

The jazz age defined



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The Jazz Age could be defined at the rise in popularity of the African American and their culture. Jazz became the new musical sensation; people flocked to Harlem in New York City to listen to the new music along with the dance and theater. Following World War I, African Americans migrated north and a majority of them settled in Harlem. The war had stopped the incoming of cheap immigrant workers so the black man could find work in the city. Negroes had a heavy influence on the entertainment in Harlem which brought the white man to Harlem to enjoy the jazz, nightclubs and theaters.

The Jazz and Harlem Renaissance not only influenced the local entertainment; it influenced local poets and story tellers and not always in a positive manner. From James Weldon Johnson to F. Scott Fitzgerald, the American Africans were influenced in their writing by the roaring 20s in the city named after the City of Haarlem in The Netherlands. In James Weldon Johnson essay “ Negro Dialect”, Johnson worries about the Negro losing a part of their history by changing the way the Negro culture communicates. Johnson is concerned with the dialect coming out Harlem.

According to Johnson, a Negro in Harlem does not speak in the same eloquent Negro dialect of a slave in the cotton field. “ Take, for example, the phases rising out of life in Harlem,...I do not deny that a Negro in a log cabin is more picturesque than a negro in a Harlem flat is here...a group [Harlem Negroes] whose ideals are becoming increasingly more vital than those of the traditionally artistic group, even its members are less picturesque” (Johnson 213) He suggests Negroes in Harlem must find a way to evolve their dialect while keeping the dialect unique to the Black people.

He even suggests that the loss of Negro dialect will be missed by the white man. The song “ St. James Infirmary Blues” had many different versions throughout the twenty first century America. Gladys Bentley’s version had a strong bluesy Harlem influence. She sang with such pathos it brought tears to listener’s eyes. “ Harold Jackman wrote...” When Gladys sings “ St. James Infirmary” it makes you weep your heart out” (American Literature since the Civil War pg 219) Bentley sang “ Put a jazz band on my hearse wagon. No other version of the song could have this exact verse without the invention of Jazz in Harlem. The Jazz Age in Harlem was a change from traditional entertainment with the advancement of jazz and other black entertainment. It was a gay time but not all people were positively affected by the events in Harlem. In Langston Hughes’ “ When the Negro Was in Vogue”, Hughes writes how the black man was entertainment for the white man. The white man flocked to Harlem but Hughes was not impressed. But I was never there, because the Cotton Club was a Jim Crow club for gangsters and monied whites. ” (Hughes Pg 216) Although Harlem was predominantly black, Harlem was entertainment provided by blacks for the whites. Harlem night clubs made the unfortunate decision to of exclude their own kind. “ We can’t go downtown and sit and stare at you in your clubs. You won’t even let us in your clubs” (Hughes Pg 216) When you look closer at the Jazz age in Harlem, it was not great for the ordinary black man; it was really just new type of entertainment for the white man.

The Roaring Twenties, also known as the Jazz Age, came to end with the 1929 stock market crash. In “ Babylon Revisted”, F. Scott Fitzgerald marks how his main character, Charlie, enjoyed the roaring Twenties by partying,

drinking and dancing. Charlie enjoyed having abundant of money during this period. In describing this abundance, Charlie describes the period “ We were a sort of royalty, almost infallible, with the sort of magic around us.

(Fitzgerald Pg 228) Charlie remorsefully reminiscences how much money he spent during the fun times of the 1920s. The Jazz Age and Harlem Renaissance came to end in the after math of the 1929 Stock Market crash. Charlie described how “ the market had cleaned me out” (Fitzgerald Pg 234) Fitzgerald had used the Jazz Age to describe how his character “ lived the high life” but was brought back to earth because the 1929 Crash of the Stock market and the end of the roaring ‘ 20s.

The Jazz Age and Harlem Renaissance had a strong effect on the Negro story teller and poets. From James Weldon Johnson worrying about the loss of the Negro dialect to Fitzgerald describing how the good times of the 1920s affected his characters, Negro authors were influenced by the event in Harlem during the 1920s. On the surface, the Jazz Age and Harlem Renaissance was a golden age, Langston Hughes showed that it wasn’t a golden age for the Negro in Harlem. Bibliography American Literature Since the Civil War.

McGraw Hill Co. , Inc. 2011. 219. Web. 20 February 2012. F. Scott Fitzgerald. “ Babylon Revisited. ” American Literature Since the Civil War. McGraw Hill Co. , Inc. 2011. 213. Web. 20 February 2012. Johnson, James Weldon. “ Negro Dialect. ” American Literature Since the Civil War. McGraw Hill Co. , Inc. 2011. 213. Web. 20 February 2012. Langston Hughes. “ When the Negro Was in Vogue. ” American Literature Since the Civil War. McGraw Hill Co. , Inc. 2011. 213. Web. 20 February 2012.

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