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Harlem Renaissance What is a renaissance? A renaissance is a movement or period of vigorous artistic and intellectual activity. There was a famous renaissance in Europe during the transition from medieval times to modern times that is still taught today. There was, also, a not so well known renaissance that occurred in the United States from the 1920's to the 1930's in Manhattan. This renaissance was called "The New Negro Movement", but was later called the Harlem Renaissance. During this time, there was an unprecedented outburst of creative activity among African-Americans that occurred in all fields of art. The renaissance started off as a series of literary discussions in lower Manhattan (Greenwich Village) and upper Manhattan (Harlem).

Many African-Americans had a considerable impact on modern day arts during this renaissance. Alain LeRoy Locke was considered the leader and chief interpreter of the Harlem Renaissance. His efforts to debunk race-based myths of the inherent intellectual, social, and spiritual inferiority of African-Americans that emerged in the post Reconstruction era are thought to be some of his greatest accomplishments.

He sought to destroy commonly held myths through his writings and by identifying, selecting and promoting a talented group of well-educated African-Americans to become leaders and role models in their communities. To achieve greater understanding and harmony between the two races, Locke declared that "...

there is a growing realization that in social effort the cooperative basis must supplant long distance philanthropy." This meant he felt that Negro people

would have to develop self-sufficiency and no longer rely on seemingly altruistic efforts of other people. Langston Hughes was one of the poets who published many works of literature during this time.

He acquired a medal give by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People known as the Spingarn Medal in 1960. With this medal, he joined the ranks of famous African-Americans who spoke out or showed that racism was wrong such as Dr. Martin Luther King, Maya Angelou, Rosa Parks, and George Washington Carver. Another person who played a role in the Harlem Renaissance was Countee Cullen. At New York University his works attracted critical attention. His first collection of poems, COLOR (1925), was published before he finished college.

Countee was a part of the fresh generation of new writers that came out during the renaissance. In 1927, Countee published two more volumes of verse - Copper Sun and The Ballad of the Brown Girl - and edited an anthology of Negro poetry called Caroling Dusk. By 1928 he was the recipient of the Guggenheim fellowship and decided to study in Paris. Cullen lived in Paris for two years and experienced relatively little racial discrimination there.

Men were not the only active writers during the renaissance. Zora Neale Hurston was a colorful and flamboyant figure that created controversy whenever and wherever she appeared. Hurston was a leading African American woman writer of the Harlem Renaissance. She earned the most recognition for achievements and was the most prolific of the women in the

Renaissance era. Unlike the other writers of the Renaissance, Hurston was not a writer by training.

Rather, she was an anthropologist and was trained to observe. This training is what makes her literary contributions so unique. Hurston developed skills in careful observation, recording such observations and presenting them intact to a reading audience. In this sense, she was more than just another writer.

She was a folklorist as well. In this was her strength. There were many achievements during the “roaring twenties” by African-Americans. They excelled in all forms of art during the time known as the Harlem Renaissance. Without this period of time, our modern day arts could have been quite different.