many grim portraits like Eliot’s *Waste Land*, Fitzgerald’s *Valley*

of Ashes, and the scorched landscape of Hemingway's "Big Two-Hearted River."

By contrast, a pervasive optimism informed much of the African-American work of the period. This might seem surprising, given the racial oppression that African Americans faced then. Douglas suggests that this hopeful attitude was not blindness, arguing that black artists' optimism came largely from the existence of Harlem as a safe haven for black artists and from the recognition that their work received. A look at individual works of the era confirms both this optimism and the literary accomplishment of those who articulated it.

EARLY INNOVATIONS: MCKAY AND TOOMER

Scholars debate both the starting and ending points of the Renaissance, since the arc of a cultural ethos's rise and fall is necessarily imprecise. One might mark the beginning with Claude McKay's poem "If We Must Die," a work that asserts a strong sense of self in the face of extreme opposition. McKay, who immigrated to the United States from Jamaica in 1912, wrote the poem in response to the racial violence that occurred immediately after World War I and into the early 1920s. As blacks demanded recognition of and respect for their military service to the nation, whites responded with murderous anger and forceful oppression, which in turn sparked a series of race riots. McKay's poem appeared in the *Liberator* of July 1919, at the apex of what has come to be known as the Red Summer.

Working minor variations on the Shakespearian sonnet form, McKay calls on his fellow blacks to resist the domination of a white mob that he makes representative of the entire nation. Although the title suggests his awareness that failure is probably inevitable, he emphasizes how blacks should live in whatever time they may have left. Urging his peers to "not be like hogs" who tremble before the "mad and hungry dogs" besetting them, McKay argues that death will be meaningful if blacks meet the enemy well. The concluding couplet becomes an assertion of the sense of self that rioting whites sought to squelch: "Like men we'll face the murderous, cowardly pack, / Pressed to the wall, dying, but—fighting back!" In addition to providing the black community with a call to action, "If We Must Die" stands as an opening shot in the battle of Harlem Renaissance writers to make space for themselves in the national literary tradition, regardless of whether they defined the space as conciliatory or oppositional.

Jean Toomer's *Cane*, the first great book-length work of the Renaissance, appeared in 1923. An amalgamation of prose, poetry, and drama, the tripartite work evokes

the terror and the beauty of rural black life in Georgia and demonstrates the threat that modern urban society presents to African-American folk culture. Parts 1 and 3 of *Cane* take place in Georgia, where Toomer himself lived briefly in 1921. In Part 1 a nameless northern black male narrator describes the land and people (especially the women) that he meets when visiting Georgia. The interwoven stories and poems simultaneously emphasize the fertility of the landscape and paint human interaction as sterile. The result is a celebration of a place and a way of life that is withering in the face of contemporary social pressures.

Toomer heightens the contrast between urban and rural black life in Part 2, which consists of stories and poems set in Washington, D.C., and Chicago. In this section of the text, Toomer further emphasizes the sterility of urban life; he also contrasts the openness of the southern landscape with a series of images that emphasize confinement. In Part 3, "Kabnis," Toomer fuses his themes in the story of Ralph Kabnis, a transplanted northerner who comes to a southern community to teach and to write about his experience. Because he has decided what he will find before he ever gets there, however, he cannot create anything meaningful. Toomer juxtaposes Kabnis with Lewis, another northern migrant who, in contrast, is able to write about the community. Ultimately, Lewis and Kabnis must face each other as a part of addressing their own demons regarding the region and their attempts to make art about it. The end of the third section suggests that one of these men, probably Lewis, is the artist who writes the stories in the first two sections of *Cane*. Such a reading affirms Toomer's sense of the value of folk culture to the Renaissance artists.

Also in 1923, Charles S. Johnson began publication of *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life*. This journal was the National Urban League's counterpart to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People's (NAACP) *The Crisis: A Record of the Darker Races*, founded in 1910 and edited by W. E. B. Du Bois. Both provided publishing venues for Renaissance writers and both instituted literary competitions that bolstered the careers of many young African-American writers. *Opportunity* instituted its literary competition in 1925, while later in the year *The Crisis* held the Amy Spingarn contest. Together these publications gave black writers of the period, including Toomer, Nella Larsen, Zora Neale Hurston, Rudolph Fisher, Countee Cullen, and Langston Hughes, an audience for their work and recognition for their innovations and accomplishments.

FOLK ART VERSUS HIGH ART: HUGHES AND CULLEN

In addition to producing one of the seminal aesthetic position papers of the period, Hughes also wrote poetry that embodied the values he articulated in "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain." Working in the idioms of jazz and blues and taking the mundane actions of the folk as subject matter, Hughes bridged the gap between vernacular culture and the realm of high art. The title poem of his first volume of verse, *The Weary Blues* (1926), demonstrates what Hughes accomplished. The speaker of the poem recounts his experience of listening to a black piano player; as he describes the musician's movements ("He did a lazy sway . . . / He did a lazy sway . . ."), his language takes on the rhythm of the pianist's music. Hughes extends this fusion by incorporating blues stanzas into the poem; he also invests the black man's cathartic experience of playing the music with almost mystical significance. In the last lines of the poem, the bluesman appears to have gained something from his music that transcends the forces of nature, time, and perhaps even death.

And yet even as Hughes showcases the power of the blues, he refuses to portray himself or his fellow blacks as simpleminded. His poem, "Minstrel Man," challenges conceptions about black identity, reminding readers that the surface frivolity and lightheartedness associated with the minstrel tradition often masks deep personal pain and always obscures black performers' humanity. In addition to showing the suffering that black performers endure, Hughes illuminates difficulties that most members of the black community face: economic hardship ("Hard Luck"); sexual exploitation ("Ruby Brown"); and the omnipresent threat of violence and loss ("Song for a Dark Girl"). Throughout his Renaissance-era work, Hughes effectively balances political engagement with celebration of the "low-down folks."

By contrast, Countee Cullen pointedly ignores the "low-down folks" and their art forms. The poet whom Hughes chides in "The Negro Artist" for his aspiration to be "*poet and not Negro poet*," Cullen adheres exclusively to European forms in his work, with no infusion of the music or vernacular speech of his community. He does, however, address racial issues in his poetry, most effectively in his first two volumes of verse, *Color* (1925) and *Copper Sun* (1927); more often than not, his concerns about race are more personal than broadly political.

"Yet Do I Marvel," which appeared in *Color*, is an example of Cullen's "race poetry." This sonnet begins

with a series of speculations about God and why "He" tortures his creations; the catalog of examples that Cullen provides demonstrates his awareness of Greek and Roman mythology and situates the poetic persona firmly within the Western tradition. Then, in the final couplet, Cullen describes a most troublesome situation: "Yet do I marvel at this curious thing: / To make a poet black, and bid him sing!" In these terms, blackness and poetic expression are mutually exclusive at worst, extremely uneasy counterparts at best. In contrast to Hughes's work, one finds nothing celebratory here in the speaker's acknowledgement of his black identity. Whereas for Hughes's poetic personae blackness is a source of inspiration and strength, for Cullen's it impedes his achieving his greatest personal aspiration.

In offering this reading of the poem, I do not suggest that Cullen's speaker, or Cullen himself, does not want to be black. Neither creator nor character disavows black identity in this example; more correctly, each demonstrates confusion over what blackness means to him. Cullen addresses this issue more directly in his most anthologized poem, "Heritage." This long poem chronicles the poetic persona's struggle to come to terms with the meaning of his African heritage. The recurrent refrain emphasizes both the poet's isolation from and his longing for that past:

*One three centuries removed
From the scenes his fathers loved,
Spicy grove, cinnamon tree,
What is Africa to me?*

Throughout the piece, Africa is a thing of beauty that worries the speaker's imagination, a "book one thumbs / Listlessly, till slumber come," the subject of dreams, but of no more value to the speaker than "last year's snow." And yet, although he would claim that he, like the tree that blooms anew each year, "must forget" what came before, his choice of imagery acknowledges a different reality. He knows that his past nourishes and sustains him on some level, just as "last year's snow" became water that fed the tree in an earlier dry season. The question "What is Africa to me?" is not, as some readers suggest, a rejection of the continent, a denial of heritage. It is, instead, the speaker's exploration of his relationship to both the place and its metaphoric significance. Unlike Langston Hughes, who can write with ease of the "eternal tom tom" beating in the black voice, Cullen creates speakers who, like himself, wonder what place such primitivism can have in the articulation of black American culture. He

does not go as far as George Schuyler would in “Negro-Art Hokum” and call himself or his peers “lampblackened Anglo-Saxons”; nevertheless, his union with his past is tempestuous and uneasy.

THE NEW NEGRO

One of the most important anthologies of this period, Alain Locke’s *The New Negro* (1925) sought to reconcile the folk art-high art conflict. As a self-appointed dean of the movement, Locke—a faculty member at Howard University in Washington, D.C.—combined poetry, fiction, and drama with critical essays and original artwork in a volume that celebrated the accomplishments of African Americans of his era. *The New Negro* also argued that black artists could extend those gains by recognizing their heritage. This does not mean that Locke uncritically embraced an African past. Indeed, he rejects such a notion in his essay, “The Legacy of the Ancestral Arts” on the grounds that forced immersion in Western culture has alienated the “Aframerican” from his heritage. However, Locke does not regard this alienation as a permanent thing; instead, he challenges black artists to form an original relation to Africa and African artistry.

Locke includes Cullen’s *Heritage* in the same section of the anthology; in this context, the poem reads differently than it does on its own. First, Locke leaves off the final twelve lines of the poem, which include the poetic persona’s assertion that he must “Quench” his “pride and cool” his “blood.” The omission of these lines transforms Cullen’s recurrent question, “What Is Africa to Me?,” into an examination of what link the speaker can forge to a land that has never been part of his personal experience. Second, Locke pairs the poem with an image of an African mask, a choice that implies that Africa is a great deal to the speaker, and by extension to the black reader, whether or not the poetic persona recognizes that fact.

In the poetry and fiction section, *The New Negro* includes representations of black life at its most polished and its most basic, from Cullen’s high-flown poetic diction to the thick dialect of Zora Neale Hurston’s short story, “Spunk.” And yet, in the main, the representations of black life, at least in Harlem, are positive. This choice in some ways aligns Locke with Du Bois and his peers, who sought to help the race by promoting positive images of black life in all venues. Not long after the publication of *The New Negro*, however, a new strain of literature arose, one committed to rounding out the picture of Harlem life to include its darker elements as well. This variation on the Harlem themes only intensified the difficulty of determining what counted as appropriate black art.

One of the most famous, and most controversial, of what one might call the “dark Harlem” novels was Carl Van Vechten’s *Nigger Heaven* (1926). Van Vechten parlayed his entrée into Harlem society into the basis of his novel about aspiring author Byron Kasson’s initiation into Harlem life. When he comes to Harlem, things initially go well for him. He meets and becomes engaged to Mary Love, a librarian; unfortunately, however, his attempts to find work are consistently frustrated. Mary tries to help him, but he finds that his pride will not allow for such support. After breaking with Mary, Byron finds himself drawn to the dark places of Harlem. In that environment, he becomes ensnared by Lasca Sartoris, an enchantingly beautiful, absolutely amoral woman whose toying with Byron leads to his and her destruction. Although the novel is somewhat entertaining, readers then and later found the narrowness of its view of Harlem and Harlemites disturbing. Van Vechten commits the double transgression of exposing Harlem’s dark underbelly to the world and refusing to acknowledge the presence of the “other Harlem,” the high-culture world that Du Bois, Cullen, and their sympathizers sought to promote.

This is not to suggest that Van Vechten alienated all of the Harlem literary community with *Nigger Heaven*; indeed, many young writers appreciated his efforts, even if they recognized the limitations of his execution. For them, Van Vechten opened the way for other treatments of the Harlem underworld. Among these, Claude McKay’s *Home to Harlem* (1928) deserves special notice. This novel, which Du Bois said made him feel as if he needed to bathe after reading it, portrays the exploits of Jake Brown and Raymond, two young Harlemites who prize hedonism and dissipation above all things. Although markedly different in subject matter from McKay’s “If We Must Die,” the novel shares a rebellious spirit and a defiant tone with the poem. In this case it is the establishment view of Harlem that McKay fights back against, rejecting the notion that he must focus exclusively on genteel people and subjects when portraying black life. Unfortunately, in striking this blow against the system, McKay repeats Van Vechten’s error of blotting out the view of any of the other Harlems that coexist with the underworld he favors.

In contrast to Van Vechten’s and McKay’s novels, Rudolph Fisher’s *The Conjure-Man Dies* (1932) presents a multifaceted fictionalized Harlem that balances the best and the worst of the community. A detective story, it shows all the various levels of Harlem society and the many permutations on conventional morality at work in that community. The quartet of major characters—N’Gana

Frimbo, Detective Perry Dart, Dr. John Archer, and Bubber Brown—come from disparate walks of Harlem society and carry varying experiences shaped by their education, their finances, their occupations, their class, and even their skin colors. By showing the reader the streets of Harlem through each character's eyes, Fisher creates a variety of experiences that combine to form a new perception of both Harlem life and blackness itself. He intensifies that creation by employing the motif of conjuration, a device that functions specifically to modify one's way of seeing the world. A powerful corrective to received assumptions that limited black people to a realm of "otherness," Fisher's novel offers the reader a more diverse way of seeing black life, one that comprises both the elite cultural realm that Cullen and Du Bois celebrate and the world of Hughes's "low-down folks."

WOMEN WRITERS OF THE RENAISSANCE

The questions of propriety in tone and subject matter become even more pressing when one considers issues of gender. For women writers of the Harlem Renaissance like Jessie Fauset, Nella Larsen, and Zora Neale Hurston, the effort to articulate effectively a sense of self included an exploration of female sexuality and of romantic relationships. Significantly, although all three of these authors focused on a similar problem for black women, they presented a broad range of answers, a spectrum that paralleled and reflected the class and cultural tensions facing their male counterparts. For Fauset and Larsen the issue of passing, or the attempt to deny one's black identity by posing as a white person, also shaped the discussions of sex, class, and culture.

Of the women artists who made a significant contribution to the movement, Jessie Fauset is arguably one of the most undervalued. As literary editor of *The Crisis* and collaborator with W. E. B. Du Bois, Fauset was, in effect, a midwife to the Harlem Renaissance. It was she who first published Langston Hughes's poetry and who encouraged Countee Cullen and Jean Toomer to keep writing. In addition to being a great nurturer of writers, Fauset was herself a prolific author, publishing several essential articles and four novels, the best known of which is *Plum Bun* (1929). The story of racially mixed Angela Murray's pursuit of romantic and artistic fulfillment on both sides of the color line, *Plum Bun* raises interesting questions about the morality of passing, the limitations the black artist must face, and the difficulties encountered by women who strive for emotional and sexual self-determination in a male-dominated world. Unfortunately, although the

issues at hand are daring, Fauset's mode of addressing them is, ultimately, conventional and conservative; she brings her story to an almost unbelievably happy ending and offers somewhat pat answers to all of the questions she has raised. It is most likely this that has led most readers to overlook her fiction.

If Fauset's conservatism is part of what makes hers a lesser voice in the period, Nella Larsen's willingness to take intellectual and creative risks, along with her considerable talent, make her one of the Renaissance's leading lights. Her two novels, *Quicksand* (1928) and *Passing* (1929), portray Talented Tenth light-skinned black women who struggle to balance their respective senses of loyalty to their race with a growing desire for sexual fulfillment. In *Quicksand*, heroine Helga Crane tries to find satisfaction in Harlem, then in Denmark, before she finally settles in a small southern town as the wife of a loathsome, but sexually potent, black minister. The novel closes with an image of Helga childbearing herself to death, an image that resonates with the book's title and reminds the reader of the traps into which black women who attempt to assert themselves can fall.

Passing is in many ways even more daring, as it presents Irene Redfield's struggle to come to terms with her ambivalence about Clare Kendry, a childhood friend who is now passing for white but decides to return to the black community, whatever the cost. Irene appears worried that the cost might include Clare stealing her husband, Brian. As Deborah E. McDowell has noted, however, the novel clearly has a queer subtext, which manifests itself in Irene's growing fascination with, and fear of, Clare's "un-raced" body. Ultimately, Clare's impending return to Harlem as a free woman proves too threatening to Irene, who pushes her out an apartment window to her death. As in *Quicksand*, Larsen emphasizes the dangers facing the black woman who seeks to free herself from the strictures of externally defined race and gender identity; here, however, she makes explicit the lethal consequences that she rather obliquely suggests in her first novel.

Despite, or perhaps because of, their controversial subject matter, both of Larsen's books were very well received, so much so in fact that Larsen won a Guggenheim fellowship to do research on a novel set in Spain; unfortunately, she never produced that third novel. Through a series of unfortunate events, Larsen was charged with plagiarism after she published a short story, "Sanctuary," in 1930. Although she was subsequently cleared of the charge, the episode spoiled her taste for public life, and she largely

turned away from writing and once again took up nursing, her original chosen profession. Her death in 1964 went virtually unnoticed, and it was only the rise of the women's movement of the 1970s that resurrected her work and rehabilitated her literary reputation.

Around the same time that scholars rediscovered Larsen, Zora Neale Hurston began to regain some of the prominence that she had known during the 1920s and 1930s. An important and oftentimes irreverent participant in the Renaissance, between 1924 and 1937 Hurston contributed to *The New Negro*, studied anthropology with Franz Boas, collaborated with Langston Hughes on a folk play, enjoyed the patronage of Charlotte Osgood Mason, and published two novels and a collection of folklore. Her most famous novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), tells the story of one young black woman's quest for self-determination and her salvation through immersion in the black folk culture of central Florida. Janie Mae Crawford's pairings with first a farmer, then a businessman, then a folk hero yield her, respectively, brief but intense dissatisfaction, lengthy boredom and isolation, and brief but overwhelming happiness. Through the story of Janie Mae's journey, Hurston argues the black community's need to embrace its folk heritage, however flawed it might be, and suggests that the accompanying self-knowledge that this choice brings is the best gift that one can hope for in an imperfect world.

In Hurston's novel, the world of the "low-down folks" is the one place where her heroine finds freedom and happiness; the hallmark of that freedom is Janie's willingness to create herself through her story. With this she offers an affirmation, albeit qualified, of the principles that Hughes articulated in "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain." Significantly, however, the novel appeared in the same year that Richard Wright published his essay, "Blueprint for Negro Writing." In it Wright explicitly rejects any apolitical use of black folk culture; in reviewing Hurston's novel, he takes her to task for her failure to make use of her heritage to critique the socioeconomic disorder of the nation and of the South in particular.

With his essay, Wright raised the clarion call of the social realist, determinist fiction that he would perfect in *Native Son* (1940). He also, in some ways, sounded the death knell of the Renaissance; put another way, he made a forceful case for the idea that the values and attitudes of the Renaissance writers had, in the brief span of little more than a decade, become outdated. And yet as their resurrection in the period of the second Renaissance—the Black Arts Movement—suggests, these

aesthetic and social values had and have tremendous worth for the African-American community. It is not an overstatement to say that without the Harlem Renaissance, the African-American literary tradition could not have developed the way it did. In this cultural moment black writers experienced and expressed a sense of self-worth and self-empowerment that undergirds all subsequent declarations of black political and aesthetic pride.

[See also Dubois, W. E. B.; Hughes, Langston; Hurston, Zora Neale; and Larsen, Nella, and *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.]

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Davis, Thadious. *Nella Larsen, Novelist of the Harlem Renaissance: A Woman's Life Unveiled*. Baton Rouge, La., 1994.
- Douglas, Ann. *Terrible Honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s*. New York, 1995. An excellent study of the relationship between black and white cultural production during the Harlem Renaissance. Part 3 is dedicated entirely to the Renaissance.
- Huggins, Nathan Irvin. *Harlem Renaissance*. New York, 1973. The first full-length, detailed study of the Harlem Renaissance, Huggins's book set the standard for understanding the period until David Levering Lewis's *When Harlem Was in Vogue* appeared. Read together, the two books present the most balanced and compelling possible view of the period.
- Lewis, David Levering. *When Harlem Was in Vogue*. 2d ed. New York, 1997. A thorough treatment of the Harlem Renaissance that illuminates the tension between the middle-class origins of most Harlem Renaissance authors and their fascination with folk culture; this is considered a standard work on the period.
- Locke, Alain, ed. *The New Negro: Voices of the Harlem Renaissance*. 1925. Reprint, New York, 1997. This is the anthology of the movement; it includes representative samples of the best fiction, poetry, and essays of the Renaissance, along with visual art by Winold Reiss and Aaron Douglass. Absolutely essential to understanding the period.
- Lowe, John. *Jump at the Sun: Zora Neale Hurston's Cosmic Comedy*. Urbana, Ill., 1994. Chapter 3 provides an excellent reading of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.
- Rampersad, Arnold. *The Life of Langston Hughes*. 2 vols. New York, 1986, 1988. The best biography of one of the major figures of the Renaissance. Chapters 5 through 8 of the first volume provide an insightful account of the Renaissance and discuss Hughes's relationship to other major figures of the period.