

# The Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s



## Focus Questions 7-3-2

- What is the tone or mood of this poem?
- Why do you think the poem was written and for what audience?
- List two things in this poem that tell you about life in the United States at the time.
- Why is the HR important to American History overall?

# I, too, sing America

(1920s)

To listen to Langston Hughes read his poem, click [here](#).

'I, Too' written just before Hughes' return to the States from Europe and after he'd been denied passage on a ship because of his color, has a contemporary feel in contrast to the mythical dimension of 'The Negro Speaks of Rivers'. It is no less powerful however, in its expression of social injustice. The calm clear statements of the 'I' have an unstoppable force like the progress the poem envisages. Hughes's dignified introductions to these poems and his beautiful speaking voice render them all the more moving.

From PoetryArchive.org

- What is the tone or mood of this poem?
- Why do you think the poem was written and for what audience?
- List two things in this poem that tell you about life in the United States at the time.

*I, too, sing America.*

*I am the darker brother.*

*They send me to eat in the kitchen*

*When company comes,*

*But I laugh,*

*And eat well,*

*And grow strong.*

*Tomorrow,*

*I'll be at the table*

*When company comes.*

*Nobody'll dare*

*Say to me,*

*"Eat in the kitchen,"*

*Then.*

*Besides,*

*They'll see how beautiful I am*

*And be ashamed--*

*I, too, am America.*

# The Renaissance

- The Harlem Renaissance was a flowering of African American social thought which was expressed through
  - Paintings
  - Music
  - Dance
  - Theater
  - Literature



# Where was the Harlem Renaissance centered?

- Centered in the Harlem district of New York City, the *New Negro Movement* (as it was called at the time) had a major influence across the United States and even the world.



# The Harlem Renaissance and The Great Migration

- The economic opportunities of the era triggered a widespread migration of black Americans from the rural south to the industrial centers of the north - and especially to New York City.
- In New York and other cities, black Americans explored new opportunities for intellectual and social freedom.
- Black American artists, writers, and musicians began to use their talents to work for civil rights and obtain equality.

# Impact on History

- The Harlem Renaissance helped to redefine how Americans and the world understood African American culture. It integrated black and white cultures, and marked the beginning of a black urban society.
- The Harlem Renaissance set the stage for the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 60s.

# Contributors to the Renaissance

- Artists such as Jacob Lawrence
- Authors such as Langston Hughes
- Musicians such as Duke Ellington, Louis Armstrong, and Bessie Smith

# Jacob Lawrence



- Jacob Lawrence grew up in a settlement house in Harlem during the Harlem Renaissance
- Lawrence's parents were among those who migrated between 1916-1919, considered the first wave of the migration.
- His own life in Harlem , and the struggle of other Black Americans inspired his earliest work



# Lawrence's Work



- Jacob Lawrence painted his Great Migration series during the 1940s to capture the experience of African Americans during the 1920s

# Langston Hughes



- Hughes is known for his insightful, colorful, realistic portrayals of black life in America.
- He wrote poetry, short stories, novels, and plays, and is known for his involvement with the world of jazz and the influence it had on his writing.
- His life and work were enormously important in shaping the artistic contributions of the Harlem Renaissance in the 1920s.
- He wanted to tell the stories of his people in ways that reflected their actual culture, including both their suffering and their love of music, laughter, and language itself.



# Duke Ellington



- Ellington was a jazz composer, conductor, and performer during the Harlem Renaissance.
- During the formative Cotton Club years, he experimented with and developed the style that would quickly bring him worldwide success. Ellington would be among the first to focus on musical form and composition in jazz.
- Ellington wrote over 2000 pieces in his lifetime.

# The Cotton Club



- The Duke Ellington Orchestra was the "house" orchestra for a number of years at the Cotton Club. The revues featured glamorous dancing girls, acclaimed tap dancers, vaudeville performers, and comics. All the white world came to Harlem to see the show.
- The first Cotton Club revue was in 1923. There were two new fast paced revues produced a year for at least 16 years.

# Louis “Satchmo” Armstrong



- Louis Armstrong was a jazz composer and trumpet player during the Harlem Renaissance.
- He is widely recognized as a founding father of jazz.
- He appeared in 30 films and averaged 300 concerts per year, performing for both kids on the street and heads of state.



# Bessie Smith



- Bessie Smith was a famous jazz and blues singer during the Harlem Renaissance.
- Smith recorded with many of the great Jazz musicians of the 1920s, including Louis Armstrong.
- Smith was popular with both blacks and whites