

Harlem renaissance
and the surrealism
historical periods
essay sample



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There are many different historical periods to compare and contrast. The two periods I have chosen are the Harlem Renaissance and the Surrealism Historical periods. These two time periods are similar because they both have a great history of expressing talents in the arts: music, painting, literature, dance and theater. These two historical time periods both were influential and impactful for the roaring twenties. The Harlem Renaissance period took place starting in the 1918 to 1930s after World War 1. In Webster dictionary Renaissance is defined as being a rebirth or revival of literary ideas. That's why this time period does not really qualify as a Renaissance, because at no time prior in American History had any Black people attempted to make any major literary contribution. The social conditions were such that the Black Americans were living poor, but not as classless as the poor living of the immigrants of the West Indians.

During the great migration the poor blacks from the southern states migrated to the Northeastern and Midwest to take advantage of the prosperity and the more tolerant environment of urban living. The immigrants from the Caribbean and Africa were constantly trying to improve their economic position. For these immigrants class was more important than color. The immigrants felt like they should be judged by their talents and creativity, not their skin color. Out of heightened class consciousness, the American Black People learn to be more politically connected to their own ambitions of growth in the community. Harlem became the place where Black people could develop an independent spirit. The education in Harlem was the best in our country for Black people. It had the only schools in the

country that were not segregated. Black people made up 98% of the population in Harlem at that time, so segregation wasn't necessary.

It was known that the poor Blacks and middle class Blacks moved to Harlem solely for education, literary arts, and the new age of music, called "Jazz". Because of prohibition a lot of clubs were formed as underground speakeasies like the Cotton Club, Savoy Ballroom and the Apollo Theatre. The White Gangsters opened the Clubs to illegally smuggle alcohol into the clubs. That wasn't the only place the Blacks were allowed to show their talents. Carl Van Vechten and his wife Faye Marinoff owned a New York apartment where they hosted parties for guests of all races to break down the color bar. These parties created opportunities for many Blacks to perform and meet other writers, editors, producers and publishers. (The Harlem Renaissance, n. d.) Bringing their music from the south like; blues, blues gospel and adding the brass instruments like horns and saxophone, and increasing the up tempo of the piano playing. Harlem also had immigrants which entailed even more diversity to the new sounds.

Big white known artist started to visit and play alongside with the black musicians. One known artist was Bix Beiderbeck. His playing style was a lot softer than Louis Armstrong, a Black man and the youngest of his craft at the time. His style became the forerunner and paved the way for "cool" Jazz music of the 1940s and 1950s. One of the immigrants known for Jazz music was King Oliver. He was the leader of the Creole Jazz band, which brought another dimension to Jazz from the West Indians. White artists would hear about the music played in these New York clubs and started to frequent the clubs to hear great artists like Duke Ellington and Sidney Bechet. Some of the

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white artist were Nick LaRocca and Larry Shields, who played alongside them. ("1920s music," n. d.) The 2nd period that I chose was the Surrealism. The Surrealism movement actually started in 1924 and didn't end until 1966.

This means it started right after the Harlem Renaissance period but, shares most of the roaring twenties. This movement took place in Paris France where a small group of writers and artists decided to channel the unconscious as a mean to unlock the power of the imagination. Surrealism has come to be seen as the most influential movement in the twentieth century art. Most people think Surrealism is Abstract Expressionists that took place in the 1940's but, Surrealism is defined by Andre Breton who wrote Le Manifeste du Surrealism as a "Psychic automatism in its pure state by which one proposes to express-verbally, by means of the written word, or in any other manner- the actual functioning of thought". (Surrealism, n. d.)

Surrealism took place after World War 1, its social conditions were a little different because it took place after the War in Paris France.

The war was mostly fought on European grounds making the social conditions very grim. In London trenches were left with dead bodies, which created infestation of rats and insect like mosquitoes and fly's. Infections were deadly and medication was scariest. Paris on the other hand had glittering night clubs and exotic dance halls, similar to the ones in the United States (Harlem New York). They also had bustling Art Centers that were magnet for new talent and rich hopes and dreams, again similar to Harlem renaissance. Most of the Surrealist Artist, Musician and Writers scattered were throughout Paris during the war. They were involved in the Dada movement, now transforming into the surrealism. The Dadaists protested <https://assignbuster.com/harlem-renaissance-and-the-surrealism-historical-periods-essay-sample/>

with anti-rational, anti-art gatherings, performances, writing and art works. As the surrealism movement went on, Andre Breton and others developed philosophy they felt while Dada rejected categories and labels.

Surrealism would advocate the idea that depictive expressions are vital and impotent but, that the sense of their arrangement must be open to full range of imagination according to the Hegelian Dialectic. The surrealist believed in Freud's work on unlocking dreams and the hidden unconscious. This body of work was the utmost important to them developing methods to liberate imagination. The group aimed to revolutionize the human experience including its personal, cultural, social, and political aspects by freeing people from what they saw as false rationality and restrictive customs and structures. The Surrealism period and the Harlem Renaissance period developed one right after the other. Beginning of the 1920's after World War 1 and before the Great Depression. Both started with groups of literary people not being heard among a larger group. Harlem Renaissance period started with the Black People showing more upward motions of success.

This period allowed Blacks people to show the important of imagination, by unlocking their dreams of success that wasn't allowed outside their homes. Their talents was shown through music and movement. Blacks could now imagine success with the upper class despite the color of their skin. This is the same for Surrealism. It allowed people all over the world to have an imagination, which unlocked many minds to have expressions. Surrealism was great for expression and imaginations through art painting, theater, and music. Whereas Harlem Renaissance music was with great expression and imagination of Blacks because of the honesty and depth of the musicians <https://assignbuster.com/harlem-renaissance-and-the-surrealism-historical-periods-essay-sample/>

attempting to push themselves to the limits in order to catapult themselves into the upper class of society.

The Surrealism period in some ways continued the use of imagination and great expressions of the arts with music, dance, theater, and literary writing. This period also deviated from the Harlem Renaissance by way of not using their talents to give them class but, to give them free will of the mind “imagination”. One was in the United States and one happening in Europe (Paris, France) The Harlem Renaissance period of New Age Jazz music helped change the way Blacks were seen in the United States as entertainers. During this time period Blacks dressed for the part of the upper class. The men dressed in coat tails tuxes and bow ties and the women dressed in comfort and functionality, Flapper Dresses with raising hemline was very popular. Not just performing for Whites but Blacks too, keeping the particular dress was very important in understanding the classy dressing of the black people. They needed to show they were better than the musicians from the southern states.

They wanted to be taken serious and not like slaves, which called for better dressing. Surrealism music is expression music that you have to listen and use your imagination to feel what the artist is explaining. The Surrealism came at a time period when people wanted to explain and explore the feeling hidden in their minds. They wanted to use the actual function of thoughts. Some of the Surrealism comes from classical music, with permitting illusion heard while the piano played softly or hardly. They wanted you to hear the soft touch of the piano keys and let your mind sore. Then if the keys are hit harder they wanted you to imagine the roughness of the <https://assignbuster.com/harlem-renaissance-and-the-surrealism-historical-periods-essay-sample/>

world. They used their instruments to help encourage movement styles and expression of feeling and desires. Surrealism used dreams to imagine that what you see is nothing that was really happening.

Their style of dress was similar to the Harlem Renaissance because it was all from post-World War 1 but, the man didn't always dressed as if they were attending the opera. They did dress for class but in uniform soldier jackets and slacks. The women wore comfort styles like the Flapper dresses. The women in Europe also wore more Tomboyish haircuts. They were to believe that after the war they became more active in society. They wanted to give the appearance of a friend and an equal rather than a passive dependent. They dressed almost androgynous. (" American in Paris, Fall 2010" n. d.) The surrealism wanted to restrict all customs and structure, letting the mind "think outside the box" as we would say today. Thus unlocking the dreams hidden in the unconscious. Some of the musicians of the surrealism period wrote ballets, such as Erik Satie who wrote the score for the ballet " Parade".

Kurt Weill was another musician who wrote " The Three Penny Opera" and the " Rise and fall of the City of Mohagonny". The earlier work of " Musique Concrete" by a musician named Pierre Schaeffer have surrealism character owing to the unexpected juxtaposition of sound objects, such as the sound of Balinese priests chanting, a barge on the River Seine, the rattling of saucepans in " Etude aux casseroles" (1948) The composer Olivier Messiaen referred to the surrealist anxiety of Schaeffer's. After the first concert of " Musique Concrete" an audience member sent a card to the musicians stating " this is music heard by themselves alone, noises represents not only

the first concert of surrealism music, but also contains, in my view a musical revolution." (" Surrealism Music")

I believed that the Surrealism Period continued in some ways the ideas of the Harlem Renaissance Period of expressing their talents through the use of music, art, literary, and theater. They also deviated from the ideas of using expression of art for making a way of increasing class. They were not worried about color, class or structures. By expressing the imagination, Surrealist were open to all classes and colors. Showing no bounties to this type of structure or culturing. Surrealist artist were known for opening up dialog for their music. Erik Satie was a French composer, pianist. Satie wrote music known as much for eccentric and performance directions as for its unique sound and lack of allegiance to any one aesthetic. His music was created to make the mind use its imagination. (All Music. com, n. d.) Satie wrote music for the piano, voice, and orchestra- even for a ballet. His idiosyncratic works, such as Gymnopedies were very short and humorous. Gymnopedies was an Imaginative song, played softly were creative thoughts live.

When listening you are dawn to the soft piano playing, as your mind starts to wonder. Far from the times of the Harlem Renaissance Period where Duck Ellington played and The Cotton Club Chorus Line Dances, explicitly showed sexual content though hot dance and songs. Where you didn't have to use your imagination at all, it was all put in front of you. Duck Ellington was an American composer, pianist and band leader that also wrote music for the piano, voice and orchestra. (" The Harlem Renaissance, n. d.") The difference in his music was that he wrote very up tempo music more for fast dancing and quick movements. His music works were to show off the Chorus Dance <https://assignbuster.com/harlem-renaissance-and-the-surrealism-historical-periods-essay-sample/>

Lines, for pure entertainment. Take his song "Take the A Train" when listening, you hear the hard punches of the piano then the brass band starts, very up tempo.

Then the singer starts singing lyrics. A big difference, far from the soft Medley piano playing of Sadie's song Gymnopedies. In conclusion the Harlem Renaissance period and the Surrealism periods were both a time when Europe and the United States after World War 1 was under a great change. They both was a time that people wanted to free themselves. The Blacks of the southern United States wanted freedom of speech and equal opportunities to move up in Class as the immigrants from the West Indians had come to show with dress styles and confidence. They wanted to be able to dream big. The European wanted to free their minds with unlocking hidden thoughts giving them freedom of expression and great imagination Today artist are considered Pop Artist. The Surrealism Art had a lot of influence on them.

They too want to think outside the box and use the imagination. Abstract Art is big with Pop Art culture. Today's artist are all about freedom and no bounties. I found a new generation of artist that call themselves new thinkers in the art world, just like the Surrealism artist. This artist believe that they will spark and inspire a new generation of artist. The Art form is called POP Surrealism. They come from various back grounds of art: Low Brow art, underground commix, punk music, hotrod street culture, Kustum culture, Street Art, Graffiti, Graphic Design, Tattoo, Surf Culture, Tiki Culture and other California sub-cultures. ("POP Surrealism on Pinterest, n. d.") I believe these artist are on their way to inspiring on a new period of time.
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