

# Harlem renaissance by nathan irvin huggins assignment

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Book Review of The Harlem Renaissance by Antonio Raglans 4/25/2010 In the book entitled " Harlem Renaissance" by Nathan Irvin Huggins a story is told about the time period before World War I and the following years in which a " Black Metropolis" was created unlike the world had ever seen. It was the largest and by far the most important black community in the world. It brought together black intellectuals from all over the world to this new " Black Mecca" with dreams of prosperity and change. Their common goal was the prosperity of the New Negro as Lain Locke called them.

This New Negro was one that was cultured, educated, artistic, and would bring prosperity to the African-American. All these were the promises of the Harlem Renaissance. I think that his thesis was in the opening sentence when he talks about Harlem. When people saw Harlem, they saw opportunity, they saw a place where they could escape and enjoy artistic freedom. They saw liberation, they saw hope, they saw a place where confidence was in abundance. That confidence translated to the belief that reform could be attained. Sadly, Nathan Irvin Huggins points out that all they were was deceived by their dream.

They all saw in Harlem much more than what was really there. A common life was that they could use their talents as a way of bridging the gap between the races. Unfortunately racism has been so deep rooted in the white American psyche that it would take more than the New Negro proving he had artistic talent to be accepted as one and the same. Huggins also cites that their art was compromised by the fact that it was intended for white patrons and was not a full reflection of them. Another mistake they made was not organizing a grass roots movement.

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The black political leaders failed to become a unified voting force and were unable to obtain true political power needed to bring about change. Huggins writes about how the motivation of many talented Afro-Americans relocation to Harlem was simple; they wanted to be where their talents would reach the most people. They wanted to be in a place where their talents could be cultivated. They saw inspiration in their people and they wanted to be where their talents would be appreciated. They came to find themselves through their race in Harlem.

Upon their arrival in Harlem, Huggins points out that many artists like Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, and Claude McKay found new friends who were willing to lend a helping hand in their careers. The fact that all of these new helping hands were all white may have influenced the artistic integrity of their work. Huggins wrote " Without the help and friendship of white men and publishers, there probably would have been encouragement probably prevented those few men and women of real talent from wrestling with their senses and plodding through to those statements which the thrust of their lives and experience could force them to make" (129).

Huggins goes on to mention that Black artists found it difficult if not impossible to maintain their artistic integrity because they were dependent on their white patron. They had no voice or leverage in publishing houses other than the demand of their white patrons. If they were to create something to critical they would run the risk of losing the white patrons as well as the white benefactors. Huggins backs his observation with the story

of the Park Avenue Matron that at one time supported Zorn Neal Hurst, Louise Thompson, and Longboats Hughes.

She at one time or another supported them financially as well as helping them get published. Huggins mentions how she spared no expense on Hughes. She provided financial freedom for him to write as well as a driver to take him anywhere he wanted. Hughes felt a genuine appreciation for her because like many other Afro- Americans like him he never had anybody that cared so much for him and for his talent. The fact that it was a white woman nurturing his talent led to some clashes and the eventual dissolution of their relationship.

Huggins writes of the time Hughes wrote a poem with a very radical message that his benefactor did not like, which lead him to question where this relationship would take his work. Huggins wrote " When Hughes showed his patron this poem, He knew she did not like it. " Its not you ..... Let's a powerful poem but its not you" Who was he? Wasn't that the problem? Who was to decide? Who was to know? " (135). This quote proves that these white benefactors gave their opinion and influenced black artist's works. One of the early contributors of white interest in black intellectuals was a man by the name of Carl Van Bechtel.

He counted numerous black artists as his friends. He was responsible for popularizing " Black Art. " He through his connections allowed people like Longboats Hughes to enter the white mainstream. He also cultivated and encouraged numerous other young artists and similarly launched numerous careers. It was his fascination with the exotic and primitive as Huggins put it

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that sparked his slumming trips uptown into Harlem. That incredible rush he felt allowed him to bring many prominent white patrons back to Harlem. His popularization began the golden era called the Harlem Renaissance.

Huggins called him "The undisputed Prince of Harlem." Huggins also mentions that the fact that there were so many different types of Afro-Americans in Harlem it prevented the unification of a desired voting block. Huggins points out that there was in-race racism between light skinned blacks, blacks from the south, and blacks from the Caribbean which relates to much of the racism issues discussed throughout our class. They all were supposed to unite and together fight for reform. All this made consistent leadership impossible.

The black political leaders found it impossible to unite them all. The only one who was successful according to Huggins was Marcus Garvey because he stayed away from political agendas in Harlem. But his lack of a business sense and his own megalomania caused his attempts to flounder. None of them addressed the Negro problems but instead they wanted to quickly erase the view of a black person in chains and make everyone aware that they were more than just manual laborers. This lack of focus prevented Negro leadership from obtaining true success.

As I mentioned that black wanted to obtain true success and be viewed as different workers besides manual, I feel that it connects with our conferences about African-Americans wanting to do more for their country during the World Wars. Another problem Huggins presents with the black political leaders philosophy was that they addressed racism as a moral problem. They

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employed muckraking journalist tactics of exposing injustices and racism. Huggins states “ The assumption as that the moral weight of good would win once evil was exposed.

The unreason, the illogic the craven corruption that barred blacks from a fair chance in society could not stand, for men of good will under the harsh light of good reason” (27). This propaganda proved to be unsuccessful since it brought no significant change. As Huggins finally put it “ What good would it do to expose President Willow’s racism? Even if he read it he had a self-righteousness that was a match for any other progressive. All of that did not matter” (30). Both of these quotes prove Huggins point hat the way black political leaders approached their reform attempts were misguided.

As he put it, it did not matter the scathing criticism leaders like W. E. B. Dubos made in their editorials on black injustices it would not bring about any serious change. Unlike child labor and other topics of muckraking exposing them would not be enough to eradicate them. Huggins effectively proved to me that these white benefactors and white patrons influenced the work of black artist. Who knows what tone their works would have taken if they where liberated from white influences. Maybe they would have been razor sharp criticism like W. E. B. Dubos editorials. Unfortunately no one would ever know.

As far as their failed attempt at reform he showed some of the mistakes they made but also mentioned that they laid the foundation for a civil rights movement that eventually brought about social change that these Harlem intellectuals promised. In a book review from Amazon. Com a reviewer <https://assignbuster.com/harlem-renaissance-by-nathan-irvin-huggins-assignment/>

mention that: " More than any other period, it was during the Harlem renaissance in which the black community came of age culturally and came together as one united front against racism using cultural tools and its intellectual power and substance on par with its white counterparts.

Against all odds, they created a cultural oasis right in the middle of a sea of white hatred and racial recrimination. This flowering was something that was not only unexpected and shocking to the sensibilities of most whites, but shocking also to many blacks outside of New York, around the countryside. And although the flowering occurred across the board, its clearest expression took place in literature, art and music, which itself later was to become America's transformation art form. " American History\_ found that Huggins book was " disarmingly simple and exceedingly omelet. Solar went on explaining that the Harlem Renaissance was a Negro self- creation, and it was created in a place(Harlem) of sense and had become an urban " Mecca" where diversity, talent and energy would change the black persona. One last review that I found on ASTOR from Charles Davis of \_American Literature\_ stated that Huggins book was not the first full study assessment of black artists and of their intellectual and cultural efforts in the decade following the first World War. Of course Huggins can not provide a full assessment during that time period which could confuse readers if you look at it from that point of view.

I think that the first two reviews are in line with what I have been discussing through the whole review. During that era, African-Americans were struggling for freedom in the middle of a land full of hatred and racism.

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African-Americans wanted more freedom and it expressing it in various of categories such as art or music really helped freedom for blacks in today's society. The Authors sources are documented correctly. Book Review  
Huggins, Irvin, Nathan. Harlem Renaissance: Oxford University Press, New York, 1971