

Rachel N. Clift

Mr. Parmenter

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### The Influence of the Harlem Renaissance

The Harlem Renaissance refers to the emergence of the Harlem neighborhood in New York City as a black cultural buzz starting around the 1910s and ending roughly around the mid-1930s. This term also refers to the subsequent social and artistic explosion that resulted from the explosion of the Harlem neighborhood. The period is considered a golden age in African-American culture. This time of African-American pride brought new and creative literature, music, stage performance, and art.

The Harlem Renaissance truly began with the Great Migration. The Great Migration was the movement of over 6 million African-American individuals from the South to cities in the North, Midwest and West. This movement started around 1916, and is said to have ended around 1970. The intense segregation laws along with the lack of satisfactory economic opportunities prompted the African-Americans involved to head north, where they took advantage of the desperate necessity for industrial workers starting during the First World War. During this Great Migration, African-Americans were starting to construct a place for themselves in American society. They actively protested racial prejudice and segregation, as well as economic, political and social challenges brought upon them by their white neighbors. In doing this, they were able to create a modern black culture that would bring unimaginable influence to the American people and even worldwide for many decades.

Various still-popular artists contributed to the Harlem Renaissance such as Billie Holiday, Louis Armstrong, and Langston Hughes. African-American authors, poets, dancers, singers, musicians, actors, painters, and more contributed their art to the popular culture of the time, and helped gain enormous respect for the people of their race. Most of the artists and African-American participants involved in the explosion of the era had come to the neighborhood or other places in the North during the Great Migration. Many of the big bands of the time were led by African-Americans, and performed in nightclubs and speakeasies. This is why one could most definitely argue that the end of Prohibition brought the end of the Harlem Renaissance; there was no longer a need for these speakeasies, and African-American artists had to search for work elsewhere. Still, African-Americans continued to flourish in many aspects of popular culture, and their work is still widely respected and admired today. Writer Langston Hughes is just one example of the many writers that helped to shape literature and poetry as the years progressed.

Langston Hughes was an American poet, novelist, and playwright. His urban African-American themes made him a primary contributor to the Harlem Renaissance. Hughes's writing career truly began around the early 1920s, after he graduated from high school, when he spent a year in Mexico with his father before attending Columbia University. Around this time, Hughes's poem "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" was published in *The Crisis* magazine. His poem quickly became popular and highly praised. In 1921, Hughes enrolled at Columbia University and studied there briefly. During this time, he became a part of Harlem's growing African-American cultural movement: the Harlem Renaissance. Hughes dropped out of the university in 1922 and began working numerous odd jobs in and around New York before taking

a job as a steward on a freighter which took him to Africa and Spain. He brought his work on the ship to a halt in 1924, and briefly lived in Paris, France. He continued to publish poetry and receive positive attention from many.

The Harlem Renaissance and the many excellent artists that sprung into fame during the era continue to have a large effect on the people and cultural movements of today. The music, artistic, and writing styles of this time period have influenced innumerable people of varying races throughout the decades. This era of creativity helped to give African-Americans a more respected and prominent name in American society, and helped in the push for racial equality and the end of segregation laws.

## As I Grew Older-Langston Hughes

It was a long time ago.

I have almost forgotten my dream.

But it was there then,

In front of me,

Bright like a sun—

My dream.

And then the wall rose,

Rose slowly,

Slowly,

Between me and my dream.

Rose until it touched the sky—

The wall.

Shadow.

I am black.

I lie down in the shadow.

No longer the light of my dream before me,

Above me.

Only the thick wall.

Only the shadow.

My hands!

My dark hands!

Break through the wall!

Find my dream!

Help me to shatter this darkness,

To smash this night,

To break this shadow

Into a thousand lights of sun,

Into a thousand whirling dreams

Of sun!