

# Women of the harlem renaissance assignment

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The movement was known as the “ New Negro Movement” coined by Lain Leroy Locke in 1925. The “ New Negro’ was a term related to African Americans during the Great Migration who had moved from the south to northern cities in the United States in search of better education, employment, and suffrage. The New Negro’ was utilized o describe African Americans as artistic, conscious and sophisticated, as opposed to the stereotypes of African Americans being innately servile. The Harlem Renaissance was known as having a militant edge. The era acted as a celebration and development of the intellectual achievements of African Americans. This period was utilized to recreate the Black identity through varied mediums: music, literature, visual art, and entertainment.

The Harlem Renaissance also sparked the notion of the “ New Negro Woman”, relating to women poets, authors and intellectuals, known for heir race conscious writing. Women in the Harlem Renaissance played a vital role as the voice for the struggling minority of African American women. African American women utilized the movement to express their views on race and gender relations. The women poets of the Harlem Renaissance faced one of the classic American double-binds: they were black, and they were female.

To the general reader, the poetry of the Harlem Renaissance is more than likely embodied in the work of two or three writers like, Claude McKay or Longboats Hughes. But apart from these literary arks there are also other works by women writers that seek attention, acknowledgement and respect. This work includes poems of homespun wit and sophisticated irony; of family, politics, and existential unease; of love, betrayal, and heartache; of racial pride and world-weariness.

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In addition, they carried the burdens of “ the race”: self-consciously creating a literature for a people only recently out of slavery; not writing anything that could be construed as revealing, embarrassing or humiliating, not only to African Americans as a group and themselves as individuals, nor anything that deviated from the constrained Victorian social patterns in which all women in our culture found themselves living at that time; and, perhaps most crushing of all, being obligated to write in ways that “ proved” blacks and black women were as literate and articulate, as capable of education and cultivation, as whites.

These burdens grew out of the expectations of the Renaissance, or the New Negro Movement. As Alain Locke, one of the pioneering theorists of the movement, wrote in his seminal essay “ The New Negro,” the writers of the Renaissance would join musicians , actors and dancers and visual artists in educating the world in true African American capability: “ The especially cultural recognition that they win should accompany any considerable further benefit of race relationships. ” Things did not quite work out that way.

The lives and careers of poets such as Jessie Redmond Fauset, Secondly Bennett, and Georgia Douglas Johnson have, in the history that has been written since, been relegated to the precincts of specialists in African American literature. Yet, the achievements of Fauset, Bennett, Johnson, the other women poets of the Harlem Renaissance stand among the most heroic in the twentieth century American poetry. Jessie Redmond Fauset was born in 1882 in New Jersey. She grew up in Philadelphia and considered herself an

O. P. (1 Old Philadelphia). Faucet became a central force in the Renaissance, nurturing and encouraging many young writers.

Thought of during her career principally as a novelist, Faucet wrote delicate, if somewhat stiff to modern ears, formally structured verse. In the foreword to her novel *The Chicanery Tree*, she defined her goal as to represent the “breathing-spells, in-between spaces where colored men and women work and love.” Historian David Levering Lewis concludes that “for honesty and reciprocity,” Jessie Redmond Faucet’s influence on the Harlem Renaissance “was probably unequalled.... There is no telling what she would have done had she been a man, given her first-rate mind and formidable efficiency at any task. Faucet’s close friend was Georgia Douglas Johnson-?? the only woman of the Harlem Renaissance actually to publish a collection of verse (publishing three between 1918 and 1928). Born in 1880 in Atlanta, Georgia, Johnson herself struggled to make a living in the years after her husband’s death, and to send their two sons to college. A 1928 swapper article written about her states that her “great fear was that she would not be able to accomplish her artistic goals, for, although she works incessantly her time is too much taken up with making a living to give very much of it to literary work. She worked a series of jobs-?? as a librarian, schoolteacher, federal bureaucrat -?? and applied unsuccessfully for a number of literary grants until late in her life, which male counterparts were far more likely to obtain. She was a prolific writer, also producing drama and music, but worried greatly in her later years about the work he left unfinished. Her poetry is concerned with themes of romance and racial identity; though her most

moving verse, certainly from our perspective today, spoke to issues of female identity and freedom.

In one of her best-known poems, “The Heart of a Woman,” she writes, “The heart of a woman falls back with the night, / And enters some alien cage in its plight, / And tries to forget it has dreamed of the stars, / While it breaks, breaks, breaks on the sheltering bars.” Secondly Bennett was born in Giddings, Texas in 1902. Raised firmly in the black middle class, Bennett traveled widely, writing formally controlled, image-rich poems about literary forebears, pan-African solidarity, and the beauty she found in African American people and creativity, something of a novel position at the time. Actor and never quite got it back to writing. “I sailed in my dreams begins “Fantasy,” one of her poems, and it is both moving and inspiring to think of a woman courageously traveling, seeing, thinking these things-?? illuminating other possibilities, even if they were not able to be fully lived at that time-?? a time when black women were trapped in such stereotypes as Mamma domestics or mindless, bobbed flappers dancing at the Cotton Club. Faucet, Johnson, Bennett, and their New Negro peers Anne Spencer, Marital Bonnier, Helene Johnson, Angelina GrimmΓ??, and Alice Dunbar-Nelson, among others, presented a vibrant, living image of richly-dimensioned interior lives; of complex, ambivalent emotions towards love, work, and home; nuanced social concern and historical consciousness; the highest degree of education and attention to craft; and a most “UN-feminine” (by the standards of the time) desire for notoriety and literary achievement.

Much can be made of what their work is not; much more should be made of what it is, given the context of a time when black women held arguably the <https://assignbuster.com/women-of-the-harlem-renaissance-assignment/>

lowest position in society. These women would inspire with their example three generations of poets who had a much greater chance to realize their artistic ambitions-?? most directly Margaret Walker, author of the Yale Prize-winning *For My People*, and Secondly Brooks, the first African American to receive a Pulitzer Prize; and through them a younger generation of poets more able to completely explore their poetic selves and many of the same tensions and issues.