

THE GENIUS OF THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE

VOLUME 1



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The Genius of the Harlem Renaissance



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**Teacher Guide and Activity Book
for *The Genius of the Harlem Renaissance*
(for Core Knowledge Language Arts®)**

Editor

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The Language of Race

In referring to racial identity, the speakers and writers in this book used terms that were accepted in their times, but in many cases are no longer accepted today. In the primary sources collected in this book, for the sake of historical accuracy, we have not changed the terms each speaker or writer used when referring to race. In the introductory texts that provide background information, we have aimed to use terms for race and ethnicity that are generally accepted now. What is accepted, however, is a matter of ongoing discussion.

At the time of this writing, in reference to African Americans, there is an ongoing discussion about whether to use the lowercase “black” or uppercase “Black” to refer to persons of African ancestry. In keeping with the practice of an increasing number of major publications, in the introductions written for this book, we use the uppercase “Black,” which acknowledges, as an editor for the New York Times explains, “the difference between a color and a culture.”

While we have chosen to capitalize “Black” (except when “black” is used in historical texts), we have chosen not to capitalize “white.” The historical texts gathered in this book do not capitalize “white.” Some publications have begun to capitalize “white”—see, for example, the guidelines of National Association of Black Journalists or the American Psychological Association. There are arguments for capitalizing “white” on the grounds that lowercase “white” might be taken to imply “whiteness” as a commonly accepted norm apart from race, while uppercase “White” acknowledges “Whiteness” as a racial identity in the context of American history. On the other hand, the New York Times, the Columbia Journalism Review, and others make the point that “white” should remain lowercase because hate groups and white supremacists have long insisted on capitalizing

“white.” Given the lack of consensus on this matter at the time of the publication of this book, we maintain our practice of not capitalizing “white,” while affirming that “whiteness” is not to be understood as a norm but as a racial identity.

To sum up, in this book, when we refer to race or ethnicity, our goal has been to remain historically accurate in the primary source materials, and culturally sensitive to generally accepted current usage in the introductions that provide historical background. If you think that in specific instances we have not met this goal, please let us know by contacting the Core Knowledge Foundation.

THERE FROM THE BEGINNING – THE AFRICAN AMERICAN LITERARY TRADITIONS

Although this reader will have you looking at poetry and other literary works central to an important 20th century American cultural movement known as the Harlem Renaissance, it is important to know that African Americans have a long and proud history of making significant contributions to American literature and culture, even from the nation's earliest beginnings.

Born Borteer Furror in the early 1700s, African American farmer and craftsman Venture Smith published one of the earliest known examples of an autobiography in colonial America. Though captured into slavery when he was just six years old, he purchased his and his family's freedom as an adult and went on to recount his experiences while enslaved in *A Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Venture, a Native of Africa....*



Phillis Wheatley, 1753 - 1784

Another important contributor to American literature was a young poetess named Phillis Wheatley. Though enslaved, Wheatley was educated in the household of a prominent Boston merchant. Wheatley spoke, wrote or understood four languages and would later become an important figure to abolitionists, who touted her intellectual and creative abilities as proof that black people could be

refined through education. She was a household name among literate colonists, and her poetry inspired a generation of American colonists who were fighting for their political independence from Great Britain. Wheatley's poetry skillfully struck patriotic tones and admiration for the young country's ideals embracing freedom and equality. Yet, she never forgot the enslaved status she herself once carried and was a status shared by tens of thousands of Black people at the time. In a poem she wrote that appeared in what was the first book of poetry published by a black woman in the United States, Wheatley explained why she was such a firm believer in the cause for freedom and liberty. She wrote:

Should you, my lord, while you peruse my song,
Wonder from whence my love of Freedom sprung,
Whence flow these wishes for the common good,
By feeling hearts alone best understood,
I, young in life, by seeming cruel fate
Was snatch'd* from Afric's** fancy'd happy seat:
What pangs excruciating must molest ,
What sorrows labour*** in my parent's breast?
Steel'd was that soul and by no misery mov'd
That from a father seiz'd his babe belov'd:
Such, such my case. And can I then but pray
Others may never feel tyrannic sway?

* Phillis Wheatley used 'd in place of the suffix -ed.

** "Afric's" means "Africa's" in this line.

*** "Labour" is the British spelling of labor, which Wheatley would have used in Colonial America.

peruse, v. to read something carefully

molest, v. to abuse

tyrannic, adj. having complete power

One of her most enthusiastic fans was none other than George Washington himself. When he assumed command of the Continental Army, Wheatley wrote a poem in his honor. In a letter she included with the poem she had written for him, she stated “Your being appointed by the Grand Continental Congress to be Generalissimo of the armies of North America, together with the fame of your virtues, excite sensations not easy to suppress.” Washington was so taken by Wheatley’s words that he not only responded with a letter of his own but extended an invitation for a personal meeting. In 1776, the two met at Washington’s Cambridge, Massachusetts headquarters in the early months of the Revolutionary War.

As the Revolutionary War resulted in the emergence of a new country, African Americans grew more passionate in their demands to secure freedom for themselves. Several gifted writers lent their talents to the fight for freedom. Frederick Douglass, the most famous African American abolitionist of the time, was a self-taught formerly enslaved native of Maryland who wrote a best-selling autobiography that catapulted him to worldwide prominence as an international abolitionist. Harriet Jacobs’ *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* gave readers an inside look at the specific problems enslaved Black women faced through the vivid account of her life that she gave in that book.

As the 20th century approached, Black creatives continued to make substantial contributions to America’s cultural lifeblood. Their works were signs of things to come and set the stage for the expressive explosion of literature and art we now know as the Harlem Renaissance. Paul Laurence Dunbar was one of those early 20th century cultural innovators.



The Harlem Renaissance was a cultural movement that spanned the 1920s. During the first Great Migration (1910-1930) about 1.6 million African-American migrants left Southern rural areas to migrate to northern industrial cities.

Paul Laurence Dunbar



Born in 1872 to two formerly enslaved parents, Paul Laurence Dunbar became one of the most influential Black poets in modern American literature. Dunbar published two volumes of poetry in the 1890s despite being earlier rejected for publication because of his race. Dunbar's friendship and association with Orville Wright would later open doors for him and his poetry. Wright, who along with his brother Wilbur, invented the airplane, was Dunbar's high school classmate. Wright later printed a newspaper called the *Dayton Tattler*. Wright printed some of Dunbar's poems in this paper, which introduced bigger audiences to Dunbar's talents.

In 1899, Dunbar wrote "Sympathy", a poem in which he expressed the plight of Black people and the effects that racism had on their lives. After reading this poem, answer the questions that follow.

Sympathy

by Paul Laurence Dunbar

I know what the caged bird feels, alas!

When the sun is bright on the upland slopes;

When the wind stirs soft through the springing grass,

And the river flows like a stream of glass;

When the first bird sings and the first bud opes ,

And the faint perfume from its chalice steals—

I know what the caged bird feels!

ope, v. to open (opes)

chalice, n. a cup

I know why the caged bird beats his wing
 Till its blood is red on the cruel bars;
For he must fly back to his perch and cling
 When he fain would be on the bough a-swing;
And a pain still throbs in the old, old scars
 And they pulse again with a keener sting—
I know why he beats his wing!

I know why the caged bird sings, ah me,
 When his wing is bruised and his bosom sore,—
When he beats his bars and he would be free;
 It is not a carol of joy or glee,
But a prayer that he sends from his heart's deep core,
 But a plea, that upward to Heaven he flings—
I know why the caged bird sings!

For Further Consideration:

1. What is the overall tone of this poem?
2. The use of a refrain (a phrase that is used repeatedly) is a common rhetorical device in poetry. What refrain does this poem use?
3. What effect does the use of the refrain have on the tone of the poem?
4. Who is “the caged bird” the poem references?
5. In what way(s) might the poet identify with the “caged bird”?

THE GREAT MIGRATION AND ITS CAUSES

Imagine that you lived in a neighborhood where you could regularly hear music played by skilled musicians, day and night. Picture yourself surrounded by creative works of art, where you actually have the chance to talk to the men and women who produced them. Now see yourself surrounded by lots of smart and interesting people who know a lot about a lot of different things. You hear them talking about new and interesting ideas about making life better for all Americans during a time when you know that not everyone is treated equally or fairly. In this community, you see people wearing the most fashionable clothing around as they walk down crowded sidewalks that run alongside the apartment building you live in with your family. You may even spot one of those shiny, new-fangled automobiles zipping up and down the bustling city streets. There is a vibrance and an energy that you have never quite seen before. You are not exactly sure what to make of the sights and sounds that surround you. But what you do know, is that it is all very exciting and is nothing like the life you left behind in the rural, northern Florida town you were born in.

The scenario you have just read could have described the experience of any one of the thousands of African Americans who left rural towns all over the South to relocate to urban centers in the North. This historic phenomenon is known as The Great Migration. The Great Migration was the largest internal movement of people in American History and refers to the mass exodus of rural Southern African Americans to urban areas in the North, Midwest, and West. This movement occurred over six decades of the 20th century and occurred in two phases. Phase One of the migration started in 1910

exodus, n. an exodus is when a large number of people move away from a certain location

and ended in 1940 and the second phase lasted from the 1940s through the 1970s. In both phases, there were factors that influenced people to leave everything behind that they had ever known. The circumstances that influence people's decisions to leave their places of origins are known as push factors, while those conditions that attract people to a given area are known as pull factors. For the African Americans leaving the south, the primary push factors influencing their decision were the desire to escape racial hostility and violence, and the pursuit of better economic opportunity. Northern, Midwestern and Western cities represented the promise of relief from the racial oppression of the South and the lure of better paying jobs than the menial wages of rural farmworkers.

Once they settled in their new homes, recent arrivals were quickly disillusioned by the realities of the new lives they had chosen. While the jobs they were able to obtain in the factories and mills of their new communities paid higher wages than they had ever earned before, the work was very hard and often very dangerous. When they were not working, new urban dwellers had to adjust to life in the big city, often being forced to live in crowded, rundown buildings that were breeding grounds for crime and disease.

Perhaps most devastating for African American migrants hoping to escape the racial tensions of their native Southern homelands was the swift and shocking realization that racial prejudices could be just as acute in the North. Between the years 1917–1919, there were several race riots resulting in injuries, deaths and property destruction in the millions.

Despite the disappointments the reality of their new lives may have presented them, African Americans made the most of their situation and developed vibrant communities that helped them to adjust to their new lives in their new homes. Although both phases

oppression, n. a harsh and unjust treatment

menial, adj. low , as those paid to a servant or non-skilled labor

of the Great Migration led to significant changes for both African Americans and America as a whole, The First Great Migration set the stage for an important American intellectual and cultural movement known as the Harlem Renaissance.

The selections you will find in this two-part reader are products of that movement. This first volume will contain readings, with a few exceptions, from the first part of the Harlem Renaissance (1915 – 1926) while the second volume will contain passages produced for the most part during the second half of the movement (1926 – 1940). So that you will have a better appreciation and understanding of the works you will read, each passage will include brief biographies of their authors, as well as information about the historic events that were happening at the time they were produced.

What caused the Great Migration?

As you have just read, there are various reasons why people would choose to leave places they may have known all their lives for other, unknown places. These reasons are called push factors and can include such things as lack of economic opportunity, poor quality of life and limited chances for success. All of these were push factors for African Americans in the South at the beginning of the 20th century, especially in the minds of educated people of that time period.

One of those educated people was an African American sociologist named Charles S. Johnson.

One of the essays Dr. Johnson wrote was entitled “The New Frontage of American Life”. Alain Locke included it in his collection of essays – The New Negro. In it, Dr. Johnson explains the push factors that led millions of southern Blacks to leave the South in favor of the North in the early 20th century

Dr. Charles S. Johnson



Dr. Charles S. Johnson (1893 – 1956) was a sociologist and the first African American president of Fisk University, a historically black college or university (HBCU) in Nashville, Tennessee*. Dr. Johnson was a life-long advocate of equal rights for all Americans. The author of several books and essays on history, politics and the fight for equal rights, Dr. Johnson was among the first to publicly celebrate the landmark 1954 Supreme Court decision *Brown v Board of Education*, which outlawed racial segregation in American public schools. Dr. Johnson died of a heart attack at the age of 63 in 1956.

* Historically Black Colleges and Universities or HBCUs for short, served a very important role in educating generations of African Americans at a time when black people were not allowed to go to many colleges or universities in America. Although African Americans can now attend any college or university their grades and talents will allow them to enter, HBCUs continue to play a significant role in educating and serving communities of color in the 21st century.

The New Frontage On American Life

by Charles S. Johnson

The cities of the North, stern, impersonal and enchanting, needed men of the brawny muscles, which Europe, suddenly flaming with war, had ceased to supply, when the black hordes came on from the South like a silent, encroaching shadow. Five hundred thousand there were in the first three-year period. These had yielded with an almost uncanny unanimity of triumphant approval to urge to migration, closing in first upon the little towns of the South, then upon the cities near the towns, and, with an unfailing consistency, sooner or later, they boarded a Special bound North, to close in upon these cities which lured them, with an ultimate appeal, to their gay lights and high wages, unoppressive anonymity, crowds, excitement, and feverish struggle for life.

There was Chicago in the West known far and wide for its colossal abattoirs*, whose placarded warehouses, set close by the railroad, dotted every sizeable town of the South, calling for men; Chicago, remembered for the fairyland wonders of the World's Fair; home of the fearless, taunting "race paper"**, and above all things, of mills clamoring for men.

* The phrase "colossal abattoirs" means "big slaughterhouses". In the early 20th century, Chicago was the leading meat-packing center in America and the nation's largest stockyards and meat processing plants were located there.

** Probably refers to *The Chicago Defender*.

And there was Pittsburgh, gloomy, cheerless—bereft of the Poles and Lithuanians, Croatians and Austrians who had trucked and smelted its steel. And along with Pittsburgh, the brilliant satellite

anonymity, n. the state of being unknown

placarded, v. to be covered with signs

bereft, adj. to be missing or absent

smelt, v. the process involving heat that is used to remove steel from ore (**smelts**)

towns of Bethlehem and Duquesne and Homestead. The solid but alert Europeans in 1916 had deserted the lower bases of industry and gone after munitions money, or home to fight. Creeping out, they left a void, which to fill, tempted industry to desperate measures. One railroad line brought in 121,000 of these new laborers graciously and gratuitously. The road-beds and immense construction projects of the State were in straits and the great mills wanted men.

And there was New York City, with its polite personal service and its Harlem – the Mecca of Negroes the country over. Delightful Harlem of the effete East! Old families, brownstone* mansions, a step from worshipful Broadway**, the end of the rainbow for early relatives drifting from home into the exciting world; the factories and the docks, the stupendous clothing industries, and buildings to be “superintended”, a land of opportunity for musicians, actors and those who wanted to be, the national headquarters of everything but the government.

* Brownstone is a type of sandstone that was used to cover homes in New York City. The term is also used to mean any townhouse built in the city during the 1800s, even those not made of brownstone.

** Broadway is a large, important street in New York City.

And there was Cleveland with a faint Southern exposé but with iron mills; and St. Louis, one of the first cities of the North, a city of mixed traditions, but with great foundries, brick and terra-cotta works; Detroit, the automobile center, with its sophistication of skill and fancy wages reflecting the daring economic policies of Henry Ford; Hartford, Connecticut, where, indeed, the first experiment with southern labor, was tried on the tobacco plantations skirting the city; Akron and its rubber; Philadelphia with its comfortable old traditions and the innumerable little industrial towns where fabulous wages were paid.

munitio, n. military weapon (munitions)

Mecca, n. a sacred Muslim city in Saudi Arabia; all Muslims make a pilgrimage to Mecca during their lifetime

effete, adj. over refined, without vigor or energy

foundry, n. factories where metal structures are made (foundries)

II

Migrations, thinks Professor Carr-Saunders—and he is confirmed by history—are nearly always due to the influence of an idea. Population crowding and economic debasement, are, by their nature, more or less constant. In the case of the Negroes, it was not exclusively an idea, but an idea brought within the pale of possibility. By tradition and probably by temperament the Negro is a rural type. His *métier* (occupation) is agriculture. To this economy his mental and social habits have been adjusted... .

A new type of Negro is evolving – a city Negro. ...in ten years, Negroes have been actually transplanted from one culture to another.

Where once there were personal and intimate relations, in which individuals were in contact at practically all points of their lives, there are now group relations in which the whole structure is broken up and reassorted, casting them in contact at only one or two points in their lives. The old controls are no longer expected to operate. Whether apparent or not, the newcomers are forced to reorganize their lives, to enter a new status and adjust to it that eager restlessness which prompted them to leave home. Church, lodge, gossip, respect of friends, established customs, social and racial, exercise controls in the small Southern community. The church is the center for face-to-face relations. The pastor is the leader. The role of the pastor and the social utility of the church are obvious in this letter sent home:

“Dear pastor: I find it my duty to write you my whereabouts, also family...I shall send my church money in a few days. I am trying to influence our members here to the same. I received notice printed in a R.R. car (Get right God). O, I had nothing so striking as the above mottoe (sic). Let me no (sic)** how is our church. I am so anxious to no**. My wife always talking about her seat in the church want to no** who occupies it. Yours in Christ.”*

* motto

** know

debasement, n. the act of making something less valuable

Religion affords an outlet for the emotional energies thwarted in other directions...

In the new environment there are many and varied substitutes which answer more or less directly the myriad desires indiscriminately comprehended by the church. The complaint of the ministers that these "emancipated" souls "stray away from God" when they reach the city is perhaps warranted on the basis of the fixed status of the church in the South, but it is not an accurate interpretation of what has happened. When the old ties are broken new satisfactions are sought. Sometimes, the Young Men's Christian Association functions. This has in some cities made rivalry between the churches and the Associations. More often the demands of the young exceed the "sterilized" amusements of Christian organizations. It is not uncommon to find groups who faithfully attend church Sunday evenings and as faithfully seek further stimulation in a cabaret afterwards. Many have been helped to find themselves, no doubt, by having their old churches and pastors reappear in the new home and resume control. But too often, as with European immigrants, the family loses control over the children who become assimilated more rapidly than their parents. Tragic evidences of this appear coldly detailed in the records of delinquency...

There is a reorganization of attitudes. There is a racial as well as a social disorientation. For those who fed their hopes and expectations on a new status which would afford an escape from unrighteous and oppressive limitations of the South, there is a sensitiveness about any reminder of the station from which they have been so recently emancipated—a hair-trigger resentment, a furious revolt against the

myriad, adj. many or countless

emancipated, adj. made free

warranted, adj. justified

cabaret, n. a nightclub

assimilate, v. make a part of, absorb fully into society (assimilated)

delinquency, n. minor crime committed by a young person

disorientation, n. confusion

unrighteous, adj. wicked

oppressive, adj., tyrannical; severe

hair-trigger, adj. over responsive; easily made to react

years of training in the precise boundaries of their place, a fear of disclosing the weakness of submission where it is not expected, an expansiveness and pretense at ease in unaccustomed situation. Exact balance is difficult. Here are some of the things that register: John Diggs writes home to his friend this letter:

“Dear Partner:...I am all fixed now and living well, I don’t have to work hard. Don’t have to mister every little boy comes along. I haven’t heard a white man call a colored a nigger you know how – since I been here. I can ride in the street or steam car anywhere I get a seat. I don’t care to mix with white...I am not crazy about being with white folks, but if I have to pay the same fare I have learn to want the same acomodation (sic) and if you are first in a place here shopping you don’t have to wait till all the white folks get thro tradeing yet amid all this I love the good old south and am praying that God may give every well wisher a chance to be a man regardless of color...”*

* accommodation

For Further Consideration:

- 1.** In the opening paragraphs of this essay, Johnson identifies cities and the main industries that they were known for at the time. Name one of the cities he listed and the industry that was associated with it.
- 2.** Which environment does Johnson believe most African Americans who initially moved to the North were better suited for? What argument does he make to support this claim?
- 3.** According to Johnson, what role did churches play in the lives of Black people in the South?
- 4.** What did Johnson believe the biggest adjustment Southern Black people who moved North had to make? Use evidence from the essay to support your answer.

thro: through

tradeing: trading

James Weldon Johnson— A Multitalented Renaissance Man

James Weldon Johnson (1871 – 1938)



A native of north-central Florida, James Weldon Johnson (1871 – 1938) was one of the most prolific figures of the Harlem Renaissance, and was in fact, a REAL renaissance man. What is a Renaissance Man? A Renaissance Man is defined as someone who has interests and talents in a variety of subjects and topics. Johnson was one of the first African American attorneys

admitted to the Florida Bar*. Also during his lifetime, Johnson was an educator, diplomat, poet, songwriter, historian; and was once the executive secretary for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). The following is a selection that appeared in Alain Locke's 1925 anthology *The New Negro*. Here, Johnson presents a romanticized view of Harlem as a destination of choice for southern African Americans migrating to the North.

* The Florida Bar is an official state professional organization that attorneys must belong to in order to practice law in court. In order to be admitted to the Bar, attorneys must pass a test.

Harlem: The Cultural Capital

by James Weldon Johnson

In the history of New York, the significance of the name Harlem has changed from Dutch to Irish to Jewish to Negro. Of these changes, the last has come most swiftly. Throughout colored America, from Massachusetts to Mississippi, and across the continent to Los Angeles and Seattle, its name, which as late as fifteen years ago had scarcely been heard, now stands for the Negro metropolis. Harlem is indeed the great Mecca for the sightseer, the pleasure-seeker, the curious, the adventurous, the enterprising, the ambitious and the talented of the whole Negro world; for the lure of it has reached down to every island of the Carib Sea and has penetrated even into Africa.

In the make-up of New York, Harlem is not merely a Negro colony or community, it is a city within a city, the greatest Negro city in the world. It is not a slum or a fringe, it is located in the heart of Manhattan* and occupies one of the most beautiful and healthful sections of the city. It is not a “quarter” of dilapidated tenements but is made up of new-law apartments** and handsome dwellings, with well-paved and well-lighted streets. It has its own churches, social and civic centers, shops, theaters and other places of amusement. And it contains more Negroes to the square mile than any other spot on earth. A stranger who rides up magnificent Seventh Avenue on a bus or in an automobile must be struck with surprise at the transformation which takes place after he crosses One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street. Beginning there, the population suddenly darkens and he rides through twenty-five solid blocks where the passersby, the shoppers, those sitting in restaurants,

* Manhattan is the island where New York City is located.

** The Tenement House Act of 1901 (New York City) imposed stricter standards for apartment building construction, including improved light, ventilation, and toilet facilities. Such buildings were called “new-law” structures.

metropolis, n. an important city

quarter, n. a part of a city

dilapidated, adj. in disrepair

coming out of theaters, standing in doorways and looking out of windows are practically all Negroes; and then he emerges where the population as suddenly becomes white again. There is nothing just like it in any other city in the country, for there is no preparation for it; no change in the character of the houses and streets; no change, indeed, in the appearance of the people, except their color.

. . . the Negro colony was becoming more stable; the churches were being moved from the lower part of the city; social and civic centers were being formed; and gradually a community was being evolved. Following the outbreak of the war in Europe Negro Harlem received a new and tremendous impetus. Because of the war thousands of aliens in the United States rushed back to their native lands to join the colors and immigration practically ceased. The result was a critical shortage in labor. This shortage was rapidly increased as the United States went more and more largely into the business of furnishing munitions and supplies to the warring countries. To help meet this shortage of common labor Negroes were brought up from the South. The government itself took the first steps, following the practice in vogue in Germany of shifting labor according to the supply and demand in various parts of the country. The example of the government was promptly taken up by the big industrial concerns, which sent hundreds, perhaps thousands, of labor agents into the South who recruited Negroes by wholesale. I was in Jacksonville, Fla., for a while at that time, and I sat one day and watched the stream of migrants passing to take the train. For hours they passed steadily, carrying flimsy suitcases, new and shiny, rusty old ones, bursting at the seams, boxes and bundles and impedimenta of all sorts, including banjos, guitars, birds in cages and what not.

impetus, n. the driving force that causes something to happen

alien, n. foreigner; immigrant from another country (aliens)

join the colors, v. join the military

shift, v. to move (shifting)

impedimenta, n. bulky things or equipment

Similar scenes were being enacted in cities and towns all over that region. The first wave of the great exodus of Negroes from the South was on. Great numbers of these migrants headed for New York or eventually got there, and naturally the majority went up into Harlem. But the Negro population of Harlem was not swollen by migrants from the South alone; the opportunity for Negro labor exerted its pull upon the Negroes of the West Indies*, and those islanders in the course of time poured into Harlem to the number of twenty-five thousand or more...

* The West Indies are a group of islands bordering the Caribbean Sea and Atlantic Ocean. During the 17th century, thousands of Africans were brought to these islands by different European countries to serve as slave laborers on the sugar plantations.

...These newcomers did not have to look for work; work looked for them, and at wages of which they had never even dreamed. And here is where the unlooked for, the unprecedented, the miraculous happened. According to all preconceived notions, these Negroes suddenly earning large sums of money for the first time in their lives should have had their heads turned; they should have squandered it in the most silly and absurd manners imaginable. Later, after the United States had entered the war and even Negroes in the South were making money fast, many stories in accord with the tradition came out of that section. There was the one about the colored man who went into a general store and on hearing a phonograph for the first time promptly ordered six of them, one for each child in the house. I shall not stop to discuss whether Negroes in the South did that sort of thing or not, but I do know that those who got to New York didn't. The Negroes of Harlem, for the greater part, worked and saved their money. Nobody knew how much they had saved until congestion made expansion necessary for tenants and ownership profitable for landlords, and they began to buy property. Persons who would never be suspected of having money bought property.

enact, v. to act out (enacted)

exodus, n. a mass departure

unprecedented, adj. never happened before

preconceived, adj. a belief of something before facts

congestion, n. overcrowding

...It is true that Harlem is a Negro community, well defined and stable; anchored to its fixed homes, churches, institutions, business and amusement places; having its own working, business and professional classes. It is experiencing a constant growth of group consciousness and community feeling...

...Harlem grows more metropolitan and more a part of New York all the while. Why is it then that its tendency is not to become a mere “quarter”? I shall give three reasons that seem to me to be important in their order. First, the language of Harlem is not alien; it is not Italian or Yiddish; it is English. Harlem talks American, reads American, thinks American. Second, Harlem is not physically a “quarter.” It is not a section cut off. It is merely a zone through which four main arteries of the city run. Third, the fact that there is little or no gang labor gives Harlem Negroes the opportunity for individual expansion and individual contacts with the life and spirit of New York. A thousand Negroes from Mississippi put to work as a gang in a Pittsburgh steel mill will for a long time remain a thousand Negroes from Mississippi. Under the conditions that prevail in New York they would all within six months become New Yorkers. The rapidity with which Negroes become good New Yorkers is one of the marvels to observers. These three reasons form a single reason why there is small probability that Harlem will ever be a point of race friction between the races in New York.

For Further Consideration:

1. Using evidence from the passage you have just read how do the experiences Johnson relates about the Great Migration’s impact on Harlem reflect what you learned from reading the earlier passage on the Great Migration?
2. Johnson states that in the early 1920s, Harlem was on its way to becoming a “stable neighborhood”. What evidence does he offer to support this claim?
3. In the selection, Johnson claims that Harlem was becoming more “a part of New York,” and was not in danger of isolating itself from the rest of the city. What are the three reasons he gives for this?

metropolitan, adj. city-like; diverse

artery, n. route; road (arteries)

The Role of the Black Press in the Great Migration

In the early 20th century, Americans received their news and information from reading newspapers. Because of this, newspapers performed a very important function in American society. Out of the hundreds of papers that were in circulation over 100 years ago, several of them catered to African Americans. Among the two with the largest circulations were *The Chicago Defender* and *The Amsterdam News*. Founded in 1905 by Robert Abbott, *The Chicago Defender* grew its subscription base to half a million readers nationally, after its humble beginnings in the kitchen of its founder landlord's apartment. Himself a southern migrant, Abbott used his weekly paper as a platform to amplify the ravages of southern racism. Based out of New York City, *The Amsterdam News* has played a prominent role in African American affairs since its founding in 1909. Along with *The Defender*, *The Amsterdam News* printed job bulletins, train schedules, and information on public facilities and services like parks and schools. They also printed news of Southern lynchings, and other forms of mistreatment and discrimination Black people faced in the South.

Harlem's version of *The Defender* was *the New York Amsterdam News*. Like *The Defender*, *The Amsterdam News* started with a modest initial investment with a determined founder. James Anderson edited and published his new paper out of his home, printing a paper that focused on local concerns and the activities of African American social organizations. In 1910, Anderson relocated his paper's offices to Harlem and throughout the Renaissance frequently published the works of notable contributors like Langston Hughes and W.E.B. Dubois. Like *The Defender*, *The Amsterdam News* also

lynching, n. the act of killing someone to carry out perceived justice outside of the proper legal channels
(lynchings)

printed stories and editorials that had the effect of influencing the Black movement to the North. Both papers relied on an informal distribution network of railroad workers known as *porters* to circulate their papers to hungry audiences in the South. Porters, typically black men, were railroad workers who assisted passengers with their baggage and served them food and drink during their trips. With the opportunities for travel and relatively high wages, these jobs were highly sought and considered one of the best jobs a black man could have at this time. Porters traveling South would take copies of papers like *The Defender* and *The Amsterdam News* on their trips to the South and arrange for copies of them to be picked up by contacts who would then get them into the hands of people in their community.

The following is an article that was printed in the December 15, 1926 edition of *The New York Amsterdam News*. Read it and answer the questions that follow.

Joel Augustus Rogers



Joel Augustus Rogers was a Black writer, lecturer, anthropologist, historian, journalist, and publisher who was born in Jamaica in 1880. He came to the United States in 1906. J.A. Rogers studied the history of Africa and African Americans in the United States. He challenged stereotypes that were held about African Americans and scientific racism.

Impressions of Dixie: Another Emancipation Coming

by J.A. Rogers

Northern born Negroes, filled with horror at tales of lynching and segregation in the South, are inclined to think that the migration to the North was due, primarily, to those things. Beyond the few who were chased by the mob, it is safe to say that the great majority came because of oppression in the pocketbook, and they saw relief in the North, or came because of better business projects. In short, they boiled with indignation, not at the lynchings, but at the size of the pay envelope.

And when work slackened in the North, they returned to the South in hordes, the majority remaining, of course. Many workers told me with some heat that they could get jobs at home they couldn't get in the North. One blacksmith, working at his trade, said the best job he could get in Detroit was as a helper.

Everywhere I found Negroes in the South doing work, mechanical work, that could have been secured only with great difficulty in the North. Of course, there ought to be no cause for surprise at this, since a large portion of the labor there is black, just as in the North, the bulk of it is white.

Further proof that the migration is economic is the fact that there is a continuous migration of northern negroes to the South – of teachers, clerks, accountants, stenographers, insurance agents, who come to fill surplus white collar jobs in Negro concerns*. Many marry and make themselves at home, assuming the protective psychology, and even

* Concerns here is another word for "businesses".

Emancipation, n. liberation or freeing from slavery. In 1862, Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation during the Civil War which changed the legal status of African Americans who were enslaved in the states at war with the Union to that of free men.

indignation, n. anger

white-collar, adj an office job that requires skills and earns an above average salary

becoming anti-North, while many are heartily sick of it, but remain for the money's sake.

These facts may seem to bear out the southern white's statement that the South is the best place for the Negro, but it points to something worse: it shows that the Caucasianized* Negro, here as well in the West Indies and South Africa, is so much of a white man within, and hence so filled with aversion for himself that he hasn't sufficient group-sympathy to be irked by conditions that would be most galling to the whites were they in the Negro's place.

When the southern white man says the best place for the Negro is the South, his is thinking not of the Negro, but of himself. He prefers to employ Negroes in certain capacities or to have them around mainly because of lower wages, color egotism, the Negro's definitely fixed social position...I have always felt from my experiences in America, Europe, and elsewhere that white persons have less color prejudice than mulattoes** and blacks.

* Caucasianized is an adjective used to describe a Black person who has adopted the prejudices of a white person.

** Mulatto(-es) was an early 20th century word for some one of mixed-race heritage, usually of white and black parentage. It is an outdated term no longer considered acceptable to use. Bi-racial is the more modern and accurate term.

What the whites want [is] the economic exploitation of the Negro . . . For instance, the Jim-Crow law of Georgia expressly provides that when a colored man travels as the servant of a white, he rides in the white coach. This is the law, written or unwritten over the entire South, and includes convicts in the charge of white sheriffs.

aversion, n. a strong dislike

exploitation, n. to misuse someone to benefit from their work

. . . Not ten miles from Atlanta, the leading city of the South, I saw Negroes, so low in the scale of civilization, their single suit of clothing so encrusted with dirt, that they would have been better off had they remained in the jungles of Africa. There, at least their nude skins would have been washed by the dew. And all of this in America, whose purse is bursting with gold.

Another emancipation is due... Thomas Jefferson foresaw, in a similar evil and sad* that he trembled for his country when he remembered that God was just**.

* This article has been copied many times, and as a result, the text has gotten a bit garbled. We think the best translation would be: Thomas Jefferson foresaw a similar evil and said that he trembled for his country when he remembered that God was just.

** "Impressions of Dixie" *The New York Amsterdam News* (1922-1938); December 15, 1926; ProQuest Historical Newspapers; New York Amsterdam News pg. 20.

For Further Consideration:

1. What role did Black newspapers like *The Chicago Defender* and *The Amsterdam News* play in promoting the northward migration of African Americans in the early 20th century?
2. According to the article's author, what was the real reason southern African Americans left for the North in the early 20th century?
3. Based on what the author writes, does he believe life for African Americans in the North would be better than it would be for them in the South? Explain your answer by using evidence from the text.

THE NEW NEGRO MOVEMENT AND ITS IDEAS

The Great Migration of African Americans out of the South and into the North that started during World War I, showed no signs of letting up in the 1920s. Partially due to this streaming flux of new residents into America's urban centers, and partially due to the return of Black World War I veterans whose visions had been expanded by travel abroad, Harvard educated intellectual Alain Locke told Americans in 1925 that there was a new spirit evident in Black America. Locke declared that this spirit was one in which Black people embraced their African ancestry, no longer feeling it necessary to be ashamed of who they were. Locke gave this new identity a name: The New Negro. Besides being a new identity, the New Negro gave birth to a new way of thinking and new sets of ideas. Although these ideas and the spirit of the New Negro could be seen all over the urban North, it was the most vibrant in Harlem, New York. By the 1920s, this New York City neighborhood had become the social and political capital for Black America, and several organizations were headquartered, established, or had a large presence here. Harlem was the center of the universe for the young or young at heart, especially if they had a heart for the welfare of Black people and free expression of Black people. "The younger generation," declared Locke, "is vibrant with a new psychology; the new spirit is awake in the masses . . . Each generation . . . will have its creed." By the art, music and culture that was created in this community, 1920s Harlem represented everything Locke suggested about this bold new attitude and these fresh, exciting ideas.

The New Negro

by Alain Locke

Historians believe that there would not have been a Harlem Renaissance had it not been for the intellectual contributions of American philosopher Alain Locke.

In 1925, he published a collection of poetry and essays of the most brilliant African American thinkers of that time. It was entitled *The New Negro: An Interpretation*. This important work set out to disprove negative stereotypes about African Americans and their ability to produce works of art and literature.

Alain Locke



Born in Philadelphia, Alain Locke (1885-1954) was one of the most academically accomplished African Americans of his era. He received his Ph. D. from Harvard University and was the first Black Rhodes Scholar, which is a very prestigious academic honor for the world's best and brightest.

Forward from *The New Negro* – by Alain Locke

This volume aims to document the New Negro culturally and socially – to register the transformations of the inner and outer life of the Negro in America that have so significantly taken place in the last few years. There is ample evidence of a New Negro in the latest phases of social change and progress, but still more in the internal world of the Negro mind and spirit....Whoever wishes to see the Negro in his essential traits, in the full perspective of his achievement and possibilities, must seek the enlightenment of that self-portraiture which the present developments of Negro culture are offering...So far as his culturally articulate, we shall let the Negro speak for himself...Separate as it may be in color and substance, the culture of the Negro is a pattern integral with the times and with its cultural setting...Although there are few centers that can be pointed out approximating Harlem's significance, the full significance of that even is a racial awakening on a national and perhaps even a world scale.

...Negro life is not only establishing new contacts and founding new centers, it is finding a new soul. There is a fresh spiritual and cultural focusing. We have, as the heralding sign, an unusual outburst of creative expression. There is a renewed race-spirit that consciously and proudly sets itself apart. Justifiably then, we speak of the offerings of this book embodying these ripening forces as culled from the first fruits of the Negro Renaissance*.

* *The New Negro: An Interpretation*. (New York, NY: Albert and Charles Boni, 1925.), pp. ix-xi.

***The New Negro* – by Alain Locke**

In the last decade something beyond the watch and guard of statistics has happened in the life of the American Negro...The sociologist, the philanthropist, the race-leader are not unaware of the New Negro, but

they are at a loss to account for him. He simply cannot be swathed in their formula. For the younger generation is vibrant with a new psychology; the new spirit is awake in the masses, and under the very eyes of the professional observers is transforming what has been a perennial problem in the progressive phases of contemporary Negro life.

...With this renewed self-respect and self-dependence, the life of the Negro community is bound to enter a new dynamic phase.... the migrant masses, shifting from countryside to city, hurdle several generations of experience at a leap,...the same thing happens...in the life-attitudes and self-expression of the Young Negro, in his poetry, his art, his education and his new outlook... The day of “aunties”, “uncles” and “mammies” is...gone...Uncle Tom and Sambo have passed on*...

...The tide of Negro migration, northward and city-ward, is not to be fully explained as a blind flood started by the demands of war industry coupled with the shutting off of foreign migration, or by the pressure of poor crops coupled with increased social terrorism in certain sections of the South and Southwest. Neither labor demand, the boll-weevil nor the Ku Klux Klan** is a basic factor, however contributory any or all of them may have been. The wash and rush of this human tide on the beach line of the northern city centers is to be explained primarily in terms of a new vision of opportunity, of social and economic freedom, of a spirit to seize...a chance for the improvement of conditions.

* The use of the term **mammies** is referring to a time in the southern United States when black nursemaids were used to care for white children. **Uncle Tom** was used to describe an African American who betrayed his culture and was subservient to white people. **Sambo** was a word used to refer to a Black person. All of these terms are considered offensive and are not used today.

** First started after the Civil War, the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) first targeted violence against newly freed African Americans. The organization continues to exist as a white supremacy hate group, targeting Blacks, Latinos, Native Americans, as well as immigrants, LGBT and other minority populations.

...Take Harlem as an instance of this. Here in Manhattan is not merely the largest Negro community in the world, but the first concentration in history of so many diverse elements of Negro life. It has attracted the African, the West Indian, the Negro American; has brought together the Negro of the North and the Negro of the South; the man from the city and the man from the town and village; the peasant, the student, the businessman, the professional man, artist, poet, musician, adventurer and worker, preacher and criminal, exploiter and social outcast. Each group has come with its own separate motives and for its own special ends, but their greatest experience has been the finding of one another...prejudice have thrown these dissimilar elements into a common area of contact and interaction...In Harlem, Negro life is seizing upon its first chances for group expression and self-determination. It is – or promises to be – a race capital.

...If in our lifetime the Negro should not be able to celebrate his full initiation into American democracy, he can at least, on the warrant of these things, celebrate the attainment of a significant and satisfying new phase of group development.

For Further Consideration:

1. According to Locke, what was his reason for compiling the work contained in *The New Negro*?
2. Using support from the passages, how would you describe what Locke meant by “The New Negro” and how was he different from “The Old Negro”?
3. What evidence does Locke offer to support his belief that Harlem would be the cultural center of an important movement?
4. In what ways was Harlem a diverse place for Black people? Give specific examples from the readings.

attainment, n. an achievement

The New Negro and the Historic Sense of Self – A New Way of Defining What a Pioneer is

What do you think of when you hear the word “pioneer?” Do you think of people in horse drawn wagons moving to the Old West to create new communities while fighting off hostile Native Americans to do so? Or perhaps you may imagine hundreds of people getting in large ships and sailing from Europe escaping religious or political persecution to begin new lives in an unknown part of the world. You may even think of astronauts or space travelers as pioneers. After all, they travel to the greatest unknown of all: outer space. But, if a pioneer is someone who ventures into unknown spaces to create new opportunities for themselves and their families, couldn’t African Americans who participated in the Great Migration be considered pioneers?

One African American writer and scholar certainly thought so. Paul U. Kellogg was an early 20th century sociologist who wrote an article entitled “The Negro Pioneers” in 1925. A sociologist is someone who studies human societies and the various roles that people play in those societies. Kellogg offered a unique perspective on the millions of African Americans who left all that they knew for new lives in different parts of the country. Kellogg compared them to different types of white pioneers from earlier American history who had settled or re-settled different parts of the country that eventually made the country what it was. Why do you suppose Kellogg did this? This is one of the questions you will be asked to think about after you read the following excerpt from Kellogg’s essay.

persecution, n. poor and unfair treatment of people who differ in some way - by appearance, religious beliefs, values, or habits - from the majority of the population

About Paul U. Kellogg



An American social reformer and journalist, Paul U. Kellogg (1879 -1958), Kellogg was best known for ground-breaking sociological research that led to the elimination of the seven-day work week. A life-long advocate for workers and civil rights, Kellogg's contribution to the Harlem Renaissance was an essay he wrote that was included in Locke's *The New Negro* collection. In "The Negro Pioneers," Kellogg compared Southern Black people who moved to the North to the Great Migration to Americans who settled America in earlier times; from the Pilgrims and others who founded English colonies, to Americans who settled in western frontiers during later times.

The Negro Pioneers

by Paul U. Kellogg

In *Vandemark's Folly* and other of his novels, Herbert Quick* interpreted the settlement of the Mississippi basin. He gave us its valor and epic qualities. But in that series of remarkable biographical sketches which were cut short by his death, he lamented the cultural wastage of American pioneering. He laid a wreath on the unknown graves of the artists, poets, singers, the talented youth, who were submerged in the westward trek of peoples on the new continent as, in the course of two hundred and fifty years, they hewed their way through the forests and at last came out on the open prairie. In the northward movement of the Negroes in the last ten years, we have another folk migration which in human significance can be compared only with this pushing back of the Western frontier in the first half of the last century or with the waves of immigration which have swept in from overseas in the last half. Indeed, though numerically far smaller than either of these, this folk movement is unique. For this time we have a people singing as they come – breaking through to cultural expression and economic freedom together.

* Herbert Quick (1865–1925) was an American novelist, businessman and politician. In 1922, he wrote *Vandemark's Folly*, an historical romance set in a fictional Iowa town. Vandemark, the main character for whom the novel is named, lives the life that generations of Americans lived in settling the midwestern United States. Though the book is fictional, its popularity and positive critical reception at the time of its release were indications of the way that the novel spoke to a generation of Americans who either remember their own experiences settling wilderness America, or who were raised on the stories of those who did.

In our generation the children and grandchildren of the settlers of the Middle West have uprooted themselves as their sires did, but to-day their faces are turned cityward. In this new urban shift, the Negro is

lament, v. expressed sadness for (lamented)

hew, v. to cut down with an ax

migration, n. a large group moving from one place to another

sires, n. a person of higher social status, usually used when referring to royalty

sharing, but so swiftly and with such a peculiar quickening as he pours for the first time into the new terrain of American economic and community life, that for him is more than a migration, it is a rebirth. The full significance of this belated sharing in the American tradition of pioneering by black folk from the South should not escape us; nor the rare fortune that they bring with them cultural talents long buried and only half revealed in the cotton lands from which they come.

In a way, two great modes of impulse have been at work in the settlement of the United States, other than the material bettering of one's lot.

In no small part, ours has been the history of the under-dog – of common people rising against kings and overlords, of Pilgrims and Puritans and Catholics working loose from religious intolerance, of rebels seeking a new freedom, of adventures breaking away from the fixity of things. This tradition we share with England and Western Europe; the impulse became a dominant force in New England and was at flood throughout the tidewater colonies when in the Revolution they threw off the Georges. We may trace its re-emergence in a new form even in the part which the South took in the Civil War. This may be put in terms of its idealists, as resistance to imposed authority by men who sought the governance of their own lives, however much they might deny it to their slaves.

We have another tradition – or, at least, another mode of the same impulse. Not alone rebellion against what has been, but opportunity for what may be, shaped its course. Set off by three thousand miles of sea, settled on a continent which had been kept in reserve ten thousand years, the spirit of our people has been molded by the frontiers we cleared. It drew and grew from the open spaces, from wildernesses giving way to settlements, from the building processes of countryside and commonwealth and nation. Its like is not known in the older countries of the world, still in the process of shaking loose from old

like, n. something similar

tyrannies. We may abuse this heritage, but it is ours, a broader and more dynamic, more creative conception of liberty. Spiritually we are rebels. But, we are also pioneers.

The Civil War may be interpreted in its final outcome, as the clash between these two great streams of impulse in American life and the triumph of this newer native embodiment of the thing that has stirred and molded the American soul.

For, while the record of Western settlement in our dealings with the Indians* is a chapter not without black pages which may be compared with our slave trade, nonetheless it was the free play of free men on free land that built up the Middle West: and it was the rapidly mounting weight of men and means of that hinterland, flung into the conflict by common faith in an order which meant opportunity for all, which tipped the scales as between North and South, preserved the Union and freed the slaves. Lincoln was its man; not its leader, merely, but framed of the bone and marrow of its plain people; his spirit, the embodiment of the frontiersmen and settlers.

* The word Indians refers to Native Americans, or the Indigenous people who lived on the land that is now the United States.

And what has this to do with the northward migration of the Negro- or its counterpart, his partnership in agricultural reconstruction in the South? It has more to do than that children and grandchildren of the emancipated slaves enter the gates of the cities with the children and grandchildren of the old frontier. Or even that in this new generation they are fellow adventurers as never before in the inveterate quest of our people for new horizons – on the land and in industry. These things are in themselves of tremendous import. But, my point is, that in the pioneering of the new epoch, they are getting into stride with that of the old. By way of the typical American experience, they became for the first time a part of its living tradition.

inveterate, adj. having a particular habit or interest that is not likely to change

epoch, n. a period of time, or era

The great folkway which is America need no longer be a thing abstract, apart from them. The Negro boy, who with his satchel steps off the train in Pittsburg or Chicago, Detroit or New York, to make his way into what Robert Woods called the city wilderness, may draw at the same springs of inspiration as the boy next him from Wisconsin or Kansas, or that other who, still westward bent, throws in his lot in the valley of some irrigation projects in the mountain states. The same can be said of the Corn Club boys and girls of Georgia or South Carolina, who are building up farm homes with new tools and husbandry in regions which have been held in the mesh of a worn out economy. The Hampton and Tuskegee graduates, the farm demonstrators and co-operators who break that mesh, its tough warp of the one crop and its binding woof of the credit system, and help weave in its stead the texture of a new and more self-reliant rural life, are settlers in a very real sense. And so are the men and women who, in a great city district like Harlem, against the pressure of overcrowding and high rents, against the drag of black exploiters and white, and the hazards of sickness and precariousness of livelihood – these men and these women, who strand by strand fashion the fabric of the good life in a city neighborhood, are of the breed of the old pioneers. They are builders.

Do not mistake me, the land they come to is not all milk and honey. Nor was the way of the frontiersman, or the frontier woman, or the frontier child. Nor were these all cast in heroic or congenial, or even tolerable, molds. But the new order in the Southern countryside, the new order in the Northern city, offers an economic foothold, as did the old clearing. It calls on the spirit of team play, as did the old settlement with its road building and barn raisings. There is a smack of opportunity and freedom in the air. The very process as bound up in those changes in individual fortune, is instinct with that group consciousness of common adventure, is fresh with the tang of growth

warp and woof, n. the foundation or base of something

and expansion, which the wagon trains carried with them to the West, and which became the theme of our pioneering.

Those of us who trace our blazed ways to the Atlantic Seaboard, to Pilgrim Rock or James River blockhouse or Dutch trading post, can perhaps not realize what it means to a people to have their vista of the past shut in by whitewashed wall, mud chimney and whipping ring of a slave street. No wonder in his new racial consciousness, the Negro digs up his past and searches out in Africa the genesis of a proud tradition. My thought is that the new opportunities he is broaching in American life and labor throw open another vista of the past, one of the New World, to which he is not alien. This background may not be his to-day, I grant; but by some compensating law of relativity, it will come to meet him as he presses forward. Seldom in the history of the world have a people moved North. Our history is of Westward expansion. So coursed the great racial waves into Europe from the East.

We have had the experiment of peoples moving Southward – Northmen and Frank* and the rest, flowering out in a new and milder climate. Here we are witnessing a reversal of that process. What its outcome will be cannot be forecast. But it is something which, points of compass aside, is kin to the whole trend of American experience. It is a search for the new and democratic chance. It is pioneering.

* Frank refers to German speaking people.

It is also, an adventure in self-expression – not alone in political and economic terms, but in things of the word and spirit. We have witnessed in the United States the duress in which various immigrant groups have been held until their cause was taken by rare people as Jane Addams and Jacob Riis, endowed not alone with understanding, but with the art of interpretation. The Negro has had no language barrier; but he has been hemmed in by barbed wire entanglements

genesis, n. the beginning or origin

duress, n. the compulsion to do something against one's will

of prejudice and fixed conceptions. He is learning ways of his own to surmount them. He employs winged gifts that shoot across them. He brings song, music, dance, poetry, story-telling; rhythms and color and drama, ardent feeling and fleet thought. Not alone is his a Northward migration within the confines of America, challenging new communities with his presence. Not alone is it a shift from soil to city. Not alone a breaking-away from the old inhibitions of a fixed and often adverse social environment. He is readdressing himself to America on a cultural plane; and in arenas where the old inhibitions do not hold. A verse that pierces the heart meets no race barriers. A song that lifts the spirit with its lilt wings free in the democracy of art. It would be difficult to overestimate the significance of the Negro's employment of these cultural gifts. A new generation of both races respond to them. They afford white America a new approach to what we overlong dourly called the Race Problem. They make for swifter understanding than a multitude of heavy treatises...Harlem presents to the eye the look of any tenement and apartment district of New York so far as its physical make-up is concerned. Occasionally some writer dipped beneath the surface: Negro authors and periodicals had borne witness to it; yet so far as the newspapers were concerned, it had not registered, except as an area of real estate speculation and clashes, and the police news and racial friction of a city quarter. Kipling gave us the High Road to India in Kim. Sinclair Lewis set down America in Main Street. But that contrast is not the whole story of East and West; here was something as alluring as it was portentous happening in our midst; but unobserved and swathed in the commonplace. How to unfold it? Our number was cut from city cloth, it brought out the seams of social problems which underlie it, but also, and in all its

inhibitions, n. the blocking of free activity or expression

adverse, adj. harmful

lilt, adj. rhythm

swathe, v. to wrap in several layers (swathed)

seam, n. place where two pieces of cloth are joined (seams)

sheen, the cultural pattern that gave it texture. It proved a magic carpet which swung the reader not across the minarets and bazaars of some ancient Arabia, but the wells and shrines of a people's renaissance. The pageant of it swept past in pastel and story, poem and epic prose, and the response was instant...

...this latest experience of the American Negro is properly a promisefully racial revival, more fundamentally even, it is an induction into the heritage of the national tradition, a baptism of the American spirit that slavery cheated him out of, a maturing experience that Reconstruction delayed. Now that materially and spiritually, the Negro pioneers, and by his own initiative, shares the common experience of all the others of America's composite stock, his venturing Americanism stakes indisputable claims in the benefits and resources of our democracy.

For Further Consideration

1. Based on your reading of Kellogg's essay, what is a pioneer?
2. Kellogg compares the experiences of African Americans who relocated to the North during the Great Migration to the experiences of European Americans from earlier junctures of American history such as the Pilgrims of the colonial period and the western settlers of the 19th century. Is this a valid comparison? Why or Why not? Why do you believe Kellogg does this? (HINT: Remember that the 1920s were a different time and African Americans were not always treated fairly).
3. What are some of the reasons Kellogg gives for the importance of art, poetry, music and dance to the African American experience?

minaret, n. a tall tower on a Mosque (minarets)

revival, n. the restoration or renewal of interest

The New Negro Woman

In the early 20th century, Black women had to contend with discrimination on two fronts, their race and their gender. Because of their color, Black women were subjected to the same indignities and threats of violence that Black men faced which made them targets of physical assaults and denied access to opportunities. Because of their gender, Black women faced the same types of discrimination faced by white women the same time period, but had none of the societal protections extended to them because of their color. What an incredibly difficult position to be in!

Although the fight for women's rights gained an important victory with the ratification of the 19th Amendment, which gave women the right to vote, the women's rights movement often ignored the unique plight of Black women. This complaint would plague the women's rights movement for the rest of the 20th century and would expose a deep divide in a movement designed to make America a fairer and more inclusive country.

Alain Locke was determined to include the voices of Black women in his *New Negro* anthology. He wanted to make sure to give voice to Black women whose perspectives were constantly ignored and disregarded. The words of one contributing essayist in Locke's *New Negro* compilation eloquently describes the unique status of early 20th century Black women.

Elise Johnson McDougald



Born in 1885, Elise Johnson McDougald was an educator, writer, and activist. She was the first Black female principal in New York City public schools. Her essay, "The Task of Negro Womanhood", is considered an early example of African-American feminist writing. She died in 1971 at the age of 86.

The Task of Negro Womanhood

by Elise Johnson McDougald

Throughout the years of history, woman has been the weather-vane, the indicator, showing in which direction the wind of destiny blows. Her status and development have augured [predicted] now calm and stability, now swift currents of progress. What then is to be said of the Negro woman of to-day, whose problems are of such import to her race?

A study of her contributions to any one community, throughout America, would illuminate the pathway being trod by her people. There is, however, an advantage in focusing upon the women of Harlem – modern city in the world's metropolis. Here, more than anywhere else, the Negro woman is free from the cruder handicaps of primitive household hardships and the grosser forms of sex and race subjugation. Here, she has considerable opportunity to measure her powers in the intellectual and industrial fields of the great city. The questions naturally arise: "What are her difficulties?" and, "How is she solving them?"

To answer these questions, one must have in mind not any one Negro woman, but rather a colorful pageant of individuals, each differently endowed. Like the red and yellow of the tiger-lily, the skin of one is brilliant against the star-lit darkness of a racial sister. From grace to strength, they vary in infinite degree, with traces of the race's history left in physical and mental outline on each. With a discerning mind, one catches the multiform charm, beauty and character of Negro women, and grasps the fact that their problems cannot be thought of in mass.

Because only a few have caught this vision, even in New York, the general attitude of mind causes the Negro woman serious difficulty.

subjugation, n the action of taking complete control of a group of people

She is conscious that what is left of chivalry is not directed toward her. She realizes that the ideals of beauty, built up in the fine arts, have excluded her almost entirely. Instead, the grotesque Aunt Jemimas* of the streetcar advertisements, proclaim only an ability to serve, without grace of loveliness. Nor does the drama catch her finest spirit. She is most often used to provoke the mirthless laugh of ridicule; or to portray feminine viciousness or vulgarity not peculiar to Negroes. This is the shadow over her. To a race naturally sunny comes the twilight of self-doubt and a sense of personal inferiority. It cannot be denied that these are potent and detrimental influences, though not generally recognized because they are in the realm of the mental and spiritual. More apparent are the economic handicaps which follow her recent entrance into industry. It is conceded that she has special difficulties because of the poor working conditions of her men. It is not surprising that only the most determined women forge ahead to results other than mere survival. To the gifted, the zest of meeting a challenge is a compensating factor which often brings success. The few who do prove their mettle, stimulate one to a closer study of how this achievement is won under contemporary conditions.

* Aunt Jemima, like Uncle Tom, is a derogatory term that refers to a Black woman who is subservient to white people. Aunt Jemima was a stereotypical African American character in minstrel shows. The trademarked name and image of Aunt Jemima was used by the Quaker Oats Company on their pancake mix and pancake syrup until 2021, when they were removed from packaging due to the negative connotation associated with the name and image.

Better to visualize the Negro woman at her job, our vision of a host of individuals must once more resolve itself into groups on the basis of activity. First, comes a very small leisure group – the wives and

chivalry, n. good manners; the code of conduct of medieval knights

mirthless, adj. without joy or happiness

vulgarity, n. something that is crude or in bad taste

concede, v. to admit (conceded)

forge ahead, v. to move forward; to make progress

zest, n. great enthusiasm

compensating, adj. offsetting; counterbalancing

mettle, n. strength of character; ability to cope with difficulties

daughters of men who are in business, in the professions and a few well-paid service occupations. Second, a most active and progressive group, the women in business and the professions. Third, the service, with an even less fortunate fringe of casual workers, fluctuating with the economic temper of the times.

The first is a pleasing group to see. It is picked for outward beauty by Negro men with much the same feeling as other Americans of the same economic class. Keeping their women free to preside over the family, these women are affected by the problems of every wife and mother, but touched only faintly by their race's hardships. They do share acutely in the prevailing difficulty of finding competent household help.

Negro wives find Negro maids unwilling generally to work in their own neighborhoods, for various reasons. They do not wish to work where there is a possibility of acquaintances coming into contact with them while they serve and they still harbor the misconception that Negroes of any station are unable to pay as much as persons of the other race. It is in these homes, modest motors, tennis, golf and country clubs, trips to Europe and California, make for social standing. The problem confronting the refined Negro family is to know others of the same achievement. The search for kindred spirits gradually grows less difficult; in the past it led to the custom of visiting all the large cities in order to know similar groups of cultured Negro people. In recent years, the more serious minded Negro woman's visit to Europe has been extended from months to years for the purpose of study and travel. The European success which meets this type of ambition is instanced in the conferring of the doctorate in philosophy upon a Negro woman, Dr. Anna J. Cooper, at the last commencement of the

preside, v. to be in charge of; to watch over

acutely, adv. intensely

acquaintance, n. a person one knows (acquaintances)

kindred spirit, n. a person whose interests and experiences are similar to one's own (kindred spirits)

Sorbonne, Paris*. Similarly, a score of Negro women are sojourning abroad in various countries for the spiritual relief and cultural stimulation afforded there.

* Often referred to as "The Mother of Black Feminism", Anna Julia Cooper was just the fourth African American woman to earn a doctoral degree. In 1924, she received a PhD in history from the Sorbonne, a prestigious university in Paris, France. She was a prominent author, educator, sociologist, and activist. Born into slavery in 1858, Dr. Cooper died in 1964 at the age of 105.

A spirit of stress and struggles characterizes the second two groups. These women of business, profession and trade are the hub of the wheel of progress. Their burden is twofold. Many are wives and mothers whose husbands are insufficiently paid, or who have succumbed to social maladjustment and have abandoned their families. An appalling number are widows. They face the great problem of leaving home each day and at the same time trying to rear children in their spare time – this too, in neighborhoods where rents are large, standards of dress and recreation high and costly, and social danger on the increase. One cannot resist the temptation to pause for a moment to pay tribute to these Negro mothers. And to call attention to the service she is rendering to the nation, in her struggle against great odds to educate and care for one group of the country's children. If the mothers of the race should ever be honored by state and federal legislation, the artist's imagination will find a more inspiring subject in the modern Negro mother- self-directed but as loyal and tender as the much extolled, yet pitiable black mammy of slavery days.

The great commercial life of New York City is only slightly touched by the Negro woman, of our second group. Negro businessmen

score, n. a group of about twenty

sojourning, adv. living temporarily

succumb, v. to submit to an overpowering force; to give in (succumbed)

appalling, adj. shocking; horrifying

rear, v. to bring up and care for

render, v. to provide (rendering)

extoll, v. to praise highly (extolled)

offer her most of their work, but their number is limited. Outside of this field in Negro offices, custom is once more against her, and competition is keen for all. However, Negro girls are training, and some are holding exceptional jobs. One of the professors in a New York city college has had a young colored woman as secretary for the past three or four years. Another holds the head clerical position in an organization where reliable handling of detail and a sense of business ethics are essential. Quietly, these women prove their worth, so that when a vacancy exists and there is a call, it is difficult to find even one competent colored secretary who is not employed. As a result of the opportunity in clerical work in the educational system of New York City, a number have qualified for such positions, one having been recently appointed to the office of a high school. In other departments, the civil service in New York City is no longer free from discrimination. The casual personal interview, that tenacious and retrogressive practice introduced into the federal administration during the World War, has spread and often nullifies the Negro woman's success in written tests. The successful young woman cited above was three times "turned down" as undesirable on the basis of the personal interview. In the great mercantile houses, the many young Negro girls who might be well suited to sales positions are barred from all but menial positions. Even so, one Negro woman, beginning as a uniformed maid in the shoe department of one of the largest stores, has pulled herself up to the position of "head of stock." One of the most prosperous monthly magazines of national circulation has for the head of its news service a Negro woman who

ethics, n. principles of what is right and wrong

civil service, n. the parts of the government responsible for the administration of a country; for example, law enforcement, transportation, postal services, etc.

tenacious, adj. enduring; inflexible

retrogressive, adj. going from a better to worse position

nullify, v. to cancel out value; to make null, or nothing (nullifies)

mercantile, adj. related to merchants; shops

menial, adj. lowly; humble

rose from the position of stenographer. Her duties involve attendance upon staff conferences, executive supervision of her staff of white office workers, broadcasting and journalism of the highest order.

Yet in spite of the claims of justice and proved efficiency, telephone and insurance companies and other corporations which receive considerable patronage from Negroes deny them proportionate employment. Fortunately this is an era of changing customs. There is hope that a less selfish racial attitude will prevail. It is a heartening fact that there is an increasing number of Americans who will lend a hand in the game fight of the worthy.

Throughout the South, where business for Negro patronage are under the control of Negroes to a large extent, there are already many opportunities for Negro women. But because of the nerve strain and spiritual drain of hostile social conditions in that section, Negro woman are turning away from opportunities there to find a freer and fuller life in the North.

In the less crowded professional vocations, the outlook is more cheerful. In these fields, the Negro woman is dependent largely upon herself and her own race for work. In the legal, dental, and medical professions, successful women practitioners have usually worked their way through college and are “managing” on the small fees that can be received from an underpaid public.

Social conditions in America are hardest upon the Negro because his is lowest in the economic scale. The tendency to force the Negro downward, gives rise to serious social problems and to consequent demand for trained college women in the profession of social work. The need has been met with a response from young college women, anxious to devote their education and lives toward helping the

stenographer, n. a person who takes notes in shorthand about what is said

patronage, n. customers

submerged classes. Much of the social work has been pioneer in nature; the pay has been small, with little possibility of advancement. For even in work among Negroes, the better paying positions are reserved for whites. The Negro college woman is doing her bit at sacrifice, along such lines as these: as probation officers, investigators and police women in the correctional departments of the city; as Big Sisters attached to the Children's Court; as field workers and visitors for relief organizations, missions and churches; as secretaries for traveller's aid societies; in the many organizations devoted to preventative and educational medicine; in clinics and hospitals and as boys' and girls' welfare workers in recreation and industry.

In the profession of nursing, there are over three hundred in New York City. In the dark blue linen uniform of Henry Street Visiting Nurse Service, the Negro woman can be seen hurrying earnestly from house to house on her round of free relief to the needy. Again, she is in many other branches of public health nursing, in the public schools, milk stations and diet kitchens. The Negro woman is in the wards of two of the large city hospitals and clinics. After a score of years of service in one such institution, a Negro woman became superintendent of nurses in the war emergency. Deposed after the armistice, though eminently satisfactory, she retained connection with the training school as lecturer, for the inspiration she could be to "her girls." The growing need for the executive nurse is being successfully met as instanced by the supervisors in day nurseries and private sanitariums, financed and operated in Harlem entirely by Negroes. Throughout the South there is a clear and anxious call to nurses to carry the gospel of hygiene to the rural sections and to minister to the suffering not

relief, n. aid; assistance

depose, v. to remove (deposed)

armistice, n. cease-fire; truce

sanitarium, n. hospital for long-term care (sanitariums)

hygiene, n. cleanliness and other practices that promote good health

reached by organizations already in the communities. One social worker, in New York City, though a teacher by profession, is head of an organization whose program is to raise money for the payment of nurses to do the work described above. In other centers, West and South, the professional Negro nurse is supplanting the untrained woman attendant of former years.

In New York City, nearly three hundred women share in the good conditions obtaining there in the teaching profession. They measure up to the high pedagogical requirements of the city and state law, and are increasingly leaders in the community. In a city where the schools are not segregated, she is meeting with success among white as well as colored children in positions ranging from clerk in the elementary school on up through the graded ranks for teachers, in the lower grades, of special subjects in the higher grades, in the junior high schools and in the senior high schools. One Negro woman is assistant principal in an elementary school where the other assistant and the principal are white men and the majority of the teachers are white. Another Negro woman serves in the capacity of visiting teacher to several schools, calling upon both white and colored families and experiencing no difficulty in making social adjustments. Still another Negro woman is a vocational counsellor under the Board of Education, in a junior high school. She is advising children of both races as to future courses of study to pursue and as to the vocations in which tests prove them to be apt. This position, the result of pioneer work by another Negro woman, is unique in the school system of New York.

In the teaching profession, too, the Negro woman finds evidence of the white worker's fear of competition. The need for teachers is still so great that little friction exists. When it does seem imminent, it is smoothed away, as it recently was at a meeting of school principals.

supplant, v. to replace (supplanting)

From the floor* a discussion began with: “What are we going to do about this problem of the increasing number of Negro teachers coming into our schools?” It ended promptly through the suggestion of another principal: “Send all you get and don’t want over to my school. I have two now and I’ll match their work with any two of the best you name.” Outside of New York City, the Negro woman teacher faces problems almost as difficult as those besetting the pioneers in the field. Night riders are terrorizing the leading educators of the South, with the same tactics used years ago in the burning of buildings and in the threatening of personal injury. Negro teachers in some sections show heroism matching that of such women as Maria Becroft, Mary Wormley, Margaret Thompson, Fannie Hampton, Myrtilla Miner and others who in the early ‘80s** faced riot and violence which closed colored schools and made educational work a hazardous vocation. Throughout the North and South, urban and rural teachers form an earnest and forward-looking group of women. They are endeavoring to hold for the future the progress that has been made in the past. The Negro woman teacher finds that, figuratively speaking, she must stand on her tip toes to do it, for educational standards are no longer what they were. Surrounded by forces which persistently work to establish the myth of his inferiority, the Negro youth must be encouraged to think vigorously and to maintain a critical attitude toward what he is taught.

* From the floor means to allow members of a group to make comments or ask questions.

** In this writing, the ‘80s refers to the 1880s

The Negro teacher is bending herself to the task of imparting this power to hold the spiritual and mental balance under hostile conditions. Though her salary in most places lags behind the service she is rendering (exceptions being noted where the Jeannes-Slater and

Night rider, n. a member of a secret group, such as the KKK, who rides at night in disguise causing terror.
(Night riders)

render, v. to give (rendering)

Rosenwald Funds bring relief), her inspiration is the belief that the hope of the race is in the New Negro student. Of more vital import than what he is compelled to be to-day, is what he is determined to make of himself to-morrow. And, the Negro woman teacher, bringing to the class room sympathy and judgement, is a mighty force in this battle.

Comparatively new are opportunities in the field of trained library work for the Negro woman. In New York City, the Public Library system has opened its service to the employment of colored women of college grade. The vision of those in charge of their training is illuminated by fires that have somewhat of a missionary glow. There is an ever-present hope that, once trained, the Negro woman librarian will scatter such opportunities across the country, establishing branches wherever none exist. Into such an emergency, the successful Negro woman head of the library of the Veterans' Hospital at Tuskegee, stepped from the New York Library on One Hundred and Thirty-fifth Street. Recently at this same Harlem Branch Library a Negro woman has been placed in charge of the large, permanent collection of books by or about Negroes and examples of Negro art. Another is acting head of the children's department, and several others have been assigned to branches throughout the city where there is little or no Negro patronage. They are thus rendering exceptional service, and additionally creating an impetus for the enlargement of this field for Negro women.

One might go on to such interesting and unusual professions as bacteriology, chemistry and pharmacy, etc. and find that through the number in any one may be small, the Negro woman is creditably represented in practically every one, and according to ability she is meeting with success. In the fields of literature and art, the Negro woman's culture has once more begun to flower. After the long quiescent period, following the harvest from the pen of Phyllis

patronage, n. customers

impetus, n. boost; encouragement

to flower, v. to develop

quiescent, adj. inactive or tranquil

Wheatley, Negro woman dramatists, poets and novelists are enjoying a vogue in print. There is every prospect that the Negro woman will enrich American literature and art with stylistic portrayal of her experience and her problems.

Closing the door on home anxieties, the women engaged in trades and in industry face serious difficulty in competition in the open working field. Custom is against the Negro woman in all but a few trade and industrial occupations. She has, however, been established long in the dressmaking trade as helpers and finishers, and more recently as drapers and fitters in some of the best establishments. Several Negro women are themselves proprietors of shops in the country's great fashion district. In millinery, power-sewing machine operating on cloth, straw and leather, there are few Negro women. The laissez-faire attitude of practically all trade unions* has, in the past, made of the Negro woman an unwilling menace to the cause of labor. When one reviews the demands now being made by white women workers, for labor colleges, for political recognition, and for representation at world conferences, one cannot help but feel how far back on the road of labor progress is the struggling group of Negro workers. Yet, they are gradually becoming more alive to the issues involved. One Negro woman has held office and been most active in the flower and feather workers' union. Another has been a paid organizer in the garment industry for several years. Still another has co-operated as an unpaid worker, in endeavoring to prevent Negro women from breaking union strikes**. Pacing with pickets***,

* A union is an organization of workers who act together to create a better work environment.

** Union strikes refers to the practice of unionized workers protesting working conditions by refusing to work.

*** Pickets are people, usually posted by a union, who protest outside of a place of business to bring attention to poor work conditions.

vogue, n. popular acceptance

proprietor, n. owner (proprietors)

or explaining at meetings the wisdom underlying union principles, she became convinced that the problem lay as much in the short-sighted, “wait-until-a-strike-comes” policy of the labor unions themselves, as in the alienated or unintelligent attitude of the Negro worker. More sincerity and understanding was greatly needed. Within the past year, she has worked with two Negro men, a white woman and two white men, all union members, and with this committee of six has brought about a conference of accredited delegates from thirty-three unions in New York City. This is the first all-union conference held on adjusting the Negro workers’ problem. As a result, a permanent organization has been formed called the Trade Union Committee for Organizing Negro Workers. Headquarters have been established and a program is well under way which includes: organizing special industries, manned largely by Negro men and women; working to bring about changes in the constitutions of trade unions which make it impossible or difficult for Negroes to join; educating both black and white workers in union principles through conferences and speeches; making necessary adjustments among union members of the two races and taking part in righting any grievances of Negro union members.

In trade cookery, the Negro woman’s talent and past experience is recognized. Her problem here is to find employers who will let her work her way to managerial positions, in tearooms, candy shops and institutions. One such employer became convinced that the managing cook, a young colored graduate of Pratt Institute, could build up a business that had been failing. He offered her a partnership. As in the cases of a number of such women, her barrier was lack of capital*. No matter how highly trained, nor how much speed and business acumen has been acquired, the Negro’s credit is held in doubt.

* Capital here is referring to wealth or assets.

Thirty years ago, a young Negro girl began learning all branches of the fur trade. She is now in business for herself, employing three women of her race and one Jewish man. She has made fur experts of still another half-dozen-colored girls. Such instances as these justify the prediction that the foothold, which is being gained in the trade world will, year by year, become more secure.

Because of the limited fields for this group, many of the unsuccessful drift into the fourth social grade – the domestic and casual workers. These drifters increase the difficulties of the Negro women suited to housework. New standards of household management are forming and the problem of the Negro woman is to meet these new businesslike ideals. The constant influx of workers unfamiliar with household conditions in New York keeps the situation one of turmoil. The Negro woman, moreover, is revolting against residential domestic service. It is a last stand in her fight to maintain a semblance of family life. For this reason, principally, the number of day or casual workers is on the increase. Happiness is almost impossible under the strain of these conditions. Health and morale suffer, but how else can her children, loose all afternoon, be gathered together at nightfall? Through it all she manages to give satisfactory service and the Negro woman is sought after this unpopular work, largely because her honesty, loyalty and cleanliness have stood the test of time. Through her drudgery, the woman of other groups find leisure time for progress. This is one of her contributions to America.

It is apparent from what has been said that even in New York City, Negro women are of a race which is free neither economically, socially nor spiritually. Like women in general, but more particularly like those of other oppressed minorities, the Negro woman has been forced to submit to overpowering conditions. Pressure has been exerted upon her, both from without and within her group... .

turmoil, n. extreme confusion

semblance, n. appearance

drudgery, n. tiring work

...The ration of opportunity in the ...social, economic and political spheres is about that which exists between white men and women. In the large, I would say that the Negro woman is the cultural equal of her man because she is generally kept in school longer. Negro boys, like white boys, are usually put to work to subsidize the family income. The growing economic independence of Negro working women is causing her to rebel against the domineering family attitude of the cruder working-class husband. The masses of Negro men are engaged in menial occupations throughout the working day. Their baffled and suppressed desires to determine their economic life are manifested in overbearing domination at home. Working mothers are unable to instill different ideals in the sons. Conditions change slowly. Nevertheless, education and opportunity are modifying the spirit of the younger Negro men. Trained in modern schools of thought, they begin to show a wholesome attitude of fellowship and freedom for their women. The challenge to young Negro womanhood is to see clearly this trend and grasp the proffered comradeship with sincerity. In this matter of sex equality, Negro women have contributed few outstanding militants, a notable instance being the historic Sojourner Truth. On the whole the Negro woman's feminist efforts are directed chiefly toward the realization of the equality of the races, the sex struggle assuming the subordinate place...

The Colored Women's Branch of the Y.W.C.A. and the women's organizations in the many churches as well as the beneficial lodges and associations, care for the needs of their members... . In New York City, many associations exist for social betterment, financed and operated by Negro women. One makes child welfare its name and special concern. Others like the Utility Club, Utopia Neighborhood,

subsidize, v. to finance or fund

manifest, v. to show or display (manifested)

Debutantes' League, Sempre Fidelius, etc., raise funds for old folks' homes, a shelter for delinquent girls and fresh-air camps for children.

On the other hand, the educational welfare of the coming generation has become the chief concern of the national sororities of Negro college women. The first to be organized in the country, the *Alpha Kappa Alpha*^{*}, has a continuous program of education and vocational guidance for students of the high schools and colleges. The work of Lambda Chapter, which covers New York City and its suburbs, has been the most effective in carrying out the national program. Each year, it gathers together between one and two hundred such students and gives the girls a chance to hear the life stories of Negro women, successful in various fields of endeavor. Recently, a trained nurse told how, starting in the same schools as they, she had risen to the executive position in the Harlem Health Information Bureau. A commercial artist shows how real talent had overcome the color line. The graduate physician was a living example of the modern opportunities in the newer fields of medicine open to women. Alpha Beta Chapter in New York City, during the current year, presented a young art student with a scholarship of \$1,000 for study abroad. In such ways as these are the progressive and privileged groups of Negro women expressing their community and race consciousness^{*}.

* McDougald references two historically black Greek-letter organizations in her essay as organizations established for Black women and by Black women involved in the movement for racial uplift in the early 20th century. These organizations are known as sororities, and their male counterpart organizations are known as fraternities. Sorority and fraternity are taken from Greek words that mean sister and brother respectively. By the time this essay was written, in all, there had been four historically Black sororities and four historically Black fraternities that were established. They were, in order of establishment: Alpha Phi Alpha- (fraternity 1906); Alpha Kappa Alpha – (sorority 1908); Kappa Alpha Psi – (fraternity 1911); Omega Psi Phi – (fraternity 1911); Delta Sigma Theta – (sorority 1913); Phi Beta Sigma (fraternity 1914); Zeta Phi Beta – (sorority 1920); Sigma Gamma Rho – (sorority 1922). A ninth organization, Iota Phi Theta (fraternity 1963) was founded much later but together with the other eight organizations are known as The Divine Nine, and continues to make important contributions to the social and cultural improvement of African Americans today.

We find the Negro woman, figuratively struck in the face daily by contempt from the world about her. Within her soul, she knows little of peace and happiness. But through it all, she is courageously standing erect, developing within herself the moral strength to rise above and conquer false attitudes. She is maintaining her natural beauty and charm and improving her mind and opportunity. She is measuring up to the needs of her family, community and race, and radiating a hope throughout the land.

For Further Consideration

Use the passage to answer the following questions.

- 1.** According to McDougald, what was the “Task of Negro Womanhood?” Cite an example from the text to support your answer.
- 2.** McDougald listed several challenges Black women faced in the early 20th century. Using the text, what was at least one of those problems?
- 3.** Just as McDougald identified the challenges facing Black women in the early 20th century, she also discussed solutions to those problems. Based on the reading, identify at least one of those solutions.

The New Negro Spirit in Verse

– The Poetry of the Early Harlem Renaissance

Literature in the form of poetry was a key part of the artistic expression that occurred during the Harlem Renaissance. Through their work, poets described the beauty and pain of the African American experience of the early 20th century. The poetry these writers created also sought to shatter negative stereotypes of African Americans while helping to shape a new identity they hoped would be celebrated and embraced. Poetry from the Harlem Renaissance was diverse in both style and substance. You will now read representative works by some of these insightful writers and thinkers.

Georgia Douglas Johnson



One of several women to make important contributions to the Harlem Renaissance, Georgia Douglas Johnson was born in 1880 in Atlanta, Georgia. Her parents were of African American, Native American and English descent. She attended Atlanta University Normal College and studied music at the Oberlin Conservatory and Cleveland College of Music. In addition to poetry, Johnson wrote plays and a syndicated newspaper column. One of her earliest poems, *The Heart of a Woman*, explores themes of loneliness, pain, love, and isolation from the unique perspective as an African American woman in the early 20th century.

The Heart of a Woman
by Georgia Douglas Johnson

The heart of a woman goes forth with the dawn,

As a lone bird, soft winging, so restlessly on,

Afar o'er life's turrets and vales does it roam

In the wake of those echoes the heart calls home.

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.

turrets and vale, n. towers and valleys

Calling Dreams

by Georgia Douglas Johnson

The right to make my dreams come true,

I ask, nay, I demand of life,

Nor shall fate's deadly contraband

Impede my steps, nor countermand;

Too long my heart against the ground

Has beat the dusty years around,

And now at length I rise! I wake!

And stride into the morning break!

For Further Consideration

1. What do you suppose Johnson meant when she wrote: "The heart of woman goes forth with the dawn...in the wake of those echoes the heart calls home"?
2. What might be the "dreams of the stars", Johnson wrote about? (Hint: Think about the lives Black women led in the early 20th century and how very different those lives are from today.)
3. How does Johnson address her dreams in *Calling Dreams*?
4. What does she mean when she demands "the right to make my dreams come true" in *Calling Dreams*? How is the tone here different from the tone of *The Heart of a Woman*?

contraband, n. smuggling illegal goods; also used to refer to escaped slaves during the Civil War

countermand, v. to cancel or reverse

stride, v. walk with confidence

Countee Cullen



Born in the early 20th century, Countee Cullen was a leading figure of the Harlem Renaissance even before he graduated from high school. He recited his works in various sites around Harlem including churches and political meetings. Among the large group of young writers and artists who gathered in Harlem, in the early-to-mid-1920s Cullen stood out. Within the New Negro movement, he represented an “old-school” writer whose choice of a strict,

formal Romanticism and adherence to traditional measures and rhymes separated him from, for instance, Langston Hughes, who experimented with form and created his popular blues poetry. Whereas many younger Renaissance writers celebrated Blackness, intending to, as Hughes put it, “express [their] individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame,” Cullen declared that he was “POET and not NEGRO POET”.

Despite his desire to avoid making his race or race-related matters the focus of his work, it was a tribute to his African heritage that won him the most acclaim in literary circles early in his career. The poem called “Heritage,” was published in 1925. In this poem, Cullen was writing about a theme that was very much a topic of interest to Harlem intellectuals: their relationship to Africa. Americans of African descent felt an attraction to the home of their ancestors – a place that many of them had very little actual knowledge of since education about Africa had either been omitted or distorted in their own educational backgrounds.

Heritage

by Countee Cullen

What is Africa to me:
Copper sun or scarlet sea,
Jungle star or jungle track,
Strong bronzed men, or regal black
Women from whose loins I sprang
When the birds of Eden sang?
One three centuries removed
From the scenes his fathers loved,
Spicy grove, cinnamon tree,
What is Africa to me?

So I lie, who all day long
Want no sound except the song
Sung by wild barbaric birds
Goaded massive jungle herds,
Juggernauts of flesh that pass
Trampling tall defiant grass
Where young forest lovers lie,
Plighting troth* beneath the sky.
So I lie, who always hear,
Though I cram against my ear
Both my thumbs, and keep them there,
Great drums throbbing through the air.
So I lie, whose fount of pride,

* Plighting troth means to promise marriage

Dear distress, and joy allied,
Is my somber flesh and skin,
With the dark blood dammed within
Like great pulsing tides of wine
That, I fear, must burst the fine
Channels of the chafing net
Where they surge and foam and fret.

Africa? A book one thumbs
Listlessly, till slumber comes.
Unremembered are her bats
Circling through the night, her cats
Crouching in the river reeds,
Stalking gentle flesh that feeds
By the river brink; no more
Does the bugle-throated roar
Cry that monarch claws have leapt
From the scabbards where they slept.
Silver snakes that once a year
Doff the lovely coats you wear,
Seek no covert in your fear
Lest a mortal eye should see;
What's your nakedness to me?
Here no leprous flowers rear
Fierce corollas in the air;
Here no bodies sleek and wet,

scabbard, n. covers for a blades, most often swords (scabbards)

doff, v. to take off

covert, n. bushes in which animals can hide

leprous, adj. having a skin disease, such as leprosy, which was highly contagious and identifiable by a large rash; leprosy people were isolated and avoided

corolla, n. the petals of a flower, often arranged in the shape of a circle (corollas)

Dripping mingled rain and sweat,
Tread the savage measures of
Jungle boys and girls in love.
What is last year's snow to me,
Last year's anything? The tree
Budding yearly must forget
How its past arose or set
Bough and blossom, flower, fruit,
Even what shy bird with mute
Wonder at her travail there,

Meekly labored in its hair.
One three centuries removed
From the scenes his fathers loved,
Spicy grove, cinnamon tree,
What is Africa to me?

For Further Consideration

1. Using specific examples from the poem, how does Cullen describe the African continent?
2. How do the images Cullen presents of Africa differ from popular images of Africa? Why do you think Cullen found it necessary to offer an alternative view of Africa than that which most people held at that time?

Claude McKay



Born in Sunny Ville, Jamaica, on September 15, 1899, Claude McKay was a leading poet of the Harlem Renaissance. At thirteen, McKay left Jamaica for New York just in time to join the burgeoning literary movement that would later become known as the Harlem Renaissance. Although mostly known as a poet, McKay was also a novelist, essayist, journalist, and activist. His writings include *Spring in New Hampshire* (1920), *Negroes in America* (1923), and *Home to Harlem* (1928).

McKay's political activism was often reflected in his poetry. "If We Must Die" (1919), his most popular poem, would later be recited by British Prime Minister Winston Churchill over radio airwaves during World War II. He would later die of heart failure in Chicago, Illinois, on May 22, 1948 at the age of forty-eight.

If We Must Die by Claude McKay

If we must die, let it not be like hogs
Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot,
While round us bark the mad and hungry dogs,
Making their mock at our accursèd lot.
If we must die, O let us nobly die,

So that our precious blood may not be shed
 In vain; then even the monsters we defy
Shall be constrained to honor us though dead!
 O kinsmen! we must meet the common foe!
Though far outnumbered let us show us brave,
And for their thousand blows deal one death-blow!
 What though before us lies the open grave?
Like men we'll face the murderous, cowardly pack,
 Pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back!*

*"If We Must Die," first published in The Liberator Magazine, July 1919.

For Further Consideration

1. What is the overall tone of this work?
2. What does the speaker likely mean in line 12 when he says: "What though before us lies the open grave?"
3. What main problem expressed in the first two lines of "If We Must Die" helps reveal the meaning of the poem?
4. What does the speaker in "If We Must Die" suggest that the kinsmen should do?
5. What audience is McKay addressing in his poem? Why do you think this?
6. How does the speaker describe his foes?

In vain, n. for no reason or purpose

constrain, v., to force (constrained)

kinsmen, n., male relatives

foe, n. enemy

THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE OF LANGSTON HUGHES

Langston Hughes 1902 – 1967



Born James Mercer Langston Hughes in Joplin, Missouri, in 1902, Langston Hughes was the most prolific poet of the Harlem Renaissance. When he was a little boy, his father settled in Mexico looking to escape American racial prejudices. His mother refused to join her husband, despite his becoming a prosperous lawyer and landowner in Mexico. Instead, she moved quite frequently in search of work

to support herself and her young son. Young Langston received a love for the arts from his mother, who also insisted that he receive the best education possible. In 1909, seven-year-old Langston was sent to live with his grandmother in Lawrence, Kansas where he listened attentively to his grandmother's stories of Black people's heroic quest for freedom, liberty and justice. When he was twelve, Langston's beloved grandmother died and he was forced, yet again, to relocate, this time to Lincoln, Illinois to live with his mother and his new stepfather. There would be one more move in young Langston's life, to Cleveland, Ohio, where he graduated, having developed a keen interest in poetry, art and music.

After graduating from high school, Hughes went to live with his father in Mexico, where he taught English to the children of wealthy Mexicans. His father didn't think much of his son's artistic interests and abilities, preferring that he instead further his education to possibly join him at his law practice one day. Hughes rejected his father's plans for him and continued to pursue his interest in writing. His first poem "The Negro Speaks of Rivers," appeared in *The Crisis*, the official magazine for the NAACP, in 1921. That same year, Hughes decided to enroll in Columbia University, located in New York City, only to leave after one year disgusted by the bigotry he experienced there.

Even though he was no longer attending college, Hughes decided to stay in New York City, eventually making his way to Harlem. By now, his mother had relocated to Harlem and Hughes would work a series of menial jobs to support the two of them. One of those jobs was a cabin boy on board a passenger freight liner, and through this job, he met a number of the era's most famous and celebrated writers including Richard Wright, Zora Neale Hurston, and Ernest Hemingway.

Hughes did eventually complete his college education at Lincoln University, an HBCU located in Pennsylvania. After graduation he continued to write not only poetry but short stories, essays, novels and even operas. By the time he died in the mid-1960s, Hughes left behind a body of work that included a vast collection of poetry, novels, plays, short stories, operas and children's books.

The Negro Speaks of Rivers

I've known rivers:

I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than the
flow of human blood in human veins.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.

I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.

I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.

I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln
went down to New Orleans, and I've seen its muddy
bosom turn all golden in the sunset

I've known rivers:

Ancient, dusky rivers.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

For Further Consideration

1. Hughes mentions four rivers in his poem. Using a map, identify the continent on which each river is located.
2. What concepts do you think rivers symbolize in the poem?
3. What historical event is Hughes referencing in the lines: "I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln went down to New Orleans, and I've seen its muddy bosom turn all golden in the sunset."?
4. What do the rivers that the narrator in the poem speaks of have in common with each other?
5. Describe the mood of "The Negro Speaks of Rivers". Which line(s) best create the mood of the poem?

Hughes had the unique ability to compact so much emotion into short poems. The poem "Minstrel Man" is an example of this ability because it is a poem that discusses the injustices African Americans faced regularly and the coping mechanisms they had to develop to deal with them. The title of the poem references a form of live stage entertainment where white actors wearing blackface performed skits that played into the worst stereotypes of Black people. The shows reached their peak in popularity during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The Minstrel Man

Because my mouth
Is wide with laughter
And my throat
Is deep with song,
You do not think
I suffer after
I have held my pain
So long.

Because my mouth
Is wide with laughter,
You do not hear
My inner cry,
Because my feet
Are gay with dancing,
You do not know
I die.

For Further Consideration

1. Based on how the introduction defines minstrel shows, why did Hughes choose this as the title for this poem?
2. Explain how the speaker's life is like a minstrel show performer.
3. What is the poem's message about life for African Americans during the early twentieth century?

Few poets or writers captured the emotional burdens of African American life in the early 20th century as skillfully as Hughes. Hughes conveyed the pain and anger Black people felt as a result of their treatment in a hostile society. He chose Black men as speakers for most of his poems, perhaps for no other reason than he himself was a Black man so he was able to bring a high level of relatability to the impactful words of his poems.

"I, Too" is a cry of protest against American racism. Its speaker, a Black man, laments the way that he is excluded from American society, even though he is, and always has been a key part of it. From the first martyr for the cause of American freedom, to the nearly 200,000 Black men who gave their lives to preserve the Union, during the Civil War, Hughes expresses in eighteen short, but powerful lines that, despite the relentless nature of Jim Crow segregation, African Americans had to fight, that they would assume their rightful place in American life. Read the poem and respond to the questions that follow.

I, Too

I, too, sing America.
I am the darker brother.
They send me to eat in the kitchen
When company comes,
But I laugh,
And eat well,
And grow strong.

Tomorrow,
I'll be at the table
When company comes.
Nobody'll dare
Say to me,
"Eat in the kitchen,"
Then.

Besides,
They'll see how beautiful I am
And be ashamed—
I, too, am America.

For Further Consideration

1. What is the overall message of "I, Too"?
2. What does Hughes mean when he says, "I, too, am America?"
3. What do these lines mean? How might these lines support social changes that were happening or were about to happen in 20th century America?

*Tomorrow,
I'll be at the table
When company comes.*

4. What do these lines say about Hughes' acceptance and identity as a Black man?

*I, too, sing America.
I am the darker brother.*

Life is Fine
by Langston Hughes

I went down to the river,
I set down on the bank.
I tried to think but couldn't,
So I jumped in and sank.
I came up once and hollered !
I came up twice and cried!
If that water hadn't a-been so cold
I might've sunk and died.

But it was Cold in that water! It was cold!

I took the elevator
Sixteen floors above the ground.
I thought about my baby
And thought I would jump down.
I stood there and I hollered!
I stood there and I cried!
If it hadn't a-been so high
I might've jumped and died.

But it was High up there! It was high!

holler, v. yell (hollered)

So since I'm still here livin',
I guess I will live on.
I could've died for love—
But for livin' I was born
Though you may hear me holler,
And you may see me cry—
I'll be dogged , sweet baby,
If you gonna see me die.

Life is fine! Fine as wine! Life is fine!

For Further Consideration

1. Why does the speaker jump into the river and take an elevator to the sixteenth floor? What is he trying to do?
2. What emotions might the speaker be feeling?
3. In the end, what happens to the speaker?

Harlem
(also called ***A Dream Deferred***)
by Langston Hughes

What happens to a dream deferred ?

Does it dry up
like a raisin in the sun?
Or fester like a sore—
and then run?

Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over—
like a syrupy sweet

Maybe it just sags
like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?

For Further Consideration

1. What is a dream deferred?
2. What are some similes that Langston Hughes uses for a dream deferred?
3. What dreams could Hughes feel were deferred?
4. What does Hughes mean when he asks if the dream explodes?

defer, v. to postpone (deferred)

Poetry Influenced by the Harlem Renaissance Poets

Nikki Grimes

Nikki Grimes is a contemporary poet, born in 1950. She is a poet, a journalist, and an award winning author of books for children and young adults.

The next two poems are from her collection of “Golden Shovel poems,” *One Last Word*. Golden Shovel poems use a line from one poem to write a new poem—one that echoes the original. Here are two poems that Nikki Grimes wrote using lines from iconic Harlem Renaissance poems.

In David’s Old Soul Nikki Grimes ends each line with a word from the line: “my soul has grown deep like the rivers” from Langston Hughes’s poem, “The Negro Speaks of Rivers.”

David’s Old Soul by Nikki Grimes

As far back as I can remember, **my**
mother has called me “an old **soul**.”
I never understood. But now that our family **has**
dwindled to just Mom and us kids, I’ve **grown**
into a man. You do what you have to. “David, dig **deep**,”
is the whisper in my ear. So I stand strong **like**
a tree my baby brothers can lean on. I try to be **the**
raft that helps carry them over this life’s rough **rivers**.

The Sculptor is based around a line from Calling Dreams by Georgia Douglas Johnson, found on page 62 of this volume. As in David's Old Soul, each line of The Sculptor ends with a word from Johnson's defiant line: "the right to make my dreams come true."

The Sculptor by Nikki Grimes

No accident of birth or race or place determines **the**
scope of hope or dreams I have a **right**
to. I inventory my head and heart **to**
weigh and measure what talents I might use to **make**
my own tomorrow. It all depends on the grit at **my**
disposal. My father says hard work is the clay **dreams**
are molded from. Yes. Molded. Dreams do not **come**.
They are carved, muscled into something solid, something **true**.

For Further Consideration

1. What other poem in this reader includes dreams?
2. What role do dreams play in each poem?
3. Why is the title *The Sculptor* appropriate for this poem?

ZORA NEALE HURSTON – POWER IN THE PEN

Zora Neale Hurston



Born in Alabama in the 1890s, Zora Neale Hurston's legacy wasn't fully realized or appreciated until long after her death in 1960 at the age of 69. In addition to literature, Hurston made lasting contributions to anthropology and film in her portrayals of the racial and gender struggles in the early-1900s American South. Her works were concerned with both the African American experience and her struggles as an African American woman. She has

and continues to have a profound impact on writers of all ethnic backgrounds and all genders.

Hurston moved to the small community of Eatonville, Florida, when she was three years old. Her father was a Baptist minister and sharecropper, her mother was a schoolteacher. Located just outside of Orlando in central Florida, Eatonville was one of the first all-Black towns incorporated in the United States and was a place where African Americans could live relatively free from harassment and discrimination.

Hurston loved Eatonville and used it as the setting in her stories. When she was a young student, some northern schoolteachers visited Eatonville and gave Hurston several books that opened her mind to literature – an experience Hurston later described as a new kind of “birth” for her. After living the rest of her childhood in Eatonville, she attended Bowie State University, an HBCU in Maryland and graduated with a degree in English Literature. At a time when it was a remarkable feat that African American women obtained one four-year degree, Hurston acquired two, receiving her Bachelors in Anthropology at the age of thirty-seven.

Hurston’s works often represented a departure from the works of other Harlem Renaissance figures. People like Alain Locke and Langston Hughes used more polished forms of writing to appeal to middle-class, educated “New Negro” audiences. Hurston, on the other hand, frequently situated her works in rural, Southern, working-class environments, using themes and subjects familiar to Black folk culture that some who may have wanted to distance themselves from this element of Black culture found repulsive.

Despite her creative talents, Hurston had frequent brushes with poverty. She received financial support from white benefactors on occasion and had government employment at other times. When these sources of income were not readily available, she resorted to other means to financially support herself including, in her last poverty-stricken years, as a maid. After stints of living all over the country, she returned to Florida where she died in poverty and was buried in an unmarked grave. In the early 1970s, famous writer Alice Walker, author of *The Color Purple*, revived interest in Hurston, whose novels, poetry, and other works are better appreciated and studied in middle, high school and college classrooms across the country.

On Colorism

The Harlem Renaissance was all about exploring every possible dimension of what it meant to be Black in America. This sometimes meant investigating some aspect of Black life where Black people discriminated against each other. This is especially true when it came to discrimination that was based on the shade of a person's skin. Being Black was one thing. Being a darker skinned Black person was another matter entirely. This describes the idea behind colorism. Colorism is defined as "prejudice or discrimination against individuals with a dark skin tone among people of the same racial or ethnic group."

Wait! Run that back! You mean that people can be prejudiced against people that share the same racial or ethnic background they do?

As incredible as this may be to believe, this is absolutely the sad truth. During the early 20th century, the idea that the lighter your skin was, the better person you were was so widespread that it even affected people of color as well. If having white skin was considered the best thing you could have in the early 20th century, then if you had a skin tone that was as close to it as possible, that may have been the second-best thing. Take a look at this well-known poem from the early 20th century, that expressed this point of view:

*If you're light you're alright
If you're brown stick around'
If you're black, get back!*

What is the meaning behind this doggerel? If it seems to mean to you that the lighter your skin is the more people will like having you around, you would be right. People put meaning behind these words by creating special clubs and organizations that separated people, not by their race, but by the tone of their skin color.

doggerel, n. irregular verse used to create a comic effect

They used what was known as “the paper bag test” to consider prospective members. They would literally hold a brown paper bag up to the arm of a person who was wishing to join that group and if the person’s arm was darker than the paper bag, they would not be allowed to join.

The topic of colorism is the main theme behind Zora Neale Hurston’s 1926 play, *Color Struck*. As you read the play, you will see how the main character’s obsession with skin color cost her everything, including love and acceptance of herself.



NOTE ON DIALECT

Hurston wrote this play in a dialect that reflected the way she interpreted Black speech of the South (specifically central Florida) in the early 1900s. A dialect includes the words and pronunciation specific to a certain place and/or group of people. This use of dialect can sometimes be hard to understand. It also contains words that, although they were commonly used among Black people at that time, are now considered to be derogatory and offensive. Words like “coons” and “darkies” are unacceptable terms today as they were used by the white population to denigrate Black people.

Color Struck*

By: Zora Neale Hurston

A Play in Four Scenes

SETTING

Time: Twenty years ago and present [1926]

Place: A Southern City.

CHARACTERS

JOHN TURNER, a light brown-skinned man

EMMALINE BEAZELY, a black woman

EFFIE, a mulatto girl

DINKY

ADA

WESLEY, a boy who plays an accordion

JOE CLARKE

OLD MAN LIZZIMORE

LOU LILLIAN, Emma's daughter, a very white girl

RAILWAY CONDUCTOR

DOCTOR

MAN 1

MAN 2

MAN 3

ST. AUGUSTINE MAN

Several who play mouth organs, guitars, banjos

Dancers, Passengers, etc.

* Color Struck is a phrase used in the African American community to refer to someone who prefers lighter skin and finer features over darker skin and more pronounced features such as hair texture, lip size, eye color and nostril width.

SETTING. - Early night. The inside of a “Jim Crow” railway coach. The car is parallel to the footlights. The seats on the down stage side of the coach are omitted. There are the luggage racks above the seats. The windows are all open. There are exits in each end of the car-right and left.

ACTION. - Before the curtain goes up there is the sound of a locomotive whistle and a stopping engine, loud laughter, many people speaking at once, good natured shrieks, strumming of stringed instruments, etc. The ascending curtain discovers a happy lot of Negroes boarding the train dressed in the gaudy, tawdry best of the year 1900. They are mostly in couples-each couple bearing a covered over market basket which the men hastily deposit in the racks as they scramble for seats. There is a little friendly pushing and shoving. One pair just miss a seat three times, much to the enjoyment of the crowd. Many “plug” silk hats are in evidence, also sunflowers in buttonholes. The women are showily dressed in the manner of the time, and quite conscious of their finery. A few seats remain unoccupied.

Enter Effie [*left*] above, with a basket. One of the men [*standing, lifting his “plug” in a grand manner*]. Howdy do, Miss Effie, you’se lookin’ jes lak a rose.

[Effie blushes and is confused. She looks up and down for a seat.]

Fack is, if you wuzn’t walkin’ long, ah’d think you wuz a rose-

[he looks timidly behind her and the others laugh].

Looka here, where’s Sam at?

EFFIE [*tossing her head haughtily*].

I don’t know an’ I don’t keer.

DINKY [*visibly relieved*].

Then lemme scorch you to a seat.

gaudy, adj. overly colorful and bright; in poor taste

tawdry, adj. showy, but poor quality

fack, n. dialect for fact

scorch, v. dialect for escort; take

[He takes her basket and leads her to a seat in the center of the car, puts the basket in the rack and seats himself beside her with his hat at a rakish angle.]

DINKY *[sliding his arm along the back of the seat].*

How come Sam ain't heah—y'all on a bust?

EFFIE *[angrily]*

A man dat don't buy me nothin tuh put in mah basket, ain't goin' wid me tuh no cake walk.

[The hand on the seat touches her shoulder and she thrusts it away].
Take yo' arms from 'round me, Dinky! Gwan hug yo' Ada!

DINKY *[in mock indignation]*

Do you think I'd look at Ada when Ah got a chance tuh be wid you? Ah always wuz sweet on you, but you let ole Mullet-head Sam cut me out.

MAN 1 *[with head out of the window]*

Just look at de darkies coming!

[With head inside coach]

Hey, Dinky! Heah come Ada wid a great big basket.

[Dinky jumps up from beside Effie and rushes to exit right. In a moment they re-enter and take a seat near entrance. Everyone in coach laughs. Dinky's girl turns and calls back to Effie.]

ADA

Where's Sam, Effie?

EFFIE

Lawd knows, Ada.

ADA

Lawd a mussy! Who you gointer walk de cake wid?

rakish angle, n. in a suggestive way showing lower moral standards

cakewalk, n. a high stepping dance that originated on plantations in the nineteenth century and was still popular in the twentieth century. The prizes for the best performances were elaborately decorated cakes

EFFIE

Nobody, Ah reckon. John and Emma gointer win it nohow. They's the bestest cakewalkers in dis state.

ADA

You'se better than Emma any day in de week. Cose Sam cain't walk lake John.

[She stands up and scans the coach.]

Looka heah, ain't John an' Emma going? They ain't on heah!

[The locomotive bell begins to ring.]

EFFIE

Mah Gawd, s'pose dey got left!

MAN *[with head out of window]*

Heah they come, nip and tuck-who-ee! They'se gonna make it!

[He waves excitedly.]

Come on Jawn!

[Everybody crowds the windows, encouraging them by gesture and calls. As the whistle blows twice, and the train begins to move, they enter panting and laughing at left. The only seat left is the one directly in front of Effie.]

DINKY *[standing]*

Don't y'all skeer us no mo' lake dat! There couldn't be no cake walk thout y'all. Dem shad-mouf St. Augustine coons would win dat cake and we would have tuh kill 'em all bodaciously.

JOHN.

It was Emmaline nearly made us get left. She says I wuz smiling at Effie on the street car and she had to get off and wait for another one.

shad-mouf, adj. a colorist insult drawing attention to a protruding upper lip and comparing it to that of a shad fish

EMMA [*removing the hatpins from her hat, turns furiously upon him*]
You wuz grinning at her and she wuz grinning back jes lake a ole chessy cat!

JOHN [*positively*]
I wuzn't.

EMMA [*about to place her hat in rack*]
You wuz. I seen you looking jes lake a possum.

JOHN
I wuzn't. I never gits a chance tuh smile at nobody-you won't let me.

EMMA
Jes the same every time you sees a yaller face, you takes a chance.

[They sit down in peeved silence for a minute.]

DINKY
Ada, les we all sample de basket. I bet you got huckleberry pie.

ADA
No I aint, I got peach an' tater pies, but we aint gonna tetch a thing tell we gits tuh de hall.

DINKY [*mock alarm*]
Naw, don't do dat! It's all right tuh save the fried chicken, but pies is always et on trains.

ADA
Aw shet up!

[He struggles with her for a kiss. She slaps him but finally yields.]

JOHN [*looking behind him*]
Hellow, Effie, where's Sam?

EFFIE
Deed, I don't know.

yaller, adj. a slang expression used in the early twentieth century to describe someone with lightly colored skin

JOHN

Y'all on a bust?

EMMA

None ah yo'bizness, you got enough tuh mind yo' own self. Turn 'round!

[She puts up a pouting mouth and he snatches a kiss. She laughs just as he kisses her again and there is a resounding smack which causes the crowd to laugh. And cries of "Oh you kid!" "Salty dog!"]

[Enter conductor left calling tickets cheerfully and laughing at the general merriment.]

CONDUCTOR

I hope somebody from Jacksonville wins this cake.

JOHN

You live in the "Big Jack?"

CONDUCTOR

Sure do. And I wanta taste a piece of that cake on the way back tonight.

JOHN

Jes rest easy-them Augustiners aint gonna smell it.

[Turns to Emma.]

Is they, baby?

EMMA. Not if Ah kin help it.

Somebody with a guitar sings; "Ho babe, mah honey taint no lie."

[The conductor takes up tickets, passes on and exits right.]

WESLEY

Look heah, you cake walkers-y'all oughter git up and limber up yo' joints. I heard them folks over to St. Augustine been oiling up wid goose-grease, and over to Ocala they been rubbing down in snake oil.

A WOMAN'S VOICE

You better shut up, Wesley, you just joined de church last month. Somebody's going to tell the pastor on you.

WESLEY

Tell it, tell it, take it up and smell it. Come on out you John and Emma and Effie, and limber up.

JOHN

Naw, we don't wanta do our walking steps-nobody won't wanta see them when we step out at the hall. But we kin do something else just to warm ourselves up.

[Wesley begins to play "Goo Goo Eyes" on his accordion, the other instruments come in one by one and John and Emma step into the aisle and "parade" up and down the aisle—Emma holding up her skirt, showing the lace on her petticoats. They two-step back to their seat amid much applause.]

WESLEY

Come on out, Effie! Sam aint heah so you got to hold up his side too. Step on out.

[There is a murmur of applause as she steps into the aisle. Wesley strikes up "I'm gointer live anyhow till I die." It is played quite spiritedly as Effie swings into the pas-me-la]

WESLEY *[in ecstasy]*

Hot stuff I reckon! Hot stuff I reckon!

[The musicians are stamping. Great enthusiasm. Some clap time with hands and feet. She hurls herself into a modified Hoochy Koochy, and finishes up with an ecstatic yell.]

There is a babble of talk and laughter and exultation.

limber up, v. loosen up

pas-me-la: a similar dance to the cake-walk. It also has ties to plantation life

Hoochy-Koochy, n. a dance with sexual overtones. The Hoochy Koochy was popular in vaudeville shows from the 1890s through the early twentieth century and was a precursor to the dances performed in burlesque shows.

exultation, n. applause; approval

JOHN [*applauding, loudly*]
If dat Effie can't step nobody can.

EMMA

Course you'd say so cause it's her. Everything she do is pretty to you.

JOHN [*caressing her*]

Now don't say that, Honey. Dancing is dancing no matter who is doing it. But nobody can hold a candle to you in nothing.

[Some men are heard tuning up-getting pitch to sing. Four of them crowd together in one seat and begin the chorus of "Daisies Won't Tell." John and Emma grow quite affectionate.]

JOHN [*kisses her*]

Emma, what makes you always picking a fuss with me over some yaller girl. What makes you so jealous, nohow? I don't do nothing.

[She clings to him, but he turns slightly away. The train whistle blows, there is a slackening of speed. Passengers begin to take down baskets from their racks.]

EMMA

John! John, don't you want me to love you, honey?

JOHN [*turns and kisses her slowly*]

Yes, I want you to love me, you know I do. But I don't like to be accused o' ever light colored girl in the world. It hurts my feeling. I don't want to be jealous like you are.

[Enter at right Conductor, crying "St. Augustine, St. Augustine." He exits left. The crowd has congregated at the two exits, pushing good-naturedly and joking. All except John and Emma. They are still seated with their arms about each other.]

EMMA [*sadly*]

Then you don't want my love, John, cause I can't help mahself from being jealous. I loves you so hard, John, and jealous love is the only kind I got.

hold a candle to, v. to equal or compare to

[John kisses her very feelingly.]

EMMA

Just for myself alone is the only way I knows how to love.

[They are standing in the aisle with their arms about each other as the curtain falls.]

SCENE II

SETTING- A weather-board hall. A large room with the joists bare. The place has been divided by a curtain of sheets stretched and a rope across from left to right. From behind the curtain there are occasional sounds of laughter, a note or two on a stringed instrument or accordion. General stir. That is the dance hall. The front is the ante-room where the refreshments are being served. A “plank” seat runs all around the hall, along the walls. The lights are kerosene lamps with reflectors. They are fixed to the wall. The lunch-baskets are under the seat. There is a table on either side upstage with a white Man behind each. At one, ice cream is sold, at the other, roasted peanuts and large red and-white sticks of Peppermint candy.

People come in by twos and three, laughing, joking, horse-plays, gauchily flowered dresses, small waists, bulging hips and waists, hats worn far back on the head, etc. People from Ocala greet others from Palatka, Jacksonville, St. Augustine, etc.

Some find seats in the ante-room, others pass on into the main hall.

Enter the Jacksonville delegation, laughing, pushing proudly.

DINKY

Here we is, folks-here we is. Geissler take dot cake on back tub Jacksonville where it belongs.

weather-board hall, n. a hall or building with its outside unpainted, so the wood ages in the weather

gauchily, adj. gaudy; in poor taste

ante-room, n. a small room connected to a larger room

MAN

Gwan! Whut wid you mullet-head Jacksonville Coons know whut to do wid a cake. It's gointer stay right here in Augustine where de good cake walkers grow.

DINKY

Taint no 'Walkers' never walked till John and Emmaline prance out—you mighty come a tootin'.

[Great laughing and joshing as more people come in. John and Emma are encouraged, urged on to win.]

EMMA

Let's we git a seat, John, and set down.

JOHN

Sho will-nice one right over there.

[They push over to wall seat, place basket underneath, and sit. Newcomers shake hands with them and urge them on to win.]

[Enter Joe Clarke and a small group. He is a rotund, expansive man with a liberal watch chain and charm.]

DINKY *[slapping Clarke on the back]*

If you don't go 'way from here! Lawdy, if it aint Joe.

CLARKE *[jovially]*

Ah thought you had done forgot us people in Eatonville since you been living up here in Jacksonville.

DINKY

Course Ah aint.

[Turning.]

Looka heah folks! Joe Clarke oughta be made chairman uh dis meetin'-Ah mean Past Great-Grand Master of Ceremonies, him being the onliest mayor of de onliest colored town in de state.

GENERAL CHORUS

Yeah, let him be-thass fine, etc.

DINKY [*setting his hat at a new angle and throwing out his chest*].
And Ah'll scorch him to de platform. Ahem!

[Sprinkling of laughter as Joe Clarke is escorted into next room by Dinky.]

[The musicians are arriving one by one during this time. A guitar, accordion, mouth organ, banjo, etc. Soon there is a rapping for order heard inside and the voice of Joe Clarke.]

JOE CLARKE.

Git yo' partners one an' all for de gran' march! Git yo' partners, gent-mens!

MAN [*drawing basket from under bench*]

Let's we all eat first.

[John and Emma go buy ice-cream. They coquettishly eat from each other's spoons. Old Man Lizzimore crosses to Effie and removes his hat and bows with a great flourish.]

LIZZIMORE

Sam ain't here t'night, is he, Effie.

EFFIE [*embarrassed*]

Naw suh, he aint.

LIZZIMORE

Well, you like chicken?

[Extends arm to her.]

Take a wing!

[He struts her up to the table amid the laughter of the house. He wears no collar.]

coquettishly, adv. flirtatiously

flourish, n. wave

JOHN [*squeezes Emma's hand*]

You certainly is a ever loving mamma-when you aint mad.

EMMA [*smiles sheepishly*]

You oughtn't to make me mad then.

JOHN

Ah don't make you! You makes yo'self mad, den blame it on me. Ah keep on tellin' you Ah don't love nobody but you. Ah knows heaps uh half-white girls Ah could git ef Ah wanted to. But

[he squeezes her hard again]

Ah jus' wants you! You know what they say! De darker de berry, de sweeter de taste!

EMMA [*pretending to pout*]

Oh, you tries to run over me an' keep it under de cover, but Ah won't let yuh.

[Both laugh.]

Les' we eat our basket!

JOHN

Alright.

[He pulls the basket out and she removes the table cloth. They set the basket on their knees and begin to eat fried chicken.]

MALE VOICE

Les' everybody eat-motion's done carried.

[Everybody begins to open baskets. All have fried chicken. Very good humor prevails. Delicacies are swapped from one basket to the other. John and Emma offer the Man next to them some supper. He takes a chicken leg. Effie crosses to John and Emma with two pieces of pie on a plate.]

sheepishly, adv. showing embarrassment

EFFIE

Y'll have a piece uh mah blueberry pie—it's mighty nice!

[She proffers it with a timid smile to Emma who "freezes" up instantly.]

EMMA

Naw! We don't want no pie. We got cocoanut layer-cake.

JOHN

Ah—Ah think ah'd choose a piece uh pie, Effie.

[He takes it.]

Will you set down an' have a snack wid us?

[He slides over to make room.]

EFFIE *[nervously]*

Ah, naw, Ah got to run on back to mah basket, but Ah thought maybe y'll mout' want tuh taste mah pie.

[She turns to go.]

JOHN

Thank you, Effie. It's mighty good, too.

[He eats it. Effie crosses to her seat. Emma glares at her for a minute, then turns disgustedly away from the basket. John catches her shoulder and faces her around.]

JOHN *[pleadingly]*

Honey, be nice. Don't act lak dat!

EMMA *[jerking free]*

Naw, you done ruint mah appetite now, carryin' on wid dat punkin-colored ole gal.

JOHN

Whut kin Ah do? If you had a acted polite Ah wouldn't a had nothin' to say.

EMMA

Naw, youse jus' hog-wile ovah her cause she's half-white! No matter whut Ah say, you keep carryin' on wid her. Act polite? Naw Ah aint gonna be deceitful an' bust mah gizzard fuh nobody! Let her keep her dirty ole pie ovah there where she is!

JOHN *[looking around to see if they are overheard]*

Sh-sh Honey, you mustn't talk so loud.

EMMA *[louder]*

Ah-Ah aint gonna bite mah tongue! If she don't like it she can lump it. Mah back is broad-[John tries to cover her mouth with his hand]. She calls herself a big cigar, but I kin smoke her.

[The people are laughing and talking for the most part and pay no attention. Effie is laughing and talking to those around her and does not hear the tirade. The eating is over and everyone is going behind the curtain. John and Emma put away their basket like the others, and sit glum. Voice of Master-of-ceremonies can be heard from beyond curtain announcing the pas-me-la contest. The contestants, mostly girls, take the floor. There is no music except the clapping of hands and the shouts of "Parse-me-lah" in time with the hand-clapping. At the end Master announces winner. Shadows seen on curtain.]

MASTER

Mathilda Clarke is winner-if she will step forward she will receive a beautiful wook fascinador.

[The girl goes up and receives it with great hand-clapping and good humor.]

And now since the roosters is crowin' foah midnight, an' most of us got to git up an' go to work tomorrow, The Great Cake Walk will begin. Ah wants de floor cleared, cause de representatives of de several cities will be announced an' we wants 'ern to take de floor

deceitful, adj. dishonest

gizzard, n. stomach

wook fascinador: a wool fascinador—now more associated with fancy headwear, "fascinador" originally referred to a light shawl or scarf worn on the head and shoulders, often made of lightweight wool

as their names is called. Den we wants ‘ern to do a gran’ promenade roun’de hall. An’ they will then commence to walk fuh de biggest cake ever baked in dis state. Ten dozen eggs-ten pounds of flour -ten pounds of butter, and so on and so forth. Now then-*[he strikes a pose]* for St. Augustine, Miss Lucy Taylor, Mr. Ned Coles.

[They step out amid applause and stand before stage.]

For Daytona, Miss Janie Bradley, Enoch Nixon

[Same business.]

For Ocala, Miss Docia Boger, Mr. Oscar Clarke

[Same business.]

For Palatka, Miss Maggie Lemmons, Mr. Senator Lewis

[Same business.]

And for Jacksonville the most popular “walkers” in de state Miss Emmaline Beazeby, Mr. John Turner.

[Tremendous applause. John rises and offers his arm grandiloquently to Emma.]

EMMA *[pleadingly, and clutching his coat]*

John let’s we all don’t go in there with all them. Let’s we all go on home.

JOHN *[amazed]*

Why, Emma?

EMMA

Cause, cause all them girls is going to pulling and hauling on you, and-

JOHN *[impatiently]*

Shucks! Come on. Don’t you hear the people clapping for us and calling our names? Come on!

promenade, n. the opening of a formal dance when all the guests march into the dance hall
Grandiloquently, adv. in a way to impress

[He tries to pull her up-she tries to drag him back.]

Come on, Emma! Taint no sense in your acting like this. The band is playing for us. Hear ‘em?

[He moves feet in a dance step.]

EMMA

Naw, John, Ah’m skeered. -I-.

[He tries to break away from her. She is holding on fiercely.]

JOHN

I got to go! I been practising almost a year—I—we done come all the way down here. I can walk the cake, Emma-we got to-I got to go in!

[He looks into her face and sees her tremendous fear.]

What you skeered about?

EMMA *[hopefully]*

You won’t go in—You’ll come on go home with me all by ourselves. Come on John. I can’t, I just can’t go in there and see all them girls-Effie hanging after you.

JOHN.

I got to go in-

[he removes her hand from his coat]

-whether you come with me or not.

EMMA

Oh-them yaller wenchies! How I hate em! They gets everything they wants.

VOICE INSIDE

We are waiting for the couple from Jacksonville-Jacksonville! Where is the couple from... .

[Wesley parts the curtain and looks out.]

WESLEY

Here they is out here spooning! You all can't even hear your names called. Come on John and Emma.

JOHN

Coming.

[He dashes inside. Wesley stands looking at Emma in surprise.]

WESLEY

What's the matter, Emma? You and John spatting again?

[He goes back inside.]

EMMA *[calmly bitter]*

He went and left me. If we is spatting we done had our last one.

[She stands and clenches her fists.]

Ah, mah God! He's in there with her. Oh, them half whites, they gets everything, they gets everything everybody else wants! The men, the jobs - everything! The whole world is got a sign on it. Wanted: Light colored. Us blacks was made for cobble stones.

[She muffles a cry and sinks limp upon the seat.]

VOICE INSIDE

Miss Effie Jones will walk for Jacksonville with Mr. John Turner in place of Miss Emmaline Beazeley.

SCENE III-Dance Hall

Emma springs to her feet and flings the curtains wide open. She stands staring at the gay scene for a moment defiantly then creeps over to a seat along the wall and shrinks into the Spanish Moss, motionless.

spat, v. to argue (spatting)

cobble stone, n. flat, rounded, flat stone once used to make roads (cobble stones)

Spanish Moss, n. a bluish grey plant that grows on and hangs on tree branches particularly in tropical climates

Dance hall decorated with palmetto leaves and Spanish Moss—a flag or two. Orchestra consists of guitar, mandolin, banjo, accordion, church organ and drum.

MASTER *[on platform]*

Couples take yo' places! When de music starts, gentlemen parade yo' ladies once round de hall, den de walk begins.

[The music begins. Four men come out from behind the platform bearing a huge chocolate cake. The couples are “prancing” in their tracks. The men lead off the procession with the cake - the contestants make a grand slam around the hall.]

MASTER

Couples to de floor! Stan' back, ladies an' gentlemen - give 'em plenty room.

[Music changes to “Way Down in Georgia.” Orchestra sings. Effie takes the arm that John offers her and they parade to the other end of the hall. She takes her place. John goes back upstage to the platform, takes off his silk hat in a graceful sweep as he bows deeply to Effie. She lifts her skirts and curtsies to the floor. Both smile broadly. They advance toward each other, meet midway, then, arm in arm, begin to “strut.” John falters as he faces her, but recovers promptly and is perfection in his style. [Seven to nine minutes to curtain.] Fervor of spectators grows until all are taking part in some way - either hand-clapping or singing the words. At curtain they have reached frenzy.]

QUICK CURTAIN

[It stays down a few seconds to indicate ending of contest and goes up again on John and Effie being declared winners by Judges.]

palmetto, n. a palm plant that typically grows in tropical climates

curtsy, v. a greeting, usually made by women, by bending the knee with one foot forward and bowing (curties)

fervor, n. a strong emotion

frenzy, n. wild excitement

MASTER *[on platform, with John and Effie on the floor before him].*

By unanimous decision de cake goes to de couple from Jacksonville!

[Great enthusiasm. The cake is set down in the center of the floor and the winning couple parade around it arm in arm. John and Effie circle the cake happily and triumphantly. The other contestants, and then the entire assembly fall in behind and circle the cake, singing and clapping. The festivities continue. The Jacksonville quartet step upon the platform and sing a verse and chorus of "Daisies won't tell." Cries of "Hurrah for Jacksonville! Glory for the big town," "Hurrah for Big Jack."]

A MAN *[seeing Emma]*

You're from Jacksonville, aint you?

[He whirls her around and around.]

Aint you happy? Whoopee!

[He releases her and she drops upon a seat. She buries her face in the moss.]

[Quartet begins on chorus again. People are departing, laughing, humming, with quartet cheering. John, the cake, and Effie being borne away in triumph.]

SCENE IV

TIME - present. The interior of a one-room shack in an alley. There is a small window in the rear wall upstage left. There is an enlarged crayon drawing of a man and woman - man sitting cross-legged, woman standing with her hand on his shoulder. A center table, red cover, a low, cheap rocker, two straight chairs, a small kitchen stove at left with a wood-box beside it, a water bucket on a stand close by. A hand towel and a wash basin. A shelf of dishes above this.

crayon drawing, n. refers to a drawing made with pastels or chalk

There is an ordinary oil lamp on the center table but it is not lighted when the curtain goes up. Some light enters through the window and falls on the woman seated in the low rocker. The door is center right. A cheap bed is against the upstage wall. Someone is on the bed but is lying so that the back is toward the audience.

ACTION - As the curtain rises, the woman is seen rocking to and fro in the low rocker. A dead silence except for the sound of the rocker and an occasional groan from the bed. Once a faint voice says “water” and the woman in the rocker arises and carries the tin dipper to the bed.

WOMAN.

No mo’ right away—Doctor says not too much.

[Returns dipper to pail. Pause.]

You got right much fever—I better go git the doctor agin.

[There comes a knocking at the door and she stands still for a moment, listening. It comes again and she goes to door but does not open it.]

WOMAN

Who’s that?

VOICE OUTSIDE

Does Emma Beasely live here?

EMMA

Yeah—

[pause]

—who is it?

VOICE

It’s me - John Turner.

EMMA *[puts hands eagerly on the fastening]*

John? Did you say John Turner?

VOICE

Yes, Emma, it's me.

[The door is opened and the man steps inside.]

EMMA

John! Your hand...

[she feels for it and touches it]

John, flesh and blood.

JOHN *[laughing awkwardly]*

It's me alright, old girl. Just as bright as a basket of chips. Make a light quick so I can see how you look. I'm crazy to see you. Twenty years is a long time to wait, Emma.

EMMA *[nervously]*

Oh, let's we all just sit in the dark awhile.

[Apologetically]

I wasn't expecting nobody and my house aint picked up. Sit down.

[She draws up the chair. She sits in rocker.]

JOHN

Just to think! Emma! Me and Emma sitting down side by each. Know how I found you?

EMMA *[dully]*

Naw. How?

JOHN *[brightly]*

Soon's I got in town I hunted up Wesley and he told me how to find you. That's who I come to see, you!

EMMA

Where you been North somewheres? Nobody out where you got to.

JOHN

Yes, up North. Philadelphia.

EMMA

Married yet?

JOHN

Oh yes, seventeen years ago. But my wife is dead now and so I came as soon as it was decent to find you. I wants to marry you. I die happy if I didn't. Couldn't get over you—couldn't forget. Forget me, Emma?

EMMA

Naw, John. How could I?

JOHN [*leans over impulsively to catch her hand*]

Oh, Emma, I love you so much. Strike a light honey so I can see you see if you changed much. You was such a handsome girl!

EMMA

We don't exactly need no light, do we, John, tuh jus' set an' talk?

JOHN

Yes, we do, Honey. Gwan, make a light. Ah wanna see you.

[There is a silence.]

EMMA

Bet you' wife wuz some high-yaller dickty-doo.

JOHN

Naw she wasn't neither. She was jus' as much like you as Ah could get her. Make a light an' Ah'll show you her pictcher. Shucks, ah gotta look at mah old sweetheart.

[He strikes a match and holds it up between their faces and they look intently at each other over it until it burns out.]

You aint changed none at all, Emma, jus' as pretty as a speckled pup yet.

decent, adj, proper, respectable

pictcher, n. dialect for picture

EMMA [*lighter*]

Go long, John!

[*Short pause*]

...member how you useter bring me magnolias?

JOHN

Do I? Gee, you was sweet! ‘Member how Ah useter pull mah necktie loose so you could tie it back for me? Emma, Ah can’t see to mah soul how we lived all this time, way from one another. ‘Member how you useter make out mah ears had done run down and you useter screw ‘em up agin for me?

[*They laugh.*]

EMMA

Yeah, Ah useter think you wuz gointer be mah husban’ then - but you let dat ole—.

JOHN

Ah aint gonna let you alibi on me lak dat. Light dat lamp! You cain’t look me in de eye and say no such.

[*He strikes another match and lights the lamp.*]

Course, Ah don’t wanta look too bossy, but Ah b’lieve you got to marry me tuh git rid of me. That is, if you aint married.

EMMA

Naw, Ah aint.

[*She turns the lamp down.*]

JOHN [*looking about the room*]

Not so good, Emma. But wait till you see dat little place in Philly! Got a little “Rolls-Rough” too—gointer teach you to drive it, too.

magnolia, n. scented, white flower that grows on a tree of the same name (magnolias)

alibi, v. make an excuse

Rolls Rough slang term for an old, not so luxurious car

EMMA

Ah been havin' a hard time, John, an' Ah lost you - oh, aint nothin' been right for me! Ah aint never been happy.

[John takes both of her hands in his.]

JOHN

You gointer be happy now, Emma. Cause Ah'm gointer make you. Gee Whiz! Ah aint but forty-two and you aint forty yet - we got plenty time.

[There is a groan from the bed.]

Gee, what's that?

EMMA *[ill at ease]*

Thass mah chile. She's sick. Reckon Ah bettah see 'bout her.

JOHN

You got a chile? Gee, that great! Ah always wanted one. but didn't have no luck. Now we kin start off with a family. Girl or boy?

EMMA *[slowly]*

A girl. Comin' tuh see me agin soon, John?

JOHN

Comin' agin? Ah aint gone yet! We aint talked, you aint kissed me an' nothin', and you aint showed me our girl.

[another groan, more prolonged.]

She must be pretty sick - let's see.

[He turns in his chair and Emma rushes over to the bed and covers the girl securely, tucking her long hair under the covers, too-before he arises. He goes over to the bed and looks down into her face. She is mulatto. Turns to Emma teasingly.]

chile, n. dialect for child

Talkin' 'bout me liking high-yallers—yo husband musta been pretty near white.

EMMA *[slowly]*

Ah, never wuz married, John.

JOHN.

It's alright, Emma.

[Kisses her warmly.]

Everything is going to be O.K.

[Turning back to the bed.]

Our child looks pretty sick, but she's pretty.

[Feels her forehead and cheek.]

Think she oughter have a doctor.

EMMA

Ah done had one. Course Ah cain't git no specialist an' nothin' lak dat.

[She looks about the room and his gaze follows hers.]

Ah aint got a whole lot lake you. Nobody don't git rich in no white-folks' kitchen, nor in de washtub. You know Ah aint no school-teacher an' nothin' lak dat.

[John puts his arm about her.]

JOHN

It's all right, Emma. But our daughter is bad off—run out an' git a doctor—she needs one. Ah'd go if Ah knowed where to find one—you kin git one the quickest—hurry, Emma.

EMMA *[looks from John to her daughter and back again.]*

She'll be all right, Ah reckon, for a while. John, you love me—you really want me sho' nuff?

JOHN

Sure Ah do—think Ah'd come all de way down here for nothin'? Ah wants to marry agin.

EMMA

Soon, John?

JOHN

Real soon.

EMMA

Ah wuz jus'thinkin', mah folks is away now on a little trip—be home day after tomorrow—we could git married tomorrow.

JOHN

All right. Now run on after the doctor—we must look after our girl. Gee, she's got a full suit of hair! Glad you didn't let her chop it off.

[Looks away from bed and sees Emma standing still.]

JOHN

Emma, run on after the doctor, honey.

[She goes to the bed and again tucks the long braids of hair in, which are again pouring over the side of the bed by the feverish tossing of the girl.]

What's our daughter's name?

EMMA

Lou Lillian.

[She returns to the rocker uneasily and sits rocking jerkily. He returns to his seat and turns up the light.]

JOHN

Gee, we're going to be happy—we gointer make up for all them twenty years [*another groan*]. Emma, git up an' gwan git dat doctor. You done forgot Ah'm de boss uh dis family now—gwan, while Ah'm here to watch her whilst you're gone. Ah got to git back to mah stoppin'-place after a while.

EMMA

You go git one, John.

JOHN

Whilst Ah'm blunderin' round tryin' to find one, she'll be gettin' worse. She sounds pretty bad.

[takes out his wallet and hands her a bill]

Get a taxi if necessary. Hurry!

EMMA *[does not take the money, but tucks her arms and hair in again, and gives the girl a drink]*

Reckon Ah better go git a doctor. Don't want nothin' to happen to her. After you left, Ah useter have such a hurtin' in heah

[touches her bosom]

till she come an' eased it some.

JOHN

Here, take some money and get a good doctor. There must be some good colored ones around here now.

EMMA *[scornfully]*

I wouldn't let one of 'em tend my cat if I had one! But let's we don't start a fuss.

[John caresses her again. When he raises his head he notices the picture on the wall and crosses over to it with her—his arm still about her.]

JOHN

Why, that's you and me

EMMA

Yes, I never could part with that. You coming tomorrow morning, John, and we're gointer get married, aint we? Then we can talk over everything.

JOHN

Sure, but I aint gone yet. I don't see how come we can't make all our arrangements now.

[Groans from bed and feeble movement.]

Good lord, Emma, go get that doctor!

[Emma stares at the girl and the bed and seizes a hat from a nail on the wall. She prepares to go but looks from John to bed and back again. She fumbles about the table and lowers the lamp. Goes to door and opens it. John offers the wallet. She refuses it.]

EMMA

Doctor right around the corner. Guess I'll leave the door open so she can get some air. She, won't need nothing while I'm gone, John.

[She crosses and tucks the girl in securely and rushes out, looking backward and pushing the door wide open as she exits. John sits in the chair beside the table. Looks about him - shakes his head. The girl on the bed groans, "water," "so hot." John looks about him excitedly. Gives her a drink. Feels her head. Takes a clean handkerchief from his pocket and wets it and places it upon her forehead. She raises her hand to the cool object. Enter Emma running. When she sees John at the bed she is full of fury. She rushes over and jerks his shoulder around. They face each other.]

EMMA

I knowed it!

[She strikes him.]

A half white skin.

[She rushes at him again. John staggers back and catches her hands.]

JOHN

Emma!

fury, n. anger

EMMA *[struggles to free her hands]*

Let me in so I can kill you. Come sneaking in here like a pole cat!

JOHN *[slowly, after a long pause]*

So this the woman I've been wearing over my heart like a rose for twenty years! She so despises her own skin that she can't believe any one else could love it!

[Emma writhes to free herself.]

JOHN

Twenty years! Twenty years of adoration, of hunger, of worship!

[On the verge of tears he crosses to door and exits quietly, closing the door after him.]

[Emma remains standing, looking dully about as if she is half asleep. There comes a knocking at the door. She rushes to open it. It is the doctor—white. She does not step aside so that he can enter.]

DOCTOR

Well, shall I come in?

EMMA *[stepping aside and laughing a little]*

That's right, doctor, come in.

[Doctor crosses to bed with professional air. Looks at the girl, feels the pulse and draws up the sheet over the face. He turns to her.]

DOCTOR

Why didn't you come sooner. I told you to let me know of the least change in her condition.

EMMA *[flatly]*

I did come—I went for the doctor.

DOCTOR

Yes, but you waited. An hour more or less is mighty important sometimes. Why didn't you come?

EMMA *[passes hand over face]*

Couldn't see.

[Doctor looks at her curiously, then sympathetically takes out a small box of pills, and hands them to her.]

DOCTOR

Here, you're worn out. Take one of these every hour and try to get some sleep.

[He departs.]

[She puts the pill-box on the table, takes up the low rocking chair and places it by the head of the bed. She seats herself and rocks monotonously and stares out of the door. A dry sob now and then. The wind from the open door blows out the lamp and she is seen by the little light from the window rocking in an even, monotonous gait, and sobbing.]

For Further Consideration

1. Scene One opens in the "Jim Crow" section of a railway car. What does the "Jim Crow" section mean?
2. Why does Emma get mad with John in Scene One?
3. Near the end of Scene One, Emma claims to have a jealous love for John. What makes Emma jealous?
4. There are a couple of surprising plot twists in Scene Four of the play. What is one example?
5. Based on what you read about colorism, what are the effects of colorism on Emma's life? Who is to blame for these effects?

SONGS OF SORROW AND SOLACE: THE NEW NEGRO AND THE OLD SPIRITUALS

Do you remember the last time that you were sick? Maybe you had a bad headache, or maybe it was your stomach that was bothering you. Perhaps it was a fever that took a long time to break, or the feeling of not ever wanting to leave your bed because you were too sore or too drained to do much of anything. Whatever it was that made you feel that way, do you remember what your parents gave you to make you feel better? Maybe it was a bowl of hot soup, or perhaps they made you drink plenty of refreshing beverages like cool water and juices. Maybe they allowed you to stay in bed longer than usual and watch your favorite television shows or movies in between naps. Whether it was the soups, the drinks or the rest or perhaps a combination of all of these things, in time, your body received what it needed to heal and recover from the illness that made you feel ill in the first place.

African Americans had long been exposed to illnesses that caused pain and suffering. From the long, hard voyage that brought many of them to America during the Middle Passage, to the harsh days of slavery with its brutal conditions and constant fear of punishment and family separation, to the days of Jim Crow segregation, African Americans relied on remedies that could soothe their spirits to give them the strength needed to move on and endure.

One of their most reliable remedies were songs that were known as *spirituals*. These songs, often referred to as African American or Negro spirituals, were songs that religious messages and were

created during slavery by enslaved people who sang them as a way of both passing time in the fields as they worked, *and* to relay secret messages about escape or meeting plans. According to the Library of Congress, these songs are the most significant forms of American folksong and cultural expression.

An essay about this authentic African American art form is included in 1925's *The New Negro*. Because this was a collection of essays that was meant to celebrate the modern spirit of activism and pride, the inclusion of an essay about something that is so closely associated with slavery might be a strange decision. Why do you think this was done? Perhaps the decision was made to write the essay as a way of recognizing how far African Americans had come in a relatively short period of time. Maybe it is possible the essay was included because they were a positive reminder of how African Americans used music as a means of self-expression and as a way of communicating with one another. After all, Locke reminded his audiences that jazz, the genre of music that was gaining in widespread popularity during the 1920s, owed its existence to spirituals. He once wrote that African Americans had always used music to escape the harshness of poverty and blues and jazz both have their roots in the spirituals of the ancestors. Locke's reminder shows us that the New Negro owed his existence to the Old Negro in many ways, and the spirituals of the Old Negro, just may be his most significant contribution.

The Negro Spirituals

by Alain Locke

The spirituals are really the most characteristic product of the race genius as yet in America. But the very elements which make them uniquely expressive of the Negro make them at the same time deeply representative of the soil that produced them. Thus, as unique spiritual products of American life, they become nationally as well as racially characteristic. It may not be readily conceded now that the song of the Negro is America's folk-song; but if the Spirituals are what we think them to be, a classic folk expression, then this is their ultimate destiny. Already they give evidence of this classic quality. Through their immediate and compelling universality of appeal, through their untarnishable beauty, they seem assured of the immortality of those great folk expressions that survive not so much through being typical of a group or representative of a period as by virtue of being fundamentally and everlastingly human. This universality of the spirituals looms more and more as they stand the test of time. They have outlived the particular generation and the peculiar conditions which produced them; they have survived in turn the contempt of the slave owners, the conventionalizations of formal religion, the repressions of Puritanism, the corruptions of sentimental balladry, and the neglect and disdain of second-generation respectability. They have escaped the lapsing conditions and the fragile vehicle of folk art and come firmly into the context of formal music. Only classics survive such things.

In its disingenuous simplicity, folk art is always despised and rejected at first; but generations after, it flowers again and transcends the level

untarnishable, adj. not able to be damaged

immortality, n. able to live forever

universality, n. applicable (to many people)

loom, v. to appear in one's mind (looms)

contempt, n. open disrespect

conventionalization, n. conforming to what is expected (conventionalizations)

repressions of Puritanisms, n. avoiding pleasurable or enjoyable experiences or things

disingenuous, adj. not sincere or straight forward

of its origin. The slave songs are no exception; only recently have they come to be recognized as artistically precious things. It still requires vision and courage to proclaim their ultimate value and possibilities. But while the first stage of artistic development is yet uncompleted, it appears that behind the deceptive simplicity of Negro song lie the richest undeveloped musical resources anywhere available. Thematically rich, in idiom of rhythm and harmony richer still, in potentialities of new musical forms and new technical traditions so deep as to be accessible only to genius, they have the respect of the connoisseur when even while still under the sentimental and condescending patronage of the amateur. Proper understanding and full appreciation of the spirituals, in spite of their present vogue, is still rare. And the Negro himself has shared many of the common and widespread limitations of view with regards to them. The emotional intuition which has made him cling to this folk music has lacked for the most part that convinced enlightenment that eventually will treasure the spirituals for their true musical and technical values. And although popular opinion and the general conception have changed very materially, a true estimate of this body of music cannot be reached until many prevailing preconceptions are completely abandoned... .

...It was the great service of Dr. DuBois* in his unforgettable chapter on the Sorrow Songs in *The Soul of Black Folk* to give them a serious and proper social interpretation... The humble origin of these sorrow songs is too indelibly stamped upon them to be ignored or overlooked. But underneath broken words, childish imagery, peasant simplicity, lies as Dr. DuBois pointed out, an epic intensity...for which the only historical analogy is the spiritual experience of the Jews and the only

* Dr. W.E.B. DuBois (1868-1963) was a sociologist, historian, and civil rights activist, as well as one of the founders of the NAACP. He actively protested against lynchings, Jim Crow laws, and discrimination.

connoisseur, n. expert; a person who is highly knowledgeable
amateur, n. a person who is unskilled or not a professional
analogy, n. similar experience

analogue, the Psalms. Indeed they transcend emotionally even the very experience of sorrow out of which they were born; their mood is that of religious exaltation, a degree of ecstasy that makes them in spite of the crude vehicle a classic expression of the religious emotion...

...Perhaps there is no such thing as intrinsically religious music... secular elements can be found in all religious music...but something so intensely religious and so essentially Christian dominates the blend that they are indelibly and notably of this quality. The spirituals are spiritual...

...Emotionally, these songs are far from simple. They are not only spread over the whole gamut of human moods, with the traditional religious overtone adroitly insinuated in each instance, but there is further a sudden change of mood in the single song... .

...It is in the interest of musical development itself that we insist upon a broader conception and a more serious appreciation of Negro folk song, and of the spiritual which is the very kernel of this distinctive folk art. We cannot accept the attitude that would merely preserve this music but must cultivate that which would also develop it. Equally with treasuring and appreciating as music of the past, we must nurture and welcome its contribution to the music of tomorrow... .

For Further Consideration

1. According to the passage, what are spirituals and what makes them an uniquely American folkart?
2. When did spirituals originate? When and by whom were they started by?
3. Why does Locke believe that spirituals are worth preserving and studying? Cite specific evidence from the text that supports this observation.

analogue, n. comparable writing

Psalm, n book of Biblical hymns (Psalms)

exaltation, n. joy

intrinsically, adv. naturally

secular, adj. not religious

Acknowledgements

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THE GENIUS OF THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE

In the early 1900s, many African Americans left the South to relocate to urban centers in the North looking to escape racial hostility, and searching for greater economic opportunity and relief from racial oppression. The “Great Migration” was the largest internal movement of people in American History and set the stage for the important American intellectual and cultural movement known as **The Harlem Renaissance**.

The Genius of the Harlem Renaissance is a compilation of writings by prominent Black writers in the first part of the twentieth century in Harlem—where Black people were able to freely express themselves culturally and artistically.

In this volume, Dr. Andrea Oliver explores different styles of writing—poetry, drama, essays, as well as articles from the legendary newspapers of the Black Press of the time. Artists such as Langston Hughes, Paul Dunbar, and Zora Neale Hurston are showcased, as are the great essayists J.A. Rogers, Alain Locke, and James Weldon Johnson. The poets Georgia Douglas Johnson, Countee Cullen, Claude McKay, and many others are presented in these pages.

The Genius of the Harlem Renaissance gives us thoughtful insights into a time and place that must not be forgotten; a time and place that distill the vibrant art of a people who are finally able to express the long suppressed voices of their hearts and minds.

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