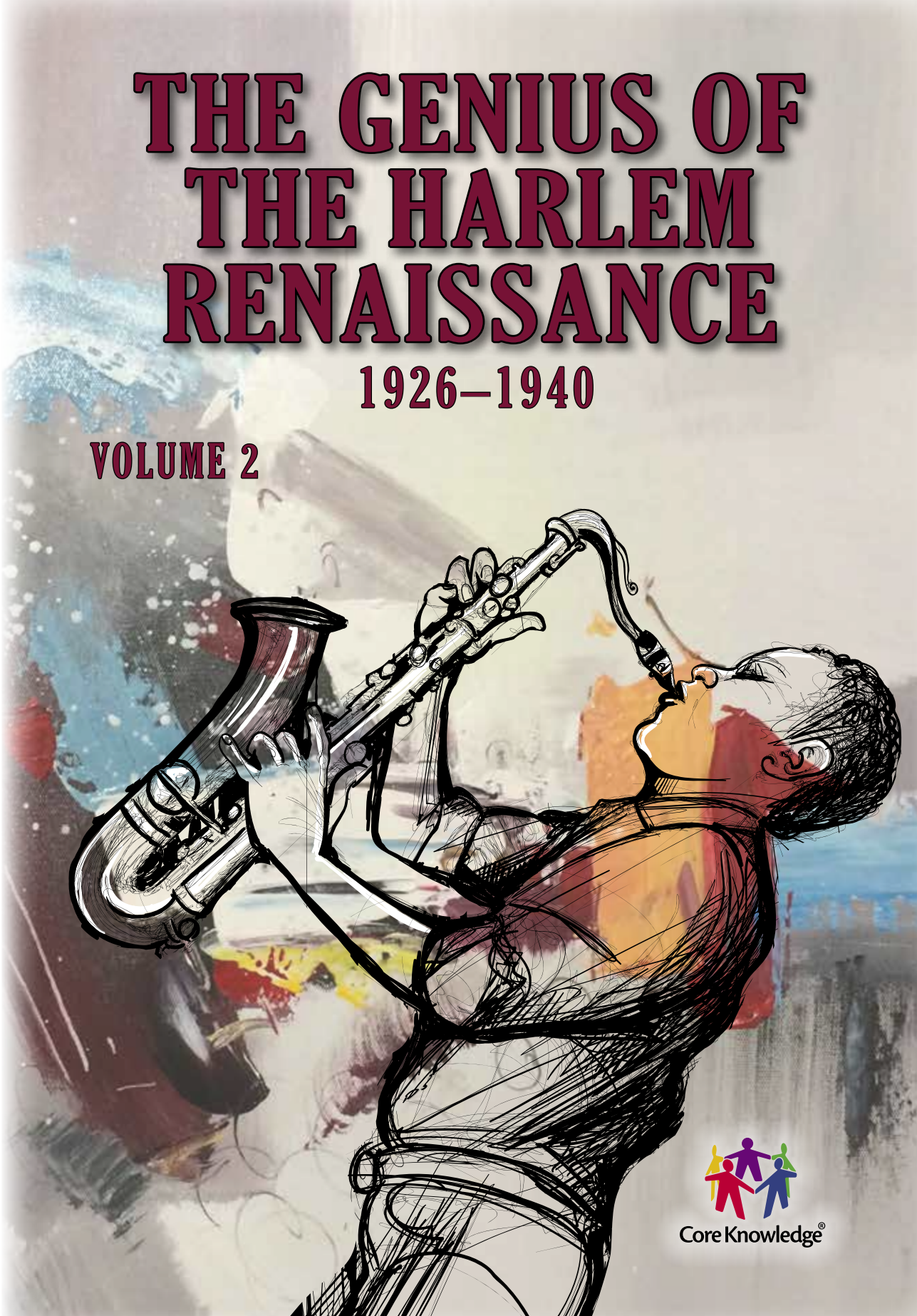
THE GENIUS OF THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE

1926–1940

VOLUME 2



Core Knowledge®

The Genius of the Harlem Renaissance 1926–1940

Volume 2

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Teacher Guide and Activity Book
for *The Genius of the Harlem Renaissance,* Volume 2
(for Core Knowledge Language Arts®)

Editor
Andrea Oliver, PhD
Dr. Andrea Oliver is a native of Greenville, Florida, and is currently a Professor of American History at Tallahassee Community College. An experienced educator of over 25 years of service in precollegiate and collegiate level classrooms, Dr. Oliver is the author of *A History of the United States: Precolonial to the 1880s*, Volume 1, another Core Knowledge title. At the time of this book's publication, Dr. Oliver is working on a book about the first African American valedictorians and salutatorians in formerly segregated southern high schools. Dr. Oliver is married to Eddie Oliver, a decorated high school math teacher, and is the mother of three children: Julia, Madison, and Eddie (Deuce) II.

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THE GENIUS OF THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE

Volume 2

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.

The Impact Continues– The Continuing Cultural Significance of the Harlem Movement

In Volume One of this reader, we traced the African American literary tradition in this country from its beginnings until its culmination through the Harlem Renaissance's early years. In Volume Two, we will continue the study of this very important cultural movement as it helped to define another significant period in American history: The Great Depression.

As one social critic once remarked, when America catches a cold, Black America catches pneumonia. This observation proved especially true when assessing Black America's position during the Great Depression. In October 1929, the stock market suffered a hard "crash." This in and of itself did not cause the Great Depression, because several conditions led to the market's collapse. But, as Langston Hughes eloquently stated, "The Depression brought everyone down a peg or two, and the Negro had but a few pegs to fall."

For starters, Black Americans did not prosper like white Americans had during the 1920s. Certainly, the Depression made things worse. In the South, black sharecroppers, or tenant farmers, had the greatest disadvantage when agriculture markets crashed. Limited jobs in the urban South went to whites. Black unemployment in the North also skyrocketed, topping 50 percent in some places.

But African Americans were no strangers to adversity. They used the survival strategies they developed through centuries of hardship to eke out an existence during the first years of the Great Depression.

Survival demanded the pooling of resources, and Black women were at the core of these coordinated efforts. They bartered and exchanged for goods and services since money was scarce. One woman might barter bread and sugar for some other household staple like milk, beans, or soap. Black women were master home economists, skillfully preserving food scraps to make soups and stews, using fabric remnants to repair clothing, and employing their agricultural skills to raise so-called kitchen sink gardens filled with small crops like tomatoes, greens, and potatoes. This kind of ingenuity and grit was witnessed in rural hamlets too. Black people caught fish and other edible aquatic animals and sold or bartered their surplus catches.

Despite owning very little materially and having their daily lives consumed by thoughts and efforts to maintain their survival, African Americans still managed to make invaluable contributions to American culture. For instance, the literary explosion created by the Harlem Renaissance did not burn out as much as it flickered to a waning flame as the 1930s approached. Writers like Zora Neale Hurston, Claude McKay, and Langston Hughes remained active into the 1930s even as their works began to shift focus away from life in Jazz Era Harlem, toward themes of survival, tenacity, and human dignity that members of their community exhibited during the Great Depression.

Book sales and magazine subscriptions, both of which had become the mainstays of the Renaissance's existence, dropped substantially during the Depression. As a result, key figures in the early phases of the Harlem Renaissance had to resort to other means to support themselves. After the most prolific stage of his career during the early phase of the Harlem Renaissance, Claude McKay left Harlem and spent the last years of his life in service to the Catholic Church. He died in 1948, just days shy of his fifty-ninth birthday. Zora Neale Hurston put her anthropological skills and education to work on compiling slave narratives during the 1930s as a part of a New Deal era initiative to record the stories of the remaining formerly

enslaved people. Three weeks after her fifty-ninth birthday, Zora Neale Hurston died penniless in 1960. Her grave did not have a headstone until 1973, when writers who had been influenced by her work, like novelist Alice Walker, raised funds to have one installed at her gravesite out of respect. The critically acclaimed author has since had her work studied in high schools, colleges, and universities around the world. Hurston is counted among the primary muses for future generations of black American women authors. In addition to Walker, Hurston has inspired Maya Angelou, Gloria Naylor, and Toni Morrison. Langston Hughes, the longest lived of the three major Harlem Renaissance writers, was sixty-six at the time of his death in 1967. After the height of his Harlem Renaissance career, his writing moved from works of fiction to nonfiction. He served as a weekly civil rights columnist for the *Chicago Defender* from 1942 to 1962.

The Depression Phase of the Harlem Renaissance and Its Impact on Black Culture

Throughout the 1930s, the artistic energy the Harlem Renaissance created may not have been at the peak of its popularity as it had been a decade earlier. However, this did not mean that the literary works of Black intellectuals and writers were not flourishing. On the contrary, Black literature, like American literature in general, assumed an edgier tone in style and substance. Writers saw themselves as occupying an important role in 1930s America. In a country that seemed to have lost its way, Depression era writers saw it as their duty to restore a sense of lost self to the American people. For America's Black writers, that duty took on a greater sense of urgency, and this was reflected in their work, even if different writers took varying approaches in their works.

Some writers used their writing as vehicles to the past—vehicles that people could use to transport themselves to the lives of their ancestors so they could establish a connection to those who had

gone on before them. Working with a white historian named Stetson Kennedy, Zora Neale Hurston used her academic training as an anthropologist to collect oral histories of formerly enslaved Floridians. She and Kennedy compiled the stories they collected and published them in a government sponsored collection of oral histories known as the Works Progress Administration Slave Narratives. The Works Progress Administration (WPA) was one of President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal* programs that directly benefited Black Americans by employing Black artists, musicians, actors, and writers, like Hurston. The agency sponsored the state-by-state compilation of these stories, all of which are now available digitally through the Library of Congress.**

* The New Deal is the name given to a series of plans, policies, and proposals of the Franklin D. Roosevelt administration that were designed to address the problems brought on by the Great Depression. The programs were better and more frequently referenced by three- or four-letter acronyms and were meant to either provide relief for struggling Americans, or reform long-standing issues that made conditions possible for the Great Depression in the first place. Programs such as the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) and Social Security Administration (SSA) are examples of New Deal era programs that are still in place today.

** Created in the mid-1930s, the Works Progress Administration (WPA) was a New Deal program designed to address one of the Depression's main problems: unemployment. At its height, the WPA employed millions of Americans in various occupations including educators and writers, like Zora Neale Hurston. For more information and to read these narratives, visit: https://www.loc.gov/collections/slave-narratives-from-the-federal-writers-project-1936-to-1938/articles-and-essays/introduction-to-the-wpa-slave-narratives/wpa-and-the-slave-narrative-collection/.

Harlem Renaissance Reaches Full Maturity

As is usually the case with any significant cultural movement, diverse opinions about that movement arise as it grows in popularity and influence. The Harlem Renaissance was no exception. Alain Locke declared a new spirit emanating from African Americans that placed pride in their heritage at their core, and they produced works of literature, art, and music that celebrated that heritage. Not everyone agreed with Locke that the uniqueness of the African American experience needed to be isolated in any race-specific way. A prominent African American journalist of the 1920s and 30s, George Schuyler, criticized the Harlem Renaissance movement for its emphasis on the uniqueness of the African American experience. In fact, Schuyler went further in his criticism by denying that there was even such a thing as "black art" or "black culture." You will read excerpts from a 1926 article in which Schuyler maintained that to assert the existence of "black art" reflecting race-specific themes and subjects was as insulting as art promoting the very stereotypes that Harlem Renaissance figures claimed their art was seeking to reject.

George Samuel Schuyler (1895–1977)

Born on the eve of the twentieth century in 1895, George Samuel Schuyler was a veteran of World War I, one of few African Americans to serve as a commissioned officer in the United States Army at that time. After the war, Schuyler relocated to Harlem, where he wrote articles on African American life and other topics of interest for leading publications of the era including the *Pittsburgh Courier*, one of the most widely circulated African American newspapers in the nation. Schuyler's political views ran the gamut of the spectrum. Once an avid socialist, Schuyler's views grew more conservative as he aged. He died in 1977 at the age of 82.

Read the excerpt from Schuyler's essay and answer the questions that follow.

George Schuyler Argues Against "Negro Art"

Negro art "made in America" is…nonexistent…. Negro art there has been, is, and will be among the numerous black nations of Africa, but to suggest the possibility of any such development among the ten million colored people in this republic is self-evident foolishness. Eager apostles from Greenwich Village, Harlem, and environs proclaimed a great renaissance of Negro art just around the corner waiting to be ushered on the scene by those whose hobby is taking races, nations, peoples, and movements under their wing. New art forms expressing the "peculiar" psychology of the Negro were about to flood the market. In short, the art of Homo Africanus was about to electrify the waiting world. Skeptics patiently waited. They still wait.

True, from dark-skinned sources have come those slave songs based on Protestant hymns and Biblical texts known as the spirituals, work songs and secular songs of sorrow and tough luck known as the blues, that outgrowth of ragtime known as jazz (in the development of which whites have assisted), and the Charleston, an eccentric dance invented by the gamins around the public "marketplace" in Charleston, S.C. No one can or does deny this. But these are contributions of a caste in a certain section of the country. They are foreign to Northern Negroes, West Indian Negroes, and African Negroes. They are no more expressive or characteristic of the Negro race than the music and dancing of the Appalachian highlanders or the Dalmatian peasantry are expressive or characteristic of the Caucasian race. If one wishes to speak of the musical contributions of the peasantry of the south, very well. Any group under similar circumstances would have produced something similar. It is merely a coincidence that this peasant class happens to be of a darker hue than the other inhabitants of the land.

One recalls the remarkable likeness of the minor strains of the Russian mujiks to those of the Southern Negro.

As for the literature, painting, and sculpture of Aframericans*—such as there is—it is identical in kind with the literature, painting, and sculpture of white Americans: that is, it shows more or less evidence of European influence. In the field of drama little of any merit has been written by and about Negroes that could not have been written by whites. The dean of the Aframerican literati is W. E. B. Du Bois, a product of Harvard and German universities; the foremost Aframerican sculptor is Meta Warwick Fuller, a graduate of leading American art schools and former student of Rodin; while the most noted Aframerican painter, Henry Ossawa Tanner, is dean of American painters in Paris and has been decorated by the French government. Now the work of these artists is no more "expressive of the Negro soul"—as the gushers put it—than are the scribblings of Octavus Cohen or Hugh Wiley.**

This, of course, is easily understood if one stops to realize that the Aframerican is merely a lampblacked Anglo-Saxon. If the European immigrant after two or three generations of exposure to our schools, politics, advertising, moral crusades, and restaurants becomes indistinguishable from the mass of Americans of the older stock (despite the influence of the foreign-language press), how much truer must it be of the sons of Ham who have been subjected to what the uplifters call Americanism for the last three hundred years. Aside from

* Aframerican is a predecessor to the term African American.

** Octavus Roy Cohen was an early 20th century playwright who specialized in comedic plays about African Americans using black dialect in their dialogs. Hugh Wiley was a popular mystery writer of the 1930s, who modeled one of his main characters after an African American soldier he once knew. In bringing these two writers up, Mr. Schuyler is making the point that these two non-Black writers were just as skilled in capturing the communication stylings of African Americans even though they themselves were not African Americans.

his color, which ranges from very dark brown to pink, your American Negro is just plain American. Negroes and whites from the same localities in this country talk, think, and act about the same. Because a few writers with a paucity of themes have seized upon imbecilities of the Negro rustics and clowns and palmed them off as authentic and characteristic Aframerican behavior, the common notion that the black American is so "different" from his white neighbor has gained wide currency. The mere mention of the word "Negro" conjures up in the average white American's mind a composite stereotype of Bert Williams, Aunt Jemima, Uncle Tom, Jack Johnson, Florian Slappey, and the various monstrosities scrawled by the cartoonists.…

Again, the Aframerican is subject to the same economic and social forces that mold the actions and thoughts of the white Americans. He is not living in a different world as some whites and a few Negroes would have me believe. When the jangling of his Connecticut alarm clock gets him out of his Grand Rapids bed to a breakfast similar to that eaten by his white brother across the street; when he toils at the same or similar work in mills, mines, factories, and commerce alongside the descendants of Spartacus, Robin Hood, and Erik the Red; when he wears similar clothing and speaks the same language with the same degree of perfection; when he reads the same Bible and belongs to the Baptist, Methodist, Episcopal, or Catholic church; when his fraternal affiliations also include the Elks, Masons, and Knights of Pythias; when he gets the same or similar schooling, lives in the same kind of houses, owns the same Hollywood version of life on the screen; when he smokes the same brands of tobacco and avidly peruses the same puerile periodicals; in short, when he responds to the same political, social, moral, and economic stimuli in precisely the same manner as his white neighbor, it is sheer nonsense to talk about "racial differences"

puerile, *adj.,* childish, trivial

as between the American black man and the American white man. Glance over a Negro newspaper (it is printed in good Americanese) and you will find the usual quota of crime news, scandal, personals, and uplift to be found in the average white newspaper—which, by the way, is more widely read by the Negroes than is the Negro press. In order to satisfy the cravings of an inferiority complex engendered by the colorphobia of the mob, the readers of the Negro newspapers are given a slight dash of racialistic seasoning. In the homes of the black and white Americans of the same cultural and economic level one finds similar furniture, literature, and conversation. How, then, can the black American be expected to produce art and literature dissimilar to that of the white American?

Consider Coleridge-Taylor, Edward Wilmot Blyden, and Claude McKay, the Englishmen; Pushkin, the Russian; Bridgewater, the Pole; Antar, the Arabian; Latino, the Spaniard; Dumas, *père* and *fils*, the Frenchmen; and Paul Laurence Dunbar, Charles W. Chestnutt and James Weldon Johnson, the Americans. All Negroes; yet their work shows the impress of nationality rather than race. They all reveal the psychology and culture of their environment—their color is incidental. Why should Negro artists of America vary from the national artistic norm when Negro artists in other countries have not done so? If we can foresee what kind of white citizens will inhabit this neck of the woods in the next generation by studying the sort of education and environment the children are exposed to now, it should not be difficult to reason that the adults of today are what they are because of the education and environment they were exposed to a generation ago. And that education and environment were about the same for blacks and whites. One contemplates the popularity of the Negro-art hokum and murmurs, "How-come?"

quota, *n.* share, proportion
engendered, *v.* created, caused to exist
hokum, *n.* nonsense

This nonsense is probably the last stand or the old myth palmed off by Negrophobists for all these many years, and recently rehashed by the sainted Harding, that there are "fundamental, eternal, and inescapable differences" between white and black Americans. That there are Negroes who will lend this myth a helping hand need occasion no surprise. It has been broadcast all over the world by the vociferous scions of slaveholders, "scientists" like Madison Grant and Lothrop Stoddard, and the patriots who flood the treasure of the Ku Klux Klan; and is believed, even today, by the majority of free, white citizens. On this baseless premise, so flattering to the white mob, that the blackamoor is inferior and fundamentally different, is erected the postulate that he must needs be peculiar; and when he attempts to portray life through the medium of art, it must of necessity be a peculiar art. While such reasoning may seem conclusive to the majority of Americans, it must be rejected with a loud guffaw by intelligent people.

Questions to Consider:

1. What does Schuyler say to the suggestion that African Americans have generated art forms that are distinctive and unique to them? Use specific references from the text to support your answer.
2. What does Schuyler believe is the more important factor for the creation of literature, music, and art? Use specific references from the text to support your answer.
3. What evidence does Schuyler use to support his claim that "it is nonsense to talk about 'racial differences' between the white man and the black man?"

blackamoor, *n.* an antiquated and offensive term for a Black person

Langston Hughes Responds to Schuyler

Considered the most prolific figure of the early phase of the Harlem Renaissance, Langston Hughes vigorously rejected Schuyler's views on the value the Harlem Renaissance held in fashioning a unique African American identity. As far as Hughes was concerned, if someone desired to be known as simply an artist—and not a Black artist—it reflected a deeply entrenched and disturbing desire to be white. If an artist desired to create a separation between their identity as a Black man or woman and the art they created, Hughes believed that was a form of self-hatred. Read Hughes' scathing response to Schuyler's essay, and respond to the questions that follow.

The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain

by Langston Hughes

One of the most promising of the young Negro poets said to me once, "I want to be a poet—not a Negro poet," meaning, I believe, "I want to write like a white poet"; meaning subconsciously, "I would like to be a white poet"; meaning behind that, "I would like to be white."* And I was sorry the young man said that, for no great poet has ever been afraid of being himself. And I doubted then that, with his desire to run away spiritually from his race, this boy would ever be a great poet. But this is the mountain standing in the way of any true Negro art in America—this urge within the race toward whiteness, the desire to pour racial individuality into the mold of American standardization, and to be as little Negro and as much American as possible.

But let us look at the immediate background of this young poet. His family is of what I suppose one would call the Negro middle class: people who are by no means rich yet never uncomfortable nor hungry—smug, contented, respectable folk, members of the Baptist church. The father goes to work every morning. He is a chief steward at a large white club. The mother sometimes does fancy sewing or supervises parties for the rich families of the town. The children go to a mixed school. In the home they read white papers and magazines. And the mother often says "Don't be like ni****s" (sic) when the children are bad. A frequent phrase from the father is, "Look how well a white man does things." And so the word white comes to be unconsciously a symbol of all virtues. It holds for the children beauty, morality, and money. The whisper of "I want to be white" runs silently through their minds. This young poet's home is, I believe, a fairly typical home of the colored middle class. One sees immediately how difficult it would be for an artist born in such a home to interest himself in interpreting the beauty of his own people. He is never taught to see that beauty. He is taught rather not to see it, or if he does, to be ashamed of it when it is not according to Caucasian patterns.

For racial culture the home of a self-styled "high-class" Negro has nothing better to offer. Instead there will perhaps be more aping of things white than in a less cultured or less wealthy home. The father is perhaps a doctor, lawyer, landowner, or politician. The mother may be a social worker, or a teacher, or she may do nothing and have a maid. Father is often dark but he has usually married the lightest woman he could find. The family attend a fashionable church where few really colored faces are to be found. And they themselves draw a color line. In the North they go to white theaters and white movies. And in the South they have at least two cars and a house "like white folks." Nordic manners, Nordic faces, Nordic hair, Nordic art (if any), and an Episcopal heaven. A very high mountain indeed for the would-be racial artist to climb in order to discover himself and his people.

But then there are the low-down folks, the so-called common element, and they are the majority—may the Lord be praised! The people who have their nip of gin on Saturday nights and are not too important to themselves or the community, or too well fed, or too learned to watch the lazy world go round. They live on Seventh Street in Washington or State Street in Chicago and they do not particularly care whether they are like white folks or anybody else. Their joy runs, bang! into ecstasy. Their religion soars to a shout. Work maybe a little today, rest a little tomorrow. Play awhile. Sing awhile. O, let's dance! These common people are not afraid of spirituals, as for a long time their more intellectual brethren were, and jazz is their child. They furnish a wealth of colorful, distinctive material for any artist because they still hold their own individuality in the face of American standardizations. And perhaps these common people will give to the world its truly great Negro artist, the one who is not afraid to be himself. Whereas the better-class Negro would tell the artist what to do, the people at least let him alone when he does appear. And they are not ashamed of him—if they know he exists at all. And they accept what beauty is their own without question.

Certainly there is, for the American Negro artist who can escape the restrictions the more advanced among his own group would put upon him, a great field of unused material ready for his art. Without going outside his race, and even among the better classes with their "white" culture and conscious American manners, but still Negro enough to be different, there is sufficient matter to furnish a black artist with a lifetime of creative work. And when he chooses to touch on the relations between Negroes and whites in this country, with their innumerable overtones and undertones, surely, and especially for literature and the drama, there is an inexhaustible supply of themes at hand. To these the Negro artist can give his racial individuality, his heritage of rhythm and warmth, and his incongruous humor that so often, as in the Blues, becomes ironic laughter mixed with tears. But let us look again at the mountain.

A prominent Negro clubwoman in Philadelphia paid eleven dollars to hear Raquel Meller, a Spanish singer and actress, sing Andalusian popular songs. But she told me a few weeks before she would not think of going to hear "that woman," Clara Smith, a great black artist, sing Negro folksongs. And many an upper-class Negro church, even now, would not dream of employing a spiritual in its services. The drab melodies in white folks' hymnbooks are much to be preferred. "We want to worship the Lord correctly and quietly. We don't believe in 'shouting.' Let's be dull like the Nordics," they say, in effect.

The road for the serious black artist, then, who would produce a racial art is most certainly rocky and the mountain is high. Until recently he received almost no encouragement for his work from either white or colored people. The fine novels of Chesnutt go out of print with neither race noticing their passing. The quaint charm and humor of Dunbar's dialect verse brought to him, in his day, largely the same kind of encouragement one would give a sideshow freak (A colored man writing poetry! How odd!) or a clown (How amusing!).

The present vogue in things Negro, although it may do as much harm as good for the budding colored artist, has at least done this: it has brought him forcibly to the attention of his own people among whom for so long, unless the other race had noticed him beforehand, he was a prophet with little honor. I understand that Charles Gilpin acted for years in Negro theaters without any special acclaim from his own, but when Broadway gave him eight curtain calls, Negroes, too, began to beat a tin pan in his honor. I know a young colored writer, a manual worker by day, who had been writing well for the colored magazines for some years, but it was not until he recently broke into the white publications and his first book was accepted by a prominent New York publisher that the "best" Negroes in his city took the trouble to discover that he lived there. Then almost immediately they decided to give a grand dinner for him. But the society ladies were careful to whisper to his mother that perhaps she'd better not come.

They were not sure she would have an evening gown.

The Negro artist works against an undertow of sharp criticism and misunderstanding from his own group and unintentional bribes from the whites. "O, be respectable, write about nice people, show how good we are," say the Negroes. "Be stereotyped, don't go too far, don't shatter our illusions about you, don't amuse us too seriously. We will pay you," say the whites. Both would have told Jean Toomer not to write *Cane*. The colored people did not praise it. The white people did not buy it. Most of the colored people who did read "Cane" hate it. They are afraid of it. Although the critics gave it good reviews the public remained indifferent. Yet (excepting the work of Du Bois) "Cane" contains the finest prose written by a Negro in America. And like the singing of Robeson, it is truly racial.

But in spite of the Nordicized Negro intelligentsia and the desires of some white editors we have an honest American Negro literature already with us. Now I await the rise of the Negro theater. Our folk music, having achieved world-wide fame, offers itself to the genius of the great individual American Negro composer who is to come. And within the next decade I expect to see the work of a growing school of colored artists who paint and model the beauty of dark faces and create with new technique the expressions of their own soul-world. And the Negro dancers who will dance like flame and the singers who will continue to carry our songs to all who listen—they will be with us in even greater numbers tomorrow.

Most of my own poems are racial in theme and treatment, derived from the life I know. In many of them I try to grasp and hold some of the meanings and rhythms of jazz. I am as sincere as I know how to be in these poems and yet after every reading I answer questions like these from my own people: Do you think Negroes should always write about Negroes? I wish you wouldn't read some of your poems to white folks. How do you find anything interesting in a place like a cabaret? Why do you write about black people? You aren't black. What makes you do so many jazz poems?

But jazz to me is one of the inherent expressions of Negro life in America: the eternal tom-tom beating in the Negro soul—the tom-tom of revolt against weariness in a white world, a world of subway trains, and work, work, work; the tom-tom of joy and laughter, and pain swallowed in a smile. Yet the Philadelphia clubwoman is ashamed to say that her race created it and she does not like me to write about it, The old subconscious "white is best" runs through her mind. Years of study under white teachers, a lifetime of white books, pictures, and papers, and white manners, morals, and Puritan standards made her dislike the spirituals. And now she turns up her nose at jazz and all its manifestations—likewise almost everything else distinctly racial. She doesn't care for the Winold Reiss portraits of Negroes because they are "too Negro." She does not want a true picture of herself from anybody. She wants the artist to flatter her, to make the white world believe that all Negroes are as smug and as near white in soul as she wants to be. But, to my mind, it is the duty of the younger Negro artist, if he accepts any duties at all from outsiders, to change through the force of his art that old whispering "I want to be white," hidden in the aspirations of his people, to "Why should I want to be white? I am a Negro—and beautiful!"

So I am ashamed for the black poet who says, "I want to be a poet, not a Negro poet," as though his own racial world were not as interesting as any other world. I am ashamed, too, for the colored artist who runs from the painting of Negro faces to the painting of sunsets after the manner of the academicians because he fears the strange un-whiteness of his own features. An artist must be free to choose what he does, certainly, but he must also never be afraid to do what he might choose.

Let the blare of Negro jazz bands and the bellowing voice of Bessie Smith singing the Blues penetrate the closed ears of the colored near-intellectuals until they listen and perhaps understand. Let Paul Robeson singing "Water Boy," and Rudolph Fisher writing about the streets of Harlem, and Jean Toomer holding the heart of Georgia in his hands, and Aaron Douglas drawing strange black fantasies cause the smug Negro middle class to turn from their white, respectable,

ordinary books and papers to catch a glimmer of their own beauty. We younger Negro artists who create now intend to express our individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame. If white people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, it doesn't matter. We know we are beautiful. And ugly too. The tom-tom cries and the tom-tom laughs. If colored people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, their displeasure doesn't matter either. We build our temples for tomorrow, strong as we know how, and we stand on top of the mountain, free within ourselves.

Questions to Consider:

1. Hughes opened his article with the response he gave to a young poet who said he wanted to be known, not as a great Black poet, but as a poet. What response did Hughes give to that poet?
2. How does Hughes defend the nature of the poetry he produces himself?
3. Explain in your own words what Hughes meant when he wrote "We younger Negro artists who create now intend to express our individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame. If white people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, it doesn't matter… If colored people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, their displeasure doesn't matter either. We build our temples for tomorrow, strong as we know how, and we stand on top of the mountain, free within ourselves."
4. How is Hughes' message of freedom of expression for African Americans a reflection of the New Negro spirit defined by Alain Locke that you learned about in Volume One of this reader?

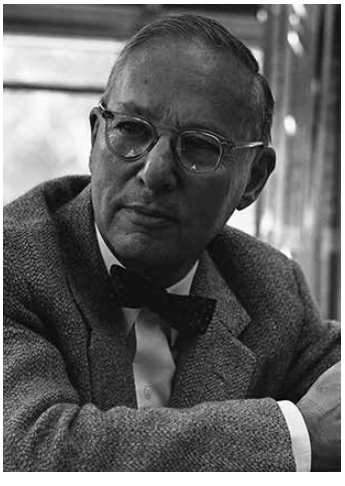
American Identity and African Americans

While identity and belonging were concepts at the center of the debate between Schuyler and Hughes during the middle to later stages of the Harlem Renaissance, Black intellectuals have long struggled with how Black Americans fit into the overall identity of what it meant to be an American. More than twenty years before the Harlem Renaissance in the early twentieth century, W.E.B. Du Bois, another important contributor to the Harlem Movement wrote, "One ever feels his two-ness, an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.*" At the time Du Bois wrote about "being torn asunder," he meant that statement quite literally. To be torn asunder meant to be damaged or torn into pieces. This is exactly what happened to the bodies of hundreds of Black men and women who were lynched** during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It is hard to imagine that once upon a time, a practice so cruel was not only widely accepted, but was viewed as a source of entertainment. Churches sold tickets and encouraged spectators to bring their families. Victims were dismembered, their body parts tossed to cheering crowds. Studies found that these attacks took place not because Blacks committed crimes, but because they tried to assert themselves as equal to whites. An 1899 lynching near Newnan, Georgia, was an example of this instance. As he walked through downtown Atlanta, Du Bois learned that Black laborer Sam Hose was lynched after an argument with his boss over unpaid wages. Hose's knuckles were on display as a trophy in a grocer's window further down Mitchell Street.

* From "Double Consciousness," an essay by Dr. W.E.B. Du Bois. Originally written in 1897, it was reprinted and included in a collection of essays known as *The Soul of Black Folk*, published in 1903.

** *Lynch* means to kill someone, usually as a mob by hanging, for an alleged crime without due process or a trial. The lynching of African Americans was at its height in this country from 1890–1930s.

But how can a group of people prove their loyalty and love for a country that seems to allow brutal injustices against them like lynching? This was a constant question confronting the nation, especially in times of war. In the years before World War I and World War II, the patriotism and loyalty of Black people were constantly questioned—even in the face of evidence such as commendable military service and civic contributions to the war effort. It is the unfortunate case that African Americans faced questions about their loyalty during times of national conflict, since leading African Americans including Du Bois himself constantly asserted their love of country and their wish to be included in greater American society.



The struggle to balance the double consciousness that existed—and still exists—between an identity that is African American and one that is American was powerfully evident, even with those who were not African American. Born to Jewish immigrants in 1895, American anthropologist Melville Herskovits studied how elements of traditional African culture were reflected in African American culture. His research and scholarly contributions helped form the groundwork of African American studies at the college level in the mid-twentieth century. Read excerpts from his 1926 essay "The Negro's Americanism" and answer the questions that follow.

The Negro's Americanism
by Melville Herskovits

Glimpses of the whirring cycle of life in Harlem leave the visitor bewildered at its complexity. There is constantly before one the tempting invitation to compare and contrast the life there with that of other communities one has had the opportunity of observing.

Should I not find there, if anywhere, the anomalous cultural position of the Negro, of which I had heard so much? Should I not be able to discover there his ability, of which we are so often told, to produce unique cultural traits, which might be added to the prevailing white culture, and, as well, to note his equally well-advertised inability to grasp the complex civilization of which he constitutes a part? And so I went, and what I found was churches and schools, club houses and lodge meeting-places, the library and the newspaper offices and the Y.M.C.A. and busy One Hundred and Thirty-fifth Street and the hospitals and the social service agencies. I met persons who were lawyers and doctors and editors and writers, who were chauffeurs and peddlers and longshoremen and real estate brokers and capitalists, teachers and nurses and students and waiters and cooks. And all Negroes. Cabarets and theaters, drug stores and restaurants just like those everywhere else. And finally, after a time, it occurred to me that what I was seeing was a community just like any other American community. The same pattern, only a different shade! Where, then, is the "peculiar" community of which I had heard so much? To what extent, if any, has the Negro genius developed a culture peculiar to it in America? I did not find it in the great teeming center of Negro life in Harlem, where, if anywhere, it should be found. May it not then be true that the Negro has become acculturated to the prevailing white culture and has developed the patterns of culture typical of American life?

Let us first view the matter historically. In the days after the liberation of the Negroes from slavery, what was more natural than that they should strive to maintain, as nearly as possible, the standards set up by those whom they had been taught to look up to as arbiters—the white group? And we see, on their part, a strong conscious effort to do just this. They went into business and tried to make money as their white fellows did. They already had adopted the white forms of religious faith and practice, and now they began to borrow other types of organization.

anomalous ***adj.,*** of an uncertain nature, outside of normal classifications

Schools sprang up in which they might learn, not the language and technique of their African ancestors, but that of this country, where they lived. The "respected" members of the community were those who lived upright lives such as the "respected" whites lived—they paid their debts, they walked in the paths of sexual morality according to the general pattern of the prevailing Puritanical culture, and they went to church as was right and proper in every American town. The matter went so far that they attempted to alter their hair to conform to the general style, and the fortunes made by those who sold hair-straightening devices and medicines are a matter of record.

In Harlem we have to-day, essentially, a typical American community. You may look at the Negroes on the street. As to dress and deportment, do you find any vast difference between them and the whites among whom they carry on their lives ? Notice them as they go about their work—they do almost all of the things the whites do, and in much the same way. The popular newspapers in Harlem are not the Negro papers—there is even no Negro daily—but the city newspapers which everyone reads. And there is the same gossipy reason why the Harlemites read their own weeklies as that which causes the inhabitants of Chelsea, of the Bronx, of Putnam , Connecticut, or of West Liberty, Ohio, to read theirs. When we come to the student groups in Harlem, we find that the same process occurs—the general culture-pattern has taken them horse, foot and artillery. Do the whites organize Greek letter fraternities and sororities in colleges, with pearl-studded pins and "houses"? You will find a number of Negro fraternities and sororities with just the same kind of insignia and "houses." Negro community centres are attached to the more prosperous churches just as the same sort of institutions are connected with white churches. And they do the same sort of things there; you can see swimming and gymnasium classes and sewing classes and nutrition talks and open forums and all the rest of it that we all know so well.

When I visit the Business Men's Association, the difference between this gathering and that of any Rotary Club is imperceptible. And on the other end of the economic scale that equally applies to Negro and white, and which prevails all over the country, we find the Socialist and labor groups. True, once in a while an element peculiarly Negro does manifest itself; thus I remember vividly the bitter complaints of one group of motion picture operators at the prejudices which prevent them from enjoying the benefits of the white union. And, of course, you will meet with this sort of thing whenever the stream of Negro life conflicts with the more general pattern of the "color line." But even here I noticed that the form of the organization of these men was that assumed by their white fellow-workers, and similarly when I attended a Socialist street-meeting in Harlem, I found that the general economic motif comes in for much more attention that the problems which are of interest to the Negro *per se*.

Perhaps the most striking example of complete acceptance of the general pattern is in the field of sex relations. I shall never forget the storm of indignation which I aroused among a group of Negro men and women with whom I chanced to be talking on one occasion, when, apropos of the question of the treatment of the Negro woman in literature, I inadvertently remarked that even if the sexual looseness generally attributed to her were true, it was nothing of which to be essentially ashamed, since such a refusal to accept the Puritanical modes of procedure generally considered right and proper might contribute a welcome leaven to the conventionality of current sex mores. The reaction, prompt and violent, was such as to show with tremendous clarity the complete acculturation of these men and women to the accepted standards of sex behavior. There was not even a shade of doubt but that sexual rigidity is the ultimate ideal of relations between men and women, and certainly there was no more indication of a leaning toward the customs to be found in ancestral Africa than would be found among a group of whites.

Or, let us consider the position of the Negro intellectuals, the writers and artists. The proudest boast of the modern young Negro writer is that he writes of humans, not of Negroes. His literary ideals are not the African folktale and conundrum, but the vivid expressionistic style of the day—he seeks to be a writer, not a Negro writer. It was this point, indeed, which was especially stressed at a dinner recently given in New York City for a group of young Negro writers on the occasion of the publication of a novel by one of their number. Member after member of the group stated this position as his own—not Negro as such, but human—another striking example of the process of acculturation. The problem then may be presented with greater clarity. Does not the Negro have a mode of life that is essentially similar to that of the general community of which he is a part? Or can it be maintained that he possesses a distinctive, inborn cultural genius which manifests itself even in America? To answer this, we must answer an even more basic question: what is cultural genius? For the Negro came to America endowed, as all people are endowed, with a culture, which had been developed by him through long ages in Africa. Was it innate? Or has it been sloughed off, forgotten, in the generations since he was brought into our culture? To understand the problem with which we are presented, it may be well to consider what this thing, culture, is, and the extent to which we can say that it falls into patterns. By the word *culture* I do not mean the refinements of our particular civilization which the word has come to connote, but simply those elements of the environment which are the handiwork of man himself. Thus, among ourselves, we might consider a spinning machine, or the democratic theory of society, or a fork, or the alphabet as much a cultural fact as a symphonic tone-poem, a novel, or an oil painting. We may best come to an understanding of culture through a consideration of some of the phases of primitive life, where the forces at work are not overshadowed by the great imponderable fact of dense masses of population. As we

look over the world, we see that there is no group of men, however simply they may live their lives, without the thing we call culture. And, what is more important, the culture they possess as the result of their own historical background—is an adult affair, developed through long centuries of trial and error, and something constantly changing. Man, it has been said, is a culture-building animal. And he is nowhere without the particular culture which his group have built. It is true that the kinds of culture which he builds are bewilderingly different—to compare the civilization of the Eskimo, the Australian, the Chinese, the African, and of ourselves leaves the student with a keener sense of their differences, both as to form and complexity, rather than with any feeling of resemblances among them. But one thing they do have in common: the cultures, when viewed from the outside, are stable. In their main elements they go along much as they always have gone, unless some great historical accident (like the discovery of the steam engine in our culture or the intrusion of the Western culture on that of the Japanese or the transplanting of Negro slaves from Africa to America) occurs to upset the trend and to direct the development of the culture along new paths. To the persons within the cultures, however, they seem even more than just stable. They seem fixed, rigid, all-enduring. Indeed, they are so taken for granted that, until comparatively recent times, they were never studied at all. But what is it that makes cultures different? There are those, of course, who will maintain that it is the racial factor. They will say that the bewildering differences between the cultures of the Englishman, the Chinaman, the Bantu, and the Maya, for example, are the result of differences in innate racial endowment, and that every race has evolved a culture peculiarly fitted to it. All this sounds very convincing until one tries to define the term "race." Certain anthropologists are trying, even now, to discover criteria which will scientifically define the term "Negro." One of the most distinguished of these, Professor T. Wingate Todd,

has been working steadily for some years in the attempt, and the net results are certain hypotheses which he himself calls tentative. The efforts of numerous psychological testers to establish racial norms for intelligence are vitiated by the two facts that first, as many of them will admit, it is doubtful just what it is they are testing, and, in the second place, that races are mixed. This is particularly true in the case of the Negroes; in New York City, less than two percent of the group from whom I obtained genealogical material claimed pure Negro ancestry, and while this percentage is undoubtedly low, the fact remains that the vast majority of Negroes in America are of mixed ancestry.

If ability to successfully live in one culture were restricted to persons of one race, how could we account for the fact that we see persons of the most diverse races living together, for example, in this country, quite as though they were naturally endowed with the ability to meet the problems of living here, while again we witness an entire alien people adopting our civilization, to use the Japanese again for illustration?

Our civilization is what it is because of certain historic events which occurred in the course of its development. So we can also say for the civilization of the African, of the Eskimo, of the Australian. And the people who lived in these civilizations like ourselves, view the things they do—as a result of living in them—not as inbred, but as inborn. To the Negro in Africa, it would be incomprehensible for a man to work at a machine all day for a few bits of paper to be given him at the end of his work-day, and in the same way, the white traveler stigmatizes the African as lazy because he will not see the necessity for entering on a grueling forced march so as to reach a certain point in a given time. And when we turn to our civilization, we find that it has many culture-patterns, as we may term these methods of behavior. They are ingrained in us through long habituation, and their violation evokes a strong emotional response in us, no matter what our racial

habituation, n., the process of getting used to, or of being accustomed to something

background. Thus, for a person to eat with a knife in place of a fork, or to go about the streets hatless, or for a woman to wear short dresses when long ones are in fashion, are all violations of the patterns we have been brought up to feel right and proper, and we react violently to them. More serious, for a young man not to "settle down" and make as much money as he can is regarded as bordering on the immoral, while, in the régime of sex the rigid patterns have been remarked upon, as has been the unmitigated condemnation which the breaking of these taboos calls forth. The examples which I have given above of the reaction of the Negro to the general cultural patterns of this country might be multiplied to include almost as many social facts as are observable, and yet, wherever we might go, we would find the Negro reacting to the same situations in much the same fashion as his white brother.

What, then, is the particular Negro genius for culture? Is there such a thing? Does he contribute something of his vivid, and yet at the same time softly gracious personality to the general culture in which he lives? What there is to-day in Harlem distinct from the white culture which surrounds it, is, as far as I am able to see, merely a remnant from the peasant days in the South. Of the African culture, not a trace. Even the spirituals are an expression of the emotion of the Negro playing through the typical religious patterns of white America. But from that emotional quality in the Negro, which is to be sensed rather than measured, comes the feeling that, though strongly acculturated to the prevalent pattern of behavior, the Negroes may, at the same time, influence it somewhat eventually through the appeal of that quality.

That they have absorbed the culture of America is too obvious, almost, to be mentioned. They have absorbed it as all great racial and social groups in this country have absorbed it. And they face much the same problems as these groups face. The social ostracism to which they are subjected is only different in extent from that to which the

Jew is subjected. The fierce reaction of race-pride is quite the same in both groups. But, whether in Negro or in Jew, the protest avails nothing, apparently. All racial and social elements in our population who live here long enough become acculturated, Americanized in the truest sense of the word, eventually. They learn our culture and react according to its patterns, against which all the protestations of the possession of, or of hot desire for, a peculiar culture mean nothing.

As we turn to Harlem we see its social and economic and political make-up a part of the larger whole of the city—separate from it, it is true, but still essentially not different from any other American community in which the modes of life and of action are determined by the great dicta of "what is done." In other words, it represents, as do all American communities which it resembles, a case of complete acculturation. And so, I return again to my reaction on first seeing this center of Negro activity, as the complete description of it: "Why, it's the same pattern, only a different shade!*"

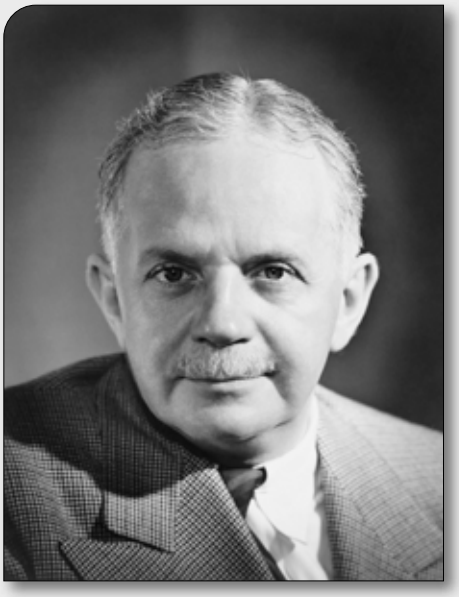
* Source: *The New Negro: An Interpretation*. Compiled by Alain Locke. Albert & Charles Boni, 1925. pp. 353–360.

Questions to Consider:

1. The introductory biographical essay mentioned that Herskovits was an anthropologist. Look up the word *anthropologist* and describe the meaning of the word.
2. How does Herskovits's career as an anthropologist make him qualified to make observations on Black life in Harlem?
3. What conclusions about African American culture does Herskovits draw? Use references from the text to support your answer.
4. What reaction do you think most white Americans may have had to Herskovits's observations? (HINT: Remember that American society was strictly segregated at the time Herskovits wrote this essay).
5. Why did Herskovits choose Harlem as the basis of his study on African American culture?

Walter White–
Using the pen to fight injustice

Walter White



Walter White was born on July 1, 1893. He was a journalist, novelist, essayist, and activist. As an activist, he led the most significant Civil Rights organization of the 20th century—the NAACP— for 25 years. He was a graduate of Clark Atlanta University.

White traveled the South investigating and writing about lynchings for his work with the NAACP. White's appearance enabled him to engage in a practice many lighter-skinned African Americans engaged in, known as passing. Because he was often mistaken as a Caucasian man, he was able to witness these grisly spectacles and later write about them in articles that appeared in northern newspapers and magazines, especially the NAACP's own publication, *The Crisis*.

Later, under White's leadership, the NAACP started a legal defense fund that mounted many legal challenges to segregation that resulted in significant successes, including the Supreme Court case Brown v Board of Education, which ruled that segregation in public education was unconstitutional. White died in 1955 at the age of 61.

On Passing–How Some African Americans Dealt with Life in Segregated America

In his autobiography, *A Man Called White*, Walter White wrote: "I am a black man. My skin is white, my eyes are blue, my hair is blond. The traits of my race are nowhere visible on me." It was White's outward appearance that enabled him to do the very important work of calling attention to brutal lynchings that were happening in the South. He was able to carry out investigations and report on these investigations. Because White's features allowed him to "pass for white," he was able to get firsthand access to lynchings. As a result of this access, hisreporting was both vivid and accurate.

What is the definition of "passing," or "passing for white"? Simply put, passing occurs when members of a racial, ethnic, or religious group present themselves as belonging to another such group. Historically, people have chosen to "pass" for a variety of reasons: to gain more social clout; to have a wider range of opportunities; to avoid persecution, and even the threat of death. To pass, one must lack or be able to obscure characteristics or traits most often associated with a particular racial or ethnic group. In some cases, passing is almost like a performance, and people must consciously obscure the characteristics that they know will give them away.

In the United States, passing has a specific history with Black people, and the legacy of the "one-drop rule." Born out of white supremacist desires to maintain the "purity" of whiteness, this rule stated that any person with Black ancestry—no matter how far back—was Black. As a result, people who may not have appeared Black if you passed them on the streets would still be identified as Black on official documents. African Americans and Black people as

a whole have historically passed to escape the virulent oppression that led to their enslavement, segregation, and brutalization. Being able to pass for white sometimes meant the difference between a life in captivity and a life of freedom. In fact, the enslaved couple William and Ellen Craft escaped from bondage in 1848 after Ellen passed as a young white planter and William as her servant.

Passing has been the subject of memoirs, novels, essays, and films. Nella Larsen's 1929 novel *Passing* is arguably the most famous work of fiction on the subject. In the novel, a fair-skinned Black woman, Irene Redfield, discovers that her racially ambiguous childhood friend, Clare Kendry, has crossed the color line—leaving Chicago for New York and marrying a white bigot to advance in life socially and economically. Clare does the unthinkable by entering Black society once again and putting her new identity at risk.

James Weldon Johnson's 1912 novel, *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (a novel disguised as a memoir), is another well-known work of fiction about passing. Arguably the most famous film about passing is *Imitation of Life*, which debuted in 1934 and was remade in 1959. The film is based on the 1933 Fannie Hurst novel of the same name. Philip Roth's novel *The Human Stain*, published in 2000, also addresses passing. A film adaptation of the book debuted in 2003. The novel has been linked to the real-life story of late *New York Times* book critic Anatole Broyard, who hid his Black ancestry for years, although Roth denies any connection between *The Human Stain* and Broyard. Broyard's daughter, Bliss Broyard, however, did write a memoir about her father's decision to pass for white, *One Drop: My Father's Hidden Life—A Story of Race and Family Secrets* (2007). Anatole Broyard's life bears some resemblance to the Harlem Renaissance writer Jean Toomer, who reportedly passed for white after penning the popular novel *Cane* (1923).

You are about to read "The Paradox of Color," an essay by Walter White, that references the practice of passing as a means of escaping racism and discrimination. After reading the essay, answer the questions that follow the passage.

The Paradox of Color

by Walter White

The hushed tenseness within the theater was broken only by the excited chattering between the scenes which served as oases of relief. One reassured himself by touching his neighbor or gripping the edge of the bench as a magnificently proportioned Negro on the tiny Provincetown Theatre stage, with a voice of marvellous(sic) power and with a finished artistry enacted Eugene O'Neill's epic of human terror, *The Emperor Jones*.* For years I had nourished the conceit that nothing in or of the theater could thrill me—I was sure my years of theater-going had made me immune to the tricks and the trappings which managers and actors use to get their tears and smiles and laughs… But the chills that chased each other up and down my spine then were only pleasurable tingles compared to the sympathetic terror evoked by Paul Robeson as he fled blindly through the impenetrable forest of the "West Indian island not yet self-determined by white marines."

Nor was I alone. When, after remaining in darkness from the second through the eighth and final scene, the house was flooded with light, a concerted sigh of relief welled up from all over the theater. With real

* *The Emperor Jones* was a 1920s stage play written by white American playwright Eugene O'Neill. It was O'Neill's first hit production, and it earned him a Pulitzer Prize in Drama. The plot involves an African American protagonist escaping to a West Indian island where he names himself its emperor. It is one of the first Broadway stage productions featuring leading African American performers to win critical acclaim. The main character was first portrayed by Charles Sidney Gilpin, and in later stagings by actor and activist Paul Robeson.

joy we heard the reassuring roar of taxicabs and muffled street noises of Greenwich Village and knew we were safe in New York. Wave after wave of applause, almost hysterical with relief, brought Paul Robeson time and time again before the curtain to receive the acclaim his art had merited. Almost shyly he bowed again and again as the storm of handclapping and bravos surged and broke upon the tiny stage. His color—his race—all, all were forgotten by those he had stirred so deeply with his art.

Outside in narrow, noisy MacDougal Street the four of us stood. Mrs. Robeson, alert, intelligent, merry, an expert chemist for years in one of New York's leading hospitals; Paul Robeson, clad now in conventional tweeds in place of the ornate, gold-laced trappings of the Emperor Jones; my wife and I. We wanted supper and a place to talk. All about us blinked invitingly the lights of restaurants and inns of New York's Bohemia. Place after place was suggested and discarded. Here a colored man and his companion had been made to wait interminably until, disgusted, they had left. There a party of four colored people, all university graduates, had been told flatly by the proprietress, late of North Carolina, she did not serve "ni****s." At another, other colored people had been stared at so rudely they had bolted their food and left in confusion. The Civil Rights Act of New York would have protected us—but we were too much under the spell of the theater we had just quitted to want to insist on the rights the law gave us. So we mounted a bus and rode seven miles or more to colored Harlem where we could be served with food without fear of insult…. The man whose art had brought homage to his feet from sophisticated New York could not enter even the cheapest of the eating places of lower New York with the assurance that some unpleasantness might not come to him before he left.

What does race prejudice do to the inner man of him who is the victim of that prejudice? What is the feeling within the breasts of the Paul Robesons, the Roland Hayes's, the Harry Burleighs,* as they listen to the applause of those whose kind receive them as artists but refuse to accept them as men? It is of this inner conflict of the black man in America or, more specifically in New York City, I shall try to speak.

I approach my task with reluctance—it is no easy matter to picture that effect which race or color prejudice has on the Negro of fineness of soul** who is its victim. Of wounds to the flesh it is easy to speak. It is not difficult to tell of lynchings and injustices and race proscription. Of wounds to the spirit which are a thousand times more deadly and cruel it is impossible to tell in entirety. …If I can evoke in your mind a picture of what results proscription has brought, I am content.

With its population made up of peoples from every corner of the earth, New York City is, without doubt, more free from ordinary manifestations of prejudice than any other city in the United States. Its Jewish, Italian, German, French, Greek, Czecho-Slovakian, Irish, Hungarian quarters with their teeming thousands and hundreds of thousands form so great a percentage of the city's population that "white, Gentile, Protestant Nordics" have but little opportunity to develop their prejudices as they do, for example, in Mississippi or the District of Columbia. It was no idle joke when some forgotten wit remarked, "The Jews own New York, the Irish run it and the Negroes enjoy it."

* Paul Robeson, Roland Hayes, and Harry Burleigh were well-known entertainers at the time this essay was written. Robeson was a classically trained actor. Roland Hayes was a classically trained tenor, who, at the height of his career earned fame and acclaim with his ability to sing in four different languages. Harry Burleigh was a classical composer, arranger, and singer. The writer, Walter White, was a highly educated journalist and sociologist and an esteemed leader in the NAACP. None of the accolades and accomplishments of these four men mattered when it came to finding a place to have a meal with their companions because they were still Black.

* What White meant by this—"the Negro of fineness of soul"—was an African American with a high level of education or socioeconomic status.

race proscription, ***n***. the act of banning or prohibiting something based on race

New York's polyglot population, which causes such distress to the Lothrop Stoddards and the Madison Grants,* by a curious anomaly, has created more nearly than any other section that democracy which is the proud boast but rarely practised accomplishment of these United States. The Ku Klux Klan has made but little headway in New York City for the very simple reason that the proscribed outnumber the proscribers.** Thus, race prejudice cannot work its will upon Jew or Catholic or Negro, as in other more genuinely American centers. This combined with the fact that most people in New York are so busy they haven't time to spend in hating other people, makes New York as nearly ideal a place for colored people as exists in America.

Despite these alleviating causes, however, New York is in the United States where prejudice appears to be indigenous. Its population includes many Southern whites who have brought North with them their hatreds. There are here many whites who are not Southern but whose minds have indelibly fixed upon them the stereotype of a Negro who is either a buffoon or a degenerate beast or a subservient lackey. From these the Negro knows he is ever in danger of insult or injury. This situation creates various attitudes of mind among those who are its victims. Upon most the acquisition of education and culture, of wealth and sensitiveness causes a figurative and literal withdrawal, as far as is humanly possible or as necessity permits, from all contacts with the outside world where unpleasant situations may arise. This naturally means the development of an intensive Negro culture and a definitely bounded city within a city. Doubtless there are some advantages, but it is certain that such voluntary segregation works a greater loss upon those within and those without the circle.

* In mentioning Lothrop Stoddard and Madison Grant, White invokes the names of two of the era's leading white supremacists. Both Stoddard and Grant believed in strict segregation of the races and the thoughts and writings of at least one (Lothrop Stoddard), influenced the thoughts and writings of one of the 20th century's most notorious figures: Adolf Hitler.

** "…that the proscribed outnumber the proscribers…" White means that those who would be discriminated against outnumber the ones who would be doing the discriminating.

indigenous, *adj.* native or in-born

Upon those within, it cuts off to a large extent the world of music, of the theater, of most of those contacts which mean growth and development and which denied, mean stagnation and spiritual atrophy. It develops as well a tendency towards self-pity, towards a fatal conviction that they of all peoples are most oppressed. The harmful effects of such reactions are too obvious to need elaboration.

Upon those without, the results are equally mischievous. First there is the loss of that deep spirituality, that gift of song and art, that indefinable thing which perhaps can best be termed the over-soul of the Negro, which has given America the only genuinely artistic things which the world recognizes as distinctive American contributions to the arts….

There are, however, many other ways of avoidance of proscription and prejudice. Of these one of no small importance is that popularly known as "passing," that is, those whose skin is of such color that they can pass as white may do so. This is not difficult; there are so many swarthy races represented in New York's population that even colored people who could easily be distinguished by their own race as Negroes, pass as French or Spanish or Cuban with ease. Of these there are two classes. First are those who for various reasons disappear entirely and go over the line to become white in business, social and all other relationships. The number of these is very large—much larger than is commonly suspected. To my personal knowledge one of the prominent surgeons of New York City who has an elaborately furnished suite of offices in an exclusive neighborhood, whose fees run often into four figures, who moves with his family in society of such standing that the names of its members appear frequently in the society columns of the metropolitan press, is a colored man from a Southern city. There he grew tired of the proscribed life he was forced to lead, decided to move North, and forget he was a colored man.

swarthy, *adj.* tinted with a brown hue

He met with success, married well and he and his wife and their children form as happy a family circle as one could hope to see. O'Neill's *All God's Chillun Got Wings* to the contrary, his wife loves him but the more for his courage in telling her of his race when first they met and loved.

This doctor's case is not an exception. Colored people know many of their own who have done likewise. In New York there is at least one man high in the field of journalism, a certain famous singer, several prominent figures of the stage, in fact, in almost any field that could be mentioned there are those who are colored but who have left their race for wider opportunity and for freedom from race prejudice. Just a few days before this article is being written I received a note from a woman whose name is far from being obscure in the world of the arts. The night before, she wrote me, there had been a party at her studio. Among the guests were three Southern whites who, in a confidential mood, had told her of a plan the Ku Klux Klan was devising for capitalizing in New York prejudice against the Negro. When I asked her why she had given me the information she told me her father, resident at the time of her birth in a Southern state, was a Negro.

The other group is made up of the many others who "pass" only occasionally. Some of these do so for business reasons, others when they go out to dine or to the theater.

If a personal reference may be forgiven, I have had the unique experience within the past seven years of investigating some thirty-seven lynchings and eight race riots by the simple method of not telling those whom I was investigating of the Negro blood within my veins.

Large as is the number of those who have crossed the line, . . . they form but a small percentage of those who might follow such an example but who do not. The constant hammering of three hundred years of oppression has resulted in a race consciousness among the

Negroes of the United States which is amazing to those who know how powerful it is. In America, as is well known, all persons with any discernible percentage of Negro blood are classed as Negroes, subject therefore to all of the manifestations of prejudice. They are never allowed to forget their race. By prejudice ranging from the more violent forms like lynching and other forms of physical violence down to more subtle but none the less effective methods, Negroes of the United States have been welded into a homogeneity of thought and a commonness of purpose in combating a common foe. These external and internal forces have gradually created a state of mind among Negroes which is rapidly becoming more pronounced where they realize that just so long as one Negro can be made the victim of prejudice because he is a Negro, no other Negro is safe from that same oppression. This applies geographically, as is seen in the support given by colored people in cities like Boston, New York, and Chicago to those who oppose lynching of Negroes in the South, and it applies to that large element of colored people whose skins are lighter who realize that their cause is common with that of all Negroes regardless of color.

Unfortunately, however, color prejudice creates certain attitudes of mind on the part of some colored people which form color lines within the color line. Living in an atmosphere where swarthiness of skin brings, almost automatically, denial of opportunity, it is as inevitable as it is regrettable that there should grow up among Negroes themselves distinctions based on skin color and hair texture. There are many places where this…custom is more powerful than in New York—for example, there are cities where only mulattoes attend certain churches while those whose skins are dark brown or black attend others. Marriages between colored men and women whose skins differ markedly in color, and indeed, less intimate relations are frowned upon. Since those of lighter color could more often secure the better jobs an even wider chasm has come between them, as those

homogeneity, *n.* sameness

with economic and cultural opportunity have progressed more rapidly than those whose skin denied them opportunity.*

Thus, even among intelligent Negroes there has come into being the fallacious belief that black Negroes are less able to achieve success. Naturally such a condition had led to jealousy and suspicion on the part of darker Negroes, chafing at their bonds and resentful of the patronizing attitude of those of lighter color.

In New York City this feeling between black and mulatto has been accentuated by the presence of some 40,000 Negroes from the West Indies, and particularly by the propaganda of Marcus Garvey and his Universal Negro Improvement Association. In contrast to the division between white and colored peoples in the United States, there is in the West Indies, as has been pointed out by Josiah Royce and others, a tripartite problem of race relations with whites, blacks, and mulattoes. The latter mingle freely with whites in business and other relations and even socially. But neither white nor mulatto has any extensive contact on an equal plane with the blacks. It is this system which has enabled the English whites in the islands to rule and exploit though they as rulers are vastly inferior numerically to blacks and mulattoes. …

…It is true beyond doubt that such a doctrine created for a time greater antagonisms among colored people, but an inevitable reaction has set in which, in time, will probably bring about a greater unity than before among Negroes in the United States.

We have therefore in Harlem this strange mixture of reactions not only to prejudice from without but to equally potent prejudices from within. Many are the comedies, and many are the tragedies which these artificial lines of demarcation have created. Yet with all these

* White is referencing the practice of colorism. See *The Genius of the Harlem Renaissance,* Volume 1, pages 82–83.

lines of demarcation, *n.* dividing lines

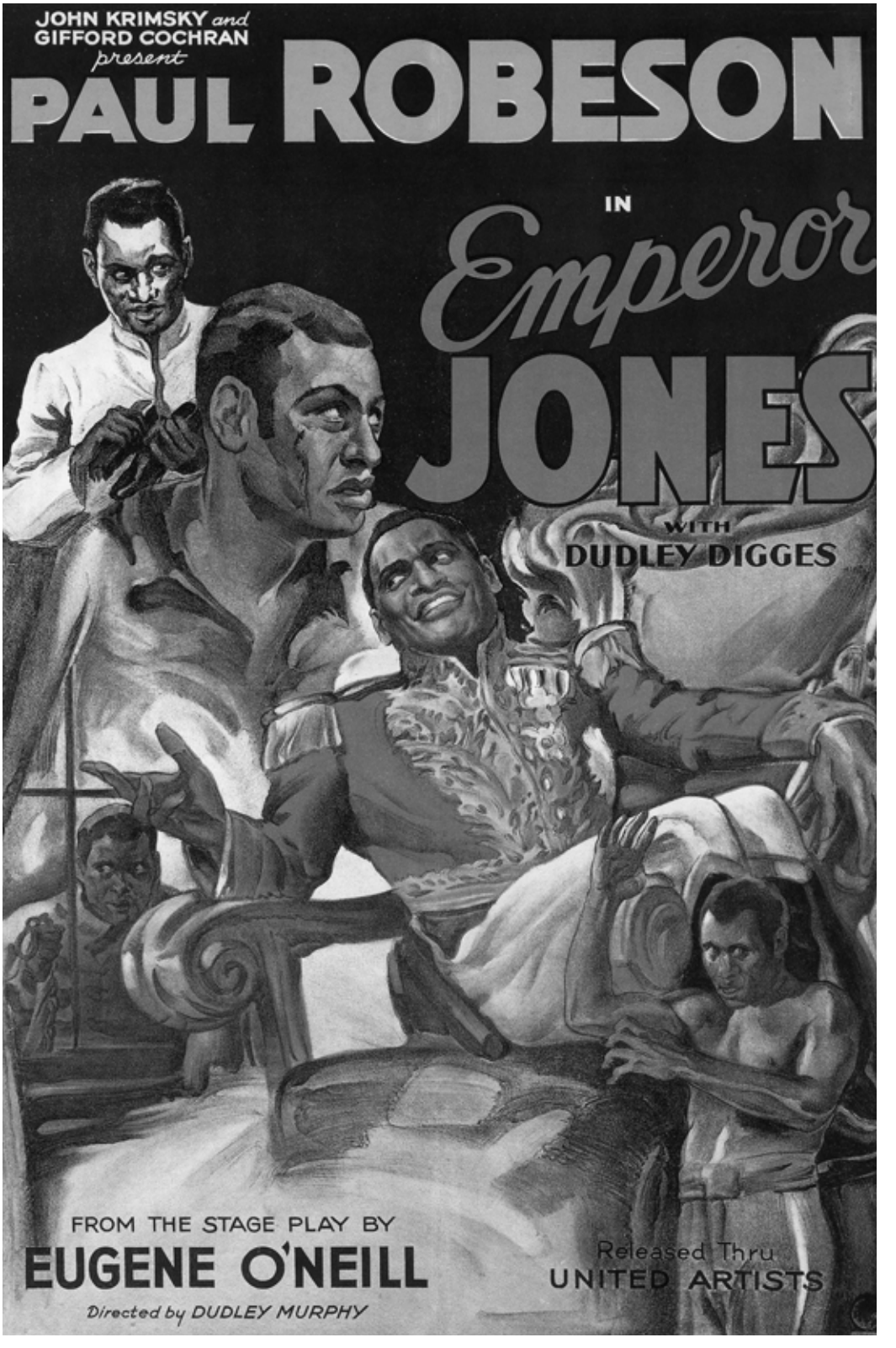
forces and counter forces at work, there can be seen emerging some definite and hopeful signs of racial unity. Though it hearkens back to the Middle Ages, this is essential in the creation of a united front against that race and color prejudice with which the Negro, educated or illiterate, rich, or poor, native or foreign-born, mulatto, octoroon, quadroon, or black, must strive continuously.*

Questions to Consider:

1. The name of White's essay is "The Paradox of Color." The word *paradox* means a situation that has contradictory or confusing elements. What are the confusing or contradictory elements that White discusses about African Americans who were educated, famous, or wealthy? Use references from the passage to support your answer.
2. White discusses some of the strategies African Americans used to avoid discrimination. One that he mentions a great deal is passing. In your own words, what does *passing* mean? Why did White say this was a way that African Americans could escape the discrimination Black people faced in the early twentieth century?
3. In addition to passing, White also makes a reference to colorism in his article. What is colorism? Use what you learned in *The Harlem Renaissance*, Volume 1 to help you write a definition for this concept. What impact does colorism have on members of the African American community? Use a passage from the reading to support your answer.
4. In the promotional poster for the film *The Emperor Jones*, which was the play referenced by White in his essay, how is actor Paul Robeson depicted in each of these five different portraits?

* Excerpts from this essay were taken from Alain Locke, comp., *The New Negro: An Interpretation*. (Albert & Charles Boni, 1925), 361–368.

mulatto, *n.* someone who is biracial.
octoroon, *n.* someone who is of one-eighth African and seven-eighths European descent
quadroon, *n.* someone who has one-quarter African ancestry


JOHN KRIMSKY and
GIFFORD COCHRAN
present
PAUL ROBESON
IN
Emperor
JONES
WITH
DUDLEY DIGGES
FROM THE STAGE PLAY BY
EUGENE O'NEILL
Directed by DUDLEY MURPHY
Released Thru
UNITED ARTISTS

A Black Woman on Identity and the Practice of Passing

As a practice that helps members of an oppressed racial minority escape the pain of discrimination, racial passing was something that both men and women of color engaged in. But the motivations for deciding to do so were different depending on the gender of the individual. For men who passed as white, the motivation was generally rooted in a desire to escape exclusion from jobs, careers, or opportunities to advance that they would have otherwise faced by living as men of color. For women, the opportunity to live as a white woman broadened the available marriage pool, which represented an opportunity to improve status and advantage. In both instances, passing's overarching goal was to allow the passer the opportunity to enjoy a life that was free from the constraints of racial prejudice.

African American novelist Nella Larsen made the phenomenon of passing the central theme of her 1929 novel of the same name. *Passing* was set in 1920s Harlem and was the story of two childhood friends who had grown fascinated with each other's lives resulting in choices they made as younger women. One of them, a character named Clare Kendry, passed for white and married a white man. Clare's husband, while wealthy, was also extremely bigoted and often made anti-Black comments in front of his wife, not knowing his wife had African American ancestry in her background. Clare's friend, Irene Redfield, had the same near European appearance as Clare, but lived her life as a Black woman, and managed to create a comfortable and stable life with her Black husband. The novel is written in three parts and tells the intricate story of the lives the two women lead because of the choices they made concerning their identities. Despite a modest reception and muted critical acclaim at

the time of its publication, the novel is considered a representative classic of Harlem Renaissance literature, and its enduring storyline has been adapted several times, including most recently in a 2021 Netflix movie.

Nella Larsen

Nella Larsen was born in 1891 and raised in an immigrant household on the South Side of Chicago. Her mother was a Danish immigrant and a seamstress, and her father was of Afro-Caribbean descent from what was once known as the Danish West Indies, which today comprise the US and British Virgin Islands. Larsen herself was of mixed-race ancestry and had the physical characteristics that would have allowed her to pass for white, though there is no evidence to suggest that she did. Larsen had a difficult childhood and young adulthood owning to her mixed-race heritage and the difficulty she had fitting in. She attended Fisk University, a historically Black college in Nashville, Tennessee, and went on to marry a prominent African American scientist named Elmer Imes, who was only the second Black man to receive a PhD in physics in America. In addition to writing, Larsen was a nurse and a librarian. You will read an excerpt from *Passing*. Answer the questions that follow.

From The Novel *Passing*
by Nella Larson

This chapter presents a frank discussion of the social and economic advantages and disadvantages associated with racial passing. Read it to answer the questions that follow.
Editorial Note: A racially offensive epithet appears in full in the original version of the novel but has not been printed here in keeping with modern sensibilities and a sense of appropriateness.

On Tuesday morning a dome of grey sky rose over the parched city, but the stifling air was not relieved by the silvery mist that seemed to hold a promise of rain, which did not fall.

To Irene Redfield, this soft foreboding fog was another reason for doing nothing about seeing Clare Kendry that afternoon.

But she did see her.

The telephone. For hours it had rung like something possessed. Since nine o'clock she had been hearing its insistent jangle. A while, she was resolute, saying firmly each time: "Not in, Liza, take the message." And each the time the servant returned with the information: "It's the same lady ma'am; she says she'll call again."

But at noon, her nerves, frayed and her conscience smiting her at the reproachful look on Liza's ebony face as she withdrew for another denial, Irene weakened.

"Oh, never mind. I'll answer this time, Liza."

"It's her again."

"Hello…Yes."

"It's Clare, 'Rene….where have you been?...Can you be here around four?...What?...But, 'Rene you promised! Just for a little while… You can come if you want to…I am so disappointed. I had counted so

on seeing you…Please be nice and come. Only for a minute. I'm sure you can manage it if you try…I won't beg you to stay…Yes…I'm going to expect you…It's the Morgan…Oh, yes! The name's Bellew, Mrs. John Bellew…About four, then…I'll be so happy to see you!...Goodbye."

"Damn!"

Irene hung up the receiver with an emphatic bang, her thoughts immediately filled with self-reproach. She'd done it again. Allowed Clare Kendry to persuade her into promising to do something for which she had neither time nor any special desire…

Clare met her in the hall with a kiss. She said: "You're good to come, 'Rene. But, then, you always were nice to me." And under her potent smile a part of Irene's annoyance with herself fled. She was even a little glad that she had come.

Clare led the way, stepping lightly, towards a room whose door was standing partly open, saying: "There's a surprise. It's a real party, See."

Entering, Irene found herself in a sitting-room, large and high, at whose windows hung startling blue draperies which triumphantly dragged attention from the gloomy chocolate colored furniture. And Clare was wearing a thin floating dress of the same shade of blue, which suited her and the rather difficult room to perfection.

For a minute, Irene thought the room was empty, but turning her head, she discovered, sunk deep in the cushions of a huge sofa, a woman, staring up at her with such intense concentration that her eyelids were drawn as though the strain of that upward glance had paralyzed them. At first Irene took her to be a stranger, but in the next instant she said in an unsympathetic, almost harsh voice: "And how are you, Gertrude?"

The woman nodded and forced a smile to her pouting lips. "I'm all right," she replied. "And you're just the same, Irene. Not changed a bit."

"Thank you," Irene responded, as she chose a seat. She was thinking: "Great goodness! Two of them!"

For Gertrude too had married a white man, though it couldn't be truthfully said that she was "passing." Her husband—what was his name?—had been in school with her and had been quite well aware, as had his family and most of his friends, that she was a Negro. It hadn't, Irene knew, seemed to matter to him then. Did it now, she wondered? Had Fred—Fred Martin, that was it—had he ever regretted his marriage because of Gertrude's race? Had Gertrude?

Turning to Gertrude, Irene asked: "And Fred, how is he? It's unmentionable years since I've seen him."

"Oh, he's all right," Gertrude answered briefly.

For a full minute, no one spoke. Finally out of the oppressive little silence Clare's voice came pleasantly, conversationally: "We'll have tea right away. I know that you can't stay long, 'Rene. And I'm so sorry you won't see Margery. We went up the lake over the week end to see some of Jack's people, just out of Milwaukee. Margery wanted to stay with the children. It seemed a shame not to let her, especially since it's so hot in town. But, I'm expecting Jack any second."

Irene said briefly: "That's nice."

Gertrude remained silent. She was, it was plain, a little ill at ease. And her presence there annoyed Irene, roused in her a defensive and resentful feeling for which she had at the moment no explanation. But, it did seem to her odd that the woman that Clare was now should have invited the woman that Gertrude was. Still, of course Clare couldn't have known. Twelve years since they had met.

Later, when she examined her feeling of annoyance, Irene admitted, a shade reluctantly, that it arose from a feeling of being outnumbered,

a sense of aloneness, in her adherence to her own class and kind; not merely in the great thing of marriage, but in the whole pattern of her life as well.

Clare spoke again, this time at length. Her talk was of the change that Chicago presented to her after her long absence in European cities. Yes, she said in reply to some question from Gertrude, she'd been back to America a time or two, but only as far as New York and Philadelphia, and once she had spent a few days in Washington. John Bellew, who, it appeared, was some sort of international banking agent, hadn't particularly wanted her to come with him on this trip, but as soon as she had learned that it would probably take him as far as Chicago, she made her mind up to come anyway.

"I simply had to. And after I once got here I was determined to see someone I knew and find out what had happened to everybody. I didn't quite see how I was going to manage it, but I meant to. Somehow. I'd just about decided to take a chance and go out to your house, 'Rene, or call up and arrange a meeting when I ran into you. What luck!"

Irene agreed that it was luck. "It's the first time I've been home for five years, and now I'm about to leave. A week later and I'd have been gone. And how in the world did you find Gertrude?"

"In the book. I remembered about Fred. His father still has the meat market." "Oh, yes," said Irene, who had only remembered it as Clare had spoken, "on Cottage Grove near—"

Gertrude broke in. "No. It's moved. We're on Maryland Avenue—used to be Jackson—now. Near Sixty-third Street. And the market's Fred's. His name's the same as his father's."

Gertrude, Irene thought, looked as if her husband might be a butcher. There was left of her youthful prettiness, which had been so much admired in their high-school days, no trace. She had grown broad, fat almost, and though there were no lines on her large white

face, its very smoothness was somehow prematurely ageing. Her black hair was clipt, and by some unfortunate means all the live curliness had gone from it. Her over-trimmed Georgette crêpe dress was too short and showed an appalling amount of leg, stout legs in sleazy stockings of a vivid rose-beige shade. Her plump hands were newly and not too competently manicured—for the occasion, probably. And she wasn't smoking.

Clare said—and Irene fancied that her husky voice held a slight edge—"Before you came, Irene, Gertrude was telling me about her two boys. Twins. Think of it! Isn't it too marvelous for words?"

Irene felt a warmness creeping into her cheeks. Uncanny, the way Clare could divine what one was thinking. She was a little put out, but her manner was entirely easy as she said: "That is nice. I've two boys myself, Gertrude. Not twins, though. It seems that Clare's rather behind, doesn't it?"

Gertrude, however, wasn't sure that Clare hadn't the best of it. "She's got a girl. I wanted a girl. So did Fred."

"Isn't that a bit unusual?" Irene asked. "Most men want sons. Egotism, I suppose."

"Well, Fred didn't."

The tea-things had been placed on a low table at Clare's side. She gave them her attention now, pouring the rich amber fluid from the tall glass pitcher into stately slim glasses, which she handed to guests, and then offered them lemon or cream and tiny sandwiches or cakes.

After taking up her own glass she informed them: "No, I have no boys and I don't think I'll ever have any. I'm afraid. I nearly died of terror the whole nine months before Margery was born for fear that she might be dark. Thank goodness, she turned out all right. But I'll never risk it again. Never! The strain is simply too–too hellish."

Gertrude Martin nodded in complete comprehension.

This time it was Irene who said nothing.

"You don't have to tell me!" Gertrude said fervently. "I know what is all right. Maybe you don't think I wasn't scared to death too. Fred said I was silly, and so did his mother. But, of course, they thought it was just a notion I'd gotten into my head and they blamed it on my condition. They don't know like we do, how it might go way back, and turn out dark no matter what colour the father and mother are."

Perspiration stood out on her forehead. Her narrow eyes rolled first in Clare's then in Irene's direction. As she talked, she waved her heavy hands about.

"No," she went on, "no more for me either. Not even a girl. It's awful the way it skips generations and then pops out. Why, he actually said he didn't care what colour it turned out, if I would only stop worrying about it. But, of course, nobody wants a dark child." Her voice was earnest and she took for granted that her audience was in entire agreement with her.

Irene, whose head had gone up with a quick little jerk, now said in a voice of whose even tones she was proud: "One of my boys is dark."

Gertrude jumped as if she had been shot at. Her eyes goggled. Her mouth flew open. She tried to speak, but could not immediately get the words out. Finally, she managed to stammer: "Oh! And your husband, is he—is he—er—dark, too?"

Irene, who was struggling with a flood of feelings, resentment, anger, and contempt, was, however, still able to answer as coolly as if she had not that sense of not belonging to and of despising the company in which she found herself drinking iced tea from tall amber glasses on that hot August afternoon. Her husband, she informed them quietly, couldn't exactly "pass."

At that reply Clare turned on Irene her seductive caressing smile and remarked a little scoffingly: "I do think that coloured people—we—are too silly about some things. After all, the thing's not important to Irene or hundreds of others. Not awfully, even to you, Gertrude. It's only deserters like me who have to be afraid of freaks of the nature. As my inestimable dad used to say, 'Everything must be paid for.' Now, please one of you tell me what ever happened to Claude Jones. You know, the tall, lanky specimen who used to wear that comical little moustache that the girls used to laugh at so. Like a thin streak of soot. The moustache, I mean."

At that Gertrude shrieked with laughter. "Claude Jones!" and launched into the story of how he was no longer a Negro or a Christian but had become a Jew.

"A Jew!" Clare exclaimed.

"Yes, a Jew. A black Jew, he calls himself. He won't eat ham and goes to the synagogue on Saturday. He's got a beard now as well as a moustache. You'd die laughing if you saw him."

"He's really too funny for words. Fred says he's crazy and I guess he is. Oh, he's a scream all right, a regular scream!" And she shrieked again.

Clare's laugh tinkled out. "It certainly sounds funny enough. Still, it's his own business if he gets along better by turning—" At that, Irene, who was still hugging her unhappy don't-care feeling of rightness, broke in, saying bitingly: "It evidently doesn't occur to either you or Gertrude that he might possibly be sincere in changing his religion. Surely everyone doesn't do everything for gain."

Clare Kendry had no need to search for the full meaning of that utterance. She reddened slightly and retorted seriously: "Yes, I admit that might be possible—his being sincere, I mean. It just didn't happen to occur to me, that's all. I'm surprised," and the seriousness changed

to mockery, "that you should have expected it to. Or did you really?"

"You don't, I'm sure, imagine that that is a question that I can answer," Irene told her. "Not here and now."

Gertrude's face expressed complete bewilderment. However, seeing that little smiles had come out on the faces of the two other women, and not recognizing them for the smiles of mutual reservations which they were, she smiled too.

Clare began to talk, steering carefully away from anything that might lead towards race or other thorny subjects. It was the most brilliant exhibition of conversational weightlifting that Irene had ever seen. Her words swept over them in charming well-modulated streams. Her laughs tinkled and pealed. Her little stories sparkled.

Irene contributed a bare "Yes" or "No" here and there. Gertrude, a "You don't say!" less frequently.

For a while the illusion of general conversation was nearly perfect. Irene felt her resentment changing gradually to a silent, somewhat grudging admiration.

Clare talked on, her voice, her gestures colouring all she said of wartime in France, of after-the-wartime in Germany, of the excitement at the time of the general strike in England, of dressmakers' openings in Paris, of the new gaiety of Budapest.

But it couldn't last, this verbal feat. Gertrude shifted in her seat and fell to fidgeting with her fingers. Irene, bored at last by all this repetition of the selfsame things that she had read all too often in papers, magazines, and books, set down her glass and collected her bag and handkerchief. She was smoothing out the tan fingers of her gloves preparatory to putting them on when she heard the sound of the outer door being opened and saw Clare spring up with an expression of relief saying: "How lovely! Here's Jack at exactly the right minute. You can't go now, 'Rene dear."

John Bellew came into the room. The first thing that Irene noticed about him was that he was not the man that she had seen with Clare Kendry on the Drayton roof. This man, Clare's husband, was a tallish person, broadly made. His age she guessed to be somewhere between thirty-five and forty. His hair was dark brown and waving, and he had a soft mouth, somewhat womanish, set in an unhealthy-looking dough-coloured face. His steel-grey opaque eyes were very much alive, moving ceaselessly between thick bluish lids. But there was, Irene decided, nothing unusual about him, unless it was an impression of latent physical power.

"Hello, Nig," was his greeting to Clare.

Gertrude who had started slightly, settled back and looked covertly towards Irene, who had caught her lip between her teeth and sat gazing at husband and wife. It was hard to believe that even Clare Kendry would permit this ridiculing of her race by an outsider, though he chanced to be her husband. So he knew then, that Clare was a Negro? From her talk the other day Irene had understood that he didn't. But how rude, how positively insulting, for him to address her in that way in the presence of guests!

In Clare's eyes, as she presented her husband, was a queer gleam, a jeer, it might be. Irene couldn't define it.

The mechanical professions that attend an introduction over, she inquired, "Did you hear what Jack called me?"

"Yes," Gertrude answered, laughing with a dutiful eagerness.

Irene didn't speak. Her gaze remained level on Clare's smiling face.

The black eyes fluttered down. "Tell them, dear, why you call me that."

The man chuckled, crinkling up his eyes, not, Irene was compelled to acknowledge, unpleasantly. He explained: "Well, you see, it's like this. When we were first married, she was as white as–as–well as white

as a lily. But I declare she's gettin' darker and darker. I tell her if she don't look out, she'll wake up one of these days and find she's turned into a ni&&*r."

He roared with laughter. Clare's ringing bell-like laugh joined his. Gertrude after another uneasy shift in her seat added her shrill one. Irene, who had been sitting with lips tightly compressed, cried out: "That's good!" and gave way to gales of laughter. She laughed and laughed and laughed. Tears ran down her cheeks. Her sides ached. Her throat hurt. She laughed on and on and on, long after the others had subsided. Until, catching sight of Clare's face, the need for a more quiet enjoyment of this priceless joke, and for caution, struck her. At once she stopped.

Clare handed her husband his tea and laid her hand on his arm with an affectionate little gesture. Speaking with confidence as well as with amusement, she said: "My goodness, Jack! What difference would it make if, after all these years, you were to find out that I was one or two per cent coloured?"

Bellew put out his hand in a repudiating fling, definite and final. "Oh, no, Nig," he declared, "nothing like that with me. I know you're no ni&&*r, so it's all right. You can get as black as you please as far as I'm concerned, since I know you're no ni&&*r. I draw the line at that. No ni&&*rs in my family. Never have been and never will be."

Irene's lips trembled almost uncontrollably, but she made a desperate effort to fight back her disastrous desire to laugh again, and succeeded. Carefully selecting a cigarette from the lacquered box on the tea-table before her, she turned an oblique look on Clare and encountered her peculiar eyes fixed on her with an expression so dark and deep and unfathomable that she had for a short moment the sensation of gazing into the eyes of some creature utterly strange and apart. A faint sense of danger brushed her, like the breath of a cold fog.

Absurd, her reason told her, as she accepted Bellew's proffered light for her cigarette. Another glance at Clare showed her smiling. So, as one always ready to oblige, was Gertrude.

An on-looker, Irene reflected, would have thought it a most congenial tea-party, all smiles and jokes and hilarious laughter. She said humorously: "So you dislike Negroes, Mr. Bellew?" But her amusement was at her thought, rather than her words.

John Bellew gave a short denying laugh. "You got me wrong there, Mrs. Redfield. Nothing like that at all. I don't dislike them. I hate them. And so does Nig, for all she's trying to turn into one. She wouldn't have a ni&&*r maid around her for love nor money. Not that I'd want her to. They give me the creeps. The black…devils."

This wasn't funny. Had Bellew, Irene inquired, ever known any Negroes? The defensive tone of her voice brought another start from the uncomfortable Gertrude, and, for all her appearance of serenity, a quick apprehensive look from Clare.

Bellew answered: "Thank the Lord, no! And never expect to! But I know people who've known them, better than they know their black selves. And I read in the papers about them. Always robbing and killing people. And," he added darkly, "worse."

From Gertrude's direction came a queer little suppressed sound, a snort or a giggle. Irene couldn't tell which. There was a brief silence, during which she feared that her self control was about to prove too frail a bridge to support her mounting anger and indignation. She had a leaping desire to shout at the man beside her: "And you're sitting here surrounded by three black devils, drinking tea."

The impulse passed, obliterated by her consciousness of the danger in which such rashness would involve Clare, who remarked with a gentle reprovingness: "Jack dear, I'm sure 'Rene doesn't care to hear all about your pet aversions. Nor Gertrude either. Maybe they read the

papers too, you know." She smiled on him, and her smile seemed to transform him, to soften and mellow him, as the rays of the sun do to a fruit.

"All right, Nig, old girl. I'm sorry," he apologized. Reaching over, he playfully touched his wife's pale hands, then turned back to Irene. "Didn't mean to bore you, Mrs. Redfield. Hope you'll excuse me," he said sheepishly. "Clare tells me you're living in New York. Great city, New York. The city of the future."

In Irene, rage had not retreated, but was held by some dam of caution and allegiance to Clare. So in the best casual voice she could muster, she agreed with Bellew. Though, she reminded him, it was exactly what Chicagoans were apt to say of their city. And all the while she was speaking, she was thinking how amazing it was that her voice did not tremble, that outwardly she was calm. Only her hands shook slightly. She drew them inward from their rest in her lap and pressed the tips of her fingers together to still them.

"Husband's a doctor, I understand. Manhattan, or one of the other boroughs?"

Manhattan, Irene informed him, and explained the need for Brian to be within easy reach of certain hospitals and clinics.

"Interesting life, a doctor's."

"Ye-es. Hard, though. And in a way, monotonous. Nerve-racking too."

"Hard on the wife's nerves at least, eh? So many lady patients." He laughed, enjoying, with a boyish heartiness, the hoary joke.

Irene managed a momentary smile, but her voice was sober as she said: "Brian doesn't care for ladies, especially sick ones. I sometimes wish he did. It's South America that attracts him."

"Coming place, South America, if they ever get the ni&&*rs out of it. It's run over —"

"Really, Jack!" Clare's voice was on the edge of temper.

"Honestly, Nig, I forgot." To the others he said: "You see how henpecked I am." And to Gertrude: "You're still in Chicago, Mrs.——er——Mrs. Martin?"

He was, it was plain, doing his best to be agreeable to these old friends of Clare's. Irene had to concede that under other conditions she might have liked him. A fairly good-looking man of amiable disposition, evidently, and in easy circumstances. Plain and with no nonsense about him.

Gertrude replied that Chicago was good enough for her. She'd never been out of it and didn't think she ever should. Her husband's business was there.

"Of course, of course. Can't jump up and leave a business."

There followed a smooth surface of talk about Chicago, New York, their difference and their recent spectacular changes.

It was, Irene, thought, unbelievable and astonishing that four people could sit so unruffled, so ostensibly friendly, while they were in reality seething with anger, mortification, shame. But no, on second thought she was forced to amend her opinion. John Bellew, most certainly, was as undisturbed within as without. So, perhaps, was Gertrude Martin. At least she hadn't the mortification and shame that Clare Kendry must be feeling, or, in such full measure, the rage and rebellion that she, Irene, was repressing.

"More tea, 'Rene?" Clare offered.

"Thanks, no. And I must be going. I'm leaving tomorrow, you know, and I've still got packing to do."

She stood up. So did Gertrude, and Clare, and John Bellew.

"How do you like the Drayton, Mrs. Redfield?" the latter asked.

"The Drayton? Oh, very much. Very much indeed," Irene answered, her scornful eyes on Clare's unrevealing face.

"Nice place, all right. Stayed there a time or two myself," the man informed her.

"Yes, it is nice," Irene agreed, "Almost as good as our best New York places." She had withdrawn her look from Clare and was searching in her bag for some non-existent something. Her understanding was rapidly increasing, as was her pity and contempt. Clare was so daring, so lovely, and so "having."

They gave their hands to Clare with appropriate murmurs. "So good to have seen you." …"I do hope I'll see you again soon."

"Good-bye," Clare returned. "It was good of you to come, 'Rene dear. And you too, Gertrude."

"Good-bye, Mr. Bellew."…"So glad to have met you." It was Gertrude who had said that. Irene couldn't, she absolutely couldn't bring herself to utter the polite fiction or anything approaching it.

He accompanied them out into the hall, summoned the elevator.

"Good-bye," they said again, stepping in.

Plunging downward they were silent.

They made their way through the lobby without speaking.

But as soon as they had reached the street Gertrude, in the manner of one unable to keep bottled up for another minute that which for the last hour she had had to retain, burst out: "My God! What an awful chance! She must be plumb crazy."

"Yes, it certainly seems risky," Irene admitted.

"Risky! I should say it was. Risky! My God! What a word! And the mess she's liable to get herself into!"

"Still, I imagine she's pretty safe. They don't live here, you know. And there's a child. That's a certain security."

"It's an awful chance, just the same," Gertrude insisted. "I'd never

in the world have married Fred without him knowing. You can't tell what will turn up."

"Yes, I do agree that it's safer to tell. But then Bellew wouldn't have married her. And, after all, that's what she wanted."

Gertrude shook her head. "I wouldn't be in her shoes for all the money she's getting out of it, when he finds out. Not with him feeling the way he does. Gee! Wasn't it awful? For a minute I was so mad I could have slapped him."

It had been, Irene acknowledged, a distinctly trying experience, as well as a very unpleasant one. "I was more than a little angry myself."

"And imagine her not telling us about him feeling that way! Anything might have happened. We might have said something."

That, Irene pointed out, was exactly like Clare Kendry. Taking a chance, and not at all considering anyone else's feelings.

Gertrude said: "Maybe she thought we'd like a good joke. And I guess you did. The way you laughed. My land! I was scared to death he might catch on."

"Well, it was rather a joke," Irene told her, "On him and us and maybe on her."

"All the same, it's an awful chance. I'd hate to be her."

"She seems satisfied enough. She's got what she wanted, and the other day, she told me it was worth it."

But about that Gertrude was skeptical. "She'll find out different all right."

Rain had begun to fall, a few scattered large drops.

The end-of-the-day crowds were scurrying in the directions of street-cars and elevated roads.

Irene said, "You're going south? I'm sorry. I've got an errand. If you don't mind, I'll just say goodbye here. It has been nice seeing you, Gertrude. Say hello to Fred for me, and to your mother if she remembers me. Good-bye."

She wanted to be free of the other woman, to be alone; for she was still sore and angry.

What right, she kept demanding of herself, had Clare Kendry to expose her, or even Gertrude Martin, to such humiliation, such downright insult?

And all the while, on the rushing ride out to her father's house, Irene Redfield was trying to understand the look on Claire's face as she had said good-bye. Partly mocking, it had seemed, and partly menacing. And something else for which she could find no name. For an instant a recrudescence* of that sensation of fear which she had had while looking into Clare's eyes that afternoon touched her. A slight shiver ran over her.

"It's nothing," she told herself, "Just somebody walking over my grave, as the children say." She tried a tiny laugh and was annoyed to find that it was close to tears.

What a state she had allowed that horrible Bellew to get her into!

And late that night, even, long after the last guest had gone and the old house was quiet, she stood at her window frowning out into the dark rain and puzzling again over that look on Clare's incredibly beautiful face. She couldn't, however, come to any conclusion about its meaning, try as she might. It was unfathomable, utterly beyond any experience or comprehension of hers.

She turned away from the window, at last, with a still deeper frown. Why, after all, worry about Clare Kendry? She was well able to take care of herself, had always been able. And there were, for Irene, other things, more personal and more important to worry about.

Besides, her reason told her, she had only herself to blame for her disagreeable afternoon and its attendant fears and questions. She ought never to have gone.**

* The recurrence of an undesirable condition. A repeatedly bad situation.

** from Nella Larsen, *Passing,* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1929).

Questions to Consider

1. Why is Irene reluctant to meet with her old friend Clare?
2. Irene is not only the main character in this chapter, but she is also its narrator. In the chapter, she admitted to being annoyed with not only Clare but with the third character at the tea, Gertrude, as well. What reasons does she give for feeling this way?
3. Why is Clare's marriage to Jack Bellew problematic?
4. How do Gertrude and Irene feel about Clare's marriage to Jack Bellew? Cite specific passages from the text to support your response.
5. What were Irene's feelings about Clare and the whole idea of passing after her visit with Clare was over?
6. The topic of passing was not only the main subject of essays and novels, but of films during the 1930s as well. Motion pictures were a relatively new art form in the 1930s, especially those featuring dialogue, and its novelty added an element of interest to Black performing art. The 1934 film *Imitation of Life* explored the phenomenon of racial passing, a choice made by about 30,000 African Americans every year. In this scene, the standing woman has just informed her mother, the seated woman, that she intends to pass for white. How does the mother's pose and facial expression demonstrate her reaction to this news?

The Musical Dimensions of the Harlem Renaissance

As important as the literary contributions of the Harlem Renaissance were, the musical innovations of the era were powerful as well. During the 1920s, people of all races flocked to Harlem to enjoy themselves—and to break the law. In 1919, the United States ratified the Eighteenth Amendment which made it illegal to manufacture, distribute, or sell alcoholic beverages. But liquor flowed freely in Harlem's nightclubs and restaurants. Jazz was the music patrons listened to while they visited these establishments. Jazz was the soundtrack of the 1920s. It was an authentically American art form that was created and performed first and foremost by Black musicians and composers.

Jazz music was synonymous with Harlem and its cultural movement and leading writers of the era recognized it even then. J. A. Rogers was a contributor to Locke's collection of essays titled *The New Negro*. In an essay he wrote on the importance of jazz music, Rogers explained to his readers what jazz music was and why it was closely associated with Harlem's cultural movement. Read Rogers' essay and respond to the questions that follow.

Jazz At Home

by J.A. Rogers

Jazz is a marvel of paradox: too fundamentally human, at least as modern humanity goes, to be typically racial, too international to be characteristically national, too much abroad in the world to have a special home. And yet jazz in spite of it all, is one part American and three parts American Negro and was originally the nobody's child of

the levee and the city slum. Transplanted exotic—a rather hardy one, we admit—of the mundane world capitals, sport of the sophisticated, it is really at home in its humble native soil wherever the modern unsophisticated Negro feels happy and sings and dances to his mood. It follows that jazz is more at home in Harlem than in Paris, though from the look and sound of certain quarters of Paris one would hardly think so. It is just the epidemic contagiousness of jazz that makes it, like the measles, sweep the block. But somebody had to have it first: that was the Negro.

What after all is this taking new thing, that, condemned in certain quarters, enthusiastically welcomed in others, has nonchalantly gone on until it ranks with the movie and the dollar as a foremost exponent of modern Americanism? Jazz isn't music merely. It is a spirit that can express itself in almost anything. The true spirit of jazz is a joyous revolt from convention, custom, authority, boredom, even sorrow—from everything that would confine the soul of man and hinder its riding free on the air. The Negroes who invented it called their songs the "Blues," and they weren't capable of satire or deception. Jazz was their explosive attempt to cast off the blues and be happy, carefree happy, even in the midst of sordidness and sorrow. And that is why it has been such a balm…and has become a safety valve for modern machine-ridden and convention-bound society. It is the revolt of the emotions against repression.

The story is told of the clever group of "Jazz -specialists" … Then, the entertainment over and the guests away, the "entertainers" entertained themselves with their very best, which is always impromptu, for the sheer joy of it. That is jazz.

In its elementals, jazz has always existed. It is in the Indian war-dance, the Highland fling, the Irish jig, the Cossack dance, the Spanish

taking, *adj.* captivating

fandango, the Brazilian maxixe, the dance of the whirling dervish, the hula hula of the South Seas, …the strains of Gypsy music, and the ragtime of the Negro. Jazz proper, however, is something more than all these. It is a release of all the suppressed emotions at once, a blowing off of the lid, as it were. It is hilarity expressing itself through pandemonium, musical fireworks.

The direct predecessor of jazz is ragtime. That both are . . . African there is little doubt, but to what extent it is difficult to determine. In its barbaric rhythm and exuberance there is something of the bamboula, a wild, abandoned dance of the West African and the Haytian* Negro . . . . But jazz time is faster and more complex than African music. With its cowbells, auto horns, calliopes, rattles, dinner gongs, kitchen utensils, cymbals, screams, crashes, clankings, and monotonous rhythm it bears all the marks of a nerve-strung, strident, mechanized civilization. It is a thing of the jungles—modern man-made jungles.

The earliest jazz-makers were the itinerant piano players who would wander up and down the Mississippi from saloon to saloon, from dive to dive. Seated at the piano with a carefree air that a king might envy, their box-back coats flowing over the stool, their Stetsons pulled well over their eyes, and cigars at an angle of forty-five degrees, they would "whip the ivories" to marvelous chords and hidden racy, joyous meanings, evoking the intense delight of their hearers who would smother them at the close with huzzas and whiskey. Often wholly illiterate, these humble troubadours knowing nothing of written music or composition, but with minds like cameras, would listen to the rude improvisations of the dock laborers and the railroad gangs and reproduce them, reflecting perfectly the sentiments and the longings of these humble folk. The improvised bands at Negro dances in the South, or the little boys with their harmonicas and Jews' harps,

* The current spelling for *Haytian* is *Haitian*.

each one putting his own individuality into the air, played also no inconsiderable part in its evolution. "Poverty," says J. A. Jackson of the *Billboard*, "compelled improvised instruments. Bones, tambourines, make-shift string instruments, tin can and hollow wood effects, all now utilized as musical novelties, were among early Negroes the product of necessity. . . .

The origin of the present jazz craze is interesting. More cities claim its birthplace . . . . New Orleans, San Francisco, Memphis, Chicago, all assert the honor is theirs. Jazz, as it is to-day, seems to have come into being this way, however: W. C. Handy, a Negro, having digested the airs of the itinerant musicians referred to, evolved the first classic, Memphis Blues. Then came Jasbo Brown, a reckless musician of a Negro cabaret in Chicago, who played this and other blues, blowing his own extravagant moods and risqué interpretations into them, while hilarious with gin. To give further meanings to his veiled allusions he would make the trombone "talk" by putting a derby hat and later a tin can at its mouth. The delighted patrons would shout, "More, Jasbo. More, Jas, more." And so the name originated.

. . . As was shown, it is of Negro origin plus the influence of the American environment. It is . . . thoroughly American Negro; . . . it is …the product of the peculiar and unique experience of the Negro in this country. . . .

. . . [T]here still remains something elusive about jazz that few, if any of the white artists, have been able to capture. The Negro is admittedly its best expositor. That elusive something, for lack of a better name, I'll call Negro rhythm. The average Negro, particularly of the lower classes, puts rhythm into whatever he does, whether it be shining shoes or carrying a basket on the head to market as the Jamaican women do. Some years ago, while wandering in Cincinnati I happened upon a Negro revival meeting at its height. The majority

present were women, a goodly few of whom were white. Under the influence of the "spirit" the sisters would come forward and strut—much of jazz enters where it would be least expected. The Negro women had the perfect jazz abandon, while the white ones moved lamely and woodenly. This same lack of spontaneity is evident to a degree in the cultivated and inhibited Negro.

In its playing technique, jazz is similarly original and spontaneous. The performance of the Negro musicians is much imitated, but seldom equaled . . . .

Musically jazz has a great future . . . . The pioneer work in the artistic development of jazz was done by Negro artists . . . . "Jazz . . . is an important contribution to modern musical literature…. It comes from the soil, where all music has its beginning."

". . . The Negro musicians of America are playing a great part in this change. They have an open mind, and unbiassed outlook. They are not hampered by conventions or traditions, and with their new ideas, their constant experiment, they are causing new blood to flow in the veins of music. . . ."

[Jazz] has come to stay . . . .

Questions to Consider

1. According to Rogers, which group of people should receive the credit for creating jazz music?
2. Rogers identified certain elements as defining the essence of jazz music. What were those elements?
3. Rogers named a specific musician as the originator of jazz music. Who was that person?
4. What did Rogers say about the significance of jazz music in American and African American culture?

Discrimination in Music

It is ironic that even though it was African Americans who invented jazz, and African Americans who were its best and most celebrated performers of it, that during the Harlem Renaissance ordinary, working-class Black Americans were excluded from enjoying it live in some of Harlem's top-notch clubs because of the color of their skin. The Cotton Club was Harlem's most exclusive night club. Opened in 1923 by a white mobster to sell illegal alcohol, The Cotton Club catered to an exclusively white clientele who viewed a trip to Harlem as an exotic excursion. Although the entertainers and servers were Black, the customers were all white and Black patrons were not admitted. Notable jazz musicians like Duke Ellington and Cab Calloway had long time associations with these exclusionary clubs.

Langston Hughes decried this state of affairs. Outraged about the oppression of Black people not being able to patronize high-end jazz clubs, even though it was their music responsible for these clubs' successes in the first place, he wrote "Jazzonia" as an expression of this outrage. The title "Jazzonia" alludes to a specific passage in the Bible, describing the ancient society of Babylon and how the Babylonians forced Jewish prisoners to entertain them by playing Jewish religious songs.

Just by the title then, Hughes draws a clear parallel between the oppression of Black people in Harlem and the oppression of the Jews 3000 years ago.

As a creation of the Black community, it is plausible that Hughes regarded jazz as his or the Black community's religious music, music that they now played to entertain the white community. The poem shows several religious aspects, such as the repeated use of *oh* and *soul* and the reference to Eve, which could refer to

her being banished from the Garden of Eden and the Black people being banished from the high-end jazz clubs in Harlem.

But using Babylonia as a metaphor for "Jazzonia" might also refer to it as an empire or a country. The poem clearly describes the beautiful world of jazz: the shining, singing, silver tree being a quartet of silver trumpets playing music that flows like a river through a person's soul. Read the poem and answer the questions that follow.

Jazzonia

by Langston Hughes

Oh, silver tree!
Oh, shining rivers of the soul!

In a Harlem cabaret
Six long-headed jazzers play.
A dancing girl whose eyes are bold
Lifts high a dress of silken gold.

Oh, singing tree!
Oh, shining rivers of the soul!

Were Eve's eyes
In the first garden
Just a bit too bold?
Was Cleopatra gorgeous
In a gown of gold?

Oh, shining tree!
Oh, silver rivers of the soul!

In a whirling cabaret
Six long-headed jazzers play.*

* Langston Hughes, "Jazzonia," in *The Weary Blues* (Alfred A. Knopf, 1926)

Questions to Consider

1. What tone does Hughes use in the poem "Jazzonia"?
2. What are some of the literary devices Hughes utilizes in the poem "Jazzonia"?

The Great Depression and Its Impact on African American Music

Louis Armstrong

The Great Depression severely impacted the vibrant Black culture industry of the 1920s. Record sales in 1932 were only a sixth of what they had been in 1927. Black musicians like Louis Armstrong had enjoyed a golden age of creativity during the 1920s. In his heyday, Armstrong saw his popularity bolstered by crowds who flocked to hear his live performances in New York City nightclubs. Nightclub attendance waned during the Depression. Most New Yorkers were not in the mood to go out, and they didn't really have the extra money to do so anyway.

Despite these challenges, creativity in Black music could still be seen. In smaller New York clubs a new kind of jazz was born—big band swing. Born in Washington, D.C., in 1899, Edward Kennedy "Duke"

Ellington is considered by many to be the originator of this brand of jazz music. Others esteem him as the greatest jazz composer and bandleader of all time. He made hundreds of recordings, appeared in films and on radio, and in the 1930s even toured Europe.

At the height of his popularity, Ellington served as the resident bandleader at Harlem's famous Cotton Club. It is during this time, that Ellington's reputation extended beyond the borders of Harlem. Big band swing became popular in the 1930s and transformed white and Black American culture alike. Big band swing music is music that features sweeping brass instrumental arrangements framed by pleasant sounding vocals set to a tempo suitable for dancing. Harvard University, one of America's most prestigious colleges, published a feature on Duke Ellington in a 1937 edition of its college newspaper, *The Crimson*. The writer of the article noted that Ellington was "deeply absorbed" by his work as a conductor and composer. The article noted that Ellington was "a serious fellow" whose method of writing music was simple: "he gets in a mood and just writes…he never forces anything in his writing."*

The popularity of swing music helped boost the career of Black bandleaders, even if it led to a creative slump that disheartened many of the younger Black musicians. The disappointment over what they felt had become the boring predictability of swing music led to the creation of yet another style of jazz music—bebop.

Bebop jazz was more improvisational in style. Being improvisational meant that the musicians who played it were able to make up melodies and arrangements on the spot, even in the middle of a performance. Bebop musicians responded to the riffs and sounds of their fellow musicians. The unpredictable twists and turns the music took delighted audiences because they did not know what tunes they could expect to hear next.

* Source: *The Harvard Crimson*, October 19, 1937. No writer attributed.

As cool as the music itself were the musicians who performed it. One of the most famous bebop performers was jazz trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie. Gillespie pioneered bebop style in dress, language, and demeanor. He began to wear dark glasses on stage, out of necessity–(the glasses helped to reduce the glare from the lights that shined in his face after he had cataract surgery). But the glasses he wore quickly became a style icon among fans of his music. He wore pegged pants, jackets with wide lapels, and a beret at a time when most men wore hats with wide brims.

Dizzy Gillespie

Black Culture During Hard Times

Writers and visual and performing artists were as affected by the harsh economic realities of the Great Depression as other Americans were. These cultural contributors increasingly felt a responsibility to use their art as tools to restore a sense of self in a nation that seemed to have lost its way during the Depression. The culture of the 1930s celebrated the dignity of common people and featured renewed interest in the country's recent past. It was a reminder of how the country had previously overcome troubles and that it could similarly triumph over its current difficulties.

The Visual Art of the Harlem Renaissance

The literary and musical dimensions of the Harlem Renaissance are well documented, but it is important for us to recognize that visual artists were very influential and active during this movement. Sculptors, painters, graphic artists, and photographers were key contributors to this twentieth century movement that placed African Americans and their culture at the forefront. The following are autobiographical summaries and reviews of the works of some of these central figures.

Aaron Douglas

Known as the "father of African American art," **Aaron Douglas** presented a different visual representation of African Americans that reflected the New Negro attitude Alain Locke wrote about in his 1925 essay. Born in 1899, Douglas was influenced by important art movements of the 1920s, such as cubism, which made subjects appear fragmented and fractured. His work was also influenced by the era's trend towards incorporating bold colors into his work. Douglas spent most of his career as an artist in Harlem, where he produced the bulk of his work during the 1920s and '30s. Douglas lived until 1979 when he died at the age of eighty.

Archibald John Motley

One of the first African American graduates of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in the early 1900s, **Archibald John Motley** was one of the foremost contributing artists in the Harlem Renaissance. His work would later take him to Chicago, where a robust artistic movement flourished during the 1930s and '40s, proof that the influence of the Harlem Renaissance could be seen beyond Harlem itself. Motley's favorite subjects involved lively scenes of people enjoying jazz culture, which he depicted in vibrant tones and shapes. Motley's life spanned almost the length of the twentieth century as he was born in 1891 and died in 1981, months before his ninetieth birthday.

How does this painting represent themes related to The New Negro and the Jazz Culture of the 1920s and '30s?

Archibald Motley's *Black Belt*, 1934

Richmond Barthè

Richmond Barthè was an African American sculptor active during the Harlem Renaissance, best known for his portrayal of African American subjects. It wasn't just that Barthè featured Black figures in his art, but it was also the way that he chose to design them. He sculpted Black figures in ways that had not been done before, not as objects of ridicule, but as subjects to be admired and viewed in humane ways. Barthè was a native of Mississippi who was born at the turn of the twentieth century in 1901. He died in 1989 at the age of eighty-eight.

***Mother and Son*, 1935**

This sculpture shows an anguished mother cradling her dead son's body with a noose that is still attached to his neck. This work was meant to make a bold statement about the pain that lynching brought many Black mothers during the early twentieth century when the practice was at its peak. Unlike other figures during the Harlem Renaissance, Barthè tended to shy away from political activism. He destroyed this piece himself in 1940.

James Van Der Zee

Photography was an emerging art form in the 1920s, but its novelty did not keep it from making an impact on the Harlem Movement. Pioneering photographer **James Van Der Zee** became the Harlem Renaissance's unofficial recorder of Harlem Black life. Van Der Zee found inspiration in nearly every establishment you could think of. From nightclubs, to restaurants, to barber shops, and church services, Van Der Zee documented the diverse and thriving culture that defined life in Harlem during the Movement's heyday of the 1920s and '30s. Van Der Zee was born in 1886 and lived until 1983 when he died just weeks shy of his ninety-seventh birthday.

***Elks,* 1931**

Questions to Consider

1. It is said that Van Der Zee gained a reputation for making flattering portraits of his subjects, who were almost exclusively Black. Given the general stereotypes of Black people and how they may have been portrayed in other media, why do you think it may have been important for Van Der Zee to make the effort to put his subjects in the best possible light?
2. Van Der Zee saw himself as an artist first and then a photographer. Is photography art? Why or why not?

Illustrations and Images

A Parade of Elks (b/w photo) / Buyenlarge Archive/UIG / Bridgeman Images / 77b

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Barthé, Richmond, Sculptor. Sculpture entitled, "Mother & Son", by Richmond Barthé. , None. [Between 1940 and 1950] Photograph. LOC 95518086 / 76

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Richmond Barthe, -, three-quarters length, facing slightly right. , . [No Date Recorded on Caption Card] Photograph. LOC 2006684486 / 75

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THE GENIUS OF THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE
1926–1940

In Volume One of this reader, we traced the African American literary tradition in this country from its beginnings through the early years of the Harlem Renaissance. In Volume Two, we will continue the study of this very important cultural movement as it helped to define another significant period in American history: **The Great Depression**.

In this volume, Dr. Andrea Oliver explores the writings of George Schuyler, Langston Hughes, Melville Herskovits, and Walter White, and includes an excerpt from the novel *Passing*, by Nella Larson. Dr. Oliver also examines the impact of the Great Depression on American music. Jazz was an authentically American art form that was created and performed first and foremost by Black musicians and composers. Sculptors, painters, graphic artists, and photographers were key contributors that placed African Americans and their culture at the forefront. Included are autobiographical summaries and reviews of the works of some of these central figures.

The Genius of the Harlem Renaissance, Volume 2 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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