

Good example of research paper on harlem renaissance

[Art & Culture](#), [Renaissance](#)



Renaissance has the connotation of a rebirth age after the dark age. It signifies changes, improvements, and development of a culture or a country from the chaos of the dark ages. One revolutionary cultural movement that happened in the span of 1920s is called as the Harlem Renaissance.

Harlem Renaissance was previously referred to as the New Negro Movement which is named after the anthology in 1925 by Alain Locke. The new African-American movement that included their cultural expressions all over the urban areas of the North eastern as well as the Midwestern part of the United States that were affected by the African American Great Migration. Among these urban areas, Harlem was the largest. Although the center of this movement is within the Harlem neighbourhood in Manhattan, New York City, many black writers that were from Africa and the Caribbean who were in Paris were also got influenced by the New Negro Movement or the Harlem Renaissance (Huggins, no page).

During the start of the twentieth century and the mark of the end of the Great Depression, black intellectuals who are situated in Harlem had come to realize of having their own self-consciousness and self-concept. These people from Harlem or also called as the Harlemites were so confident and they were convinced that they were starting their culture's dusk of dawn, in which they also believed that they have started their own renaissance (Huggins, page 3).

The movements that happened during the Harlem Renaissance skyrocketed in the community of the African-Americans when slavery was abolished as well as the community expansion of the African-American in the north. The rate increased as one of the consequences of the World War 1 along with the

great changes that happened in the society and culture in the early 20th century of the United States. During this period, industrialization attracted people from rural areas to migrate into cities and this has contributed to the factors of the Harlem Renaissance.

Religion especially Christianity played a big role in the Harlem Renaissance. Many of the writers as well as the social critics discussed the contributions of Christianity to the lives of African-American. As an example, a famous poem made by Langston Hughes entitled Madam and the Minister reflected the role and the moods of religion during the Harlem Renaissance. One cover story that the Crisis Magazine published in May 1936 explained how Christianity played a big role to the formation of the three largest Methodist churches in 1936. Crisis magazine were questioning the union of these three churches. In addition to that, one of the articles published by the magazine with the title “ The Catholic Church and the Negro Priest” in January 1920 reflected the struggles of the African-American priests in the Catholic Church. In the article, the magazine scrutinized the policies that were based on race that made the African-American priests be excluded from higher positions in the church (Mac Williams, page 122).

The early stage of the Harlem Renaissance happened in the late 1910s. The premiere showing of the Three Plays for a Negro Theatre took place in 1917. These three plays were written by Ridgely Torrence, who was a playwright. The plays featured African-American actors that conveyed complex human emotions as well as human yearnings. These plays also rejected the stereotypes of the blackface which is a form of makeup done by performers in theatre shows in order to represent a black person. The plays also rejected

the common things that a minstrel shows do which consist of comic skits, variety performances like dancing, and playing music where white people perform in it wearing blackfaces (Gates, page 931).

Also during the showing of these plays in 1917, James Weldon Johnson called the premiere of these plays as one of the most important singular event in the history of the entire Negro in the American Theatre. Another mark of the renaissance happened in 1919 when the poet Claudy McKay published his sonnet with the militant theme entitled " If We Must Die." This sonnet did not allude to race but the African-American readers of it have heard its note of being against racism (McKay, no page).

Another writer that became well-known during the Harlem Renaissance was John Steinbeck. His novels focused on the actual happenings in the society especially when it comes to the troubles, problems, and the struggles of the working class. Two of his famous novels are the Of Mice and Men and the Grapes of Wrath. The Story of the Grapes of Wrath is about a family who travelled to California to become migrant workers. This book showed the homelessness of the people in the society of America where they have to work hard in order to support their families (John Steinbeck Biography, no page).

Aside from the plays and the sonnets, a new way of piano playing also emerged during the Harlem Renaissance. The style is called as the Harlem Stride style which was later on incorporated to the traditional jazz band instruments. The incorporation of this style blurred the lines between poor and elite African-Americans during those times since traditional jazz bands usually composed of brass instruments which were the symbols of the south

while the piano is the symbol of the wealthy people. Because of this, the wealthy people then got more access to jazz music (Boland, no page).

Fashion and the clothing of the Black Americans took a dramatic turn during the Harlem Renaissance. Black Americans started to dress clothes primly and properly which were far from dark, dull, and gloomy clothing. Women started to dress up in wide hats with flower garlands, modest veils, silk stockings that were held by garters, the women also started wearing open-toed slippers and low-slung dresses with the hip ribbons. As for the men, they started wearing zoot suits that were wide-legged and high-waisted. They also wore pegged trousers and long coats with wide padded shoulders and lapels, brimmed hats and socks that were hand-colored. African Americans also took their pride from their heritage through starting a style of leopard-skin coats which indicated the great power of the famous African animal, the leopard (West, page105-106).

When it comes the other forms of arts that emerged during this era, one of the sculptors who got famous with his sculpture of a blackberry woman was Richmond Barthe. He sculpted a African American woman who is wearing a simple dress and balancing a basket on her head. This might just be one of the things that Barthe saw while he was on the market in Mississippi. The woman that he sculpted has the frontal, linear form found in most Western African sculptures (Smithsonian American Art Museum, no page).

In terms of painting, Claude Clark was one of the frontrunners during the Harlem Renaissance. He made the painting Resting which shows a man wearing usual clothes and is barefooted. His painting shows a man which looks like that he is taking a break from farm works. His eyes are hidden

from his red hat but you can see that he is attentively looking in the unseen viewers (Smithsonian American Art Museum, no page). Clark's painting shows the poverty in the African- American society that is very evident during those times.

Many movements thereafter rooted out from the Harlem Renaissance. Buck (page 119) said that the civil rights movement had its roots from the Harlem Renaissance. If Locke was to the Harlem Renaissance, Martin Luther King was to the civil rights movement of the 1960s. Both the Harlem Renaissance and the civil rights movement have the same goal, for the black people to have their place in the society and be acknowledged by the people since black people should also have civil and political rights.

Martin Luther King approached the movement with peace. However, Malcolm X approached the fight for the rights of the African-American more violently. Malcolm X and Martin Luther King were working on the same goal but Malcolm X took a different approach. He believe that whites should not be trusted, and he wanted the African-Americans to build up their own strong communities without the white American's help. He wanted a separate state for their people. He led a mass rally in Harlem but was gunned down by his rivals of Black Muslims (Malcolm X and the Nation of Islam, no page).

Harlem Renaissance brought many changes to the self-concept of the African-Americans. The effects of the renaissance can still be felt in the contemporary society. In the modern society, racism is minimized and reduced which is a good sign of the equality that was once fought for by the African Americans. Even the current president of America now is presided by an African-American and he is even serving his second term now. This goes

to show how the Americans accepted other types of culture in the society. Through the Harlem Renaissance, we learned that Americans with African heritage also have rich cultures and they can have their own distinction in the society.

Works Cited

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