

The Harlem Renaissance

Vol XCIII, No. 311

Monday, February 17, 2014

\$1.25

Background



- defined by Alain Locke in his essay, "The New Negro" (1929)
- Began in 1919
- Ended in 1929 with the onset of the Great Depression
- a period of cultural rebirth for African Americans

Major Goals of the Period

- to renew self respect in African Americans, and help shed feelings of inferiority
- to encourage African Americans to not use discrimination as an excuse, and to rise above prejudice to show they are equal to artists of the white world
- to help rediscover African roots and culture, but understand the role of African-Americans in American society

The Great Migration

- End of the Civil War in 1865 ushered in an era of increased education and employment opportunities
- 1896 Plessy vs. Ferguson Supreme Court Case declared racial segregation acceptable
- But severe debilitation of cotton in South caused economic decline
- Many African Americans migrated to northern industrial cities in hopes of better economic opportunity and to escape racial discrimination
- A large number of migrants settled in Harlem, New York, and it became the cultural capital of black America
- Innovative young African American writers, painters, and musicians began gathering and working together.

The best of humanity's recorded history is a creative balance between horrors endured and victories achieved, and so it was during the Harlem Renaissance.

Activists and the "Back to Africa" Movement

In 1909, a group of activists led by W.E.B. Dubois founded the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) to promote civil rights.

Jamaican-born Marcus Garvey began promoting the "Back to Africa" movement, hoped to unite all people of African descent into one community with one absolute government. It also promoted pride in heritage and race.



The Cotton Club and Jazz



During Prohibition, speakeasies sprung up all over the city. The most prominent is Harlem. The Cotton Club had the best and best of a luxurious southern plantation. Only African Americans were allowed to perform there, and only white patrons were allowed inside. Some of the most famous jazz performers of the time (Jazz King Louis Armstrong, composer and musician Duke Ellington) performed on the Cotton Club's stage.

The Cotton Club and other clubs allowed white people to experience Jazz for the first time, and soon became mainstream.

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The Cotton Club and Jazz



During Prohibition, speakeasies sprung up all over the cities. The most prominent in Harlem, **The Cotton Club**, had the look and feel of a luxurious Southern plantation. Only African Americans were allowed to perform there, and only white patrons were allowed inside. Some of the most famous jazz performers of the time (singer Lena Horne, composer and musician Duke Ellington) performed on the Cotton Club's stage.

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