

increased political awareness contributed to both of the early Harlem riots.

By the 1950s, urban renewal projects were under way. These projects ultimately resulted in the forced relocation of Blacks when old buildings were torn down. Because of severe overcrowding, for most the housing situation only became worse. Eventually, there were roughly ten housing developments in Central Harlem housing more than 40,000 of Harlem's 300,000 residents. The rest of those in Harlem lived in older tenement apartment houses built before 1900 or slightly newer brownstone or multidwelling buildings. Few of these housing options were in good repair, and most continued to decline with unabated overcrowding.

Harlem living conditions further deteriorated during the 1960s. Due to the publicity of subpar housing conditions, city and state authorities began to pay attention to the issue but continually failed to follow through on promises. These contradictions led to a series of rent strikes—organized efforts at holding landlords responsible for housing conditions. After years of concerted efforts, including picketing, demonstrations, petitions, and attempts at legal action against landlords as well as countless families being thrown out of their homes for failure to pay rent, Harlem residents gained some ground with legislative measures in support of modifying the conditions of the Harlem ghetto.

Residents of Harlem continued to engage politically, protesting against segregated schools by participating in the great school boycott of 1964, fighting to dismantle discrimination in employment, and protesting for equal rights for Blacks nationwide. After another Harlem riot based on racial issues during the mid-1960s, Malcolm X gained great influence for his nationalist arguments. In addition, by 1966 the Black Panthers were organized in Harlem and agitated for violence in pursuit of change. In 1968, another Harlem riot occurred in response to the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. Additional riots in 1995, organized by Black activists against Jewish shop owners on 125th Street, were significantly different from previous riots, with fewer being injured or killed.

### Harlem Today

Religious institutions have maintained their importance in Harlem. Today, there are more than 400 churches in the neighborhood, including representation

from a variety of religious denominations. Historically, drug use in Harlem has produced high rates of abuse and collateral crime. Heroin was the drug of choice during the 1950s and 1960s, and crack cocaine was the drug of choice during the 1980s; however, after aggressive policing measures initiated during the late 1980s, crime rates in all categories have fallen dramatically. Furthermore, after more than a decade of gentrification, property values in Harlem have skyrocketed and countless new housing units have been developed—improvements that have outpaced the rest of New York since the early 1990s. For these reasons, Harlem today attracts many middle-class Blacks and Whites alike.

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*See also* African Americans; Discrimination; East Harlem; Ghetto; Harlem Renaissance; Irish Americans; Urban Riots

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## HARLEM RENAISSANCE

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The Harlem Renaissance (1917–1934), originally called the “Negro Renaissance,” was a golden age of African American arts. Its mission was to bring about racial renewal through cultural diplomacy. The Renaissance was not just “art for art’s sake.” That “Negro art” could redraw the public image of “colored” people in the United States was its animating purpose, with the goal of achieving what David Levering Lewis called “civil rights by copyright.” Enjoying a “double audience” of Black and White, the Harlem Renaissance was a spectacular success during its heyday. As a public exhibition of African American

poetry, prose, drama, art, and music, this valiant effort to remove the masks of racial stereotypes so as to put a new social face on African Americans improved race relations somewhat—a nearly impossible task given the entrenched racial prejudices of the day under the legalized segregation of Jim Crow laws.

Not only did the Harlem Renaissance attract a White patronage and market, the movement instilled a racial pride and nobility among African Americans whose lives it touched. Thus the Harlem Renaissance created a place in the national literary tradition, officially recognized in the “White House Salute to America’s Authors” event on March 13, 2002, which paid tribute to “writers of the Harlem Renaissance” who “shaped a rich literary history and became agents of change.” Its cultural diplomacy became a cultural legacy. This entry summarizes that era.

### The Rise of the Harlem Renaissance

Beginning with the end of World War I in 1917 and concurrent with the Jazz Age, the Harlem Renaissance was made possible in part by powerful social forces effecting sweeping changes across the United States. A mass exodus of an estimated 5 million African Americans from the rural South to the urban North, “The Great Migration” (1915–1960) was described by Harlem Renaissance spokesman Alain Locke (1885–1954) as “a deliberate flight not only from countryside to city, but from mediaeval America to modern.” These “shifting crystallizations” in U.S. demography resulted in the rise of a Black middle class in major U.S. cities, particularly in the Northeast. In the midst of this status revolution, one place stood out in particular: Harlem.

Harlem is a large sector of upper Manhattan in New York City—“little more than a note of sharper color in the kaleidoscope of New York,” according to Locke. Harlem catalyzed the formation of a distinct racial consciousness that had previously been “a race more in name than in fact” or “more in sentiment than in experience,” reflecting a “common condition rather than a common consciousness.” The Harlem Renaissance offered African Americans their “first chances for group expression and self-determination.” The Harlem Renaissance succeeded in the first objective but failed in the latter one.

Parties played a major role both in Harlem nightlife and in the Renaissance itself, and its official inaugural

was a formal banquet. On March 21, 1924, *Opportunity* editor and sociologist Charles S. Johnson invited a group of young writers and artists to a dinner party of the Writers Guild held in the Civic Club, a restaurant on West Twelfth Street near Fifth Avenue in Harlem. The Civic Club was the only “upper-crust” New York nightclub free of color or sex restrictions. The party was called to celebrate Jessie Redmon Fauset’s first novel, *There Is Confusion*, and to recognize “a newer school of writers” that included Eric Walrond, Countee Cullen, Langston Hughes, and Gwendolyn Bennett.

After dinner, Paul Kellog, editor of *Survey Graphic* (the premier journal of social work in the United States at the time), approached Johnson with an extraordinary offer, inviting him to assemble and edit literary work from these emergent authors for a special Harlem issue. Wishing to work behind the scenes, however, Johnson passed that invitation on to Locke—who had won national acclaim as the first African American Rhodes Scholar in 1907—asking him to guest edit that special issue of *Survey Graphic*. A week later, the *New York Herald Tribune* proclaimed that Harlem was “on the edge of, if not already in the midst of, what might properly be called a Negro renaissance.” Published in March 1925, the special issue titled “Harlem: Mecca of the New Negro” was an instant success. It sold an estimated 42,000 copies in two printings.

### The New Negro: African Americans’ “First National Book”

Capitalizing on this success, Locke expanded the “Harlem” special issue and in November 1925 recast it as an anthology, *The New Negro: An Interpretation*—the inaugural epochal centerpiece of the New Negro movement and its manifesto and acclaimed as the “first national book” of African Americans. *The New Negro* featured thirty-four contributors, four of whom were White. The volume showcased most of the stellar figures of the Harlem Renaissance who went on to pursue independent literary and artistic careers in their own right. The great W. E. B. Du Bois (1868–1963) crowned the anthology by contributing the final essay. Locke proclaimed *The New Negro* to be “our spiritual Declaration of Independence.” Locke figured prominently in the Harlem Renaissance as its principal art critic, promoter, and power broker.

### The Artists and Their Legacy

The prime movers of the Harlem Renaissance believed that art held more promise than politics in bringing about a sea of change in U.S. race relations. A more realistic goal was the cultivation of wholesome race pride. The advent of a self-conscious “Negro poetry” by “Negro poets” helped to foster the group consciousness that Locke found to be singularly lacking among African Americans historically yet developing rather suddenly in his generation.

Locke helped to launch the career of Langston Hughes (1902–1967)—widely regarded as the poet laureate of the Harlem Renaissance—whose poems “Let America Be America Again” and “Theme for English B” are frequently anthologized in American literature textbooks. Disinclined to identify himself as a Negro poet, Countee Cullen (1903–1946) published his first volume of poems, *Colors*, in 1925. This volume won the first Harmon Foundation Award in Literature in 1926. A West Indian and British citizen, Claude McKay (1889–1948), contributed the poem “White House” to *The New Negro* anthology. Because of its politically sensitive nature, Locke changed the title of the poem to “White Houses.”

In his social protest poem, “To America,” McKay personified the United States as a tiger (striped in black and white), racially terrible yet magnificent in its awesome power. Considered to be the “inaugural address” of the Harlem Renaissance and McKay’s greatest claim to fame was his military sonnet, “If We Must Die,” which appeared in the July issue of *Liberator* during the “Red Summer” of 1919, when race riots swept across twenty-five of the nation’s inner cities like a firestorm. The poem took on the power of an anthem; it was reprinted by virtually every leading African American magazine and newspaper. McKay’s sonnet surpassed his race when Winston Churchill used “If We Must Die” to rally British soldiers in battles against the Nazis in World War II. As Locke had predicted, Harlem Renaissance poets entered into the canon of mainstream American literature and enriched British culture as well.

The Harlem Renaissance was, to a limited degree, an interracial movement. For instance, in the 1925 “Harlem” issue of *Survey Graphic*, Locke published seven portraits of Harlem folk sketched by German-born Winold Reiss (1886–1953). Carl Van Vechten (1880–1964) was probably the pivotal White promoter



**Langston Hughes.** Hughes (1902–1967) is widely regarded as the poet laureate of the Harlem Renaissance. His poems are frequently anthologized in American literature textbooks and have become accepted as central to the nation’s literature tradition.

Source: Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, LC-USZ62-43605.

of the Harlem Renaissance. Patron of Locke, Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston (1891–1960), and others, Charlotte Osgood Mason (1854–1946) was a secret benefactor of major Harlem Renaissance artists and writers. Other influential White patrons included Paul Kellog (1879–1958) and Albert C. Barnes (1872–1951), among others.

Writer Jean Toomer (1894–1967) was a mulatto who could pass for White and ultimately did. In 1923, he published *Cane*, a novel set in Georgia, which Hughes praised as “the finest prose written by a Negro in America” and which Locke hailed as “a brilliant performance.” Toomer was a one-book author whose career was abortive for personal reasons. Born of a Danish mother and a West Indian father, Nella Larsen (1893–1963) in 1929 won the Harmon Foundation’s Bronze Medal for Literature for her 1928 novel *Quicksand*, which Du Bois praised as “the best piece of fiction that Negro America has produced since the heyday of [Charles] Chesnutt.” Although legally Black, Larsen had loyalties to both Blacks and Whites, a theme of racial fusion and confusion explored in *Quicksand*, where the main character, Helga Crane, is a full projection of Larsen herself. In 1930, Larsen became the first Black woman to win a Guggenheim Fellowship.

There are more than 130 published plays by thirty-seven Harlem Renaissance authors. On May 22, 1921, *Shuffle Along* opened at Broadway's David Belasco Theater and became the first musical revue scored and performed by African Americans. In 1929, the Negro Experimental Theatre was founded in February, the Negro Art Theatre was formed in June, and the National Colored Players was established in September.

Acknowledged by some as "the father of Black American art," Aaron Douglas (1899–1979) was recognized by Locke as "the pioneer of the African style among the American Negro artists." In addition to being an illustrator whose work first appeared in the "Harlem" issue of *Survey Graphic* and then in *The New Negro*, Douglas drew on Egyptian and African art and was influenced by cubism, art deco, and art nouveau as well.

These are among the outstanding writers, artists, and performers of the Harlem Renaissance.

### The Fall of the Harlem Renaissance

With a mission but without a unifying ideology, the Harlem Renaissance crashed along with the stock market during the early years of the Great Depression, and its failure to effect any real social change was underscored dramatically by the Harlem Riot of 1935. In 1936, Locke wrote an obituary of the Harlem Renaissance: "Eleven brief years ago, Harlem was full of the thrill and ferment of sudden progress and is prosperity; and *Survey Graphic* sounded the tocsin of the emergence of a 'new Negro' and the onset of a 'Negro renaissance.' Today, . . . that same Harlem is prostrate in the grip of the depression and throes of social unrest." Locke had a more sober view on the power of the arts to effect social change: "For there is no cure or saving magic in poetry and art, an emerging generation of talent, or in international prestige and interracial recognition, for unemployment or precarious marginal employment, for high rents, high mortality rates, civic neglect, [and] capitalistic exploitation, on the one hand, and radical exploitation, on the other." The Harlem Renaissance arose during the period of U.S. progressivism, with its faith in the reform of democracy. It was not so much that the Harlem Renaissance failed as it was that the United States failed the Harlem Renaissance.

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*See also* African Americans; *American Dilemma*, An; Discrimination; Du Bois, William Edward Burghardt; Jim Crow; Johnson, Charles S.; Minority Rights; People of Color; Prejudice; Racism; Segregation

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## HATE CRIMES

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*Hate crimes* or bias crimes are incidents in which the offenders have selected their victims because of their race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, gender, disability, sexual orientation, or other innate characteristics.