The Harlem Renaissance

Reconstruction and Jim Crow Era

- 1866: The “Black Codes” are passed by all white legislators of the former Confederate States. Congress passes the Civil Rights Act, conferring citizenship on African Americans and granting them equal rights to whites. The Ku Klux Klan is formed in Tennessee.
- 1868: The 14th Amendment is ratified, defining citizenship. 1870 The 15th Amendment is ratified, giving African Americans the right to vote.
- 1877: The era of Reconstruction ends. Federal troops are withdrawn from the South, which puts an end to efforts to protect the civil rights of African Americans.
- 1879: Thousands of African Americans start to migrate out of the South to escape oppression.
- 1881: Tennessee passes the first of the “Jim Crow” segregation laws, segregating state railroads. Similar laws are passed over the next 15 years throughout the Southern states.
- 1896: Plessy v. Ferguson case: racial segregation is ruled constitutional by the Supreme Court. The “Jim Crow” (“separate but equal”) laws begin, barring African Americans from equal access to public facilities.

Harlem

- 1900: Harlem becomes a final destination for many blacks escaping from the South. As former slaves and other immigrants moved north, they settled into this well-to-do neighborhood, which was experiencing an economic crisis due to a fall in real estate prices.
- 1910: The NAACP **(**National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) is founded.
- 1914: Marcus Garvey, a Jamaican born black nationalist, founds the UNIA (Universal Negro Improvement Association)
- 1916: Madame Walker**,** an affluent black woman who had made millions of dollars after she created a hair product for black women, moves to Harlem**.**
- 1917: Protests and Riots for equal rights.
- 1919: Claude McKay publishes "If we Must Die," a militant poem urging blacks to resist racism.
- 1925: The New Negro movement . Alain Locke edits *Harlem: Mecca of the New Negro*.
- 1926: Langston Hughes publishes *The Weary Blues*, his first collection of poems, celebrating black culture.
- 1929: the stock market crashed, ushering in the Great Depression

The Jim Crow Era

As soon as blacks gained the right to vote, secret societies sprang up in the South, devoted to restoring white supremacy in politics and social life. Most notorious was the Ku Klux Klan, an organization of violent criminals that established a reign of terror in some parts of the South, assaulting and murdering local Republican leaders. In the generation after the end of Reconstruction, the Southern states deprived blacks of their right to vote, and ordered that public and private facilities of all kinds be segregated by race. Until job opportunities opened in the North in the twentieth century, spurring a mass migration out of the South, most blacks remained locked in a system of political powerlessness and economic inequality. Many former slaves believed that their years of unrequited labor gave them a claim to land ("forty acres and a mule”). The federal government's decision not to redistribute land in the South, meant that only a small percentage of the freedpeople became landowners. Most rented land or worked for wages on white-owned plantations. Sharecropping was slavery by a new name.

The segregation and disenfranchisement laws known as "Jim Crow" represented a formal, codified system of racial apartheid that dominated the American South for three quarters of a century. The laws affected almost every aspect of daily life, mandating segregation of schools, parks, libraries, drinking fountains, restrooms, buses, trains, and restaurants. In legal theory, blacks received "separate but equal" treatment under the law — in actuality, public facilities for blacks were always inferior to those for whites, when they existed at all. Jim Crow Laws condemned black citizens to inferior treatment and facilities that were almost always inferior to those provided to white Americans.

In addition, blacks were systematically denied the right to vote in most of the rural South through the selective application of literacy tests and other racially motivated criteria. The era of Jim Crow laws saw a dramatic reduction in the number of blacks registered to vote within the South. This time period brought about the Great Migration of blacks to northern and western cities like New York City, Chicago, and Los Angeles.

1896: Plessy v Ferguson

- In 1892 Homer Plessy, who was classified as an African American, was arrested, out on trial and found guilty of violating state law. Why? He refused to move from the 1st class carriage of a train (for which he had bought a ticket) to the 'coloured' carriage.
- Plessy appealed against the court's decision.
- In 1896 the Supreme Court ruled that Blacks as and whites could receive separate services so long as they were equivalent.
- The *Plessy v Ferguson* ruling legally accepted the 'separate but equal' policy in American Life and allowed for segregation laws.

Plessy was 1/8 black and 7/8 white. Under Louisiana state law he was classified as an African-American, and thus required to sit in the "colored" car.

Colorism

During slavery, black people who were fathered by their white masters often gained privileges based on their lighter coloring. Indeed, one reported pattern is that blacks of lighter skin were reputedly selected to work in the Big Houses of plantation masters while blacks of darker hues were routinely sent to the fields. As they had more educational opportunities, it was easier for them to find alternatives to sharecropping after Emancipation and formed the middle class.

The idea of uplift, that is, blacks of talent and education helping each other, is strongly tied to colorism, for many of the persons who were well educated in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were indeed lighter skinned. They fit into what W. E. B. Du Bois described as "The Talented Tenth." Du Bois maintained that one tenth of the black population in America should become educated as quickly as possible and should help the remaining ninety percent.

Black people of lighter hue who claimed class distinctions based upon their skin colors provided an ambiguous and problematic model for darker skinned blacks. Even as visibly black Negroes resented the presumed inherent right of lighter skinned blacks to be leaders and spokespersons for all black people, they nonetheless adhered to that hierarchy. Patterns developed in which darker skinned blacks sought to marry lighter skinned blacks; this tendency existed well into the late twentieth century. Darker blacks sometimes envied lighter skinned blacks and sought, through any means possible in the early twentieth century, to become like them and, by extension, like whites. From the hair straightening products that Madam C. J. Walker perfected, to the processed hair that Malcolm X recounts getting in the 1940s, to the skin lightening creams that were advertised in prominent magazines such as Ebony and Jet, darker skinned African Americans were offered wish fulfillment options to try to make themselves as “white” and therefore as acceptable as possible. Yet, very often the effort at whitening and erasing one’s phenotypical Africanness was only a strategic move to access white privileges and did not imply an acceptance of the superiority of white aesthetic norms.

“I am a woman who came from the cotton fields of the South. From there I was promoted to the washtub. From there I was promoted to the cook kitchen. And from there I promoted myself into the business of manufacturing hair goods and preparations….I have built my own factory on my own ground.”

Madame C. J. Walker

Is Your Hair Short?

Breaking Off, Thin, or Falling Out?

MADAM C. J. WALKER
President of the Madam C. J. Walker Mfg. Co. and the Lelia College, 640 North West Street, Indianapolis, Ind.

Have you Tetter, Eczema? Does your Scalp Itch? Have you more than a normal amount of Dandruff?

If so, write for MME. C. J. WALKER'S WONDERFUL HAIR GROWER, which positively cures all Scalp Diseases, stops the Hair from Falling Out and starts it at once to Growing.

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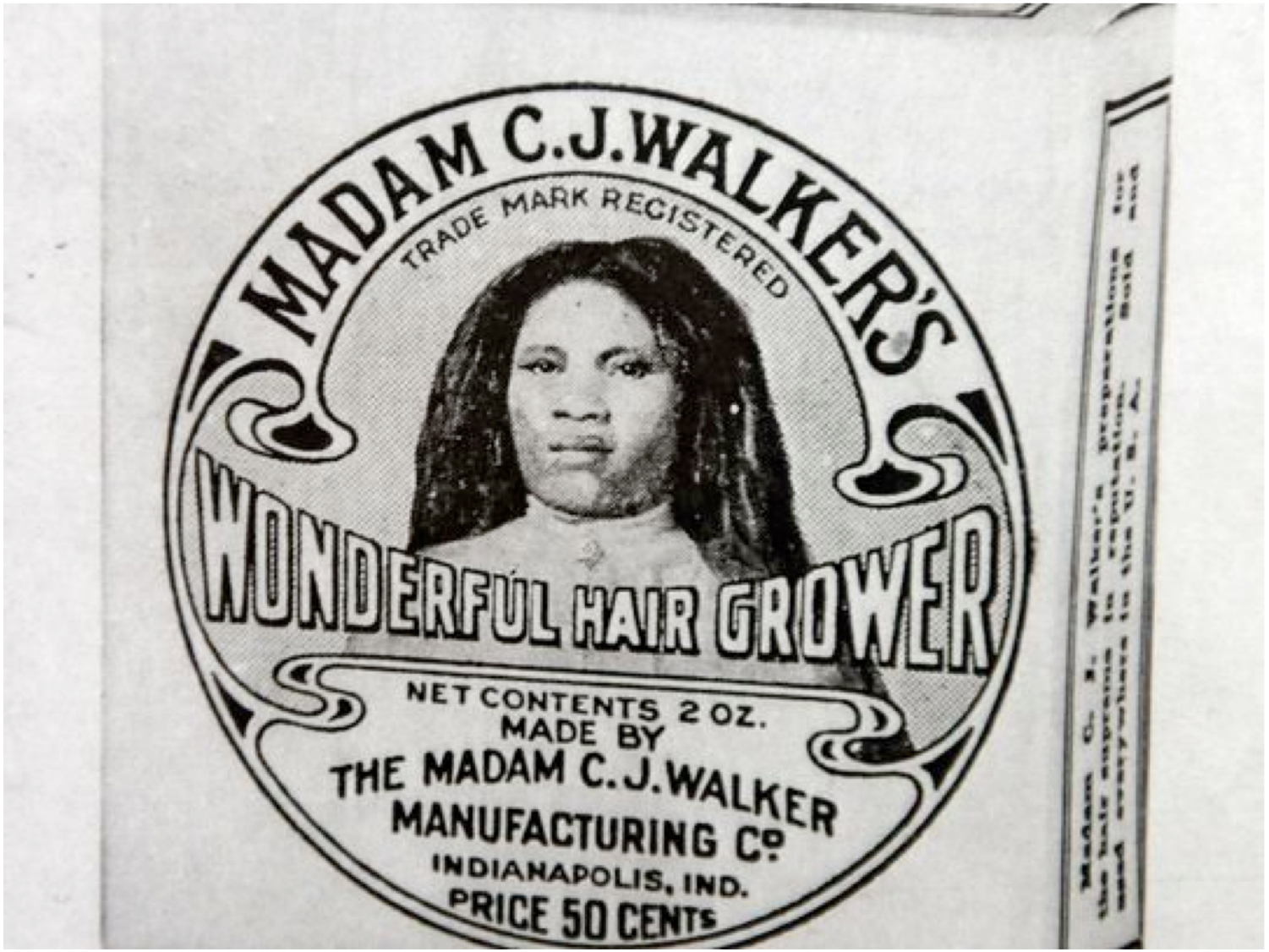
If in New York call at Our College for personal treatments and instructions in the care of the scalp and hair. All communications out of the vicinity of New York, address mail to Mme. C. J. Walker, 640 N. West St., Indianapolis, Ind.

A six weeks trial treatment sent to any address by mail for $1.70. Make all Money Orders payable to Mme. C. J. Walker. Send stamp for reply. AGENTS WANTED. Write for terms.

If in New York, call at the Lelia College, 108 W. 136th Street, for personal instructions for care of the scalp and hair, otherwise address all communications to Mme. C. J. Walker, 640 N. West St., Indianapolis, Ind.

Positively no goods shipped from the New York office.

Nov.5-3mo.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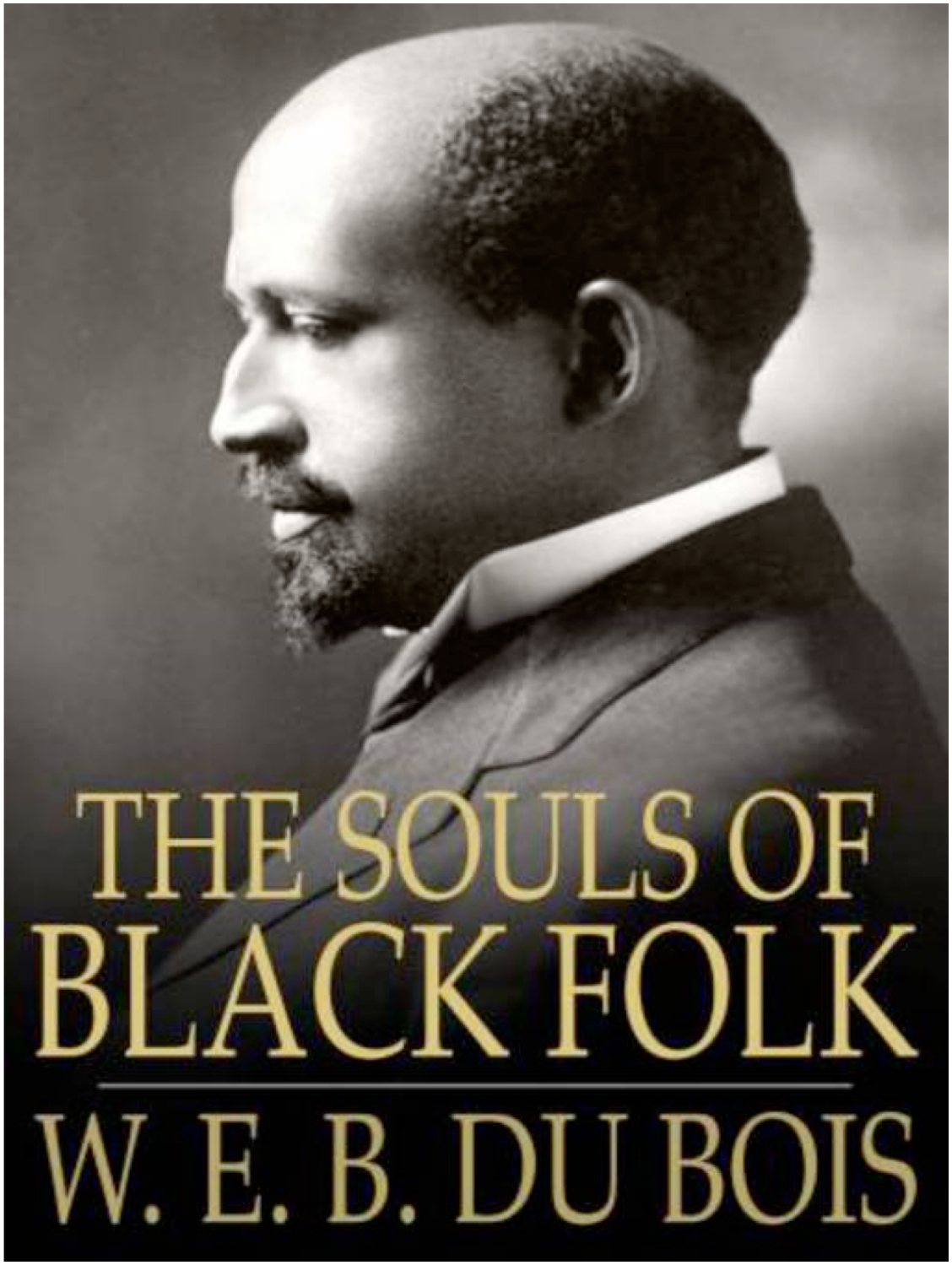
The War of Images: W.E.B. DuBois and the Paris Exposition of 1900

W.E.B. Du Bois's "The Exhibit of American Negroes"

At the turn of the century, W. E. B. Du Bois compiled a series of photographs for the "American Negro" exhibit at the 1900 Paris Exposition. He organized the 363 images into albums.

Du Bois was, committed to combating racism with empirical evidence of the economic, social, and cultural conditions of African Americans. He believed that a clear revelation of the facts of African American life and culture would challenge the claims of biological race scientists influential at the time, which proposed that African Americans were inherently inferior to Anglo-Americans. The photographs of affluent young African American men and women challenged the scientific "evidence" and popular racist caricatures of the day that ridiculed and sought to diminish African American social and economic success. Further, the wide range of hair styles and skin tones represented in the photographs demonstrated that the so-called "Negro type" was in fact a diverse group of distinct individuals.

W.E.B. DUBOIS:
THE NEW NEGRO
AT THE
1900 PARIS
EXPOSITION


THE SOULS OF
BLACK FOLK
W. E. B. DU BOIS

WEB DuBois and Double Cosciousness

Double-consciousness is a concept in social philosophy referring, originally, to a source of inward "twoness" experienced by African Americans because of their racialized oppression and disvaluation in a white-dominated society. The concept is often associated with WEB Du Bois, who introduced the term into social and political thought in his groundbreaking *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903). Du Bois was engaged throughout his long career in the attempt to understand both the socio-historic conditions facing "Black folk" in the American twentieth century, and the impacts of those conditions on the consciousness and "inner world" of the human beings subject to them. In our day the term continues to be used by numerous commentators—philosophical and otherwise—on racialized cultures, societies, and literatures, and by cultural and literary theorists to refer to the in-between condition of minority subjects.

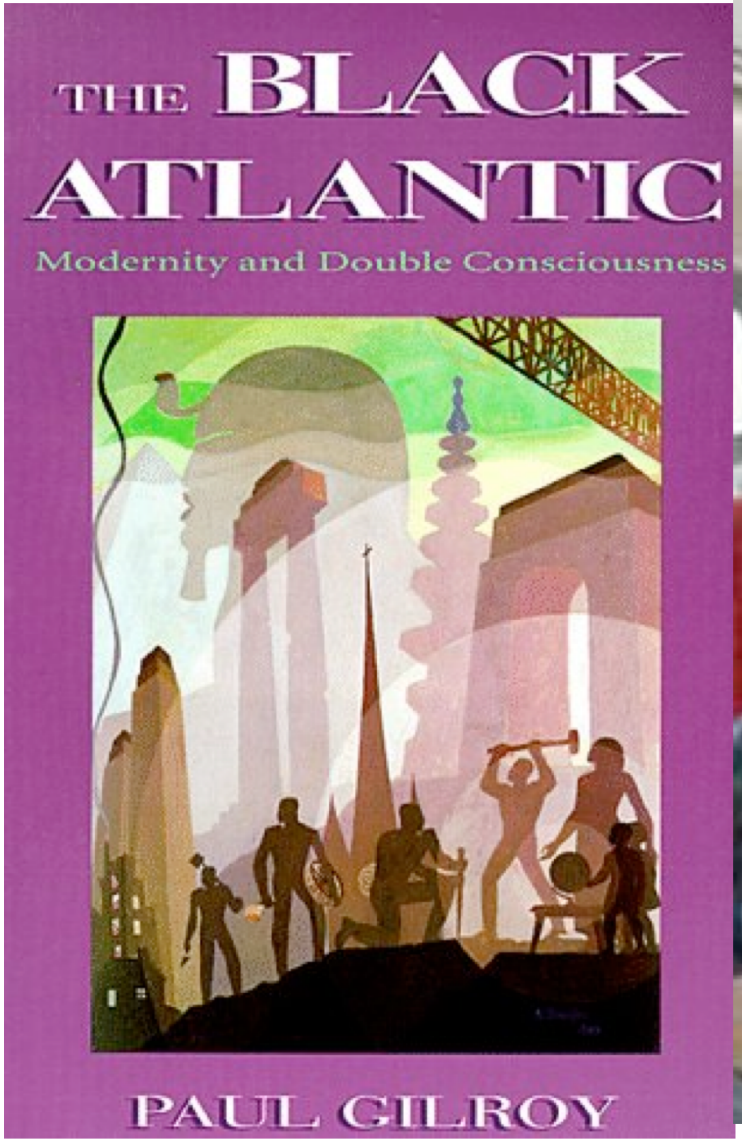
“It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness, an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife- this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He does not wish to Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He wouldn’t bleach his Negro blood in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of opportunity closed roughly in his face” (WEB DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 2-3).

Double Consciousness from Problem to Asset

“High in the tower, where I sit above the loud complaining of the human sea, I know many souls that toss and whirl and pass, but none there are that intrigue me more than the Souls of White Folk.

Of them I am singularly clairvoyant. I see in and through them. I view them from unusual points of vantage. Not as a foreigner do I come, for I am native, not foreign, bone of their thought and flesh of their language. Mine is not the knowledge of the traveler or the colonial composite of dear memories, words and wonder. Nor yet is my knowledge that which servants have of masters, or mass of class, or capitalist of artisan. Rather I see these souls undressed and from the back and side. I see the working of their entrails. I know their thoughts and they know that I know.” (Du Bois, “The Souls of White Folks”, 1920)

Henry Louis Gates, “The Black Letters on the Sign: W E B Du Bois and the Canon”: cultural multiplicity is no longer seen as the problem, but as a solution—a solution to the confines of identity itself. Double consciousness, once a disorder, is now the cure. (2006: xv)


THE BLACK ATLANTIC
Modernity and Double Consciousness
PAUL GILROY

Roots vs Routes

The subtitle of the book is *Modernity and Double Consciousness* and Gilroy defines the Black Atlantic as a counterculture of modernity. The Black Atlantic as a space of "counterculture to modernity" illustrates how black people played an integral role in the economic and cultural development of the West. Paul Gilroy describes black identity in Europe and the New World as an ongoing process of travel and exchange across the Atlantic that tried to come to terms with Western modernity, and in the while profoundly changed it. Gilroy rejects the idea of Black cultures from around the Atlantic basin as being marginal to or derived from dominant national cultures, and so resulting in specific subcultures like African-American or Anglo-African that have a closer relation to American or British culture at large than to each other.

The Ideology of Racial Uplift

"We would prescribe: homes - better homes, clean homes, pure homes; schools - better schools; more culture; more thrift; and work in large doses; put the patient at once on this treatment and continue through life. Can woman do this work? She can; and she must do her part, and her part is by no means small." Lucy Laney, "The Burden of the Educated Colored Woman" (1899)

Shirley Wilson Logan, We Are Coming: The Persuasive Discourse of Nineteenth-Century Black Women, 1999

In speeches to their black sisters during this period, prominent women educators and religious leaders also responded by advancing the agenda of racial uplift. While the term "uplift" carried with it the assumption that those being lifted occupied inferior positions and that they needed to be elevated to a more socially acceptable level, these speeches acknowledge inferiority only as a direct consequence of slavery, not as an innate and indelible trait. To remove this taint of an inferior and "downtrodden" race, black intellectuals argued for improvement in the material conditions of black people. In 1894, theWoman's Era Club of Boston chose as its slogan "Make the World Better." Representatives of the NACW organized and spoke under the motto "Lifting As We Climb." The Commitment to uplift was evident as well in informal discourse. … These prominent activists cast themselves as race women, privileging their reform activities over their wage-earning activities.

The ideology of racial uplift and the politics of respectability

The ideology of racial uplift, the idea that educated blacks are responsible for the welfare of the majority of the race, was a response to the assault on African American civil and political rights in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. White southern politicians and elite opinion leaders defended white supremacy and proclaimed the moral, mental and physical depravity and inferiority of blacks from the press, pulpit, and university. The consensus was that blacks were unfit for citizenship, and that plantation slavery, or the neo-slavery of menial labor and sharecropping, was the natural state of black people. For African American leaders and intellectuals, the politics of respectability first emerged as a way to counter the negative stereotypes of Black Americans
. Paradoxically, this tactic also reflected an acceptance and internalization of such representations by attempting to reform the behavior of individuals and erasing structural forms of oppression such as racism, sexism and poverty. Black leaders generally countered anti-black stereotypes by emphasizing class differences among blacks. From their perspective, to “uplift the race” meant highlighting their function as elites to reform the character and manage the behavior of the black masses. Against pervasive claims of black immorality and pathology, educated blacks waged a battle over the representation of their people, a strategy with ambiguous implications and results. They referred to themselves as a “better class” of blacks, and demanded recognition of their respectability, and privileged status as agents of Western progress and civilization. But in doing so, they ushered in a politics of internal class division that often seemed to internalize dominant notions of black cultural depravity and backwardness even as they sought to oppose racism.

In 1896, black women formed the National Association of Colored Women (NACW). Women reformers strove to improve the conditions of black women at work and home and fought against the racist representation of black womanhood by adopting what historian Darlene Clark Hine has defined “a culture of dissemblance”.

"Resisting respectability politics means recognizing where oppression really comes from: racist hatred of our Blackness, not just of how 'badly' we behave."

- Maisha Z. Johnson, "5 Ways 'Respectability Politics' Blame Black Women for Their Own Oppression"

everyday feminism

Evelyn B. Higginbotham, "African-American Women's History and the Metalanguage of Race," *Signs* 1992

In the centuries between the Renaissance and the Victorian era, Western culture constructed and represented changing and conflicting images of woman's sexuality, which shifted diametrically from images of lasciviousness to moral purity. Yet Western conceptions of black women's sexuality resisted change during this same time.[33] Winthrop Jordan's now classic study of racial attitudes toward blacks between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries argues that black women's bodies epitomized centuries-long European perceptions of Africans as primitive, animal-like, and savage. In America, no less distinguished and learned a figure than Thomas Jefferson conjectured that black women mated with orangutans.[34] While such thinking rationalized slavery and the sexual exploitation of slave women by white masters, it also perpetuated an enormous division between black people and white people on the "scale of humanity": carnality as opposed to intellect and/or spirit; savagery as opposed to civilization; deviance as opposed to normality; promiscuity as opposed to purity; passion as opposed to passionlessness. The black woman came to symbolize, according to Sander Gilman, an "icon for black sexuality in general."[35] This discursive gap between the races was if anything greater between white and black women than between white and black men.

Evelyn B. Higginbotham, "African-American Women's History and the Metalanguage of Race," *Signs* 1992

In response to assaults upon black sexuality, according to Darlene Clark Hine, there arose among black women a politics of silence, a "culture of dissemblance." In order to "protect the sanctity of inner aspects of their lives," black women, especially those of the middle class, reconstructed and represented their sexuality through its absence—through silence, secrecy, and invisibility. In so doing, they sought to combat the pervasive negative images and stereotypes. Black clubwomen's adherence to Victorian ideology, as well as their self-representation as "super moral," according to Hine, was perceived as crucial not only to the protection and upward mobility of black women but also to the attainment of respect, justice, and opportunity for all black Americans.[44]

Darlene Clark Hine, *Hine Sight: Black Women and the Reconstruction of American History*, 1994

I suggest that rape and the threat of rape influenced the development of a culture of dissemblance among southern black women. By dissemblance I mean the behavior and attitudes of black women that created the appearance of openness and disclosure but actually shielded the truth of their inner lives and selves from their oppressors… (p. 37)

Because of the interplay of racial animosity, class tensions, gender role differentiation, and regional economic variations, black women as a rule developed a politics of silence, and adhered to a cult of secrecy, a culture of dissemblance, to protect the sanctity of the inner aspects of their lives. The dynamics of dissemblance involved creating the appearance of disclosure, or openness about themselves and their feelings, while actually remaining enigmatic. Only with secrecy, thus achieving a selfimposed invisibility, could ordinary black women acquire the psychic space and gather the resources needed to hold their own in their often one-sided and mismatched struggle to resist oppression…

The inclination of the larger society to ignore them as elements considered 'marginal' actually enabled subordinate black women to fashion the veil of secrecy, or 'invisibility,' but paradoxically contributed to their failure to realize equal opportunity or to receive respect in the larger society. There would be no room on the pedestal for the southern black lady, nor could she join her white sisters in the prison of 'true womanhood.' In other words, stereotypes, negative images, and debilitating assumptions filled the space left empty due to inadequate and erroneous information about the true contributions, capabilities, and identities of black women. …To counter negative stereotypes many black women felt compelled to downplay, even deny, sexual expression. The twin obsessions with naming and combating sexual exploitation tinted and shaped black women's support even of the suffrage movement. (pp. 41 45)

Jane Rhodes, "Pedagogies of Respectability: Race, Media, and Black Womanhood in the Early 20th Century," *Souls* 2016

The politics of respectability were a response to the racist representations of and routine attacks on black female sexuality, character, and intellect. They enabled black women to enact subversive strategies of resistance. They were also a means for negotiating and managing the class, educational, and regional distinctions within African American communities, with an old settler establishment seeking to control what were deemed unruly and uncouth newcomers. In the early 20th century, "those who adopted an old settler respectability wanted to present a unified and positive public image of the race to counteract the cultural assumptions of white supremacy; they believed that a leadership class could help better the conditions of working-class migrants," explained Davarian Baldwin in his study of the Great Migration in Chicago.[1]

The language and ideals of black respectability were firmly entrenched in the discursive universe in which my mother and her family lived. Privileged by educational attainment, if not by actual wealth or position, they embraced the black public sphere of the north by consuming the society pages of the *Amsterdam News*, the political commentary in journals like *The Crisis* and the *Messenger*, the entertainments of local black theaters, and the expanding networks of black benevolent organizations and clubs. These sites all presented examples for how to adopt respectable speech, carriage, and values, and how to get on a path toward upward mobility. The act of purchasing and reading a newspaper, attending a theatrical production, or discussing the latest race movie could be a performance of respectability—a way to signal literacy, disposable income, and a measure of sophistication. But the core tar-

During the period between 1915 and 1930 more than a million and a half African Americans left the South searching for an escape from racial terror and the chance for economic opportunity and social advancement. Black migrants not only sought material prospects, but new forms of expression, intellectual engagement, and leisure. As writer and philosopher Alain Locke proclaimed in 1925, "In the very process of being transplanted, the Negro is becoming transformed."[5] This was also the era of the New Woman, who as a fully enfranchised citizen was stepping away from Victorian domesticity to aspire to an education, career, and independence. For black women this meant a transition away from the rural, agrarian home toward urban centers and the promise of new freedoms and altered lifestyles.

But this liberatory transformation, especially for black women, was tempered by anxieties over the public deportment and social practices of migrants that many feared would endanger elite's efforts at racial progress. Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham's influential study of black Baptist clubwomen at the turn of the 20th century, described how they sought to influence new settlers with the principles of respectability in order to control "the construction and representation of themselves as new subjectivities—as Americans as well as blacks and women."[6] Higginbotham found that black Baptist women used speeches and articles in black periodicals, particularly those with women's columns, to discuss these strategies for social reform. At the National Baptist Women's Conventions, these activists laid out an elaborate agenda for inculcating these values, in the process linking them to the struggles for women's rights and demands for racial equality. Victoria Wolcott, who studied Detroit during this period, argued that bourgeois notions of respectability reflected elite women's "desire to act as unblemished representatives of the race" as well as their interests in the welfare of their poor and working class sisters.[7] Wollcott's refor-

The Harlem Renaissance

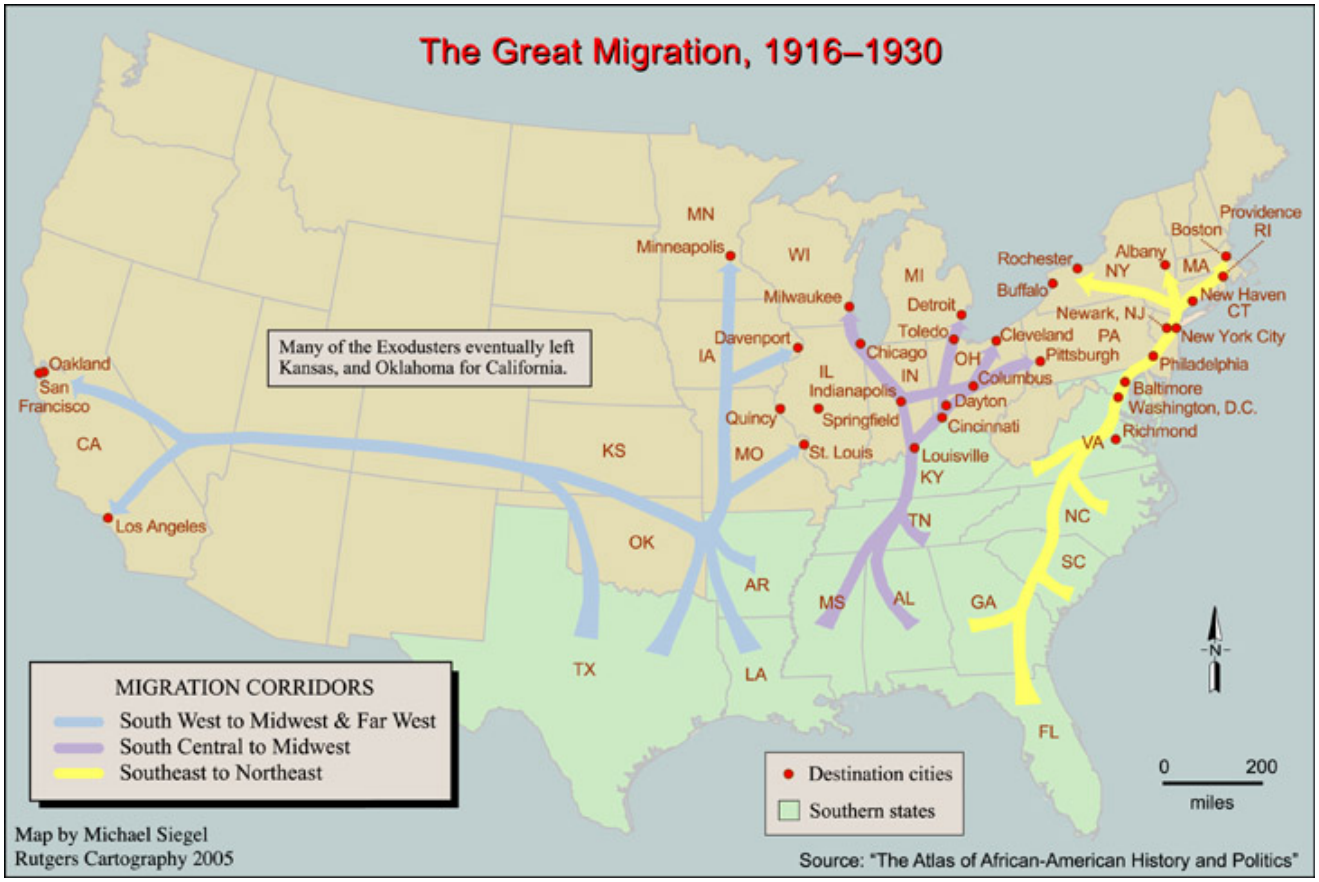
The cultural, social, and artistic explosion that took place in Harlem and other black ghettoes in some cities of the Northern US, such as New York and Chicago, between the end of World War I and the middle of the 1930s, is called the Harlem Renaissance. During this period Harlem was a center of attraction for black writers, artists, musicians, photographers, poets, and scholars, coming from the South or the Caribbean and even African countries. W.E.B. Du Bois, then the editor of THE CRISIS, the journal of the NAACP, was at the height of his fame and influence in the black community. THE CRISIS published the works of many artists of the period. The Renaissance was more than a literary movement: It involved racial pride, fueled in part by the militancy of the "New Negro" demanding civil and political rights. The lively atmosphere of Harlem seduced whites who were looking for exotic attractions and its unconventional ways of life were refreshing for white artists looking for new sources of inspiration. But the Renaissance had little impact on breaking down the rigid barriers of Jim Crow that separated the races.

Red Summer of 1919: white reaction against gains by African Americans caused an increase of lynchings (almost 90) and racial riots. African American poet Claude McKay, a native of Jamaica, wrote a poem which, while never directly mentioning race, invites blacks to fight against oppression

If We Must Die

If we must die--let it not be like hogs
Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot,
While round us bark the mad and hungry dogs,
Making their mock at our accursed lot.
If we must die--oh, let us nobly die,
So that our precious blood may not be shed
In vain; then even the monsters we defy
Shall be constrained to honor us though dead!
Oh, Kinsmen! We must meet the common foe;
Though far outnumbered, let us show us brave,
And for their thousand blows deal one deathblow!
What though before us lies the open grave?
Like men we'll face the murderous, cowardly pack,
Pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back!

W. 155th St.
Macombs Dam Bridge
Trinity Cemetery
BRONX
Edgecombe Ave.
Harlem River
Riverbank State Park
145th St. Bridge
W. 145th St.
Amsterdam Ave.
Convent Ave.
St. Nicholas Ave.
Madison Ave. Bridge
Broadway
Riverside Dr.
3rd Ave. Bridge
Willis Ave. Bridge
(8th Ave.)
W. 135th St.
St. Nicholas Park
HARLEM
Clayton Powell Blvd.
(Lenox Ave.)
5th Ave.
Madison Ave.
W. 125th St.
Manhattan Ave.
Frederick Douglass Blvd.
W. 125th St.
E. 125th St.
Triborough Bridge (TOLL)
Riverside Park
Adam
Marcus Garvey Park
Malcolm X Blvd.
EAST HARLEM
MORNINGSIDE HEIGHTS
St. Nicholas Ave.
116th St.
Park Ave.
Lexington Ave.
3rd Ave.
2nd Ave.
1st Ave.
FDR Dr.
Henry Hudson Pkwy.
Morningside Park
Cathedral Pkwy.
Central Park N.
E. 110th St.


The Great Migration, 1916–1930
Many of the Exodusters eventually left Kansas, and Oklahoma for California.
MIGRATION CORRIDORS
South West to Midwest & Far West
South Central to Midwest
Southeast to Northeast
Destination cities
Southern states
0
200
miles
N
Map by Michael Siegel
Rutgers Cartography 2005
Source: "The Atlas of African-American History and Politics"
Oakland
San Francisco
Los Angeles
CA
KS
OK
TX
MO
AR
LA
MS
AL
TN
KY
GA
FL
SC
NC
VA
IL
IN
OH
WI
MI
MN
IA
Minneapolis
Milwaukee
Davenport
Chicago
Detroit
Toledo
Cleveland
Pittsburgh
Columbus
Indianapolis
Dayton
Cincinnati
Springfield
Quincy
St. Louis
Louisville
Richmond
Baltimore
Washington, D.C.
Philadelphia
New York City
Newark, NJ
Albany
Rochester
Buffalo
NY
PA
MA
Boston
Providence
RI
New Haven
CT

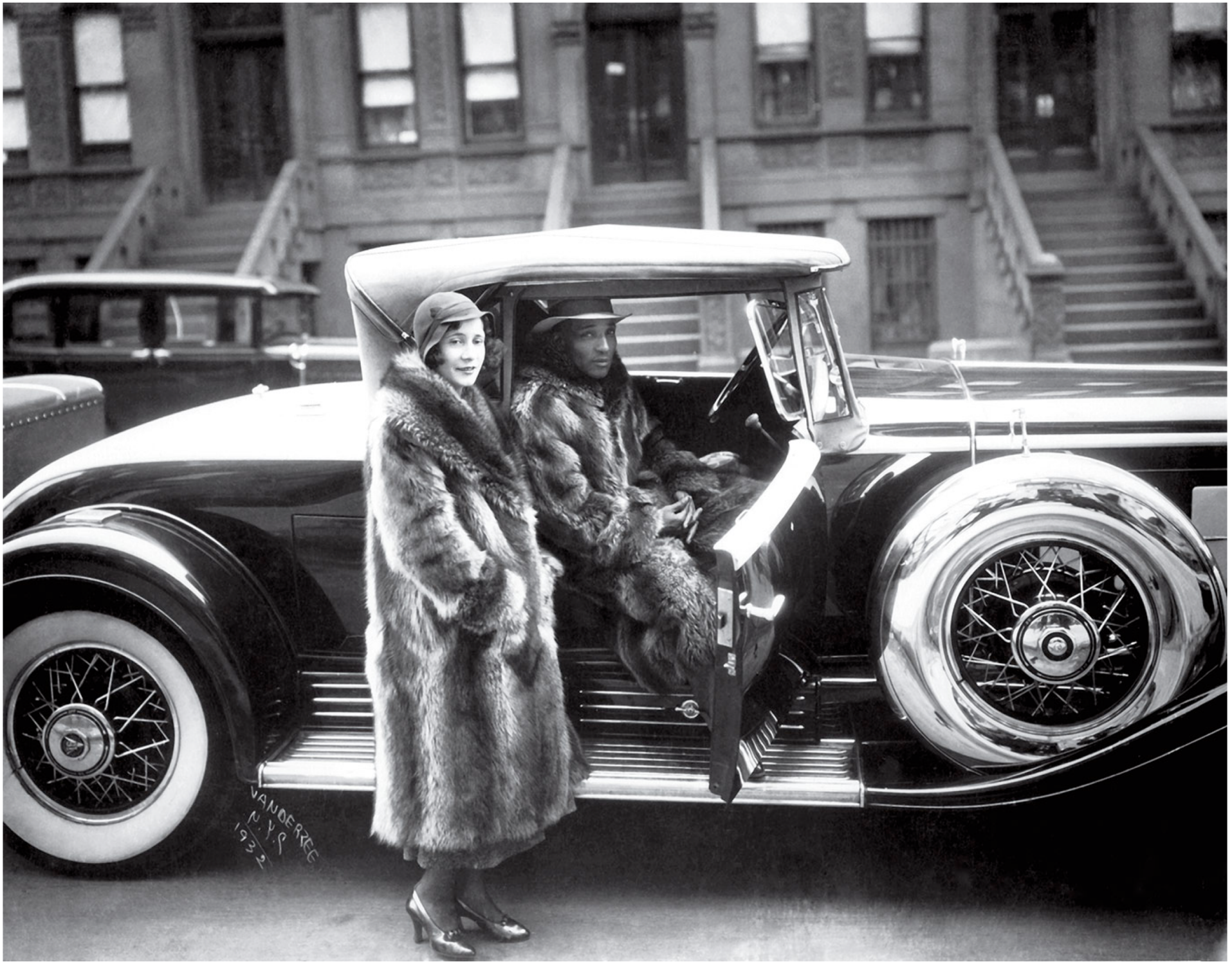
Reasons behind the Great Migration

- Racial segregation of Jim Crow laws and violence (Ku Klux Klan) in the South
- Hope for better life conditions (socially and culturally as well as economic)
- Unemployment due to boll weevil infestation in Southern cotton in the late 1910s and Mississippi flood of 1927
- 1924 Immigration Act, checking European migration, increased demand for factory workers
- The Great Mississippi Flood of 1927 displaced thousands of African-American farm workers

The word "Harlem" evoked strong and conflicting images among African Americans during the first half of the twentieth century. Was it the Negro metropolis, black Manhattan, the political, cultural, and spiritual center of African America, a land of plenty, a city of refuge, or a black ghetto and emerging slum? For some, the image of Harlem was more personal. King Solomon Gillis, the main character in Rudolph Fisher's "The City of Refuge," was one of these. Emerging out of the subway at 135th and Lennox Avenue, Gillis was transfixed: “Gillis set down his tan-cardboard extension-case and wiped his black, shining brow. Then slowly, spreadingly, he grinned at what he saw: Negroes at every turn; up and down Lenox Avenue, up and down One Hundred and Thirty-fifth Street; big, lanky Negroes, short, squat Negroes; black ones, brown ones, yellow ones; men standing idle on the curb, women, bundle-laden, trudging reluctantly homeward, children rattle-trapping about the sidewalks; here and there a white face drifting along, but Negroes predominantly, overwhelmingly everywhere. There was assuredly no doubt of his whereabouts. This was Negro Harlem.” -- Cary Wintz, “The Harlem Renaissance: What Was It, and Why Does It Matter?” (2015)

The Harlem Renaissance keywords

- Great Migration
- Racial pride
- New Negro (new beginning after slavery)
- Modernity of the black subject
- Urban culture
- Importance of Black folk culture for identity
- African heritage


VANDERZEE
N.Y.C.
1932

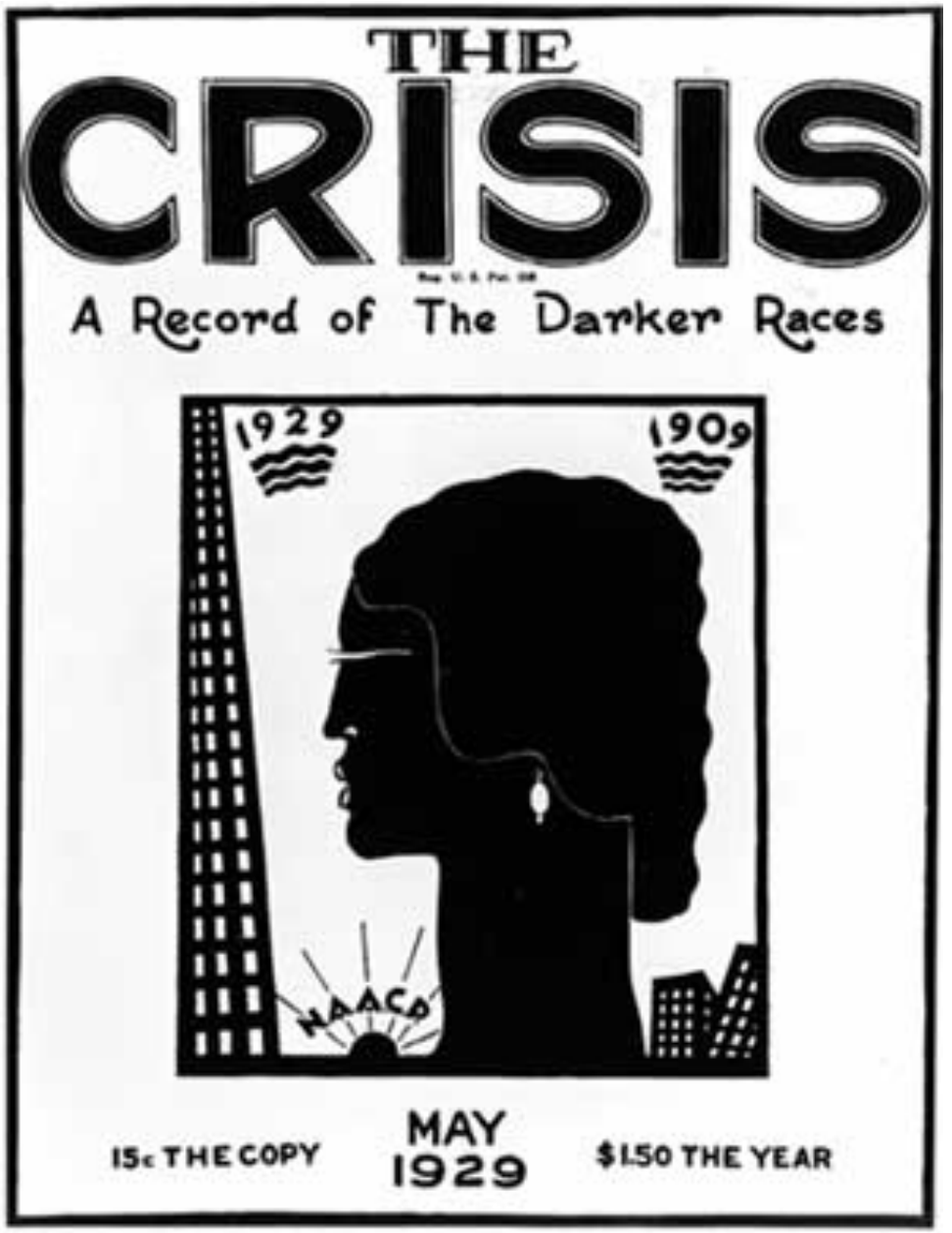
UNIA March

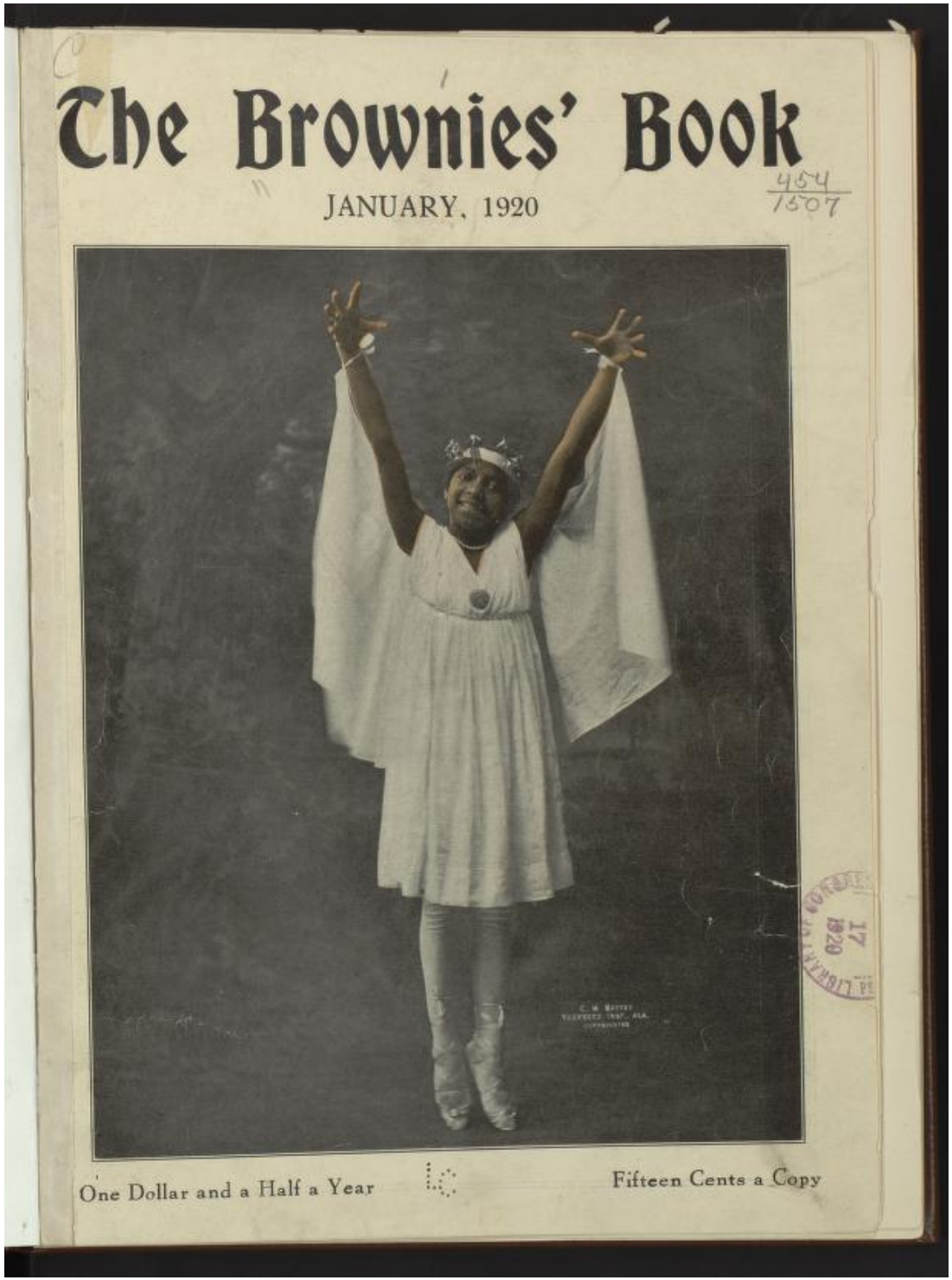
Caption Reads: “This New Negro has NO Fear”

New York Black Magazines at the beginning of the 20° Century

In 1910, The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People launched *The Crisis*, appointing W. E. B. Du Bois as editor. The publication provided a venue for the so-called "talented tenth", African-American intellectuals and artists, where to show their worth. Another publication was The National Urban League's *Opportunity*, established in 1923. Edited by Charles S. Johnson, *Opportunity* promoted contests for promising young black writers. In the same years the Universal Negro Improvement Association published *The Negro World*, promoting Marcus Garvey's philosophy of black consciousness, self-help, and economic independence.

OPPORTUNITY
A JOURNAL OF NEGRO LIFE
JUNE
1926


THE
CRISIS
A Record of The Darker Races
1929
1909
NAACP
15c THE COPY
MAY
1929
$1.50 THE YEAR



Du Bois recognized the need for young African Americans to see themselves and their concerns reflected in what they read, and he decided to expand the children's section in the *Crisis* to an independent periodical. In 1920 he launched *The Brownies' Book*, a monthly magazine for the "Children of the Sun … designed for all children, but especially for *ours*," which .

Du Bois aimed to instill and reinforce pride in Black youth and to help Black families as they raised children in a segregated and prejudiced world.

The Brownies' Book offered a groundbreaking mix of stories, advice, information and correspondence with the paramount goal of empowering Black children and validating their interests. Content included African folk tales, stories and poems about the origin of different races and messages about self-respect and pride in one's appearance.

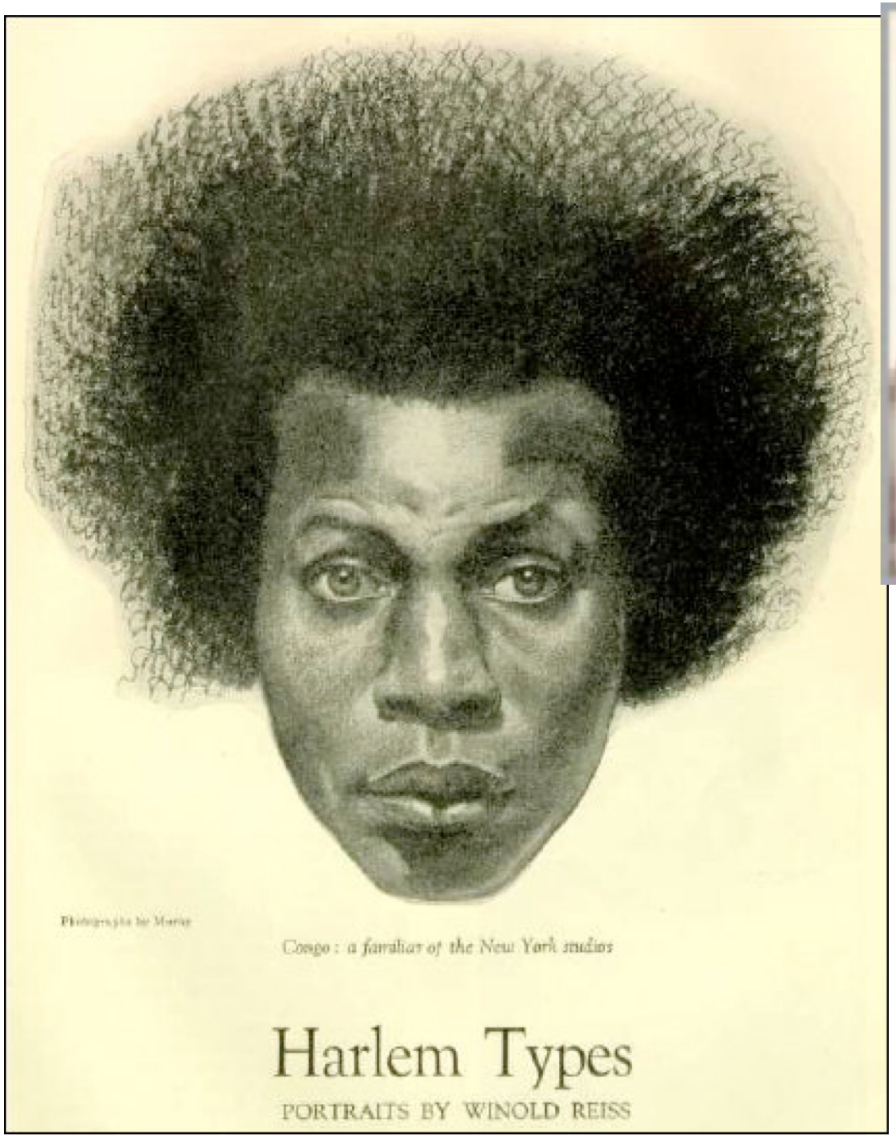
In 1925 an entire issue of the journal *Survey Graphic* devoted to the Harlem literary movement was published under the editorship of Alain Locke. "Harlem: Mecca of the New Negro" was an overnight sensation. Later that year Locke published a book-length version of the "Harlem" edition, expanded and re-titled *The New Negro: An Interpretation*. In the anthology Locke laid down his vision of the aesthetic and the parameters for the emerging Harlem Renaissance.

THE NEW NEGRO
AN INTERPRETATION

EDITED BY ALAIN LOCKE

BOOK DECORATION AND PORTRAITS BY WINOLD REISS

ALBERT AND CHARLES BONI
NEW YORK 1925



Congo : a familiar of the New York studios

Harlem Types

PORTRAITS BY WINOLD REISS

. . . The day of "aunties," "uncles" and "mammies" is equally gone. Uncle Tom and Sambo have passed on, and even the "Colonel" and "George" play barnstorm rôles from which they escape with relief when the public spotlight is off. The popular melodrama has about played itself out, and it is time to scrap the fictions, garret the bogeys and settle down to a realistic facing of facts.

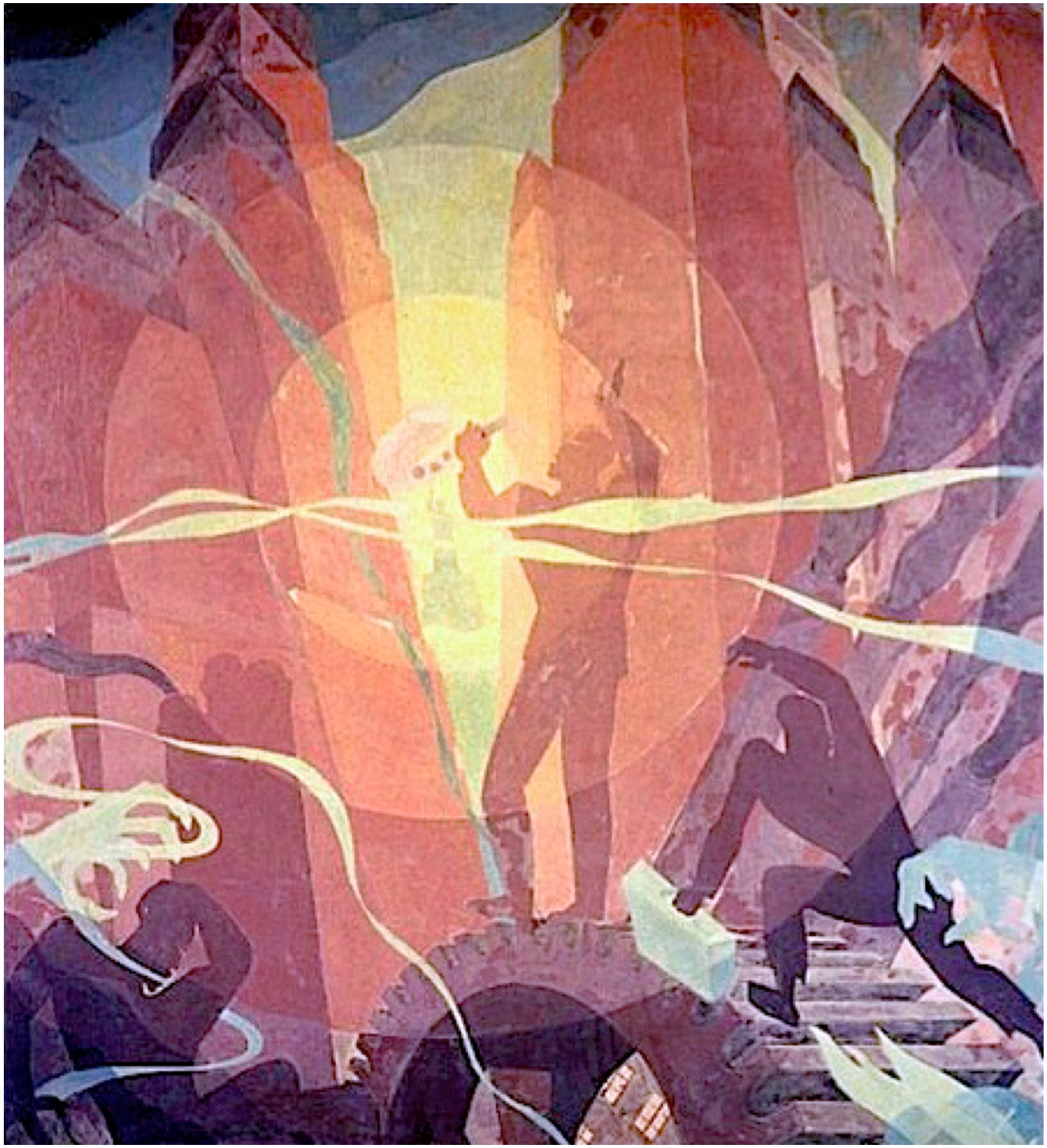
First we must observe some of the changes which since the traditional lines of opinion were drawn have rendered these quite obsolete. A main change has been, of course, that shifting of the Negro population which has made the Negro problem no longer exclusively or even predominantly Southern. Why should our minds remain sectionalized, when the problem itself no longer is? Then the trend of migration has not only been toward the North and the Central Midwest, but city-ward and to the great centers of industry—the problems of adjustment are new, practical, local and not peculiarly racial. Rather they are an integral part of the large industrial and social problems of our present-day democracy. And finally, with the Negro rapidly in process of class differentiation, if it ever was warrantable to regard and treat the Negro en masse it is becoming with every day less possible, more unjust and more ridiculous.

In the very process of being transplanted, the Negro is becoming transformed.

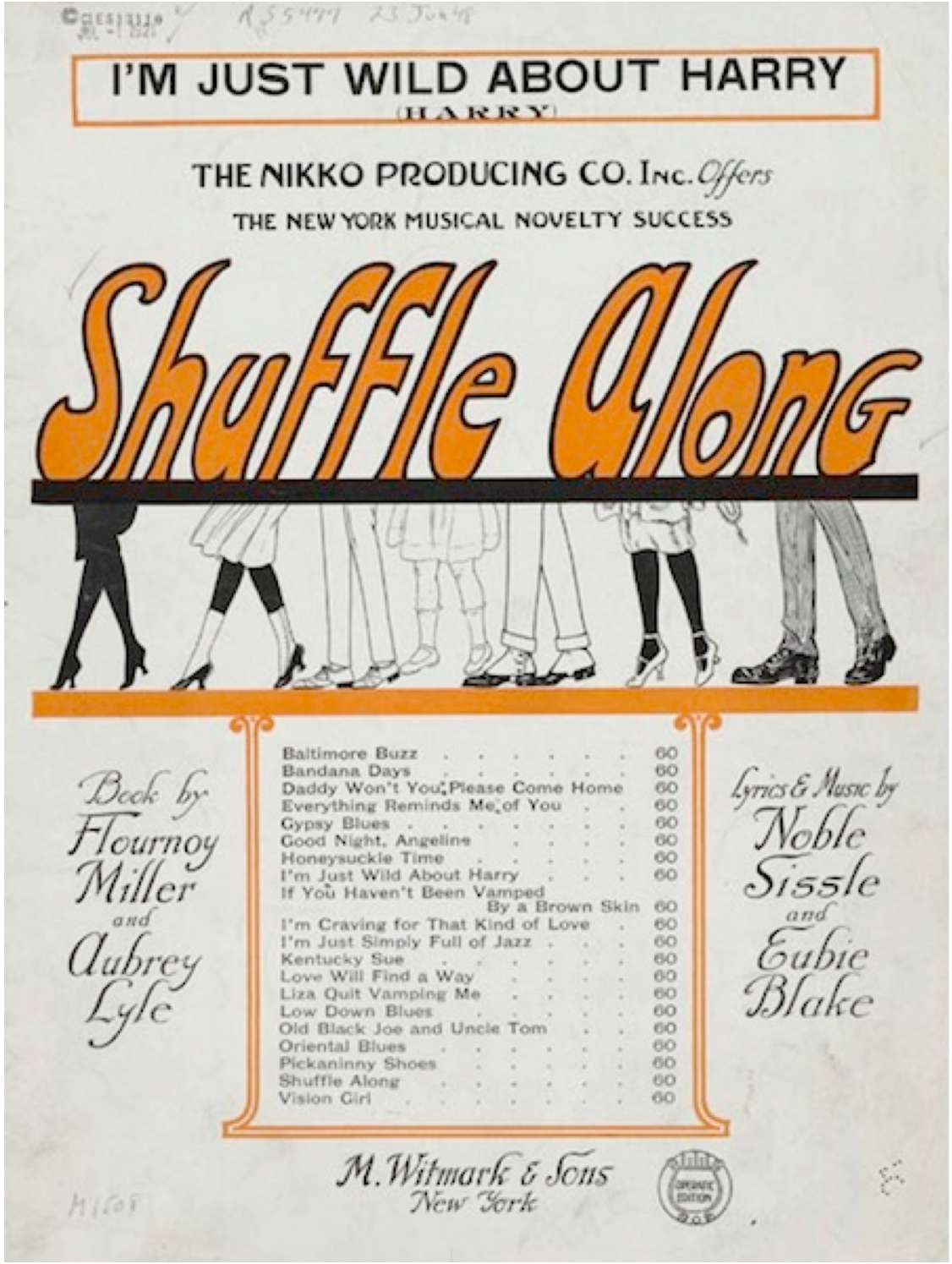
… With each successive wave of it, the movement of the Negro becomes more and more a mass movement toward the larger and the more democratic chance—in the Negro's case a deliberate flight not only from countryside to city, but from medieval America to modern.

A. Locke, “The New Negro”

Fire!! was established by Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, and Wallace Thurman. Edited by Thurman, the first issue included among its contributors the best and the brightest of "younger negro artists," many of whom would become legendary figures in the annals of the Harlem Renaissance. Unfortunately, the quarterly received mixed reviews; younger artists around the country were impressed by its boldness, but the black press and the black middle class thoroughly panned it. (For the first issue, Thurman's editorial comment was titled "Fire Burns") Because of the financial difficulties in bringing Vol. 1, No. 1 to press, it was the only issue ever published. The cover was designed by Aaron Douglas.



Song of the Towers by Aaron Douglas for the mural series Aspects of Negro Life, commissioned in 1934 by the WPA for the Harlem Branch of the New York City Public Library.



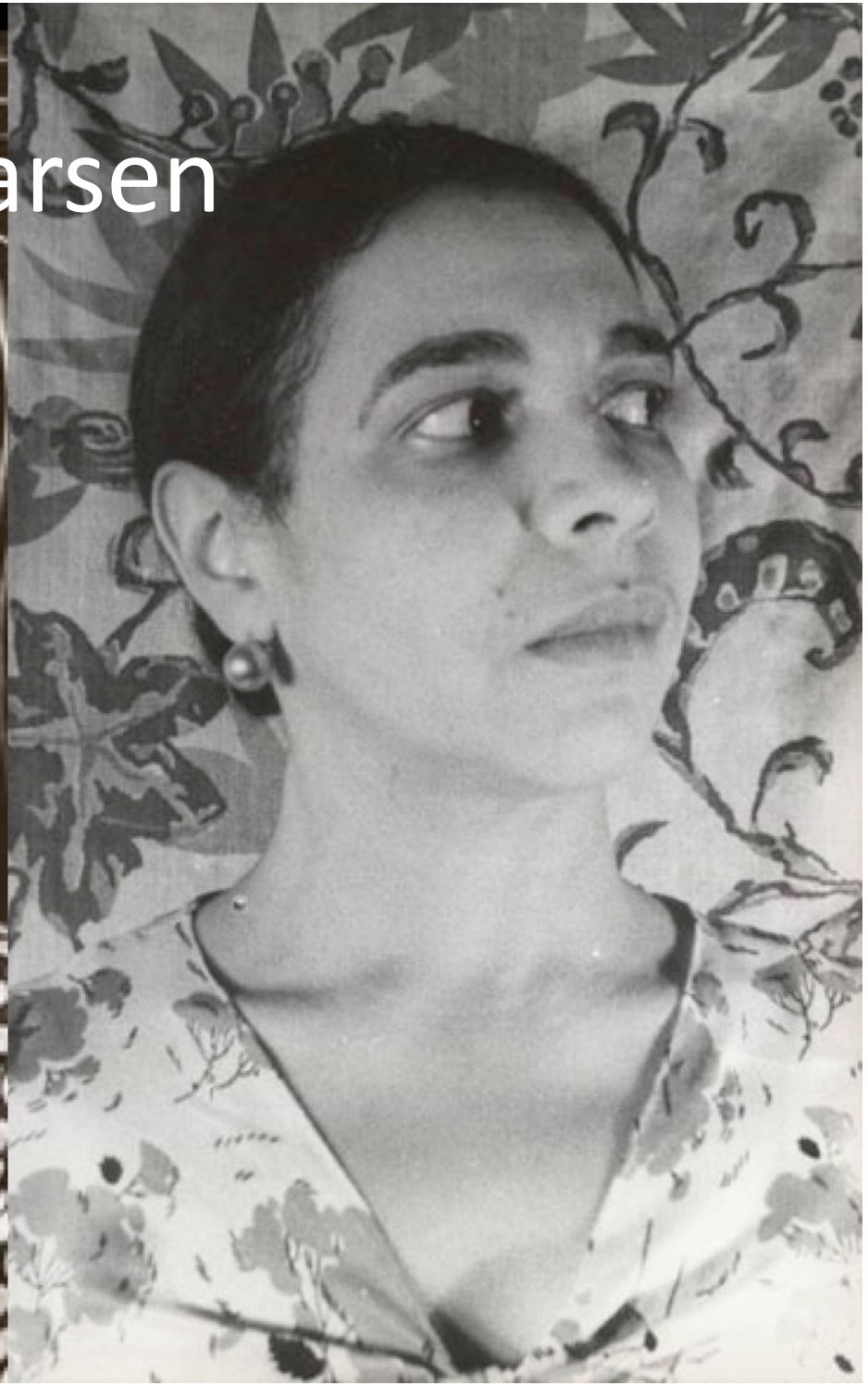
Shuffle Along, a musical play which opened in 1921 and combined jazz music with creatively choreographed jazz dance, transformed musical theater into something new, exciting, and daring and was a seminal event in the emergence of the Harlem Renaissance. It introduced white New Yorkers to black music, theater, and entertainment and helped generate the white fascination with Harlem and the African American arts that was so much a part of the Harlem Renaissance.

Scene from Eubie Blake's
"Shuffle Along Jr.
1928 - 1929
over Keith - Orpheum Circit
featuring Broadway Jones.
Not For
Publication

Marcus Garvey and the Back-to-Africa Movement

Jamaican-born Marcus Garvey was the founder of a political movement, “Garveyism,” that encouraged African American economic and political independence and the unity of all people of African descent. Garvey founded the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) in 1914, as a better alternative for Black people than interracial organizations such as the NAACP, and brought the movement to New York two years later. The movement preached Black Nationalism, which aimed to unite all people of African descent and celebrate the contributions of black leaders and heroes. Garvey believed that blacks would never achieve true freedom while under the control of white Americans. He began advocating for a return of blacks to their African homeland, the only place where they could attain the economic and political independence that would lead to true emancipation. In 1919 he founded the Black Star Line, a shipping company that he hoped would literally transport blacks across the Atlantic back to Africa. At its height, Garveyism was a massively popular movement, particularly among the poorest African Americans.

Nella Larsen



Gladys Bentley

Ethel Waters

Bessie Smith

Within the movement of the Harlem cultural renaissance, black women writers established a variety of alternative possibilities for the fictional representation of black female experience. Zora Neale Hurston chose to represent black people as the rural folk; the folk were represented as being both the source of Afro-American cultural and linguistic forms and the means for its continued existence. Hurston's exploration of sexual and power relations was embedded in this "folk" experience and avoided the cultural transitions and confrontations of the urban displacement. As Hurston is frequently situated as the foremother of contemporary black women writers, the tendency of feminist literary criticism has been to valorize black women as "folk" heroines at the expense of those texts which explored black female sexuality within the context of urban social relations. Put simply, a line of descent is drawn from *Their Eyes Were Watching God* to *The Color Purple*. But to establish the black "folk" as representative of the black community at large was and still is a convenient method for ignoring the specific contradictions of an urban existence in which most of us live. The culture industry, through its valorization in print and in film of *The Color Purple*, for example, can *appear* to comfortably address issues of black female sexuality within a past history and rural context while completely avoiding the crucial issues of black sexual and cultural politics that stem from an urban crisis.

Hazel Carby, "It Jus' Be's Dat Way Sometime: The Sexual Politics of Women's Blues," *Radical America* 20 (1986), 9-22

It has been a mistake of much black feminist theory to concentrate almost exclusively on the visions of black women as represented by black women writers without indicating the limitations of their middle-class response to black women's sexuality. These writers faced a very real contradiction, for they felt that they would publicly compromise themselves if they acknowledged their sexuality and sensuality within a racist sexual discourse, thus providing evidence that indeed they were primitive and exotic creatures. But because black feminist theory has concentrated upon the literate forms of black women's intellectual activity the dilemma of the place of sexuality within a literary discourse has appeared as if it were the dilemma of most black women. On the other hand, what a consideration of women's blues allows us to see is an alternative form of representation, an oral and musical women's culture that explicitly addresses the contradictions of feminism, sexuality, and power. What has been called the "Classic Blues," the women's blues of the twenties and early thirties, is a discourse that articulates a cultural and political struggle over sexual relations: a struggle that is directed against the objectification of female sexuality within a patriarchal order but which also tries to reclaim women's bodies as the sexual and sensuous subjects of women's song.

The figure of the woman blues singer has become a cultural embodiment of social and sexual conflict, from Gayl Jones' novel *Corregidora* to Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*. The women blues singers occupied a privileged space; they had broken out of the boundaries of the home and taken their sensuality and sexuality out of the private into the public sphere. For these singers were gorgeous, and their physical presence elevated them to being referred to as Goddesses, as the high priestesses of the blues, or like Bessie Smith, as the Empress of the blues. Their physical presence was a crucial aspect of their power; the visual display of spangled dresses, of furs, of gold teeth, of diamonds, of all the sumptuous and desirable aspects of their body reclaimed female sexuality from being an objectification of male desire to a representation of female desire.

Bessie Smith wrote about the social criticism that women faced if they broke social convention. "Young Woman's Blues" threads together many of the issues of power and sexuality that have been addressed so far. "Young Woman's Blues" sought possibilities, possibilities that arose from women being on the move and confidently asserting their own sexual desirability.

Zora Neale Hurston

THEIR EYES WERE WATCHING GOD

A NOVEL

ZORA N· HURSTON

Zora and Eatonville

Born on January 15, 1891, in Notasulga, Alabama, from a former slave and a schoolteacher, Hurston moved with her family to Eatonville, Florida, when she was still an infant. Later she claimed she was born in Eatonville in 1901. Established in 1887, Eatonville was the nation's first incorporated black township. As an all-black, apparently independent community, it was the ideal place of birth for Hurston's self-mythology: "I was born in a Negro town. I do not mean by that the black back–side of an average town. Eatonville, Florida, is, and was at the time of my birth, a pure Negro town–charter, mayor, council, town marshal town. It was not the first Negro community in America, but it was the first to be incorporated, the first attempt at organized self-government on the part of Negroes in America." (Hurston, *Dust Tracks on a Road*). Her father, John Hurston, a carpenter, was the minister of one of the two churches in town and the mayor for three terms.

After her mother's death, in 1904, Hurston's life became very difficult. Her father remarried and since she did not get along with her stepmother she went to live with other members of her family and finally started to work as a maid with a theater troupe. In 1917 she was finally able to attend school. After graduation in 1918, she entered Howard University, where she studied with Lorenzo Dow Turner. Hurston also joined a literary club, sponsored by Alain Locke, who encouraged her to publish in Howard University journals. She met other writers–Bruce Nugent, Jean Toomer, Alice Dunbar–Nelson, and Jessie Fauset, among others–who would become part of the core group of the Harlem Renaissance. Her literary career began when she submitted her work to journals and it was accepted. In 1924, she sent a short story, "Drenched in Light," to Charles S. Johnson, the editor of *Opportunity*. The story received the second prize in the annual *Opportunity* literary contest. The subject of "Drenched in Light" is Eatonville, and, according to her biographer Robert Hemenway, this encouraged her to make Eatonville the source of her art. Johnson urged her to move to New York City and by 1925, she found herself living in Harlem.

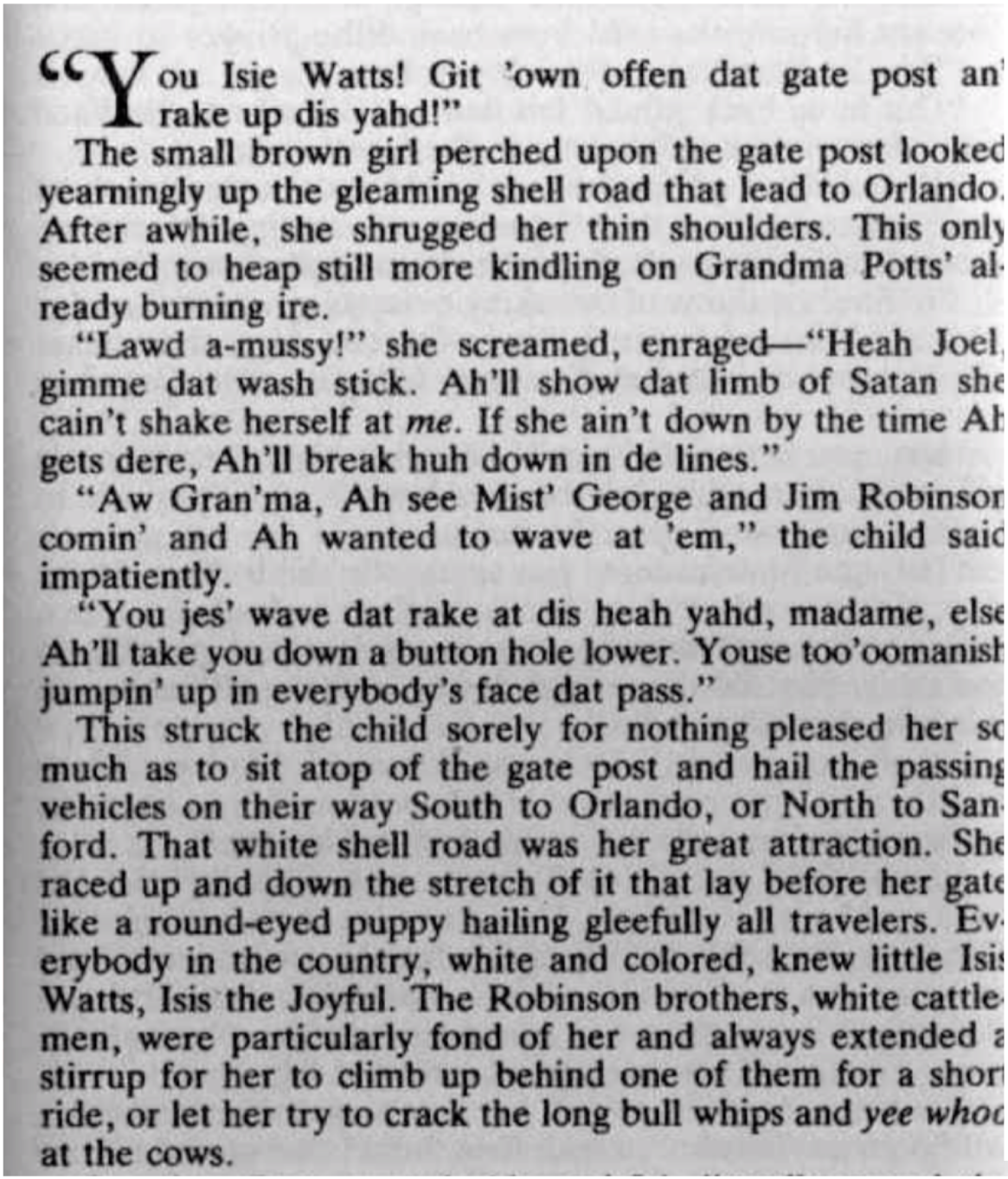
There Hurston met Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, Carl Van Vechten, Fannie Hurst, and Annie Nathan Meyer, a founder of Barnard College, who helped her getting accepted into the college and awarded a scholarship. She began to study anthropology with Franz Boas, the father of modern anthropology, who urged her to do fieldwork in her hometown, in order to preserve African American folk culture.
Her literary and scientific interests merged, as she used her knowledge of the oral culture of Southern blacks as an inspiration for her stories. In 1927, Hurston accepted the aid of Charlotte Osgood Mason, a wealthy white New York woman, who financed her expeditions but wanted the last word on how the material would be used. Hurston interrupted her academic career–although she did graduate from Barnard–but felt free to follow her own unique interest, in spite of a very controversial relationship with Mason. She became intrigued by hoodoo and traveled to New Orleans to see how it was practiced and study the life of the priestess, Marie Leveau.

In 1931 her relationship with Mason deteriorated and Hurston was left without an income while the country was heading towards the Great Depression. After reading her short story “The Gided Six-Bits” publisher Bertram Lippincott wrote to Hurston asking if she had a novel to submit. Hurston replied affirmatively–and then on July 1, 1933, she moved to Sanford, Florida, to write one. She wrote *Jonah's Gourd Vine, which* was published in May 1934. The next year Lippincott published Hurston's book of folk tales, *Mules and Men*. She was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1936 and was able to travel to Jamaica and Haiti. While she was in Haiti she began writing *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. She completed the book in seven weeks and *Their Eyes Were Watching God* was published in 1937. She also continued her anthropological studies in voodoo in Haiti and published *Tell My Horse* in 1938.

After this peak period of creativity, Hurston struggled to survive. She began working for the Works Progress Administration in 1938. This job lasted until 1939, when the WPA was dismantled. Hurston's ideas for new novels were rejected, and she had no more folklore to record. According to Hemenway, "In a sense she was written out."

During the next decade, Hurston made her living by selling occasional articles to popular magazines and working as a maid. Money became a gnawing problem, as well as Hurston's health. She was evicted from her Eau Gallie home in 1956. In the next two years, she was hired as a librarian at Patrick Air Force Base in Cocoa Beach, but fired 11 months later. When she was fired from a substitute teaching position at Lincoln Academy in Ft. Pierce, she couldn't pay her rent. In 1958, Hurston suffered a series of strokes and entered the St. Lucie County Welfare Home. She died on January 28, 1960. Patrick Duval rescued her manuscripts from destruction when her possessions were being burned after her death. She was buried in an unmarked grave at the Garden of Heavenly Rest in Ft. Pierce.

"Drenched in Light," the first of Hurston's stories to be published in a national publication, appeared at the end of 1924 in *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life*, a literary monthly sponsored by the National Urban League.



"You Isie Watts! Git 'own offen dat gate post an' rake up dis yahd!"

The small brown girl perched upon the gate post looked yearningly up the gleaming shell road that lead to Orlando. After awhile, she shrugged her thin shoulders. This only seemed to heap still more kindling on Grandma Potts' already burning ire.

"Lawd a-mussy!" she screamed, enraged—"Heah Joel, gimme dat wash stick. Ah'll show dat limb of Satan she cain't shake herself at *me*. If she ain't down by the time Ah gets dere, Ah'll break huh down in de lines."

"Aw Gran'ma, Ah see Mist' George and Jim Robinson comin' and Ah wanted to wave at 'em," the child said impatiently.

"You jes' wave dat rake at dis heah yahd, madame, else Ah'll take you down a button hole lower. Youse too'oomanish jumpin' up in everybody's face dat pass."

This struck the child sorely for nothing pleased her so much as to sit atop of the gate post and hail the passing vehicles on their way South to Orlando, or North to Sanford. That white shell road was her great attraction. She raced up and down the stretch of it that lay before her gate like a round-eyed puppy hailing gleefully all travelers. Everybody in the country, white and colored, knew little Isis Watts, Isis the Joyful. The Robinson brothers, white cattlemen, were particularly fond of her and always extended a stirrup for her to climb up behind one of them for a short ride, or let her try to crack the long bull whips and *yee whoo* at the cows.

"Drenched in Light" (1924)

"Drenched in Light" reflects Hurston's interest in white consumption of black cultural expression during the HARLEM RENAISSANCE. During this period, African Americans often performed for all white or mostly white audiences throughout the United States. Additionally, white patrons of the arts often supported African-American artists. White patronage and audience influenced the distribution and reception of black cultural expression. While "Drenched in Light" can be read as a coming-of-age story about a young black girl learning to express herself through dance, the politics of race and class serve as an important subtext for this work of short fiction. Hurston's description of locale and her use of DIALECT add a sense of realism to the story. While "Drenched in Light" has not received as much attention as her novels, this short story reveals Hurston's sophisticated awareness about the complex relationships between blacks and whites. This story

to Blue Sink. Isis crawled under the house to brood over the whipping she knew would come. She had meant well.

But sounding brass and tinkling cymbal drew her forth. The local lodge of the Grand United Order of Odd Fellows, led by a braying, thudding band, was marching in full regalia down the road. She had forgotten the barbecue and log-rolling to be held today for the benefit of the new hall.

Music to Isis meant motion. In a minute razor and whipping forgotten, she was doing a fair imitation of a Spanish dancer she had seen in a medicine show some time before. Isis' feet were gifted—she could dance most anything she saw.

Up, up, went her spirits, her small feet doing all sorts of intricate things and her body in rhythm, hand curving above her head. But the music was growing faint. Grandma was nowhere in sight. Isis stole out of the gate, running and dancing after the band.

Not far down the road, Isis stopped. She realized she couldn't dance at the carnival. Her dress was torn and dirty. She picked a long-stemmed daisy, and placed it behind her ear, but her dress remained torn and dirty just the same. Then Isis had an idea. Her thoughts returned to the battered, round-topped trunk back in the bedroom. She raced back to the house; then, happier, she raced down the white dusty road to the picnic grove, gorgeously clad. People laughed good-naturedly at her, the band played and Isis danced because she couldn't help it. A crowd of children

Isis as artist
Imaginative and creative, she needs to express her interiority, while her grandmother wants to limit her life to practicality and domesticity
Poverty does not check Isis's need to dance to music

Misery, misery and woe settled down upon her. The child wept. She knew another whipping was in store.

"Oh, Ah wish Ah could die, then Gran'ma an' papa would be sorry they beat me so much. Ah b'leeve Ah'll run away and never go home no mo'. Ah'm goin' drown mahseff in th' creek!"

Isis got up and waded into the water. She routed out a tiny 'gator and a huge bullfrog. She splashed and sang. Soon she was enjoying herself immensely. The purr of a motor struck her ear and she saw a large, powerful car jolting along the rutty road toward her. It stopped at the water's edge.

"Well, I declare, it's our little gypsy," exclaimed the man at the wheel. "What are you doing here, now?"

"Ah'm killin' mahseff," Isis declared dramatically, "Cause Gran'ma beats me too much."

There was a hearty burst of laughter from the machine.

"You'll last some time the way you are going about it. Is this the way to Maitland? We want to go to the Park Hotel."

Isis saw no longer any reason to die. She came up out of the water, holding up the dripping fringe of the tablecloth.

The door of the car swung open. She was invited to a seat beside the driver. She had often dreamed of riding in one of these heavenly chariots but never thought she would, actually.

"Jump in then, Madame Tragedy, and show us. We lost ourselves after we left your barbecue."

During the drive Isis explained to the kind lady who smelt faintly of violets and to the indifferent men that she was really a princess. She told them about her trips to the horizon, about the trailing gowns, the gold shoes with blue bottoms—she insisted on the blue bottoms—the white charger, the time when she was Hercules and had slain numerous dragons and sundry giants. At last the car approached her gate over which stood the umbrella chinaberry tree. The car was abreast of the gate and had all but passed when Grandma spied her glorious tablecloth lying back against the upholstery of the Packard.

"You Isie-e!" she bawled, "You li'l wretch you! Come heah *dis instant.*"

"That's me," the child confessed, mortified, to the lady on the rear seat.

"Oh Sewell, stop the car. This is where the child lives. I hate to give her up though."

"Do you wanta keep me?" Isis brightened.

"Oh, I wish I could. Wait, I'll try to save you a whipping this time."

Isis the storyteller
White patrons and black artists
Western primitivism at the turn of the twentieth century – interest for non-Western arts and cultures as sources of new energy and inspiration to reinvigorate a stagnant tradition

The white hand closed tightly over the little brown one that was quite soiled. She could understand a voluntary act of love even though it miscarried.

"Now, Mrs. er-er-I didn't get the name—how much did your tablecloth cost?"

"One whole big silvah dollar down at O'landah—ain't had it a week yit."

"Now here's five dollars to get another one. I want her to go to the hotel and dance for me. I could stand a little light today—"

"Oh, yessum, yessum," Grandma cut in, "Everything's alright, sho' she kin go, yessum."

Feeling that Grandma had been somewhat squelched did not detract from Isis' spirit at all. She pranced over to the waiting motor-car and this time seated herself on the rear seat between the sweet-smiling lady and the rather aloof man in gray.

"Ah'm gointer stay wid you all," she said with a great deal of warmth, and snuggled up to her benefactress. "Want me tuh sing a song fuh you?"

"There, Helen, you've been adopted," said the man with a short, harsh laugh.

"Oh, I hope so, Harry." She put her arm about the red-draped figure at her side and drew it close until she felt the warm puffs of the child's breath against her side. She looked hungrily ahead of her and spoke into space rather than to anyone in the car. "I would like just a little of her sunshine to soak into my soul. I would like that alot."

From Richard Wright's review of Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

Miss Hurston can write, but her prose is cloaked i that facile sensuality that has dogged Negro expression since the days of Phillis Wheatley. Her dialogue manages to catch the psychological movements of the Negro folk-mind in their pure simplicity, but that's as far as it goes.

Miss Hurston *voluntarily* continues in her novel the tradition which was *forced* upon the Negro in the theatre, that is, the minstrel technique that makes the "white folks" laugh. Her characters eat and laugh and cry and work and kill; they swing like a pendulum eternally in that safe and narrow orbit in which America likes to see the Negro live: between laughter and tears.

…The sensory sweep of her novel carries no theme, no message, no thought. In the main, her novel is not addressed to the Negro, but to a white audience whose chauvinistic tastes she knows how to satisfy. She exploits that phase of Negro life which is "quaint," the phase which evokes a piteous smile on the lips of the "superior" race.

Hurston's story also offers important commentary on race and class relationships. Isis interacts with a number of white people, including the Robinsons, who pass by, and the group of white people in the car, who are impressed by her. The story offers a look at the relationship between the black artists and their audience, which was often predominantly white and middle class. Helen's interest in Isis as a symbol of youth and energy portrays this relationship between black culture and white American consumers. During the Harlem Renaissance, black artists frequently performed for white audiences who functioned as consumers of black culture, and Helen's desire for Isis's performance reflects this phenomenon.

motorist, despite her grandmother's disapproval. There is no building toward a dramatic climax, and very little plot. The structure of the story is thematic. The point is that Isie, poor and black, is far from tragic; rather, she is "drenched in light," a condition which endears her to everyone, although it presents her grandmother with a discipline problem. Isie is persistently happy, and the implication is that whites suffer from an absence of such joy. Isie's white benefactor ends the story, "I want a little of her sunshine to soak into my soul. I need it."

Hurston may have been manipulating white stereotypes of black people here, but it is not a matter of satire. She remembered Eatonville as a place of great peace and happiness, identifying that happiness as a function of her family and communal existence. "Drenched in Light" refers to this sense of well being, and it repudiates any stereotyped notion that Zora Neale Hurston was a tragically deprived black child, subject to any "mark of oppression" or self-hate. Coming at the start of her literary career, in her first nationally published story, it was her manifesto of selfhood, an affirmation of her origins.

Robert E. Hemenway
Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Biography

Zora Neale Hurston's first significant publication, the short story "Drenched in Light," which appeared in *Opportunity* in December 1924, was autobiographical in more ways than one. Hurston had written into the story her past as a girl in Eatonville, Florida, and she had given to her protagonist, Isie Watts, a set of habits and aspirations she would later describe as her own.[1] But she could not have known when she wrote the story how much the conclusion would come to seem autobiographical as well. The way that Isie is picked up and cosseted by a patronizing white traveler oddly predicts the way that Hurston herself, arriving in New York hard on the heels of "Drenched in Light," was virtually adopted, first by Fannie Hurst and then by the grimly philanthropic Mrs. Charlotte Osgood Mason.[2]

Though Hurston could not have foreseen this turn of events, she must have known that white exploitation of African-American folkways was the subject of lively complaint in the press that published her story. In the review of *Cane* that *Opportunity* published in December 1923, Montgomery Gregory complained that black middle-class abhorrence of "mass life" had "enabled the white artist to exploit the Negro race for personal recognition or commercial gain."[3] A few months after "Drenched in Light" was published, Charles Johnson noted in an *Opportunity* editorial, "The first significant exploitation of the materials of Negro life has come not from Negro but from white writers."[4] Surrounded by such editorial comment, "Drenched in Light" could easily have been read as a fictional account of the way that all the best of black life was picked off by white romantics on the prowl. It would have appeared, that is to say, as the other side of the story told in Waldo Frank's "Hope," the story of interracial transfusion told over and over again in the white avant-garde press of the early 1920s.

Michael North, *The Dialect of Modernism: Race, Language, and Twentieth-century Literature* (1994)

Marianna Torgovnick, *Gone Primitive: Savage Intellects, Modern Lives* (1990):

The Primitivist Discourse

To study the primitive is thus to enter an exotic world which is also a familiar world. That world is structured by sets of images and ideas that have slipped from their original metaphoric status to control perceptions of primitives—images and ideas that I call tropes.[16] Primitives are like children, the tropes say. Primitives are our untamed selves, our id forces—libidinous, irrational, violent, dangerous. Primitives are mystics, in tune with nature, part of its harmonies. Primitives are free. Primitives exist at the "lowest cultural levels"; we occupy the "highest," in the metaphors of stratification and hierarchy commonly used by Malinowski and others like him. The ensemble of these tropes—however miscellaneous and contradictory—forms the basic grammar and vocabulary of what I call primitivist discourse, a discourse fundamental to the Western sense of self and Other.[17]

Langston Hughes

“The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain” (1926)

One of the most promising of the young Negro poets said to me once, "I want to be a poet--not a Negro poet," meaning, I believe, "I want to write like a white poet"; meaning subconsciously, "I would like to be a white poet"; meaning behind that, "I would like to be white." And I was sorry the young man said that, for no great poet has ever been afraid of being himself. And I doubted then that, with his desire to run away spiritually from his race, this boy would ever be a great poet. But this is the mountain standing in the way of any true Negro art in America--this urge within the race toward 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.

But let us look at the immediate background of this young poet. His family is of what I suppose one would call the Negro middle class: people who are by no means rich yet never uncomfortable nor hungry--smug, contented, respectable folk, members of the Baptist church. The father goes to work every morning. He is a chief steward at a large white club. The mother sometimes does fancy sewing or supervises parties for the rich families of the town. The children go to a mixed school. In the home they read white papers and magazines. And the mother often says "Don't be like niggers" when the children are bad. A frequent phrase from the father is, "Look how well a white man does things." And so the word white comes to be unconsciously a symbol of all virtues. It holds for the children beauty, morality, and money. The whisper of "I want to be white" runs silently through their minds. This young poet's home is, I believe, a fairly typical home of the colored middle class. One sees immediately how difficult it would be for an artist born in such a home to interest himself in interpreting the beauty of his own people. He is never taught to see that beauty. He is taught rather not to see it, or if he does, to be ashamed of it when it is not according to Caucasian patterns.

Most of my own poems are racial in theme and treatment, derived from the life I know. In many of them I try to grasp and hold some of the meanings and rhythms of jazz. I am as sincere as I know how to be in these poems and yet after every reading I answer questions like these from my own people: Do you think Negroes should always write about Negroes? I wish you wouldn't read some of your poems to white folks. How do you find anything interesting in a place like a cabaret? Why do you write about black people? You aren't black. What makes you do so many jazz poems?

But jazz to me is one of the inherent expressions of Negro life in America; the eternal tom-tom beating in the Negro soul--the tom-tom of revolt against weariness in a white world, a world of subway trains, and work, work, work; the tom-tom of joy and laughter, and pain swallowed in a smile. Yet the Philadelphia clubwoman is ashamed to say that her race created it and she does not like me to write about it, The old subconscious "white is best" runs through her mind. Years of study under white teachers, a lifetime of white books, pictures, and papers, and white manners, morals, and Puritan standards made her dislike the spirituals. And now she turns up her nose at jazz and all its manifestations--likewise almost everything else distinctly racial. She doesn't care for the Winold Reiss' portraits of Negroes because they are "too Negro." She does not want a true
picture of herself from anybody. She wants the artist to flatter her, to make the white world believe that all negroes are as smug and as near white in soul as she wants to be. But, to my mind, it is the duty of the younger Negro artist, if he accepts any duties at all from outsiders, to change through the force of his art that old whispering "I want to be white," hidden in the aspirations of his people, to "Why should I want to be white? I am a Negro--and beautiful"?

Mother to Son

BY LANGSTON HUGHES

Well, son, I'll tell you:
Life for me ain't been no crystal stair.
It's had tacks in it,
And splinters,
And boards torn up,
And places with no carpet on the floor—
Bare.
But all the time
I'se been a-climbin' on,
And reachin' landin's,
And turnin' corners,
And sometimes goin' in the dark
Where there ain't been no light.
So boy, don't you turn back.
Don't you set down on the steps
'Cause you finds it's kinder hard.
Don't you fall now—
For I'se still goin', honey,
I'se still climbin',
And life for me ain't been no crystal stair.

Harlem

BY LANGSTON HUGHES

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up
like a raisin in the sun?
Or fester like a sore—
And then run?
Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over—
like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags
like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?

Hughes conceived "Harlem" as one part of a longer, book-length sequence of poems exploring black life in Harlem. Hughes eventually titled this book *Montage of a Dream Deferred* (1951)