

**A Genius of the South and Harlem Renaissance: Moulding the Dynamics of American
Literature**

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Literature**

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The Department of English and Humanities
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By

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Abstract

“A Genius of The South and Harlem Renaissance: Moulding the Dynamics of American Literature” is the speculation of the literary movement in the 1920’s and its effects on twentieth century American literature. In an attempt to study and relate literary publications of the Harlem Renaissance and present the theoretical and practical application of the socio-psychology mind-set of the then black artists, the research behind this paper speculates the visceral and intellectual passion which propelled the literary movement. First of its kind in the black community, the Harlem Renaissance was the “birth” of a new consciousness of the African-American literary artists.

Essentially divided into five chapters; the first two chapters serve as dialect to give a historical overview and analysis of the movement. The second chapter draws relationships between the seminal work of African-American literature, viz-a-viz, *The Souls of Black Folks*; the psychology of the 1920’s black intellectuals, viz-a-viz, primitivism and the philosophy of the father of Harlem Renaissance, Alain Locke’s selected works of philosophy and sociology. Chapter II demonstrates the historical and psychological overview of the Harlem Renaissance and designs a construct to better understand the dynamics of the glorious movement. Chapter III is the embodiment of the literary icon of the movement, Zora Neale Hurston’s reflection on black pride in literature and her passionate inclination to defy all odds and excel in life, under circumstances of racial discrimination. In fact, the third chapter serves as the core of the thesis in dealing with the aspirations of “A Genius of the South” and her strength and prowess in literature which greatly influenced female African-American writers and others of later generations. The following chapter is the reflection of the resonance of the Harlem Renaissance in other aspects than literature, such as music and politics. It is a brief overview of the ripple effects of the movement in the realms of other artistic and social spheres in Harlem and beyond in America. The last chapter is the largest in portion and conducts a study to present the influence of the Harlem Renaissance authors, particularly Zora Neale Hurston on other twentieth century African-American authors who have wielded the dynamics of American literature, to say the least.

In five chapters, this paper attempts to draw connections and states how it was the relentless and incorruptible passion of the Harlem Renaissance authors which passed on in later generations of authors and had a true, impeccable impact on the American literature. It is the urgency and black pride in literary works such as Claude McKay’s poem *If We Must Die* and Zora Neale Hurston’s essay *How It Feels to be Colored Me* which propelled the movement and gave the world a literature of stupendous rich culture, heritage and creative spirit which ensued for decades ever since.

Chapter I

Introduction

World-class American writers like the likes of Maya Angelou, Toni Morrison and Alex Haley have graced international literary platform with rich literature that more often than not speaks of universal subjects. More than a decade ago as I turned the last page of Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mocking Bird*, it left a lasting impression on me. The depth of the impact, I thought at the time was extraordinary and demanded speculation. Soon after, I stumbled across the internationally acclaimed novel *Roots* by Alex Haley and instantly became engrossed in the history of African-American slavery. The impression that it left on me was much more encapsulating than Lee's account of racism and the dimensions of this section of American history had completely overtaken me. A history thousands of miles apart from me both in geography and in time piqued my interest and shackled my attention to its body. It was human suffering caused by the sheer monstrosity unleashed by the native Caucasian Americans, which questioned my faith in humanity. It was also about the heave, the incorruptible passion and the momentum of African-Americans' struggle to achieve freedom from the clasp of discrimination and injustice they faced in America which had the world's and my attention at its feet.

"We refuse to allow the impression to remain that the Negro-American assents to inferiority, is submissive under oppression and apologetic before insults. Through helplessness we may submit, but the voice of protest of ten million Americans must never cease to assail the ears of their fellows so long as America is unjust."

—The Niagara Movement, 1905

The twentieth century witnessed groundbreaking and revolutionary movements that voiced the African-American struggle and advocated for the freedom of the Black race in America. Bloodshed, trauma and incomprehensible treatment were met by the black skin from the time when the first slave arrived in Virginia in 1691 and it continued for almost two centuries. The sixteenth American President Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation in 1863 was a long overdue breakthrough, which led to the Thirteenth Amendment's official and effective end of slavery in all of America in 1865.

“The Nation has not yet found peace from its sins; the freedom has not yet found in freedom his promised land. Whatever of good may have come in these years of change, the shadow of a deep disappointment rests upon the Negro people- a disappointment all the more bitter because the unattained ordeal was unbounded save by the simple ignorance of a lowly people.”

—*The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), W.E.B Du Bois

However, the struggle to gain equality with the white superiors and former slave owners did not meet its demise as Du Bois explains in his book, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) and so the century that followed the issue of the Thirteenth Amendment brought forth civil rights and intellectual uprisings; among which one of the most prominent movements was the Harlem Renaissance.

“We have tomorrow
Bright before us
Like a flame.

Yesterday
A night-gone thing,
A sun-down name.

And dawn-today
Broad arch above the road we came.

We march!”

—*Youth* (1924), Langston Hughes

In the first half of the twentieth century, notable and distinguished African-American intellectuals, artists and public figures raised their voices to counter the perpetual discrimination and dehumanization against black skin. Although there is no definite begin and end time-stamp of the movement, Harlem Renaissance gained momentum and prominence mostly from 1919 to 1929, a little more than halfway between the Emancipation Proclamation of 1862 and the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960. In unison and profound solidarity, the aforementioned time period produced literary publications by exceptional individuals, which widely received international recognition. The central theme of the Harlem Renaissance lies in the beauty of its obstinate resilience and its

envisioned objective of gaining freedom and equality. The objective was not an exaggerated sentimental idea rather a fine-tuned just cause to prevent annihilation or limitation of Black talents. The 1920's bred the great surge of Black literature and the African-American struggle that no longer remained the discussion of the ceaseless disadvantages of being colored; it was no longer the wail of the helpless and mistreated rather it was a surge of a completely different tone. In fact the 1920's gave rise to the formidable force of the Black intellectual community, permanently imprinting the footprints of Harlem Renaissance in the history of American Literature. It was a surge of proud Black Literature, where Langston Hughes says "We march!" in his poem *Youth* (1924), where Countee Cullen says "This is not water running here/ These thick rebellious streams" in his poem *Harlem Youth* (1925) and where Zora Neale Hurston says she does "not belong to the sobbing school of Negrohood who hold that nature somehow has given them a lowdown dirty deal and whose feelings are all but about it" in her notable essay *How It Feels To Be Colored Me* (1928). Along with multiple other prolific writers, these trail blazers led the course of proud Black literature. In fact, it was in 1919 that the first hint of militancy was detected in the Harlem Renaissance Movement when Claude McKay writes "Like men we'll face the murderous, cowardly pack/ Pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back!" in his poem *If We Must Die*. With so much at stake, with undulating passion, pride and drive for freedom, Harlem Renaissance resonates even today in the history pages of American literature. The overwhelming, core-strength of the movement lies in the literary endeavors and as Alain Locke says "The pulse of the Negro world has begun to beat in Harlem" in *The New Negro* (1925), it was a rhythm unbreakable that became a force of nature dubbed as the Harlem Renaissance movement: changing the course of history and moulding the dynamics of American Literature.

"I have been in Sorrow's kitchen and licked out all the pots. Then I have stood on the peaky mountain wrapped in rainbows, with a harp and a sword in my hands."

-*Dust Tracks on a Road* (1942), Zora Neale Hurston

Chapter II

The Black 'Bible', Primitivism and the Philosophical Architect of Harlem Renaissance

"The Negro race, like all races, is going to be saved by its exceptional men"

—*The Talented Tenth* (1903), W.E.B Du Bois

Harlem Renaissance is the intellectual and cultural extension of the African-American political and economic endeavor to establish freedom for the blacks. W.E.B Du Bois was one of the most prolific contributors to the birth of Harlem Renaissance. He rose to national prominence as one of the leaders of the Niagara Movement which advocated for black civil rights in 1905. He has long been "the" central thinker in African American studies but political theorists, however, have largely ignored him. In the 1990s, some philosophers and theorists began to read Du Bois not only as a black leader, but also as an important thinker on political categories such as race, leadership, citizenship and democracy.

Du Bois' *The Souls of Black Folks* (1903) served as seminal work in African-American literature and is considered as the 'black Bible' of black politics. Therefore, the speculation of Bois' theories and concepts in *Souls* are regarded as of great significance. In *Souls*, Bois explains how African-Americans have "double-consciousness" of being 'an American, a Negro, two souls, two thoughts, two un-reconciled strivings, two warring ideals'. Bois says it is the extenuating condition of being black under white supremacy; in fact it is the racial discrimination and alienation that burdens the black people with "double consciousness". Over the decades, followed by the Harlem Renaissance, more and more scholars made analytical interpretation of Du Bois' *Souls*. One such individual is Robert Gooding-Williams who produced *In the Shadow of Du Bois: Afro-Political Modern Thought in America* (2009) which is documented as one of THE most important contributions to contemporary political theory. Gooding-Williams criticized Du Bois' *Souls* to be a doctrine of elitism; for Gooding-Williams states that Du Bois' conceptualization of "double-consciousness" is the result of his own identification with ordinary people and his own presumed position above them. Gooding-Williams further states that when Du Bois separates himself from the 'masses', he automatically accepts white views that blacks are 'backward' and when Du Bois calls on to the black 'talented tenth' to lead the masses and uplift the race, it resonates more of a biblical salvation than political black solidarity. Ultimately, Gooding-Williams concludes, 'Du Bois' notion of black politics is too narrow, for it includes no conceptual space for grasping these forms of

struggle as political' (p. 36). In *In the Shadow of Du Bois*, Gooding-Williams appreciates Frederick Douglas' *My Bondage and My Freedom* because of Douglas' 'plantation politics' which entails the struggle of black solidarity rather than a presumed racial unity. Douglas' black politics speaks of the essence of grassroots rather than the need of the talented tenth to 'raise up' the masses, says Gooding-Williams. Another vital critique of Du Bois that Gooding-William offers is that, Du Bois' explanation of racism and discrimination as something of anomalous existence rather than what Douglas labels as constitutive of American history. Although Gooding-Williams heavily criticized the shortcomings of Du Bois' elitism, 'talented tenth' and anomaly theory; Du Bois' *Souls* still marks democratic moments, the essence of "double consciousness" of racial segregation and is considered as a keystone in African-American literary history and is above all, considered, a classic work of American literature.

Each chapter in *The Souls of Black Folk* begins with a lyric epigraph, complete with a musical score of the melody, through the use of constructivism- *Souls* speaks of human suffering, sorrow and oppression of the black skin in America. Another significant forerunner of the Harlem Renaissance, Langston Hughes, wrote multiple poems along with Countee Culleen, Claude McKay and others, in which they showcased an urge to connect with their roots or reconstruct their own heritage:

"I was a red man one time,
But the white men came.
I was a black man, too,
But the white men came.

They drove me out of the forest.
They took me away from the jungles.
I lost my trees.
I lost my silver moons.

Now they've caged me
In the circus of civilization.
Now I herd with the many —
Caged in the circus of civilization."

— *Lament for the Dark Peoples* (1944), Langston Hughes

In *Internationalizing the Domestic: The Harlem Renaissance and the Third World anti-colonial movements* (2009), Mohammed Alquwaizani writes how this particular urgency that was voiced across multiple poems simply embodied a theory called primitivism and was popular among some poets especially of the younger generation. It is the practice of rejecting the ideals of Western/European civilization and attempting to reconstruct their own heritage “set in contrast to the popular culture in America, which is predominantly white/European” explains Alquwaizani. The struggle between black heritage and white present gives rise to conflicting notions and identity-crisis that Alquwaizani calls ‘displaced primitive’. The greatest problem of primitivism was the dilemma it caused, regarding whether to return to Africa or not and it was the realization of the impracticality and unfeasibility to trace back their journeys back home to African soil that truly made such deconstruction a predicament for the African-Americans. Records show that Marcus Garvey (1887-1940) created “Back to Africa” movement in the United States to encourage black economic independence and migration back to Africa from America; however the movement never gained much momentum and was soon forgotten.

Harlem Renaissance became not a ‘rebirth’ as the name suggests but simply a ‘birth’ of new psychology, thought and self-assertion of African-Americans. The primitivism ideology reshaped the ontological perception of black’s own placement in the white country, as Alain Locke, dubbed as the father of Harlem Renaissance, explains in *The New Negro* that “The younger generation is vibrant with a new psychology; the new spirit is awake in the masses... Each generation... will have its creed.” Alquwaizani further explains how primitivism can be explained by Claude McKay’s poetry called *America* and the tone of ambivalence detected in the poem, further explains how primitivism changed the dynamics of the Negro thought:

“Although she feeds me bread of bitterness,
And sinks into my throat her tiger’s tooth,
Stealing my breath of life, I will confess
I love this cultured hell that tests my youth!
Her vigor flows like tides into my blood,
Giving me strength erect against her hate.” (Lines 1-6)

- *America*, Claude McKay

Alquwaizani develops relations between the implications of Harlem Renaissance, socialism and the Third World. More importantly, Alquwaizani explains that it is the realization of primitivism that gave rise to two conflicting cultures and mixed social perceptions, calling it “hybridity”, which can be related to Du Bois’ “double-consciousness” in *The Souls of Black Folk*.

Harlem Renaissance resulted in multiple anti-colonial, political and post-colonial theories and movements. However, it is the change in thought and psychology of the black Americans to self-assertion, pride and new identity that lie in the central theme of the said movement from Du Bois' "double consciousness" to Alain Locke's 'new psychology' in *The New Negro*.

The 'philosophical architect' of Harlem Renaissance, Alain Leroy Locke produced countless publications. One of his major works is titled *The Concept of Race as Applied to Social Culture* (1924) where he states that race is a social and cultural characterization and not a biological one. To aid his statement he developed the notion of ethnic race or culture group. In Locke's understanding, ethnic race must mean the psychological and socially inherited dispositions that are attributed to historical contexts of particular culture groups. "Race," Locke argues "would have been regarded as primarily a matter of social (as opposed to biological) heredity," and this could have proven if studies were conducted to find the relation between race and culture by focusing on the ethnic background rather than anthropological factors.

Concrete culture-types is the summation of customary reactions, standardized practices, traditional forms of expression and interaction- it is the sum of a specific history of a given people in a particular place. Locke explains that culture stereotypes which constitute 'race' in a biological sense such as "Negro", "Caucasian" or "Asia" are in fact the sum total of multiple, heterogeneous social or ethnic races; based on Locke's ethnic concept there can be many so-called "Negro", "Caucasian" or "Asian" races. Locke's understanding of culture causes a fundamental paradigm shift in the study of human cultures.

"so considerable emphasis and meaning that at times it does seem that the best procedure would be to substitute the term *race* the term *culture group*"

"Race operates as tradition," Locke noted, "as preferred traits and values," changes in these aspects of culture in a distinctive way by a subset of a culture group constitutes "ethnic remoulding"

-*The Concept of Race as Applied to Social Culture*, Alain Locke

Like many other contemporary race theorists, Locke rejects the notion that races are biologically distinct categories of human beings. Locke stresses on the distinction between culture and race and argues that these two are mutually exclusive, although sometimes culture and race may vary together or otherwise correspond to each other.

“It is too early to assume that there is no significant relationship between race and culture because of the manifestly false and arbitrary linkage which has previously been asserted”

-The Concept of Race as Applied to Social Culture, Alain Locke

However, Locke also conveys his skepticism and hesitation regarding eradicating racial categories saying “in some revised and reconstructed form, we may anticipate the continued even if restricted use of these terms as more or less necessary and basic concepts that cannot be eliminated altogether, but that must nevertheless be so safe-guarded in this continued use as not to give further currency to the invalidated assumption concerning them” in *The Concept of Race as Applied to Social Culture*.

In *Who and What is “Negro”*? Locke sets the undertone of the “New Negro” explaining that there is most possibly something distinctively Negro about some American art. Although, the said distinction is particularly difficult to find, Locke warns that “sooner or later the critic must face the basic issues involved in his use of risky and perhaps untenable terms like ‘Negro art’ and ‘Negro literature’ and answer the much-evaded question unequivocally,—who and what is Negro?”

Locke also dwells on whether racial categories are in any way related to art and that he believes art can be better understood as an illustration of culture and society than race or ethnicity. While answering and specifying “who is Negro?” Locke addresses a common misconception in such a question saying “the fallacy of the ‘new’ as of the ‘older’ thinking is that there is a type Negro who, either qualitatively or quantitatively, is the type symbol of the entire group”

Locke explains this phenomenon as an unfortunate result of the past need to combat Negro stereotypes. The answer then to the question posed “who is Negro?” is no Negro in particular. “A full and accurate artistic portrayal of who is Negro would”, Locke argued, “have to picture the many diverse Negro strands in their own right, weaving together from these diverse threads a multifaceted presentation of Negro experiences”.

In *Who and What is “Negro”*?, “turning to the other basic question,—what is Negro,” Locke begins by narrowing the question to “what makes a work of art Negro, if indeed any such nomenclature is proper,—its authorship, its theme or its idiom?” Simply put, Locke asks if art has distinctive implication of racial identity of its author. To this Locke claims that there are many Negro artists who produced amateurish work due to their lack of mastery in Negro idioms and themes. While, on the other hand there are cases where non-Negro artists produce work related to Negro-life,

showcasing their mastery in use of Negro idioms and themes. Locke says such communal membership is not a necessary condition for the work of a particular artist to count amongst the works that comprise a racially distinctive body of art such as called "Negro art."

Alain Locke, also a race theorist made gallant attempts to theorize the stereotypes of black literature and argued to distinguish race and culture as separate categories of human identity. Locke was widely known as the father of the Harlem Renaissance, particularly for his doctrines and race theories. Moreover, he holds a significant position up in the pedestals of influence in the movement alongside literary giants such as Langston Hughes and Zora Neale Hurston.

Chapter III

Dreams

"Hold fast to dreams
 For if dreams die
 Life is a broken-winged bird
 That cannot fly.
 Hold fast to dreams
 For when dreams go
 Life is a barren field
 Frozen with snow."

-*Dreams*, Langston Hughes

Harlem Renaissance gained international recognition and much of its momentum when *The New Negro: An Interpretation* (1925) was published. It is a collection of fiction, poetry, essays and artwork on African-American literature edited by Alain Locke. It soon became the definitive text of the movement and included the work of several writers such as Countee Cullen, Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, Claude McKay and Jean Toomer among others.

Zora Neale Hurston is dubbed as the Queen of the Harlem Renaissance with good reason. Her autobiographical *Dust Tracks on a Road* is an account of her life from childhood to her fifties. It is in this book that she speaks of her loving mother who urges her to "jump at de sun." This famous quote may explain Hurston's impeccable and feisty zest to express her thoughts, for she adds in the book "Mama exhorted her children at every opportunity to jump at de sun. We might not land on the sun, but at least we would get off the ground" Hurston's work embodies the incorruptible passion of the Harlem Renaissance. It is her relentless confidence and determination to excel and to "sharpen her oyster knife" that made her an outstanding example of strength, merit and talent. She does not only contribute to the literary genius of the movement but also to political arguments, intellectual and cultural uprisings of the movement.

Hurston had a very interesting take on racism and the circumstantial disadvantage she faced being a black woman of epic literary power in the center of the Harlem Renaissance in the 1920's. Instead of deploring the extenuating circumstances of slavery and its brutality, she confidently

proclaimed, "slavery is the price I paid for civilization" in her famous essay *How It Feels to Be Colored Me*. In fact it is in this essay where Hurston reveals her uncompromising and passionate views on her own situation, writing:

"Someone is always at my elbow reminding me that I am the granddaughter of slaves. It fails to register depression with me. Slavery is sixty years in the past."

A woman of monumental respect and literary prowess, she did not simply wish to please whites like many others did but instead she saw blacks as a group who could and should help themselves and did not need the pity of liberal whites. She wrote several articles denouncing Jim Crow laws and in an article titled "*Crazy for This Democracy*" she questioned why Americans were speaking in universalistic platitudes about bringing democracy to various Third World countries, while denying it to blacks at home. Hurston strongly believed that America should fix its own problems before pushing its views on the rest of the world. She writes:

"I accept this idea of democracy. I am all for trying it out. It must be a good thing if everybody praises it like that. If our government has been willing to go to war and sacrifice billions of dollars and millions of men for the idea I think that I ought to give the thing a trial."

"The only thing that keeps me from pitching head long into this thing is the presence of numerous Jim Crow laws on the statute books of the nation. I am crazy about the idea of Democracy I want to see how it feels."

-*Crazy for Democracy*, Zora Neale Hurston

Hurston published more than fifty short stories, most of which are noteworthy and convey messages on survival in the racist society. The use of vernacular language is prevalent in Hurston's literary publications; short stories such as *Spunk* and *Sweat* in particular are reflections of social customs and colorful dialect. Her craftsmanship is quite intriguing because of her ease in switching between vernacular dialect and formal English in her writing. It allows her creative endeavors to stand out because she draws on realistic illustrations of the hardship of the black woman and man. In *Sweat*, Hurston explores the arid and abusive marital relationship between Delia and Skyes, where the husband feeds off Delia's income, berates her and also enjoys the company of his mistress. The

language used to convey the raw tension, hostility and ugliness of the situation is what makes Hurston's work worthwhile.

"Mah tub of suds is filled yo' belly with vittles more times than yo' hands is filled it."

In the end, a rattlesnake brings ironic death to Skyes and Delia sits outside waiting and listening to her life-partner slither in pain to death. In contrast, *Spunk* tells a story of the ego-play in a love-triangle involving a marriage between Lena and Joe. Spunk is Lena's alleged 'boyfriend' and Joe dies in an attempt to defend his honor and fight off the physically superior boyfriend. In the end, a wild bob-cat which is believed to be Joe's spirit back from Hell to avenge his death brings mysterious death to Spunk.

"If spirits kin fight, there's a powerful tussle goin' on somewhere ovah Jordan 'cause Ah b'leeve Joe's ready for Spunk an' ain't skeered any more yes, Ah b'leeve Joe pushed 'im mahself."

The use of ominous animals, mystery and dread to explain human nature through heavy use of vernacular dialect gives a very local and authentic spin-off to most of Hurston's short stories. It is such stories and language of Hurston's which allow readers and Hurston scholars to comprehend the epistemology of the impoverished black psychology. Her stories excite or upset readers but in most cases, readers are led to wonder about the small ironies of life and explore uneasy settings. Hurston also explores the realms of voodoo magic and had put her curiosity and expertise in the subject in ink on paper, writing *Tell My Horse* (1938). The section on voodoo material in the book gives the reader insight into a mysterious realm. Hurston powerfully describes voodoo's seductive power: "It is the old, old, mysticism of the world in African terms. Voodoo is a religion of creation and life. It is the worship of the sun, the water and other natural forces, but the symbolism is no better understood than that of other religions."

Hurston was one of the forerunners of the Harlem Renaissance, her impeccable contribution to literary, political and cultural aspects of the movement easily can lead a Hurston enthusiast to believe that she must have sustained a glorious life-long literary career. However, history tells a different and bitter story. Hurston's career flourished and bloomed from 1925, when she moved to New York, into the late 1930's. Although she continued to publish literary work of great stature through 1940's, her career and life took a turn for the worse in the 1950's. Prior to her death in 1960, in the last few years of her life Hurston struggled to make ends meet as her literary reputation slid into obscurity and scandalous accusations. Buried in an unmarked grave at the Garden of Heavenly

Rest in Fort Pierce, Florida on 28th January in 1960, Hurston's feisty nature and commanding voice in her writing was all forgotten. For decades her name and published work remained in the shadows, away from speculation and recognition, let alone appreciation. It was in 1973 when Alice Walker, a notable African-American novelist and Hurston scholar who wrote *Looking for Zora* (1975), sought Hurston's unmarked grave. Walker placed an epitaph with the inscription "A Genius of the South" permanently marking Hurston's grave and reviving Hurston's legacy.

"Zora Neale Hurston's works are brilliant glimpses into the mind of a woman who lived life for what it was, who wanted nothing more than to have...a busy life, a just mind and timely death." "She lived as she wrote, to the fullest; she wasn't just a writer, but also an anthropologist who brought to the light the folklore, and culture of nations that before there had been little study of. She brought new, exciting views of the world through her poetic words, and is a shining example of what it is to be a woman. Intelligent, driven, and confident"

- *Looking for Zora*, Alice Walker

Zora Neale Hurston is considered as a feminist voice of the 1920's by many African-American writers of late twentieth century. Although Hurston's original work does not necessarily pursue the plight of women's equality, it still instills the benefit of allowing feminist reading of Hurston's short stories such as *Sweat*, *The Conscience of the Court* and novels such as *Their Eyes Were Watching God* among her other work. Hurston's stories speak out against the uncivil and unjust treatment of women especially in their marriages and reveal the disturbing situation for women in mistreatment and abuse in the 1930's. The male leads in Hurston's short stories are usually victims of the racism and economic deprivation and cause of domestic violence. Such familial dynamics offer very crucial socio-economic context of culture of the early twentieth century black communities and so her stories become the beacon of black anthropological study.

Like many writers, many of Hurston's stories carry autobiographical influence. The stories which include the struggle of the woman in her marital relationship and community reflect Hurston's obstacles which she had to combat herself to survive. At only thirteen years old, Hurston was thrown out of her father's house because her stepmother did not approve of her or her siblings and so she became familiar with a life of struggle from a very early age. *Drenched in Light* reveals Hurston's experiences regarding child abandonment and how she felt mistreated as a child after her mother expired.

There is a profound universal memorandum underlying Hurston's stories and her own life; it is something for the taking. Readers and Hurston enthusiasts can lavishly dwell on the universality of the message that her work and her own autobiographical account carry in unison: that no matter how strenuous, laborious and impoverished life becomes, one must endure and stand to fight "with a harp and a sword" in hands and "jump at de sun". One must "sharpen her oyster knife" and not let anything drag down the spirit, be it history, people or economic condition. Hurston's zest, dominance and sheer uncompromising power in her writing are what make her work beacons of inspiration. Her work becomes testaments of resilience and relentless determination and courage of human nature beyond the struggle of black racism and into struggle of individual battle to aspire and outshine the world.

"There is something about poverty that smells like death. Dead dreams dropping off the heart like leaves in a dry season and rotting around the feet, impulses smothered too long in the fetid air of underground caves. The soul lived in a sickly air. People can be slave ships in shoes"

-*Dust Tracks on a Road*, Zora Neale Hurston

Hurston however did not whimper and falter under the weight of poverty and other menacing, life-denying factors; rather she pushed herself out of her circumstances and believed in the brighter future. After all, her poverty-stricken circumstance was like a dead dream which she had to shed, as Langston Hughes makes it very clear that dreams is our salvation and the soul of this world.

Harlem Renaissance was the manifestations of dreams to conquer abhorrence and penetrate the filth in the minds of countless Americans and produce equality among the blacks and whites in the literary and cultural platform of the country in the 1920's. It was a movement in action, where the dreams were not ideas merely lingering in pages and in thoughts; rather the dreams were alive in poems and in the streets of Harlem when Langston Hughes cried "We march!" and many followed.

Chapter IV

Music and Politics: Resonance of Harlem Renaissance

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up
like a raisin in the sun?
Or fester like a sore—
And then run?
Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over—
like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags

like a heavy load.

Or does it *explode*?

-*Harlem*, Langston Hughes

The cultural identity of the black community did not rest only on the literary explorations of the Harlem Renaissance. In fact, one of the most prevalent outcomes of the movement is the production and popularity of Jazz music. So much so, that the time period also came to be known as the Jazz Age. The influence of the movement was epidemic not only in American literary work but also in the industry of music, as Hughes writes in his poem called *Harlem*, all their dreams did really explode. From the political intellectuals to literary powerhouses such as Langston Hughes and Zora Neale Hurston, most at one point or another have stated that the collective forms of Jazz, blues and the spirituals music are the central sign of black vernacular value, integrity and autonomy. Moreover, literary scholars who have worked on the influence of music on African-American literature offered the notion of “Orphic mode”. In *Music, Memory, and Cultural Identity in the Jazz Age*, Joel Dinerstein elaborates how Orphic mode of music is a certain medium which “represents the basic human urge for quest for self and innovation”. During the time of the Harlem Renaissance, breakthrough artists such as Bessie Smith, Louis Armstrong and Roland Hayes rose to stardom and gained national recognition as artists who excelled out of the shadows of Euro-American aesthetic traditions. Dinerstein also mentions how Jazz and blues music was the synopsis of black cultural leadership, racial identity, authenticity, aesthetics, and ethnic representation.

“For instance, when I sit in the drafty basement that is The New World Cabaret with a white person, my color comes. We enter chatting about any little nothing that we have in common and are

seated by the jazz waiters. In the abrupt way that jazz orchestras have, this one plunges into a number. It loses no time in circumlocutions, but gets right down to business. It constricts the thorax and splits the heart with its tempo and narcotic harmonies. This orchestra grows rambunctious, rears on its hind legs and attacks the tonal veil with primitive fury, rending it, clawing it until it breaks through to the jungle beyond. I follow those heathen—follow them exultingly. I dance wildly inside myself; I yell within, I whoop; I shake my assegai above my head, I hurl it true to the mark yeeeeooww! I am in the jungle and living in the jungle way. My face is painted red and yellow, and my body is painted blue. My pulse is throbbing like a war drum. I want to slaughter something—give pain, give death to what, I do not know. But the piece ends. The men of the orchestra wipe their lips and rest their fingers. I creep back slowly to the veneer we call civilization with the last tone and find the white friend sitting motionless in his seat, smoking calmly.”

-*How It Feels To Be Colored Me*, Zora Neale Hurston

In 1963 Amiri Baraka published his book *Blues People*, which is a seminal work on the influence and impact of Afro-American music (blues) in American culture. He believed that there is a possibility to trace back the history of black Americans through the evolution of music, a belief he explored and wrote *Blues People*. Amiri states that blues music is the music of the black soul quoting Ernest Ansermet, a Swiss conductor in his book:

“The blues occur when the Negro is sad, when he is far from his home, his mother, or his sweetheart. Then he thinks of a motif or a preferred rhythm and takes his trombone, or his violin or his banjo, or his clarinet, or his drum, or else he sings, or simply dances. And on the chosen motif, he plumbs the depths of his imagination. This makes the sadness pass away—it is the blues”

-*Blues People*, Amiri Baraka

In *Music, Memory, and Cultural Identity in the Jazz Age*, Joel Dinerstein mentions how in 1963 “southern blacks throughout small southern cities sang spirituals as they marched into police vans while Martin Luther King, Jr. climaxed his “I Have a Dream” speech”. Blues and jazz invoked the national public black presence. Vernacular music, politics and cultural identity are intricacies of an explosion of dreams of many black Americans and it is the study of the Harlem Renaissance that leads the trajectory connecting the 1920’s Jazz age, the Blues influence to the Civil Rights movement in the 1960’s.

“We must learn to live together as brothers or we will perish together as fools”

-Martin Luther King Jr.

The pursuit to become equals to whites in all aspect of social and economic endeavors as citizens in America was the principle and cause of the strenuous racial struggle by the blacks. The sixteenth American President Abraham Lincoln freed the black slaves in 1863 but horror and inhumanity still ensued. The freed slaves and the generations of free blacks all lifted the weight of racism, endured its brutality, sustained the scars and wounds and survived to their best ability. There were several political outburst and movements from late nineteenth century to early twentieth century; but the Harlem Renaissance marked the most prolific, literary and cultural protest and expansion of the black identity in America. The movement was the stepping stone to the Civil Rights movement in the 1960's and in relation to the epistemology of African-American history; the literary and political publications that embodied the Harlem Renaissance define the trajectory to Martin Luther King Junior's campaign and his famed "I have a dream" speech.

Music was a catalytic means which transformed the thought process of the black community and played a major role in shaping the course and progression of the movement. The Harlem Renaissance also paved way to the Civil Rights movement in the 1960's which changed American history and embodied the same incorruptible passion in fight for equality which was clearly prevalent in the Harlem Renaissance literary publications.

Chapter V

Moulding American Literature

The French literary theorist Pascale Casanova suggests in her book *The World Republic of Letters* that all forms of literary work are an interface of cultural warfare where the dominant and the superior “crush the stories of those who are underdog”. She explains how the dominance is countered by relentless struggle of the underdog to challenge authority, legitimacy and ultimately revolutionize the distribution of literary power and hierarchy. *The World Republic* is a quaint and adequate doctrine which can be used to comprehend the dynamics of the Harlem Renaissance. The ripple effects, for the lack of a better word, of the profound movement led to historic mouldings in the American literature; and Toni Morrison is an exemplary subject of such effects. Not only has she gained the highest honors in the field of literature, but she pursues her career with an earnest proclamation that she is not an individual to compromise or yield to “whitewashed” demands and expectations.

“Hospitality is gold in this City; you have to be clever to figure out how to be welcoming and defensive at the same time. When to love something and when to quit. If you don't know how, you can end up out of control or controlled by some outside thing like that hard case last winter”

-*Jazz* (09), Toni Morrison

Jazz, written by Toni Morrison and published in 1992 is a historical novel which demands a more grand rank in terms of significance and appreciation. Morrison is the first African-American woman to have achieved the Nobel Prize in Literature (1993) and the eighth woman to do so; she is also the last American Nobel laureate in literature till date. Probably, the most celebrated American contemporary writer of the twentieth century, Morrison bestowed the world with great literary productions such as *Beloved* and *The Bluest Eyes* among others. In *Jazz*, Morrison explores and creates a harmonious flux between two formidable art forms: music and literature. Set in the 1920's, *Jazz* explores the time and setting of the Harlem Renaissance in a very peculiar structure, unique of Morrison. Although, her writing technique is not all-together easy to understand for the average reader, this spectacle of literature offers an elaborate explanation of the hybrid nature of music and literature combined. Both critics and readers alike have come to appreciate Morrison's refusal to compromise her values in the service of white hegemony.

In *The Fiction of Toni Morrison*, Jami L. Carlacio writes that the “perplexing but wonderful thing about Morrison's career is just how much her prominence was created not by the

mainstream publishing world, but by Morrison herself, on her own terms". Carlacio writes how Morrison's "art may always have been both beautiful and political, it has not always garnered unequivocal praise" and that recognition of her talent was slow in coming. One reason is that Morrison refuses to write what she believes to be "propaganda" which can be further explained by what Morrison says:

"When I first began to write, my work was much criticized—even despised I think—because I was not writing happy stories, about people who were able to pull it all together in spite of difficulties, about people who had risen to a certain status. [. . .] If the critics felt that they could force me to write "positive images," then clearly they assumed I was writing for white people. It was a demand that I create an image for the "other" as opposed to my making an intimate and direct account to the people in the book and to black people."

-*Toni Morrison: Conversations* (47), Carolyn C. Denard

Toni Morrison is not only an American national treasure for her literary prowess but her fiction and prose serve as critical documents to study the effect of racism on victims and those who perpetuate it. After Zora Neale Hurston, Alice Walker and others, Morrison reflects on the visceral impact of race literature and attempts to redefine the black identity that will ultimately produce a new consciousness. In *Toni Morrison: Conversations* by Carolyn C. Denard, when asked if she was influenced by Zora Neale Hurston because her work such as *Songs of Solomon* and *Tar Baby* show the influence of Hurston's fictional and anthropological work, Morrison replies saying she did not read Hurston before writing *Songs of Solomon* but since she did, she has only deeply admired Hurston's work.

In *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, Morrison explores the dynamics of racial hierarchy, exclusion and vulnerability. In a series of lectures on racial issues which Morrison delivered in Harvard University in 1990, she made remarks that renewed awareness of how she is:

"A black writer struggling with and through a language that can powerfully evoke and enforce hidden signs of racial superiority, cultural hegemony, and dismissive 'othering' of people and language which are by no means marginal or already and completely known and knowable in her work"

-*Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (x-xi), Toni Morrison

In *The Radical Vision of Toni Morrison* (2015), Rachel Kaadzi Ghansah gives a very personal, spontaneous and beautifully crafted account of Morrison's views on contemporary "youth" issues in America. Toni Morrison abhors and rejects the use of the word "nigger" in pop culture which has become something widely accepted across the country. Incessantly, Morrison had objected the popularization of the word "nigger" and more importantly campaigned against the acceptance of the ludicrous pop-culture phenomenon. She believes it does not only represent ignorance but also propels the present generation into a future of cultural degradation especially when young white men again sing songs about lynching black men without being able to recall who taught them those songs. Morrison also managed to infiltrate the white-hegemonic stereotypes that still are present in publishing industry and campaign to encourage present generation's writers of color to expand their knowledge, investigate and innovate. She believes it is difficult to predict what will happen to America when the coming generations of writers write only from the margins.

"Morrison wanted to not only broaden the tastes of the industry, she also wanted to change the fate of a literary culture that had to either diversify or die."

-*The Radical Vision of Toni Morrison*, Rachel Kaadzi Ghansah

Morrison's latest novel *Home* mentions how the author remains skeptical of "quick fixes and easy answers". In the novel, the author states how her interest in history of black literature has not been a sentimental project to ease the soul and wearies of the heart, rather her pursuit into the deepest realms of the origin of black literature has allowed her to offer others a reminder. A reminder of the integrity, literary intellect and the pursuit to greatness that led to the current black literary state in America, where there is still plenty room for improvement.

"Who told you you was trash?"-the old woman of Lotus asks the protagonist in *Home*...

It is a question for the protagonist and for the reader - who said so and why did you believe?

Toni Morrison is a literary genius, to say the least and her craftsmanship to voice the fight against contemporary racial stereotypes in the publishing industry is more than commendable; since she does it with such finesse, subtlety and intellect. Morrison's works have received increased scholarly attention, and her contributions were formally recognized around the world when she was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1993. One who has not engaged in thorough research may feel as if one is tracing the blurry lines of fallacy when stating Toni Morrison is an outcome of the Harlem Renaissance, because the movement is a mere point of trajectory which led to the development of such American literary giants like Toni Morrison and several exceptional others;

however research confirms that Morrison is in fact a ripple effect of the Harlem Renaissance moulding American literature.

“All my work, my life, everything I do is about survival, not just bare, awful, plodding survival, but survival with grace and faith. While one may encounter many defeats, one must not be defeated”

- Encyclopedia of American Poetry: The Twentieth Century (16), edited by Eric L. Haralson

Maya Angelou is another American literary name that is internationally recognized and admired for her versatility and creativity across a wide range of artistic talents. Her autobiographical novel *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969) has been a pivotal point in American literary history as it became the first non-fiction best-seller by an African-American woman. Angelou was not only actively present in the literary world but she was also prominently associated with the political front of the Civil Rights movement. Angelou's childhood experiences in a small town in Arkansas fueled her engrossment in the fight for equality. Stamps, the small town where Angelou spent her childhood years with her paternal grandmother was a highly segregated community where her grandmother was the only black store-owner. The store served as the location of the gathering of and discussion about equality by black townspeople; this part of her life led her to join the Black Arts Movement. Unlike the Harlem Renaissance, the Black Arts Movement embraced a more radical, militant aesthetic and Angelou was one of the seminal figures of this group along others like Amiri Baraka; and they worked to encourage greater African-American creativity and empowerment.

In terms of speaking about the influence of Zora Neale Hurston and the Harlem Renaissance on her work and life, Angelou made a public statement in the fifth annual ZORA! Festival in Eatonville, Florida in 1995:

“This festival has a singular importance. It is not a festival in New York City or in Hollywood. It's not a festival in Chicago, or any of the big metropolises of the world. It's in Eatonville, Florida. And it is singular in that the festival—its existence itself—educates. Without a person even having to come here, he or she is forced to recognize this was the first incorporated all black-town in the United States. That's fantastic to know. Many black people don't know that there were any. Not to mention whites, or Spanish-speaking or Native American.”

The most profound highlight of Maya Angelou's literary career is her autobiographical novel *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. It captures themes such as racism, segregation, strong black women, and displacement among others; more importantly it also embodies the visceral impact of slavery and tedious challenge to overcome it, just as Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* do.

"My race groaned. It was our people falling. It was another lynching, yet another Black man hanging on a tree. One more woman ambushed and raped. . . . This might be the end of the world. If Joe lost we were back in slavery and beyond help. It would all be true, the accusations that we were lower types of human beings. Only a little higher than the apes.."

-Chapter 19, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*.

It was the tantalizing boxing match of the African-American boxer, Joe Louis vs. Primo Carnera in 1935 which is described in chapter 19. A sensational boxer and notably the most famous African-American of his time carried the black people's salvation on his shoulders with his one-man triumphs in the boxing ring. In this section, Angelou describes how hopes and psychological salvation of the black community rested in the fists of Louis. The match becomes the physical representation of the fight between black and the white. Louis' loss would mean the "fall" of the race and his public victory would allow the blacks to live another day with strength in the face of oppression. Several psychological games were in motion because of racism and, in this case, Louis' victory was translated to whites accepting African-Americans as equals.

In fact, beyond the pages of Angelou's novel Louis's victory was a seminal moment in African American history. Thousands of African Americans stayed up all night across the country in celebration. Noted author and member of the Harlem Renaissance Langston Hughes described Louis's effect in these terms:

"Each time Joe Louis won a fight in those depression years, even before he became champion, thousands of black Americans on relief or poor would throng out into the streets all across the land to march and cheer and yell and cry because of Joe's one-man triumphs. No one else in the United States has ever had such an effect on Negro emotions—or on mine. I marched and cheered and yelled and cried, too."

“The Black female is assaulted in her tender years by all those common forces of nature at the same time that she is caught in the tripartite crossfire of masculine prejudice, white illogical hate and Black lack of power. The fact that the adult American Negro female emerges a formidable character is often met with amazement, distaste and even belligerence.”

-Chapter 34, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*,

In *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, Angelou passionately advocates for the alleged inferior black women in the community. She writes about the obstacles that a black woman faces and how she emerges as a formidable character, stating all of her strong black women characters are “survivors”. The excerpt explains how Maya is already on her way toward becoming “a formidable character” as a result of the many assaults she deals with in “her tender years,” but this does not mean that Maya is an adult. Maya’s discussion of the “common forces of nature” foreshadows how her journey of survival has yet to meet the obstacles of adolescence, sexuality, and teenage pregnancy. These obstacles face all children, but for black females, they exacerbate an already difficult situation.

Maya Angelou is one of the most influential literary figures in American literature of the twentieth century. Her publications and other forms of art have enforced respect and scholarly appreciation amongst international literary advocates. She has played a vital role in moulding American literature and truly left her literary mark “with grace and faith”.

Alice Walker is the first African-American woman to win the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award for fiction in 1983 for her book *The Color Purple*. It was then when the novelist, human rights activist and essayist gained international recognition and acclaim. Set in the early 1900s, the novel explores the female African-American experience through the life and struggles of its narrator, Celie. Celie suffers terrible abuse at the hands of her stepfather, and later, from her husband- it is a story of women’s plight to build a life free of abuse. The two most abused women in the novel, Celie and Sofia, form a deep bond; their suffering brings them together in strong solidarity. Shug is another woman in the novel who knows the value of women's solidarity. Walker places these two themes of domestic violence and women solidarity inside the larger context of the misery inflicted by a racist society. Throughout the novel, Celie references the fact that she is discriminated against by the white community. The novel is an outcry of the struggles faced by black women and is an exemplary

literary work that offers profound feminist reading. Walker summarizes Shug's religious philosophy in chapter 73; to Shug, God is genderless and "race-less" being who wants people to appreciate and enjoy life. The significance of the color purple is how it symbolizes loyalty.

In the midst of Walker's prolific literary career, one of the highlights was Walker's successful attempt to revive interest in the Harlem Renaissance's forerunner, Zora Neale Hurston. Walker not only dedicated her collection of short stories called *In Love and In Trouble: Stories of Black Women* to Hurston, but she also took commendable steps to resurrect Hurston's influence on American literature. In the collection of short stories, Walker gives varied accounts of black women's hardship. The accounts have great significance as it sheds light on the visceral struggles of the most downtrodden group of people, black women; they have to face dual prejudices that pose an individual of being a) non-white and b) a woman. In *Looking for Zora*, Walker writes how she took a trip to the south in 1973 with a friend, Charlotte Hunt to "look for Zora". After an elaborate investigative research, Walker discovered Hurston's location of burial in the *Garden of Heavenly Rest* on Seventeenth Street in Eatonville. Forgotten in the lines of obscurity, Hurston's gravesite was cleared of weeds and other vegetation and out from Walker's own pocket, she paid a gravestone maker and honored Hurston with an epitaph:

Zora Neale Hurston

"A Genius of the South"

Novelist Folklorist

1901-1960

In *Black Matrilineage: The Case of Alice Walker and Zora Neale Hurston*, Dianne F. Sadoff explains how Alice Walker's relentless passion and eagerness to uncover Hurston's grave and revive interest in her work, underlies Walker's need to find her precursor "to validate" her own creation as a writer. In Walker's journey "looking for Zora" she imagines herself to be Hurston's niece and calls it "the lie". It is a figurative truth as according to Walker, Hurston is her metaphorical mother and that of all black people. In Walker's essay "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens", she salutes and pays tribute to the mute female poets of the enslaved South who are her precursors, her "mothers". The essay gives voice to those black women who have been sexually exploited and oppressed by the

system of slavery because they could not have dreamed of being artists, but may have been 'singers' or 'saint'. These "great-grandmothers" were forbidden by the law to read or write but they kept their spirit of creativity alive and passed it on to their daughters. Zora Neale Hurston and Bessie Smith are Walker's own "great-grandmothers". Walker believes a black female tradition includes silence as well as voice.

Alice Walker's exceptional literary work such as *The Color Purple* and *In Love and In Trouble: Stories of Black Women* among others are monumental testaments to the struggle of black women to fight dual prejudices and to Hurston's influence on Alice Walker.

Speculation of African-Americans' contribution to American literature cannot escape Alex Haley's *Roots* (1976), the novel which changed America. It is a profound two-century account of Kunta Kinte and the six generations after him; a story which uncovers a rich cultural heritage and documents African descent. The vivid narrative and the study of tracing back to one's roots is the ultimate genius work of Alex Haley:

"He was thirty-four rains old! What in the name of Allah had happened to his life? He had been in the white man's land as long as he had lived in Juffure. Was he still an African, or had he become a 'nigger,' as the others called themselves? Was he even a man? He was the same age as his father when he had seen him last, yet he had no sons of his own, no wife, no family, no village, no people, no homeland, almost no past at all that seemed real to him anymore - and no future he could see. It was as if The Gambia had been a dream he'd had once long ago. Or was he still asleep? And if he was, would he ever waken?"

-*Roots* (363), Alex Haley

It is the singular most significant work of literature that has driven me to investigate and learn about the dynamics of transatlantic slave trade and which undoubtedly caused my interest to pique in African-American literature; and ultimately paved the way for me to find Zora Neale Hurston's "How it Feels to be Colored Me" essay in all its glory. The mentioned excerpt bears great significance to my understanding of the brutality of slavery because it voices the agony and silent trauma of the enslaved man. In this section, Kinte is in his depth of solitude and sadness, although he

had already spent seventeen years on American soil and witnessed the entire Revolutionary War, he fails to connect with America and dwells in the realms of self-identity crisis.

“..nightly boiling and then cooling a broth of freshly pounded fudano leaves in which she soaked her feat -and the pale palms of her hands- to an inky blackness. When Kunta asked his mother she told him to run along. So he asked his father, who told him, "The more blackness a woman has the more beautiful she is.”

-*Roots* (154), Alex Haley

In the first part of the book, prior to Kunta Kinte's forced and brutal immigration to America, Haley offers the world an account of culturally rich and structured society where people lived in sheer harmony. In the excerpt mentioned, Kinte's father explains to him how being more black is considered to be more beautiful- a perception that cruelly contrasted how the West perceived black complexion and subjugated millions of enslaved and later freed African-Americans based on the 'blackness' of their skin.

“All that is gold does not glitter,
Not all those who wander are lost;
The old that is strong does not wither,
Deep roots are not reached by the frost.

From the ashes a fire shall be woken,
A light from the shadows shall spring;
Renewed shall be blade that was broken,
The crownless again shall be king.”

- *The Fellowship of the Ring*, J.R.R Tolkein

In relation to one of my absolute favorite books and quotations, I believe Morrison, Angelou, Walker and Haley have indeed woken from the ashes and offered the world at large very definitive accounts and stories of the plight of the blacks in America; in terms of literary and social equality. The Harlem Renaissance serves as the most pivotal event in black history, opening the floodgates of literary genius and allowing such literary giants of the twentieth century to voice their convictions

and bestow their talent upon the world. These writers are only four examples among many black literary artists who have successfully moulded American literature and imprinted in pages a mark that is in the core and the vein in which throbs the creative spirit, history and literary genius of American literature.

Chapter VI

Conclusion

The Harlem Renaissance was by far the most pivotal and influential aspiration of the deprived black community; and it was literature through which they (African-Americans) rose, lifted their creative spirits, spread their wings and dove into the act of acclamation of their own talent and merit. The Harlem Renaissance was an over-due stance in battle for literary equality between the whites and the blacks in America:

“This is not water running here,
These thick rebellious streams
That hurtle flesh and bone past fear
Down alleyways of dreams

This is a wine that must flow on
Not caring how or where
So it has ways to flow upon
Where song is in the air.

So it can woo an artful flute
With loose elastic lips
Its measurements of joy compute
With blithe, ecstatic hips.”

-Harlem Wine, Countee Cullen

The incorruptible passion outlasted all odds and became prevalent in literature and creation of music and paved way to the profound political Civil Rights movement in the 1960's. Although, few seminal figures of the Harlem Renaissance gradually became apparitions and faded into obscurity, they left a lasting impression on American literature. The study and genealogy of the Harlem Renaissance offer in-depth understanding of the African-American psychology, literary context, cultural endeavors and political pursuits; in short it is the fundamental study of America in the twentieth century.

Hurston's use of vernacular dialect and her uncompromising strength in voice showed how she commanded the world that she is not to falter in the sadness of slavery rather prefers to “sharpen

her oyster knife". Along with other Harlem Renaissance authors, Hurston has emphasized on black pride and the 'new negro' philosophy, which ultimately allowed other great black writers to follow. The writers who followed in decades after the Harlem Renaissance offer the world literature of absolute finesse, utmost creative skill and monumental stories about human suffering. Most of their autobiographical, fiction or non-fiction works reflect the visceral element of the most downtrodden group of people in America in the nineteenth and twentieth century. The works of literature voice the agony and anguish of the helplessness of slavery and its extenuating circumstantial effects; the stories are tinged with a very real sense of truth. It is the historical aspect which draws in readers and speculators to African-American literature and more importantly African-American writers have undoubtedly moulded American literature with its both historical and outstanding creative contributions.

Morrison's *Beloved*, Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, Walker's *The Color Purple* and Haley's *Roots* are the most integral part of American literature; all of which earned the highest order of literary awards, acclaim and international fame. These for exemplary novels voice America's most dehumanizing and terrorizing acts and effects of slavery and its impact on the psychology of the victims. Moreover, it also voices human triumph, resilience and courage under the cruelest circumstances. Like Zora Neale Hurston emphasized in *Dust Tracks on a Road*, one must "jump at de sun" and these authors certainly did and landed "off the ground" and stood to fight "with a harp and a sword" in hands. These authors like many other African-Americans revolutionized and shaped the course of American literature and presented to the world an oeuvre of profound magnitude and finesse.

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