

CHAPTER 13 Section 4 (pages 452–457)

The Harlem Renaissance

BEFORE YOU READ

In the last section, you read about education and popular culture in the 1920s.

In this section, you will learn about the Harlem Renaissance.

AS YOU READ

Use the chart below to take notes on how African-American artists expressed themselves in the 1920s.

TERMS AND NAMES

James Weldon Johnson Poet and civil rights leader

Marcus Garvey Black nationalist leader

Harlem Renaissance African-American artistic movement

Claude McKay Poet

Langston Hughes Poet

Zora Neale Hurston Anthropologist and author

Paul Robeson Actor, singer, and civil-rights leader

Louis Armstrong Jazz musician

Duke Ellington Jazz musician

Bessie Smith Blues singer

<i>James Weldon Johnson</i>	<i>Author, lawyer, led antilynching effort</i>

African-American Voices in the 1920s (pages 452–454)

How did African Americans approach civil rights in the 1920s?

Between 1910 and 1920, hundreds of thousands of African Americans had moved from the South to the big cities of the North. This was called the *Great Migration*. It was a response to racial violence and economic discrimination against blacks in the South. By 1929, 40 percent of African Americans lived in cities. As a result, racial tensions increased in Northern cities. There were race riots.

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) worked to end violence against African Americans. W. E. B. Du Bois led a peaceful protest against racial violence.

The NAACP also fought to get laws against *lynching* passed by Congress. **James Weldon Johnson**, a poet and lawyer, led that fight. While no law against lynching was passed in the twenties, the number of lynchings gradually dropped.

Marcus Garvey voiced a message of black pride that appealed to many African Americans. Garvey thought that African Americans should build a separate society. He formed a black

nationalist group called the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA).

Garvey promoted black-owned businesses. He also urged African Americans to return to Africa to set up an independent nation.

1. How did the NAACP and Marcus Garvey's followers respond to racial discrimination?

The Harlem Renaissance Flowers in New York (pages 454–457)

What was the Harlem Renaissance?

In the 1920s, many African Americans moved to Harlem, a section of New York City. So did blacks from the West Indies, Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Haiti. Harlem became the world's largest black urban community.

This neighborhood was also the birthplace of the **Harlem Renaissance**. This literary and artistic movement celebrated African-American culture.

Above all, the Harlem Renaissance was a literary movement. It was led by well-educated middle-class blacks. They took pride in their African heritage and their people's *folklore*. They also wrote about the problems of being black in a white culture. An important collection of works by Harlem Renaissance writers, *The New Negro*, was published by Alain Locke in 1925.

The Harlem Renaissance produced many outstanding poets. **Claude McKay** wrote about the pain of prejudice. He urged African Americans to resist discrimination.

One of the most famous Harlem Renaissance poets was **Langston Hughes**. In the 1920s, he wrote about the daily lives of working-class blacks. He wove the tempos of jazz and the blues into his poems.

Zora Neale Hurston was the most famous female writer of the Harlem Renaissance. She collected the folklore of poor Southern blacks. Hurston also wrote novels, short stories, and poems.

Music and drama were important parts of the Harlem Renaissance, too. Some African-American performers became popular with white audiences. **Paul Robeson** became an important actor and singer. He starred in Eugene O'Neill's play *The Emperor Jones* and in Shakespeare's *Othello*.

Jazz became more popular in the twenties. Early in the 20th century, musicians in New Orleans blended ragtime and blues into the new sound of jazz. Musicians from New Orleans traveled North, and they brought jazz with them. The most important and influential jazz musician was **Louis Armstrong**.

Many whites came to Harlem to hear jazz in night clubs. Edward Kennedy "**Duke**" **Ellington** led an orchestra there. He was a jazz pianist and one of the nation's greatest composers.

The outstanding singer of the time was **Bessie Smith**. Some black musicians chose to live and perform in Europe. Josephine Baker became a famous dancer, singer, and comedy star in Paris.

2. Describe the contributions of one artist of the Harlem Renaissance.



This photo shows Louis Armstrong with King Oliver's Creole Jazz Band in the 1920s. Credit: Culver Pictures

Skillbuilder

1. What does this photograph tell you about the 1920s?

2. How do pictures of popular bands today compare with this picture?