

# Rural to Urban: Southern Roots in Harlem

Rachel Bowden, Hunter Er-  
tel, Carolyn Schaeffer, Kyle  
Wong

## An Introduction to Southern Roots in Harlem

When a large portion of the black community shifted from rural South to urban North during the Harlem Renaissance, deeply rooted Southern traditions stayed alive in the race as a whole and were expressed in various ways in everyday life. This exhibit will examine how southern heritage shone through the some of the most famous works of the Harlem Renaissance artists, poets, and writers.


The first wing of the exhibit is labeled “Southern Oppression,” and this wing surveys how oppression, prejudice, and discrimination in the south was a driving force behind many of the works from this time period. Paintings by artist Aaron Douglas’ series *Aspects of Negro Life* observe the life of blacks who live in the deep south, and Douglas combines images from slavery and the Reconstruction era swirling them into the same ground as images of contemporary Harlem, to convey his message. Jacob Lawrence uses his *Migration Series* to show the huge cultural shift the United States experienced during WWI, when tens of thousands of African American migrate from the south to northern urban areas, such as Chicago, Philadelphia, and of course, Harlem. Through his paintings, he attempts to explain why they were all leaving the south. This wing also looks at the literary works produced during this time period which had subject matter dealing directly with southern history, the Great Migration, and embracing the history of blacks in Africa. Carter G. Woodson reflects on how the migration of the “Talented Tenth” is in some ways hurting the race, and Arthur A. Schomburg explains that in order for blacks to progress in America, they must learn their past, be proud of everything their race has accomplished – and suffered for. Nella Larsen’s *Quicksand* is dissected and her musings on the south come through in the story around Helga Crane, the main character. Two of the most famous poets of the period, Langston Hughes and Sterling Brown, reflect on the history of mistreatment towards blacks in the south, and in the world as a whole.

The Natural wing of the Southern Roots of the Harlem Renaissance museum seeks to explore the ways in which the rural informs the urban and asks if it is possible to consider the urban without first examining what ways it is in dialogue with the pastoral. Langston Hughes’ *The Negro Speaks of Rivers*, coupled with Lois Mailou Jones’ painting *The Ascent of Ethiopia* displays the ways in which the tracing of the roots of African-Americans to the natural can be understood in the metaphor of the river. Aaron Douglas’ two paintings depict the African-American in the South, and the African in Africa, exploring the role of the black in the natural. Jean Toomer two poems (*Georgia Dusk* and *Song of Son*) as well as his excerpt from *The New Negro* show the spiritual nature of the black subject in the natural, and how the natural environment affects the black artist. *Song*


*of Son* also displays how the natural element that nourishes can also bring pain and suffering. Painting nine and thirteen from Jacob Lawrence's *Great Migration* series of paintings continues to explore this issue of the pain of tracing ones roots back to the natural to find meaning, for the realm of the natural can be harsh. Finally Leonard Diepeveen's excerpt from *Folktales in the Harlem Renaissance* is a scholarly look at how the way of interpreting the world that is the folk tale, a tradition originating from an oral culture in closer connection with their natural environment, continued to inform black writers throughout the Harlem Renaissance.

Through out the Harlem Renaissance Jazz music played an important role in fast growing nightlife and opportunities for African Americans. This was their first big impact on the world and it was the rest of the world who was listening to their music and performing their dance routines. Jazz was originally born in the south in the same place that was born the greatest jazz musician of the world, Louis Armstrong. However, it was not the South that transformed Jazz into the sensation of the 1920s but New York and more specifically Harlem. These images from the wing of my exhibition show how many different artists depicted the jazz scene in Harlem. Many of the quotes are helpful in understanding that the nightclubs attracted more than just clean socializing and dancing but also were a place for the gamblers, bootleggers and many other kinds of people. Jazz music was not only fun but also a lifestyle to many who were determined to make a name for them selves. The poem chosen describes the performers who were lusted after by the men and looked as slutty to some women. The paintings chosen depict the success of African Americans with their own race as well as the opposite race though some images of clubs in Harlem were seen as welcoming while others were looking for a certain kind of person to enter. Some images don't give credit to African Americans like it should they all share the common theme of progression of the black community.

Theater and art were great tools that helped audiences across the globe understand the struggles the race had historically, the messages they wished to convey to the white population, and the talent they carried on and off stage. The transition from South to North presented blacks with a completely new environment with more opportunities than they could have imagined, but one of the reasons they gained popularity was because of their capacity to create a Southern environment on stage and on canvas'. By creating plays and artwork that dealt with issues such as race and identity, blacks in Harlem not only educated themselves but developed a new sense of value to the white community. Through examining some of the plays, performers, paintings, photographs, and literary works of the time we can clearly understand how Southern roots were expressed in the urban environment that was Harlem, and we can better apprehend what exactly it was they strived to express in terms of what it meant to be black during the Harlem Renaissance. For one of the first times in history, being black and



expressing deep Southern hardships gained recognition and not punishment—creating some of the most famous stars of all time who successfully shared their stories to audiences everywhere.



We hope that you enjoy all of what this wing has to offer, and take the time to think about how each wings connects to the other, and realize just how important the history of the South was in forming the Harlem Renaissance.

## Southern Oppression

In this section of the catalogue we're going to look at several different images and sections of text produced by artists and writers of the Harlem Renaissance. In each work, we will be examining how the artist or writer connected the somewhat recent history of African-Americans – slavery and up through the Reconstruction period – to the social movement that was happening in urban areas, most notably Harlem, at the time. The south and Harlem are very connected, especially considering that one of the largest reasons for the Harlem Renaissance occurring was the Great Migration, where thousands of African-Americans left their lives in the rural south in the hopes of starting anew in the developing northern cities, places where they thought they had more opportunity. Each artist and writer creatively linked the past and their culture's roots in the south to the present in their work, and it resulted in some of the finest artwork and literature from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The first piece we see here is a painting from Aaron Douglas' *Aspects of Negro Life* series, titled *An Idyll of the Deep South*. The images in the painting conjure up thoughts of slavery, which is expected, but the figures

we see who are working the fields also represent blacks in the Reconstruction era, in times where blacks would partake in sharecropping for white land owners, and where some blacks would also own their own farm land that they would attempt to live off of. There is also a group of blacks huddled together



in the center of the painting, seen playing various instruments and singing to each other. Assuming the time period, one could probably infer that these men were singing some of the earliest forms of blues music, which grew and evolved in the south and then became particularly popular during the Harlem Renaissance. Douglas was also trying to show how in the past, slaves would often unite over music, and that tradition of blacks uniting over music held true for Douglas' time. In the 1920's and 30's, blacks in urban areas, and Harlem in particular, would socialize over blues and jazz music at cabarets and clubs. And making the connections of the two time periods even stronger was the fact that much of the blues music played in those cabarets and clubs harkened back to the history of African-Americans in the deep south.

Continuing in Douglas' *Aspects of Negro Life* series, his painting *Slavery Through Reconstruction* is

another piece of work that linked the cultural movement amongst African-Americans in the 20's and 30's to slavery and the Reconstruction period, and this particular painting shows a panoramic spectrum that appears to be a microcosm of the times. As the eye moves from left to right, and the timeline moves from slavery through to the Harlem Renaissance, at the very left we see slaves picking cotton and working the fields, and Klansmen riding their horses behind them. This particular part of the image could also be interpreted as representing the Reconstruction Era, when many blacks in the south still worked the lands under sharecropping agreements with white land owners, along with the Klan becoming a stronger presence in the south during this time, constantly harassing and murdering blacks. As the painting continues on a chronological line towards the right, there is a preacher in the middle with several listeners looking up towards him, and it can be assumed that his message is trying to uplift his audience, encour-



aging them to make a better life for themselves and as the painting moves past the preacher, present day Harlem enters the painting, where we see jazz musicians, ballet dancers, and people dancing in the background. As the painting moves from slavery towards Harlem, the cotton plants on the foreground of the painting dwindle until there are none on the left side, symbolic of African-Americans trying to shed their painful past as they move forward. And this painting as a whole successfully shows how the culture of blacks in America has dramatically evolved in such a short period of time. During the days of slavery, blacks weren't even treated as humans, and then during Reconstruction, they were so harshly discriminated against (and incessantly harassed by the Klan) in the south that it was near impossible to create a life. However, leaders emerged (such as the preacher in the painting), and their message was able to uplift blacks in America, and it sparked a cultural movement that exploded in Harlem and would change America.

Jacob Lawrence was another artist who gained fame during this period for his series of paintings titled *The Migration Series*. One of them most famous paintings from this series was Panel #1, which depicted masses of black people in a train station filing under one of 3 separate gates. Each gate was a train to a different city, and the 3 cities that these southern blacks were traveling to were New York City, Chicago, and St. Louis. Now, it isn't specified where these travelers are departing from, however it is assumed that these are all blacks from the south who are migrating north looking for greater opportunities in the hopes of starting a new and better life.





This is a clear representation of the Great Migration, and it another work from the Harlem Renaissance showcasing just how important and interconnected the south was with blacks who had migrated north, and it shows in these works of art.

Another famous panel from Lawrence's migration series was Panel #15, which depicted a black man sitting, slumped over on a rock in front of a tree where a noose was hanging from a single branch. This is a man who in all likelihood lost

a family member, a dear friend to a lynching by white southerners, and he is now left mourning at the site where the atrocity was committed. Lynchings were still a problem in the south all the way up and through the time period of the Harlem Renaissance, and this issue was reflected in art, literature, and essays. This particular painting shows the despair of the families who lose loved ones to brutal lynchings, which are a direct product of white racism, prejudice, and hatred. This painting is a sad reminder that no matter how greatly some blacks may be progressing in the north, in such cities as Harlem, many are still withheld of their constitutional rights and are victims of racism, discrimination, and murder in the south.



Another famous painter from this era was William H. Johnson, and one of his most notable works was one titled *Chain Gang*. The title is self-descriptive, the image shows three black men in stereotypical black and



white striped prison garb, all chained together and holding shovels and pick axes and working the on the road. These "chain gangs" of prisoners working on public roads were quite prevalent in the south during this particular time period. As it was in the south, prejudice and racism towards blacks was still a problem, and often times a black man could be wrongly imprisoned and unfairly sentenced. And once in prison they were usually mistreated, and were usually the ones to end up working long hours on these chain gangs. Johnson was from South Carolina, and like many other artists from this era who had ties to the south, his

southern heritage finds its way into his work.

During the Harlem Renaissance there were dozens of black intellectuals who took it upon themselves to reflect on this cultural movement, and it resulted in some of the finest works of literature, essays, and social commentaries from the time period. One such essay was Carter G. Woodson's *The Migration of the Talented Tenth*. In this essay Woodson reflects on the great influx of southern blacks migrating north towards urban areas (some of the most popular cities being Harlem, Philadelphia, and Chicago) due to social prejudice, debt and other forms of discrimination. He continues to dissect why so many blacks are moving and also examines the cultural and socioeconomic make-up of these migrants. Carter observes that many once powerful black politicians from the south have gone north seeking to escape the racism and prejudice of the south and also move forward in their career in politics have not found success, they are instead utilized as messengers, clerks, and employed in various other positions requiring little to no skill or education. There were also educated blacks from the south who migrated north looking for employment suiting their skills, and hoping that race wouldn't play a factor and they too found little success. Many were forced to work jobs as, "waiters, porters, butlers, and chauffeurs (Woodson, 7)." Woodson believes that these more subtle forms of racism are due to the fact that blacks have no "constituency" in the north (Woodson, 9). And according to Woodson, this great migration hurts the race as a whole because as blacks in the north are not able to progress in their menial jobs, many of the uneducated blacks who remain in the south are being taken advantage of by, "unscrupulous Negroes," and "ill-devising white men," in various scams (Woodson, 9). In this essay Woodson comments on the struggles the race endures, and yet he doesn't pose any clear solution on how blacks can move progress in the north or south. This is still a very well crafted essay, and it points out many of the subtle injustices against blacks that most Americans probably never realized, and this essay served as a means to call out those employers who were stifling the constitutional rights of the "Talented Tenth," those black intellectuals who deserved to use their education and intelligence for the good of their work.

Another important essay from the Harlem Renaissance is a piece by Arthur A. Schomburg, titled, *The Negro Digs Up His Past*. In it Schomburg clearly states his thesis in the first sentence, writing, "The American negro must remake his past in order to make his future (Schomburg, 61)." Schomburg writes that slavery destroyed much of the history of the black race in America, and that the current generation of blacks – both the working class and the intellectuals – need to take it upon themselves to recover that history. There is a deep, rich history of blacks in America, and the current generation needs to learn about their past and use it as evidence that as they move forward they will achieve great things. Schomburg looks at the work of such revered



black intellectuals such as Abbe Gregoire, Jupiter Hammon, John Baptist Phillips, and the better-known figures such as Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman, and Sojourner Truth, citing these as primary examples of black history. Schomburg also goes on reflecting about how many black intellectuals are separated from their race as outliers, and in order to disprove this notion (a notion primarily conceived by whites) the current generation needs to discover their own history, use the examples he mentioned, and prove that they are equal to all races. This essay was important for its time because of the message it was trying to convey. The positive message, encouraging blacks to be proud of their race, to make a difference, to prove all of their qualities and intelligence, it had to have resonated with many black American, particularly young adults, those who would aspire to become educated and make a difference in their community.

The Harlem Renaissance became known as one of the greatest literary time periods of the 20<sup>th</sup> century due to its literature and poetry, and perhaps the most famous, most recognizable poet to come from this era was Langston Hughes. Langston was the author of hundreds of poems and dozens of essays, and one of his most famous poems from the Harlem Renaissance was the poem *Negro*. This poem traces the roots of black history in Africa and links it to black history in the American south, during the times of slavery and reconstruction. Hughes writes with honesty, recalling slavery in his lines, “I’ve been a slave: Caesar told me to keep his doorsteps clean. I brushed the boots of Washington (Hughes, 262).” Hughes also speaks of the brutal victimization of blacks, writing, “I’ve been a victim: The Belgians cut off my hands in the Congo. They lynch me still in Mississippi (Hughes, 262).” And in more subtle lines, Hughes still comes back to the south, saying, “I’ve been a singer: All the way from Africa to Georgia I carried my sorrow songs. I made ragtime (Hughes, 262).” In this poem Hughes connects the history of blacks in Africa to the history of blacks in America, showing how each history is important to each other, and how the history of both are particularly important to the issues that blacks in America were facing during his time period. Hughes is pointing out the black race will forever be rooted in the Africa, in the south, in oppression and in victimization, and that blacks must still be proud of their history, because it has shaped who they are in the present.

Another popular poet from the Harlem Renaissance was Sterling Brown, and he wrote many of his poems in a similar style to Langston Hughes, writing about the struggles of the common folk, about his race's history in the south. One of his most popular poems was *Remembering Nat Turner*, which was a poem where Brown took on the perspectives of both black and white alike, with each recollection of Nat Turner and slave rebellion being drastically different. The present day black folks from the town where Nat escaped from don't seem to know much about him, and according to one fellow, “The old folks who coulda told you is all dead an’

gone (Brown, 236).” Yet when the narrator of this poem runs into an old white woman in the town, she claims to recall just exactly how Nat escaped. She greatly exaggerates the story, even telling outright lies (which the narrator acknowledges and then retorts with the truth in parentheses. The message here is that Nat seems to be a bigger figure towards white people in the south as opposed to blacks, and the whites will forever link Nat Turner and his rebellion to blacks in the south, even in present day where he is barely acknowledged by blacks. This mental connection by whites plays into the prejudices they hold towards blacks in present day as well.

One of the most popular books of the Harlem Renaissance was Nella Larsen’s *Quicksand*. Larsen’s story follows the life of Helga Crane, a lonely, single black woman who is trying to find her way, to find a life that will make her happy. Her travels to find this life include Tennessee, Chicago, Harlem, and Denmark, and while she does have fleeting moments of happiness, lasting happiness is something that always escapes her, as the story ends with Helga once again stuck in a marriage with a man she does not love, and life in which she finds no excitement, no happiness. And while a majority of this story does take place in urban areas like Chicago and Harlem, it begins and ends in the south. Helga is introduced as an unhappy teacher at a prestigious preparatory school for blacks in Naxos, Tennessee. Helga despises everything that the school represents, as she believes that it suppresses the true creative talents of its students, the school discourages the students from thinking freely, and she believes the school trains the students to be submissive – particularly towards whites – and it molds them into ordinary people. At the end of the novel, Larsen marries a southern black preacher and she moves to the Deep South with him into a poor community. At first she is optimistic that she can help improve the town by teaching the children, but very quickly does that optimism pass and she again finds herself unhappy with her life, fantasizing about leaving, but she never does. The point Larsen is trying to make here is that the south still has a long way to come in terms of eliminating racism and prejudice, particularly in state-funded organizations and other public settings, such as this fictional school.

To conclude, the Harlem Renaissance and the history of African-Americans in the Deep South will always be connected, because so many of the creators of this period had southern roots, their southern heritage shined through in a majority of their work. Blues, poetry that connected and resonated with the black working class (and on a more subtle level it harkened back to days of slavery and sharecropping), literature showcasing the plight of African-Americans, and essays examining the cultural differences of America; black southern heritage was a huge factor in all of these mediums, and it was a major reason that so much of the art and literature that came from this period was so powerful.

## Traces of the Natural in the Harlem Renaissance

When looking at the ways in which humanity encounters the natural, the roaring scene of early 20<sup>th</sup> century Harlem (complete with all the amenities an urban space can provide, from the supposed moral decrepitude of the speak-easy to the monument to learning that is the public library) seems far removed from any forest or pastoral landscape. Yet the Harlem Renaissance (which for the purposes of this essay is to be defined broadly, beginning with the migration of African-Americans to the urban north in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and culminating in the 1940s) is rooted in the rural south and the bucolic life, and in many ways uses these locations to trace back the heritage of African-American peoples to find meaning. Though it might seem that African-American writers of this time and place would reject the natural as being tied to the oppression of life in the Southern United States, rather it seems many treat it with nostalgia and wistfulness. We can find this through the work of poets and painters of the movement including but not limited to Jean Toomer, Langston Hughes, Aaron Douglas, and Jacob Lawrence.

The poet Jean Toomer is one whose work has a melancholy reaction to the rural environment. Although he was born in the city of Washington DC, after spending a few weeks in rural Georgia he was opened up to the romance of the pastoral life; “Georgia opened me,” he wrote in Locke’s *The New Negro*. “I received my initial impulse to an individual art form from my experience there.... There one finds soil... the soil of every art and literature that is to live must be embodied in” (Lewis 300-301). This soil of which every art and literature grown from would be a source of disconnect for the African-American artist or writer born in the rural setting now making an abode in New York, causing nostalgia and longing. Toomer’s poem *Song of the Son* grasps for some of this soil. He writes:

O land and soil, red soil and sweet-gum tree,  
So scant of grass, so profligate of pines,  
Now just before an epoch’s sun declines  
Thy son, in time, I have returned to thee,  
Thy son, I have in time returned to thee. (Lewis 301)

Yet this clinging for the life-giving soil is not without bitterness. This poem also deals with coming from a heritage of slavery, and the loss of the trial of such an ordeal. He writes “An everlasting song, a singing tree,/ caroling softly sounds of slavery,/ What they were, and what they are to me/ caroling softly sounds of slavery” (Lewis 301). The soil which births art and literature, that which imbues life with meaning, also births pain and toil. Yet the fertility of the soil image is not lost, for what is carrying out the everlasting song? It is “One plum

was saved for me, one seed” (Lewis 301). This is the narrator’s son, who despite the hardship of life and the pain and anguish of his state, will still become near-eternal within the soils fertility- reaching out through the ages in the human succession. Toomer mixes this nostalgia and longing for the rural south with bitterness from the experience of slavery in his poem *Georgia Dusk*. Here he writes of a barbecue beneath the sticky hot Georgia twilight, and the dramatized scene going around it. Here nature is mixed with religion, such as in this scene:

High-priests, an ostrich, and a ju-ju man,  
Go singing through the footpaths of the swamp.

Their strumming voices rise... the pine trees are guitars,  
Strumming, pine-needles fall like sheets of rain...  
Their voices rise... the chorus of the cane  
Is caroling a vesper to the stars. (Lewis 302)

The works of the religious men, their chants and enchantments, are tied to their environment, and indeed are used only to give it greater glory and sing its praises. It is interesting that both of his poems return to the idea of the carol. This type of music is quite different then that traditionally associated with the Harlem Renaissance, and has a whole different set of connotations then music like Jazz more traditionally associated with the Renaissance. The carol is a more historical form of music and looks back at the past of African-Americans while Jazz embraces the present and future.

The embracing of the past, the rural and wooded roots of African-Americans and their African ancestors can be traced, like so many other forms of art can be traced through the stories they tell. Folklore was not absent from the Harlem Renaissance, but may seem like an odd bedfellow for such a modernist movement. Still even the modern is informed by what came before it, and folklore permeated the spirit of the Renaissance. Leonard Diepeveen notes in his article *Folktales in the Harlem Renaissance* that

“During the Harlem Renaissance the “rediscovery” of black culture seems to promise a celebration of folktales that Blacks had inherited from reconstruction and slavery. The earlier rejuvenation of spirituals, the other great component of Black folk tradition, offered an apparent analogy. Folktales and spirituals were the two most widely known black folk expressions... and both ... initially found little acceptance by Black intellectuals or the Black middle class. But in the Years after the successful Fisk Jubilee Singers toured the Northern States and Europe (1871-1878), major writers in their book *The Crisis* gave spirituals universal praise and much attention so that by the time of the Harlem Renaissance formed the centerpiece of black cultural pride. Outward signs encouraged a similarly eager appropriation of the folktale tradition...” (64)

One example of this is Toomer’s text *Cane* which often flirts with Southern Folklore, and is the collection where the two poems above were first published. Many scholars have noted the myths within *Cane*. Charles

W. Scruggs “gives the quest for meaning a mythic slant by imputing the connection between Cain, the biblical castaway, and the subject of Toomer’s work” (Akoma 114). He writes “Toomer uses Cain as a symbol of the African in a hostile land, a slave without enjoying her fruits” (Akoma 114). Indeed it seems that within *Cane* the use of folklore and myth is doing the work of trying to bring the African-American to some earlier beginning or origin of meaning. Janet M. Whyde, for example, argues that the search for meaning in the text goes on through the subject of the female body. She writes “the woman’s body is continually transformed into poem... / songs in such a way that it becomes the narrative direct link to the African-Americans origins” (Akoma 114). This would imbue the African-American body then with a sense of the mythical, as part of the land with deep roots, rather than recent immigrants. This is not to say however that the Harlem Renaissance did not belong where it happened, for as Jean Toomer wrote in *Cane*, “The Negro has found his roots. He is in fruitful contact with his ancestry. He takes part in an uninterrupted stream of energy. He is moved by the vital deterrents of racial heritage. And something of their spirit now moves within him. He is about to harvest whatever the past has stored, good and evil. He is about to be released from an unconscious and negative concern with it” (Akoma 113). It is just important to remember just how very far back these roots go; back to a state of nature.

Another poet from the Harlem Renaissance who captures the depth of these roots is Langston Hughes. His poem *The Negro Speaks of Rivers* is similar in project to *Cane*, for it is an attempt to trace back his bearings to some earlier state of being in order to find meaning outside of the entrapment of the industrial West. It also has many of the same spiritual undertones that Toomer has. Hugh’s writes:

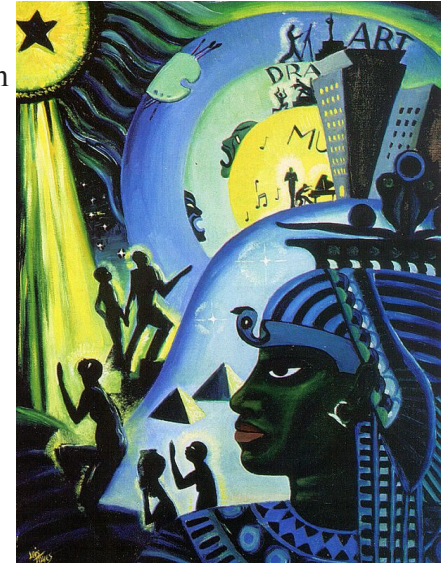
I’ve known rivers:  
I’ve known rivers ancient as the world and older than the flow  
of human blood in human veins.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers. (Lewis 257)

The association between spirituality and river is an old one, and not unfounded, for the river provides nourishment for those who seek life. They also literally can be traced back into the geography, into the land, in order to better know it and live on it. Because of this the river is a completely appropriate symbol for the way a Harlem Renaissance writer might want to trace back their belonging to a before time. Hughes poem explores this tracing back to meaning well because the rivers he lists his soul growing in do the tracing. He starts with the Euphrates, the mythical (note the use of myth being used to find origin in nature) boundary between life and death and first entering into the world and consciousness. He then moves on to the Congo and the Nile, the rivers in Africa where the narrator of the poem builds a home and establishes civilization by erecting pyramids. While



the image of a hut on the Congo may contradict heavily from the skyscrapers of New York that so much of the Harlem Renaissance took place in, is it not impossible to romanticize those beginnings as a time before oppression when real freedom, not just the opportunity to vote- freedom to run and do what you want, was possible. He then takes us to the Mississippi river at New Orleans from the feral to the pastoral. It is a meaningful history that Hughes presents through the river and establishes the natural as a source for meaning, even for a modern urbanite writer. Hughes is not the only Harlem Renaissance writer to realize the symbolic power of the river for use in tracing African Americans back to the natural. Lois Mailou Jones' painting *The Ascent of Ethiopia* displays the river as ancient and mystical, as Hughes does. Her river flows from the headdress of a pharaoh, like Hughes' pyramids, tying the African-American back to the ancient and powerful. Her river also flows into a mystical scene of people in worship of the heavens signifying the spiritual nourishment the river provides as well as its physical nourishment. From the river springs spheres of culture (music, drama, art) reminding us that these things are nourished by the river and not the other way around.



Other artists besides Lois Mailou Jones are keen to portray the link between the Harlem Renaissance and the natural. Aaron Douglas' painting *Into Bondage* is one example of this. His image seems to explore the relationship between the African caught in the pull from the dark jungle in the foreground to the bright glow of civilization and slavery in the west. It depicts a group of Africans heading out of a dark jungle and toward brightly glowing ships coming from the West. They are bound in chains ready to be sold. This image challenges the common Western assertion of lightness and whiteness being liberating and just whereas darkness being enslaving, for the Africans in the shadowed land are free and it is the brightness that enslaves them. *Into*



*Bondage* can be paired with Douglas' image *Idylls of the Deep South*, both of which portray people of African descent in a natural setting. Both also have a strong focal point of light radiating out of one particular spot. In *Idylls of the Deep South* this focal point comes from a group of musicians as other gather around them. It is not difficult to draw comparisons between this piece and Toomer's poem *Georgia Dusk*, for both depict the carol or hymn as a central activity, and as taking place or perhaps having the highest mystical power and thus meaning when taking place in the natural setting. Another Harlem Renaissance Artist

who looks at *The Natural* frequently is Jacob Lawrence, who in his Great Migration series of paintings problematizes this idea of *The Natural* setting as being ideal for the African-American. The ninth painting in the first part of the series depicts the ravaging of the cotton crop by the Bull weevil, which lead so many African-Americans to flee



the South, reminding us that *The Natural* setting can be unforgiving. The thirteenth panel follows this up showing how the crops were left to rot because all their care-takers had left.



The Work of Jacob Lawrence reminds us that perhaps this African-American nostalgia for the natural is unfounded. Indeed was it not in the South that they suffered greatly as a people and now in the glow of Harlem are free to move around? Countee Cullen brings this up in his poem *Heritage*, by asking what Africa means to him. He writes

Africa? A book one thumbs  
Listlessly, till slumber comes.  
Unremembered are her bats  
Circling through the night, her cats  
Crouching in the river reeds,  
Stalking gentle flesh that feeds  
By the river brink; no more  
Does the bugle-throated roar  
Cry that monarch claws have leapt  
From the scabbards where they slept. (Lewis 245)

This river cannot be traced back, it has been too long. Yet the need to explore his heritage, to trace back ancestry towards meaning is still there. He continues trying to mediate between what his lineage means and his new culture and religion living in the urban North, concluding

Not yet has my heart or head  
In the least way realized  
They and I are civilized. (Lewis 247)

It is not mistake that two popular Harlem Renaissance novels *Quicksand* and *The Dark Princess* end in the South, and more importantly in a rural setting. It is a reminder that the need to trace oneself back to the natural and find meaning there is not just the work of the past but the work of the future. We can not only seek to find traces, but make new tracks out of frameworks of oppression and into freedom, not simply political

freedom- but a freedom once known by the African and African-American people and that can one day be found again. The poetry and research of the great minds of The Harlem Renaissance display this.

## Harlem Renaissance “The Jazz Age”

The Harlem Renaissance has become a staple in history from the movements for African Americans, to the art, the literature and of course the music. During the time period of the 1920s laborsaving appliances and shorter working hours and a small wage increase gave many Americans a chance to have time for more leisurely activities. Movies, Radio, libraries all benefited from this increase and by 1929 American's had spend over \$4 billion on entertainment. However in the 1920s African Americans were still struggling against low income and race. This time period was a time when American's desire for entertainment grew and jazz help the African Americans put their name on the map. The time period surrounding the 1920s has been named “The Jazz Age.” Migration to large cities, New York City became the unofficial capital of black America. The new migration from the South is what brought jazz to Harlem. It became a time for the African American population to forget their stress, shake off a days work with food, alcohol, dancing, and jazz music. Music today was nowhere near as important as Jazz was in the 1920s, it was not only singing but all different instruments and harmonies and tones. It brought the community in Harlem the opportunity to have fun and made it possible for many African American talents to step out into the spotlight. This time period was a rebirth of home almost a fresh start for African Americans.

Jazz was originally founded in the south but slowly but surely creped its way up to the north. It was musicians such as Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington that made Jazz this hit sensation that it was. “In the 1920s, Armstrong changed the ensemble nature of jazz and turned it into a soloist's art. He played so loudly and so uniquely that he single handedly invented the improvised solo, while his vocal stylizations exhibited a new kind of rhythmic elasticity, called scat, that revolutionized jazz singing” (Hill 92). Duke Ellington that first came to New York to study art but was lured into the nightclubs, creating his own jazz band. He performed regularly at Harlem's hottest clubs included the Cotton Club. These musicians along with so many others created a lifestyle with jazz that brought all kinds of people together. Each musician had an ability to take jazz, expand it, and add his or her own artistic touches to the sound. Such events as cutting contests also allowed the musically gifted of the time period to expand on their talents and learn a few things from each other. “After gigs, these and other striders would produce dazzling up-tempo pyrotechnies on the piano as they competed in ferocious late night cutting contests (Hall 95).”



As Willie Smith described the contests: “Sometimes we got carving battles going that would last for four or five hours. We would embroider the melodies with our own original ideas and try to develop patterns that had more originality than those played before us. Sometimes it was just a question of who could think up the most patterns within a given tune. It was pure improvisation. You had to have your own individual style and be able to play in all the keys. In those days we would all copy each other’s shouts by learning them by picking up to much of my stuff, I’d perform in the hard keys, B major and E major” (Hall). These contests not only bonded the musicians living in Harlem but also pushed each to be better and decide who was the best. The talented musicians in the jazz world created a contrary in what they were doing and inspired people who listened to them.

The image above of all the different types of performers shows how over the “Jazz Age” many different African Americans became music icons and slowly but surely began to make a name for themselves. The image shows all different types of nightlife. The image is important because it is for once an image that does not show the difference in the races or social statuses, it is not comparing them to anyone, or making them look inferior to the white population. It is an image that focuses only on this group of African Americans and their musical abilities without anything to take away from their success. Also this image shows the growing success of these individuals because this is some sort of advertisement for their talents and does not have any inappropriate remarks on it or calling them anything other than fantastic performers. This image shows the slow change that was happening to the African American society in Harlem and slowly beginning to make an impact on the city.

When looking at the pictures of the nightclubs, each one is a little different from the others. The Cotton Club is a club for white people and still has the same clean-cut look to it while clubs. It has a white man out front and keeps to the stereotype of the clean-cut white man and only allows white people that are high on the social status in. As for the image of the Lenox Lounge is also a white night club in Harlem but the image does not look at uptight at the image of the Lenox lounge. Also the picture has a black man out from of the club already showing that it understands the importance of African Americans in the Harlem Nightlife without the African Americans jazz would not exist. The im-



age of the Savoy is very black and white, which is good because it was an interracial club. From the image it is apparent that this place was about the dancing and whoever liked to dance and let loose from life then this is the place for them. The difference in the image of Lenox versus Savoy is that Lenox has images of black performers below the sign, which gives off the vibe that the only African Americans that come here are those that perform.



The outside of the club says a lot about what people are allowed in and what kind of money is allowed in. The Cotton Club was even described best by Cab Calloway who was in the band and said “The bandstand was a replica of a southern mansion with large white columns and a backdrop painted with weeping willows and slave quarters . . . The waiters were dressed in red tuxedos, like butlers in a southern mansion, . . . there were huge cut crystal chandeliers. The Cotton Club had the image that only a certain kind of person was welcome while the Savoy’s image says that it is a place of dancing with zero implications of what kind of person is allowed.

Many clubs like The Savoy, Lenox Lounge, and the Cotton Club became staples to the Jazz Age. Jazz was not only music to listen to but it was music to dance too. It was a way for people all over town to let loose for their day and forget about the troubles of the world. “The cabaret of better type provides a certain Bohemianism for the Negro intellectual, the artist and the well-to-do. But the average thing is to much the substitute for the saloon and the wayside inn. The tired longshoreman, the porter, the housemaid and the poor elevator boy in search of recreation, seek-



ing in jazz the tonic for weary nerves

and muscles, are only too apt to find the bootlegger, the gambler and the demi-monde who have come there for victims and to escape the eyes of the police” (Roger 57). This was extremely true for the famous Cotton Club that opened in 1923 by Gangster Owney “The Killer” Madden. Many dance moves that were started in Harlem, the lindy hop, quickly spread all over America. “The Home of Happy Feet” also known as Savoy opened its doors

on march 12, 1927 to four thousand people, “From kitchen mechanics to the Talented Tenth to white café society – descended to “trip the light fantastic,” to clap hands to the Charleston, to truck around the dance floor, and to swing out doing the ballroom’s own lindy hop. It was the lindy that morphed into the swing’s era jitterbug” (Hall 96). Such amazing places change America because it was another step to positive integration and a chance for everyone to just enjoy the nightlife. “Out on the dance floor, everyone, dickty and rat, rubbed joyous elbows, laughing, mingling, forgetting differences, but whenever the music stopped everyone immediately sought their own level” said Rudolf Fisher on the Savoy Ballroom. Jazz was slowly becoming the bridge to integrate all kinds of people and these clubs would become a place where the music never stops.

Jazz entertainment in Harlem had made many different strides in the African American community, some positive and some that can be seen as negative. Now that jazz had taken over the night seen shows in

clubs had become almost like Broadway performing for about two hours at a time. African Americans had become the entertainment again for the white nightlife allowing them the opportunity to watch the amazing show and yet be kept at a safe distance from the African Americans. Though at first though it is frustrating to see that at first no little has changed and it is the African Americans that are doing the work and entertaining while the white people watch. However looking at it from a African American's point of view that they are achieving a goal, making money, and getting the opportunity to perform and show off their talent making it more understandable as to why African Americans would perform for people who had looked down on them for so many years. "With whites taking the A train uptown in unprecedented numbers, black felt exactly as Bessie Smith expressed in her classic blues song – that everything was under control. It did not matter that most whites were heading for the Jim Crow nightclubs from which blacks were excluded, because it was their music and their performers that the "foes" came to see" (Hall 101). Many poems and works had been written about the performers of the Harlem night life.

"The Harlem Dancer, Claude McKay

Applauding youths laughter with young prostitutes

And watched her perfect, half clothed body sway;

Her voice was like the sound of Blended flutes

Blown by black players upon a picnic day. . . . " (Lewis 156).

This particular poem seemed to be important because it helped to paint the idea of how though being a performer had many positives it also had some negative aspects because many of the dancers had to be under the age of 21 taking away from the youth of Harlem. However the poem also shows how scandalous jazz could be for the time period and how so many people loved the new sexy vibe of the era.

Without the cabarets and the famous musicians and Jazz itself there would be know Harlem to remember today. Jazz was an influential part of the Harlem Renaissance because it was the only positive integrated activity that welcomed everyone to listen and enjoy and everyone was hooked. Though some place segregation took place at least it provided an opportunity for all people to be in the same room. Though jazz was originally founded in the south its journey up to the popular cities of the north is what gave the music its ability to travel nation wide. The North was a more neutral place that the south and many more African Americans had populated the cities. Jazz's journey up north was crucial to the growth of Harlem. Harlem would not have become as famous or well known if it wasn't for the night life aka jazz. By the mid twenties Harlem had spread every-

where, from all black Broadway revenues downtown to Paris's hot jazz bands. Such attention was giving African American's the opportunity to step out into the spotlight and have the opportunity to show off their artistic ability. "Jazz has absorbed the national spirit, that tremendous spirit of go, the nervousness, lack of conventionality and boisterous good-nature characteristic of the merican, white or black, as compared with the more rigid formal natures of the Englishman or German. (Roger 54)" Harlem was being watched by the world.

These two images do a great job of showing all different aspects of the Harlem Renaissance for African Americans. It was an amazing opportunity in the time period for artistically gifted people to perform their new tune of jazz and also an opportunity for African Americans to enjoy the art of the dance that has spread so rapidly. In the first image with the two people dancing we can see the African American band playing on the left for the couple who seems to be performing something similar to the jitterbug. The first thing that catches the viewer's eye is the woman and the man. This could possibly be because out of all the people in the paint-



ing they are the only ones doing any real movement and that catches the viewers attention. The color choice is interesting by this artist because the colors are all very similar. All shades of pinks and purples with a bit of yellow to make the instruments stand out but even the woman in the background, her dress is purple. This palette of color is very important to the image the artist is trying to portray because there is no segregation of color. It all blends together nothing in particular stands out other than the

couple that is dancing. This image is important because the artist made the couple dancing draw in the viewer's attention because of their movement but not because of the color of their faces.

The second image is the exact opposite of the one on the left. While that image had the band, dancers, and crowd all blend together this image has the musicians pop out! The artist uses very sharp and distinct bold colors that make each different piece stand out. The first thing that draws the viewers attention in this piece is the dark faces of the African Americans in the band against the contrast



of the yellow walls. The bright yellow really makes the black faces stand out and draw you in. This image is also interesting because it does not show any of the people who are listening to the music. It is almost as if this image was painted from the angle of the side stage looking out on the performers but keeping the painting segregated by not showing who they were playing for. This image also portrays many different parts of jazz music with the piano, the other band instruments and the singer in the very top right hand corner. These two things can

been examined in two very different lights but in the end both portray African Americans as moving forward in the world and enjoying the jazz night life.

The Harlem Renaissance was a very important part of the African American history and it was the “Age of Jazz” that created an opportunity to integrate more and enjoy the arts. Though integration did not change overnight it was this age that gave African American’s the opportunity to step out and show off their musical abilities. Though there are many different paintings and works that portray all different sides of Harlem it is apparent that Harlem and the nightlife of Jazz changed the world forever.

## The Shift from Rural to Urban: Southern Culture Expressed Through Theater and Art During the Harlem Renaissance

The transition from the rural South to the urban North that a large amount of the Negro population went through during the New Negro Movement of the 1920's was a significant period in history. Harlem was the new home to many blacks across the nation, and this metropolitan environment that the race stepped into was fresh, unique, and full of life. But although this shift from rural to urban life took place, deeply rooted Southern traditions stayed alive in the race as a whole and were expressed in various ways in everyday life. Through examining the black theater and artwork of the time we can clearly understand how Southern roots were expressed in the urban environment that was Harlem, and we can better apprehend what exactly it was they strived to express in terms of what it meant to be black during the Harlem Renaissance.

In order to examine how Southern traditions were expressed through theater and are in the Harlem Renaissance, we must first look at the deep African roots that many of the Southern blacks living in the United States had. Aaron Douglas illustrates this African environment perfectly in his painting Into Bondage. By showcasing a lot of color and distinct shapes, Douglas creates a wild scene in which the figures in the painting are shackled and making their way towards large, white ships, most likely taking them to America to work as slaves. Although these men are shackled, there is a sense that they are moving "into the light" (possibly into hope or a new beginning) because of how the ships are painted as being the brightest focal point in the painting. This painting is a fine starting point in the quest to understand what exactly blacks were expressing in their theatrical endeavors, and let's us understand where a lot of the Harlem population began as a culture. Their roots were shackles, and we will see later on in this paper that these African roots are carried over into their theater as well, centuries later.

Another important figure in Harlem Renaissance's history was Jacob Lawrence, a successful painter. Lawrence strived to fully understand the roots of the African culture in order to correctly depict the migration from South to North (Hughes), similar to what Douglas starts to do in Into Bondage. Lawrence took a lot of inspiration from famous philosopher Alain Locke, who believed strongly in the possibility of an art created by blacks that would allow the values of modernism to speak directly to African Americans (Hughes). In Lawrence's series "The Great Migration Series", he gracefully captured the literal shift from South to North by still portraying the Southern vibe within the paintings.



A perfect example of this showcasing of the shift from South to North is in the painting The Migration Gained in Momentum. In this painting, Lawrence uses bold colors and simple shapes without a ton of detail to draw most of the attention to the actual movement that is happening within the painting. There are two groups of people, walking in the same direction with their belongings in hand, in a somewhat bland setting. The simple tree in the background tells us that they are outside, and because we know Lawrence's background and the title of his series, we know he is attempting to capture their shift across the country. This painting is a prime example of how Southern traditions were carried over into the urban setting, and Lawrence does this quite literally in this piece by illustrating the Southern shift itself, as if it was in real time. Lawrence, under the influence of Locke, was at the forefront of the movement and was very concerned with making sure that blacks expressed and viewed themselves in a way that did not try to hide their roots.



Nella Larsen illustrates this urban environment that the Southern black culture shifted to very well in her novel Passing. Helga, the main character in the story, moves to New York from Chicago and finds a completely new life there. To Helga, Harlem was not only sophisticated, but extremely welcoming. “New York she had found not so unkind, not so unfriendly, not so indifferent. There she had been happy, and secured work, had made acquaintances and another friend. Again she had had that strange transforming experience, this time not so fleetingly, that magic sense of having come home. Harlem, teeming black Harlem, had welcomed her and lulled her into something that was, she was certain, peace and contentment” (Larsen, 36). This quote shows us exactly how big of an impact a city had on Helga's life. Similar to Helga in the beginning of the novel, Harlem to the black community from the South represented freedom, sophistication, and a new home that allowed them to establish a culture of their own.

Theater was one of the most important and common ways that the black community in Harlem expressed themselves after the shift from South to North. A source that helped me understand how theater affects the era was “The Influence of Theater on the Harlem Renaissance”. According to this website, black theater really started in the late teens of the 1920's. In this time, blacks were only allowed to attend black theaters. At first, the only two that were open were the Lincoln and the Crescent, but when theater became more and more popular and blacks began to move closer to white theaters, white people eventually started to segregate the theaters. Other theaters opened shortly after, namely the Apollo Theater and the Cotton Club, two of the most famous theaters of the time (EDU Blogs). The Apollo theater quickly became known as the place “where stars

are born and legends are made” (Coffey Park). The Cotton Club was established in 1923 and was named the Cotton Club to imitate the plantation environment (EDU Blogs), something that again lets us know that the black community wished to keep threads of their deep Southern tradition woven into their daily lives in the urban community.

One of the most famous photographs taken in the era was titled “The Cotton Club”. It is of the Cotton Club itself, taken during the Harlem Renaissance, and is a view of the club from the street. It showcases the nightlife of Harlem extremely well by capturing a bit of the hustle and bustle of the city. It is a simple black and white photo, and the angle that the photo is taken from highlights the movement of the cars. There aren’t many people caught in the shot, and the main focal point is the Cotton Club sign itself. This is an extremely iconic image of the Harlem Renaissance as it was home to some of the most famous black singers, dancers, actors and musicians in the history of the race. The theater is a symbol of the cultural expression that thrived within the building’s walls.

Winold Reiss’ Interpretation of Harlem Jazz is perfect example of a painting that captures an immense amount of motion. This motion is important because it showcases a man dancing, almost in a crazy, loose-limbed manner that almost looks tribal or African. He is dressed up in sophisticated clothes and there is a woman dancing with him, but because of the bold, sharp shapes used along with the designs in the painting, it is hard to make out exactly what is what. This adds to the overall feel of confusion that is felt when first looking at the painting. There are African elements not only in the way that the man and woman are moving, but also in the background, as seen by the African mask behind the man on the wall. Nella Larsen creates a similar scene in her novel Quicksand. “For the while Helga was oblivious of the reek of flesh, smoke, and alcohol, oblivious of the oblivion of other gyrating pairs, oblivious of the color, the noise, and the grand distorted childishness of it all. She was drugged, lifted, sustained, by the extraordinary music, blown out, ripped out, beaten out, by the joyous, wild, murky orchestra. The essence of life seemed bodily motion” (Larsen, 48). This quote explains the movement of the dancers as if they were animals in Africa, and creates a scene that is so vivid and full of movement that the spectators become caught up in a trance.



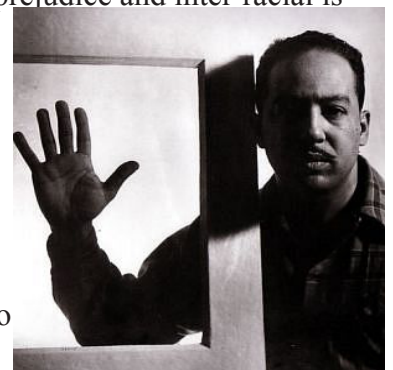
Again, these deeply embedded cultural roots that we find carried over into Harlem don’t just start in the South, but in Africa. Both Reiss and Larsen illustrate this idea very well.

Before discussion begins of some of the particular plays that were vessels for cultural expression within

the black race, it is important to examine the most common theme found in Harlem Renaissance black plays: race. Race is a hard thing to express on stage, but by setting up everyday scenarios that the blacks went through, white audiences could better understand the hardships that the black race endured merely because the color of their skin. In Authentic Blackness: The Folk in the New Negro Renaissance, Martin J. Favor chooses four authors of the period who all, in some way or another, tried to break down the idea of a fixed black identity. The book concentrates on examining the true meaning of being black and questions not only what it means to be black, but also questions who gets to decide what it means. Racism was obviously alive and well during the New Negro Movement, and there was a strong predisposition that blacks, especially those from the South, were farthest down on the ladder in terms of not only money, but human value. Interestingly enough, this bias about black people both slowed down and aided the New Negro Movement (Favor).

Developing a strong sense of racial identity was vital in the Harlem Renaissance because for one of the first times in history blacks were given the chance to develop it, and more importantly develop it on stage in front of a white audience. This pride they had in their race led later to Black Nationalism, and was one of the reasons why the Harlem Renaissance is called a renaissance after all. For the first time, acting out their Southern heritage and culture gained recognition, not punishment, by letting the white population know that they weren't just black slaves meant to work on a plantation, but sophisticated humans who were extremely talented. Theater was the vessel in which this sophistication and talent of the black community became more and more recognized.

Plays were clearly a strong tool that allowed blacks to express themselves. Appearances was the first full-length Broadway play that was written by an African American, Garland Anderson. It was about a white hotel bellboy who was put on trial for raping a white woman (EDU Blogs). Intense storylines like these were common throughout the Harlem Renaissance, and most all plays dealt with racial prejudice and inter-racial issues, a theme that was particularly prevalent in the South. Another play that deals with inter-racial issues is one written by Zora Neal Hurston called Color Struck. The play focuses on "colorism" through describing the jealousy that a black woman feels when her boyfriend shows interest in a lighter-skinned woman. The South was broken up into black and white, and when plays like Color Struck made it onto the stage, audiences in Harlem were better able to understand how this color line was existent not cross-racially, but within the black community alone. Another famous play was Mulatto written by Langston Hughes. The setting of the play is in Georgia on a white owned plantation, which is important



in itself (EDU Blogs). There's no better way to showcase the South than to re-create it on stage for all to see. The plot illustrates a plantation owner who has fathered several mulatto children with his black housekeeper. When one of his sons stirs up drama with a white woman in town, controversy breaks out with the father and his friends who thinks he should stop sleeping with his black housemaid and just marry a white woman. Caught in a race identity crisis, one of his sons returns home from school up North and demands he be treated as a white. When his father threatens him, his son in turn kills him (EDU Blogs). An intense story, this play explicitly illustrates the race related issues that are historically embedded in the black culture, seemingly not able to escape even after the migration North.

Theater was more than just a tool for cultural expression in the black community during the Harlem Renaissance. It was a way to become something, someone. In the poem America by Langston Hughes, this desire is expressed. Although this poem is referring to coming to America from a different country, the relationship between another country and America can be compared to the relationship between the South and the North, and the opportunities that the North presented. The following lines from the poem outline it perfectly:

“You are America.  
I am America  
America-the dream,  
America- the vision.  
America- the star seeking I.  
Out of yesterday  
The chains of slavery;  
Out of yesterday,  
The ghettos of Europe;  
Out of yesterday,  
The poverty and pain of the old, old world,  
The building and struggle of this new one,  
We come  
You and I,  
Seeking the stars.”

-Hughes, 258

From these lines we get a clear sense of the hope that America brings to people. Through theater, the people became the stars of their dreams.

Fenton Johnson, another famous poet of the era, wrote about the hope that was embedded in the black race, and how this hope will always be connected to their Southern heritage. In his poem Children of the Sun, he says,

“We are the children of the sun,  
Rising sun!  
Weaving Southern destiny,

Waiting for the mighty hour  
When our Shiloh shall appear  
With the flaming sword of right,  
With the steel of brotherhood,  
And emboss in crimson due  
Liberty! Fraternity!”

-Johnson, 271

This expert can be read as a description of what Harlem and theater in Harlem presented to the black community that migrated there. Harlem can be seen as the “mighty hour” that brought the “sword of right” and a sense of freeing brotherhood. Through theater and the arts, they were able to weave their Southern destiny—a destiny that was not slavery, but success.

An image that showcases this success well is a photograph taken of the Nicholas brothers, some of the most famous dancers and performers of the era by an unknown photographer. There are Southern threads woven throughout the piece, namely the train in the background that is either on its way to or coming from Chattanooga. Their performances were spectacular, as you can see from this single shot, and their story is one of success. The fact that they made it to Harlem and were able to express their heritage on stage is not only impressive, but also important for their race.

The transition from the rural South to the urban North was an extremely important time for the black population. Through theater and the arts, blacks of the Harlem Renaissance were able to express themselves and their Southern roots, and in doing so were able to teach people across the globe how talented they really were while giving insight to their cultural heritage and the hardships they went through. The transition from South to North presented blacks with a completely new environment with more opportunities they could have imagined, but one of the reasons they gained popularity was because of their capacity to create a Southern environment on stage and on canvases.



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