Voices from the Harlem Renaissance Study Guide

Voices from the Harlem Renaissance by Nathan Huggins

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Plot Summary

The book contains more than one hundred pieces of art, poetry, fiction and essays from an array of artists deemed important to the Negro renaissance, an era around the 1920s and centered in Harlem. The first section of the book is titled "New Negro Radicalism" and outlines several ideas and ideals, including that there must be a "new crowd" to take the roles of leaders among the race if the group as a whole is to advance. Another concept is that the sheer number of Negroes means the race can effect great change, but that there must be a coming together in order to make that happen. This unity is seen in different ways by different writers, with some insisting that Negroes must see things the same and pull from their African roots while other says that it's no more necessary that they be "African" than for a person with ancestors from Germany to act "German."

Harlem Renaissance: The Urban Setting describes Harlem at the time of this renaissance, though the descriptions are also presented in other sections of the book. The Cotton Club is considered a hot place by some writers but others say the fact that only the elite are allowed in means it's not the place where the masses gather. There are additional sections that include stories, poems, and essays focused on the identity of the African American and on the history and folk traditions of the race. A "Visual Arts" section includes art from several artists of the period.

The question as to whether the artistic endeavors of the era are "art or propaganda" is explored to some degree. There are some writers who believe the Negro artists hold true to themselves and write honestly about life as they see it, but others argue that too many of the artists tone their work to fit the ideals of white critics, avoiding issues that might offend the white reader or viewer and ignoring the opinions of Negroes. It's also pointed out that Negroes tend to pay more attention to their best and brightest only after the artist wins acclaim from the whites.

Through an array of opinions and literary efforts, the reader gains insight into the minds, ideas, desires, and stumbling blocks of the artists of the era that is known as the Harlem Renaissance.

New Negro Radicalism

New Negro Radicalism Summary

In "From the Messenger - A Menace to Radicalism," the author states that a Negro will readily turn on another Negro if ordered. The essay concludes with the idea that labor organizations should "harness the discontent of Negroes" in order to obtain "working class emancipation." In "A New Crowd - A New Negro," A. Phillip Randolph questions the ability of the "old crowd" to adapt to new situations. He points out that this "old crowd" recommends conservative measures. Randolph then lists a group he considers part of this group. The next question posed by Randolph is who will take over leadership roles when the time comes that the old crowd no longer exists. He answers that the new leaders must be young, radical, well-educated, and unafraid. He said these men will be ready to take the offensive and will not rest until the Negro has an equal footing.

In "If We Must Die," W.A. Domingo writes that the "New Negro" must be willing to step up where civil law fails and will always heed the "law of self-preservation." This person will be willing to fight fire with fire. Domingo goes on in "Defense of the Negro Rioters" to call for donations to a defense fund for those accused of participating in recent riots. He calls the riots "self-defense," and says qualified lawyers should be hired immediately for this purpose. In "The New Negro - What Is He?" Domingo goes on to say that the New Negro won't allow politicians to make empty promises and that he wants a good job with good pay and the opportunity to purchase goods from a common marketplace. In "Africa for the Africans," Domingo writes that Negroes have often been manipulated into killing and enslaving Negroes.

In "Garveyism," A. Phillip Randolph addresses the feasibility of economic enterprises and notes that there is "no unclaimed land in Africa." He goes on to point out that the ideals touted by Mr. Garvey can't be the reason for the plight of the Negro, but that these ideals can only have one outcome - increased hatred and violence among races. There follows an essay by Marcus A. Garvey titled, "Africa for the Africans," in which he says the Universal Negro Improvement Association advocates the construction of a "great nation in Africa." Garvey says the opposite of that idea is that Negroes will always work in a country founded by whites. Garvey says the idea of establishing an empire in Africa is practical and feasible. In "The Future As I See It," Garvey outlines some specifics of his plan, including that the Negro must not give up hope and must persevere in the quest for the ultimate goal. The section ends with "Race Pride" by W.E.B. DuBois, who says that he sees a new pride of heritage among minorities. DuBois says the whites must either get out of the Asian and African countries so that the people can rule themselves or meet all men as equal.

New Negro Radicalism Analysis

Several of the writers in the first essays and editorials insist that one of the first steps forward is to eliminate the current leaders. W.A. Domingo writes that the "Old Crowd" is filled with men who are willing to turn the other cheek and that the "New Negro" must be willing to fight fire with fire. Randolph offers up a list of those who fall into the "Old Crowd" and gives criteria for the new leaders. Domingo says that those who are accused of participating in the riots were acting in self-defense and that they must not be allowed to go to prison without a fight. Domingo points out that the Negro must be able and willing to help those who cannot maintain civil law. The attitudes of these men are truly radical and it's left to the reader to determine whether these ideas are positive.

Domingo also writes that this New Negro is tolerant and believes in the rights of others, as well as the right to free press and assembly. Domingo doesn't outright say that the current situation is intolerant and that free press and assembly are not possible, but he seems to hint at that.

Garvey's plan for building of an empire in Africa is actually quite detailed. For example, he says that no Negro should go there with the idea that he will be handed an aristocratic title and privilege. Instead, he says the plan is to reward those who are most loyal to the Negro race with the privileges.

The Urban Setting

The Urban Setting Summary

Alain Locke, in "The New Negro," suggests that the "old Negro" is really nothing more than a myth or an ideal. He talks about the fact that there are aspects of Negro culture - such as the spiritual - that were beaten down but were accepted when finally allowed to emerge. Locke then takes a look at some trends, including the tendency toward moving "city-ward," and says these are not because of poor or even violent conditions in the south nor of the industry in the north. Instead, he attributes this migration to "a new vision of opportunity." Locke then points out that the Negro is willing to work for better conditions and that this migration is not only toward the city and away from the country life, but also away from the old ways and toward the new. Locke quotes, as an example of this trend, Harlem, saying that it's a place inhabited and controlled by Negroes of many different walks of life and from many cultures.

Locke also turns his attention to the idea of the "American Negro," and points out that this isn't a group of people united by a single race, but a group united by a common experience. Locke then makes the statement that Negroes have been treated in certain ways because of the stereotype of what they are, but that many Negroes act a certain way and uses previous treatment as an excuse for that action. Locke says that understanding is a must, though not the only requirement for cooperation. Locke says he sees positive changes and cites the fact that Negroes are being "studied," rather than simply being the subject of debate and discussion.

James Weldon Johnson, in "Black Manhattan," addresses the August 1900 incident in which a Negro named Arthur Harris leaves his wife standing on a street corner for a moment and returns to find her struggling with a white man. A fight ensues and the man - later revealed as a plain-clothes police officer named Robert Thorpe - clubs Harris, who stabs and kills the officer. In the aftermath, it's said that Thorpe was arresting Mrs. Harris for solicitation. Thorpe was well respected and riots begin, with police going so far as to refuse protective custody for Negroes seeking help and joining the mob in the beatings. When city officials refuse to investigate the riots, the Citizens Protective League was formed with Rev. William H. Brooks as president. Johnson doesn't tout the CPL's action as a success - no officers were prosecuted despite testimony of wrongdoing - but does cite it as a step taken by the Negro toward demanding equal rights. Johnson then goes on to extol the efforts of other groups, including the Niagara Movement, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and the National League on Urban Conditions among Negroes.

Johnson offers a vivid description of Manhattan. He notes that in most communities, the area populated mostly by Negroes is outside the downtown area, but that Harlem is different in that respect. He says that Negro Manhattan is in the "most beautiful and healthful" areas and is at the heart of that city. He notes that there was some attempt to stop the flow of Negro residents moving into the area and that the white-based attempts

created barriers that still exist. One of the effects of this influx of people is that the Negroes who could all purchased land. Johnson points out that, though there were bitter feelings at times, there were never any race riots to speak of. The next entry is a poem by Johnson that speaks of Manhattan and "her shining towers, her avenues, her slums."

There follows an editorial by Wallace Thurman in which he says most magazines aimed at Negroes are the product of some philanthropic endeavor, but that the magazine, "Harlem," aims to be different. He concludes his editorial with the thought that the real test is not whether a quality magazine that focuses on the real issues can exist, but whether "the Negro public is ... ready for such as publication."

Rudolph Fisher presents his memories of Harlen in "The Caucasian Storms Harlem," beginning with the fact that he'd missed the city while away at medical school. He notes that there are many whites in the cabarets and that some people believe the white fascination with Negro entertainment is a passing phase, though Fisher points out that it's always been the case, at least to some degree. Fisher admits that it could be just a phase, but wonders what prompted the trend.

In "A Long Way from Home" by Claude McKay, the author describes the arrival at Ellis Island, including his own wish that he could hold to an untarnished image of New York. There follows two descriptive poems, "The Tropics in New York" and "Harlem Shadows." In the former, McKay talks of the best fruits and his longing for "the old, familiar ways," and in the latter, the footsteps of young girls begin pushed into prostitution.

Eric Walrond weaves the story of a boy and girl named Nicey trying to find a hotel room in "City Love." He swears to her he knows a place, "not fur" at all, and is turned away at the first because he doesn't have a suitcase. When he returns home, he encounters a raving woman, yelling at him to get an elevator job before winter sits in because she isn't going to trudge off to a job while he runs around doing whatever he wants. The two lovers find another place, with St. Louis going so far as to buy Nicey a hat.

Langston Hughes offers up his impressions of Harlem, including the underground trains, in an excerpt from "The Big Sea." He says he can never quite capture the excitement on paper. He goes on to talk about the parties, living on his own and the people he met. He offers up two poems, "Esthete in Harlem" in which he finds that it's strange that he finally met "Life" in Harlem, and "Railroad Avenue." "Smoke, Lilies and Jade" follows with author Richard Bruce presenting a series of impressions about "Beauty."

In "Blades of Steel," author Rudolph Fisher offers a look at a typical rivalry between two men in Harlem. Eddy Boyd, otherwise known as "Eight-Ball," is waiting his turn at the barber chair manned by Pop Overton. Just before Eight-Ball takes the seat, a known enemy named Dirty Cozzens steps forward, announces that he is next in line and attempts to push Eight-Ball out of the way. Eight-Ball stands firm and Dirty Cozzens is shoved back against a wall. Just as it seems the altercation will escalate into a full-fledged fight, a young girl named Effie steps in between the two and into the barber chair, effectively diffusing the situation. She explains that she's already had a haircut and that her purpose was to stop the fight. As is to be expected, Eight-Ball and Dirty

Cozzens later clash and Eight-Ball cuts the other man with a razor he'd taken from Pop Overton's shop.

In "Harlem Reviewed" by Nancy Cunard, the author gives an account of Harlem's physical attributes, including the fact that some 35,000 Negroes live in Harlem and Brooklyn and describing Harlem as "hard and strong." She also criticizes media, specifically targeting newspapers, and ends by saying that the sight of young Negro children is hopeful, then calling for an "all-Communist" Harlem and United States. Claude McKay, in "A Negro Extravaganza," describes a comedy show that he claims has gotten undeserved and "pointless criticism," adding that he sees a "dearth" of truly dark-skinned women as actresses.

The Urban Setting Analysis

Alain Locke presents the idea that the old Negro has been the subject of much interest and that people have argued over him, spent time and energy pulling him up or pushing him down. Locke doesn't define those expending this time and effort, though it can be assumed that it's all oppressors.

Locke says that the Negro, faced with the oppression of prejudice, has few options and that some advocate ignoring the prejudice but that alternative is "constructive participation" in causes to further the race and race relations. Locke turns his discussion to the idea that the treatment of the Negro is similar to that of the treatment of the Jews in that the Negro is gaining worldwide attention. While Locke isn't specific, he seems to indicate that there is responsibility along with that attention and that both the Negro and the rest of the world will have to step up and accept both the responsibility and adopt a willingness to tolerate this change.

Rudolph Fisher goes into great detail outlining his characters, Eight-Ball and Dirty Cozzens, in "Blades of Steel." He notes that Cozzens had been dubbed "Dirty Yallar" and that the "dirty" had stuck so that everyone knew him by that name. Rudolph notes that what people had started by nicknaming him "dirty," his environment had finished so that he is never seen without a sneer on his face. Dirty Cozzens seems to be the epitome of the serious Negro faced with trying to make himself heard and trying to take control over whatever small corner of the world is available. If this is Fisher's message, it should be noted that Dirty Cozzens is ultimately defeated by Eight-Ball. The story also includes a young girl named Effie who steps in and breaks up a fight that is brewing between the two men. It seems that Effie is the person trying to maintain peace and stands for all the women who want to keep fights from happening because they see these clashes as ultimately detrimental to their men.

Afro-American Identity - Who Am I?

Afro-American Identity - Who Am I? Summary

In "The Legacy of the Ancestral Arts," Alain Locke poses questions related to the popularity of Negro arts. He notes that there are many clubs that have been typically frequented only by Negroes but that are now attracting a white clientele, and Locke wonders what it is that causes this phenomenon. He cites several works examining the interest of other races in the artistic works of Negro artists, and notes that there seems to be a definite connection between the interest in their work and the dedication of artists. There follows a poem by Countee Cullen describing her thoughts on Africa, ending with the idea that, "Not yet has my heart or head; In the least way realized; They and I are civilized." Cullen's next poem is called "Uncle Jim" and describes the "Uncle Jim" who begins by saying "White folks is white," and earns himself the admonition that his statement is nothing more than a platitude. Cullen's next two poems are "Tableau" and "Saturday's Child." The next poem is Langston Hughes's "Afro-American Fragment," which examines the lack of personal information most have about their homeland, Africa.

In "Luani of the Jungles" by Langston Hughes, the author tells the story of a sailor aboard the freighter, "The West Ilana," who barters for a rare monkey at the advice of a white passenger who then tells the story of being bewitched by a young Negro woman named Luani who lives in a nearby village. The white man says that he continues to try to leave her, that she has a lover from her village, but that each time he leaves, he soon returns though he doesn't want to. There follows poems by Hughes, including "Danse Africaine," "Negro," "Cross," "I Too Sing America," and "The Negro Speaks of Rivers."

In "Banjo" by Claude McKay, the author tells the story of a man named Banjo who entertains at local bars by singing "Shake that Thing." Later in the story, there's a discussion about the state of Negroes and one person voices the sentiment that American Negroes are better off than Negroes in any other part of the world, and that lynching is a rare occurrence that happens only in the backward south. Two poems by McKay follows, "Africa" and "Mulatto." The first focuses on Africa as a nation and the latter on the plight of a young man who is the bastard, half-Negro son of a slave owner who would not hesitate to kill his father in order to gain his freedom.

Helene Johnson's poems, "Sonnet to a Negro In Harlem" is next with a brief description of this person, including the idea that he is both incompetent because of his hatred and "too splendid." Johnson's next poem is titled, "Poem," and describes a "little brown boy" and her own happiness that she is also a "jig" and that she understands the little boy. In "Cane," Jean Toomer tells the story of Paul, a young dark-skinned man who is being pursued by a young woman named Bona, until Paul's roommate sets the two of them up for a date. As Paul and Bona leave the restaurant together, a Negro doorman smiles in a knowing way at the two and outside, Paul rushes back inside to correct the man's

thinking of what was about to happen between the two, saying that it was to be something beautiful.

Gwendolyn Bennett's "To a Dark Girl" is next, a poem about growing past slavery. Bennett's next story is "Wedding Day" in which a man is a boxer who leaves America for France and is apparently stood up on his wedding day because "white women just don't marry colored men." In "Odyssey of a Big Boy," author Sterling Brown describes the many things he's done and jobs he's held, including as roustabout and working in the cane fields.

In "Sweat," Zora Neal Hurston tells the story of a woman named Delia Jones who does laundry for "white folks." Her husband hates the fact that she does the laundry and, in fact, hates Delia. They married when both were young and the beatings began just two months later. Now, Delia knows that her husband, Sykes, is sleeping with another woman. One day she sees them in town, Sykes buying presents for the woman while Delia delivers laundry. Sykes promises the woman that he'll get Delia out of their house and let her live there. Delia swears that she paid for the house and the possessions and will never leave. She is deathly afraid of snakes and Sykes brings a rattlesnake home, meaning to run Delia off, but Sykes encounters the snake in the dark house one night and it bites and kills him.

There follows two pieces by W.E.B. DuBoise. In "African Diary," he tells of waiting for his first glimpse of Africa. "On Being Black" is his story of a "pale and positive" friend who claims DuBoise is being overly sensitive on the issue of race.

Afro-American Identity - Who Am I? Analysis

Several of the authors in this section examine the connections and differences between Negros and their white counterparts. Cullen focuses on the differences between white and Negro children, including that the white baby is welcomed to a family and the Negro father sees the addition of another baby in the house only as another child to provide for. Hughes' poetry is similar in several ways. In "I Too Sing America," Hughes writes that he is the "darker brother." This could be an indication that he is fathered by the master of the house, a fairly common occurrence among the slave owners. Hughes seems to indicate that he has the opportunity to eat with the family but is relegated to the kitchen when the family has company at mealtime. While this is a hurtful thing to most, Hughes writes that he doesn't care because he still gets good food and grows strong and that there will come a time when he isn't sent to the kitchen, even when there is company. Hughes' deeper message is that he's the same as anyone else and he makes that point by saying that he is "America." The use of the word "America" rather than "American" can be taken to mean that he epitomizes the nation.

The story of the sailor who encounters the white passenger aboard the West Ilana freighter carries a somewhat illusive message in that it's left to the reader to determine the deeper meanings presented by Hughes. The argument could be made that the young African woman named Luani has effectively bewitched Hughes. While he doesn't

use that term, he says that Luani informed him on their first meeting that he would go with her back to Africa and that he agreed as if he had been planning for some time to make that trip. He also points out that he had left her four times and that each time he returns. Another interesting point is that Luani's lover is the son of a chief. It seems that her ability to bewitch stretches to this young man, or that he would simply have eliminated the competition.

In Cane, the ethnicity of the young man named Paul is never fully explained, but it's intimated that he was part Negro. He is, however, attending college at a school where whites attend. There are some who wonder if Paul could have Indian or Spanish ancestors, but it's left to the reader to determine which is correct. It's also noted that some people have a low opinion of him for various reasons, and Paul's roommate writes that Paul has become "moony." It seems likely that Paul is feeling the stress of having people always looking at him and seeming to wonder about him. Paul's roommate says that he is willing to stand up for Paul, but that it's an awkward situation. It's interesting that when Paul agrees to leave the restaurant with Bona, he encounters a Negro doorman who seems to indicate that he knows what lies ahead for Paul and Bona. Outside, Paul apparently thinks about what the doorman is thinking and goes back to explain to him that it's not something sordid, but something beautiful. Paul shakes the man's hand and then goes back outside to find that Bona is gone. It's left to the reader to determine the full meaning, but it seems that Paul was concerned about what the Negro thought to the point that he was willing to return and offer an explanation, but refuses to offer any information to the whites with whom he attends school. It's also interesting that Bona requests information about Paul all evening, but when Paul returns to make the explanation to the doorman, Bona leaves and is nowhere to be found when he goes back to where he left her.

Bennett's "Wedding Day" is another story that requires a great deal of evaluation. For example, the young man is a boxer who hates Americans and who then helps a woman though she is American and white, just because she is broke. She tells him not to hate her because of her ethnicity, which seems interesting because it is the exact kind of prejudice often faced by Negroes. What is more interesting about the story is not what's told, but what's omitted. It's said that the young man decides to go to the hotel room of the young woman on the morning before they are to be married that afternoon. He makes the decision to go, but then boards the subway. He says that she could have explained to him that she just needed his help and indicates that she'd told him that white women and Negro men don't marry, but doesn't give any details of their conversation.

Afro-American Past - History and Folk Tradition; Visual Arts: To Celebrate Blackness

Afro-American Past - History and Folk Tradition; Visual Arts: To Celebrate Blackness Summary

In "The Negro Digs Up His Past," Arthur A. Schomburg presents three facts. The first is that Negroes have been actively involved in the quest for freedom for the race. The second is that the most outstanding of the race have been greatly dissociated with the race as a whole. The third is that there are significant group achievements despite the general acceptance otherwise. Schomburg says that there were Negro men who were active in halting the slave trade. During the relative calm after the slave trade is effectively stopped, these same men bring the attention of the country's most influential white men to the condition of slaves, prompting the attention of the entire country on the situation. Schomburg concludes his essay by presenting the idea that a new day has arrived and that the Negroes, in keeping with the new opportunities being afforded them, are advancing quickly. Schomburg attributes this partly to the "reclaimed background" of the race as a whole.

There follows a poem, "Song of the Son" by Jean Toomer in which the author writes of "caroling softly souls of slavery." The next is "Fifty Years" by James Weldon Johnson, written on the fiftieth anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation. Johnson expresses the idea that the race is part of a greater destiny and that a cause that cost so much in effort and blood must gain God's favor.

Zora Neale Hurston next presents an essay describing specific attributes and contributions of the race. Hurston points out that some etymologists say the Negroes did not add any African words to the English language, but the author argues that Negroes did change the language to suit themselves. The author points out that Negro art is symmetrical and angular. As a cultural hero, the Devil and "Jack" are at the top of the list because of their crafty ability to outsmart others. Hurston claims that the Negro, as an artist, presents original works, though it's often said there is no originality in the race. Hurston also notes that Negroes are excellent at mimicry, but that the people mimic for the sheer joy of it, not so that they will be like others. Hurston introduces the word "jook" which is slang for a "bawdy house" or "Negro pleasure house." Hurston uses the word also as a verb and points out that the Negroes who frequented these places were happy with any singer/dancer who could "jook," and that the tendency toward light-skinned girls in the chorus line is the result of white preferences. Hurston notes that she can mention a few "quirks" of dialect, but that to fully explain would require "volumes." Hurston then presents another essay, "Shouting," in which she

examines shouting during religious ceremonies, followed by "The Sermon," a version of the story of how and why Jesus died for the sins of mankind.

Hurston's next story is the tale of "Uncle Monday" about a man who seems to simply appear in a village one day. The first to sight him is Joe Lindsay, who swears Uncle Monday was walking across a dangerous lake, filled with snakes, leeches and alligators, as though Uncle Monday was walking on top of the water. He is believed to be a "hoodoo" man, and though the villagers fear him, they come to him for his craft. It's said that he's already dead and it seems at least some believe that story. Uncle Monday is competition for the resident hoodoo woman, Aunt Judy Bickerstaff, who claims to be able to do anything Uncle Monday can do. Then comes the day when she insists that she must go fishing alone and there encounters Uncle Monday, who apparently put a spell on her to make her want to go to the lake, then strikes her with a spell so that her legs are useless and says she will remain so until she admits in her heart that he is superior. A large alligator remains beside her until she began to doubt herself, then leaves as she's rescued. It's said that whenever the alligator's growls can be heard ever after that, the people believe that the gator is visiting Uncle Monday.

There follows an expose by Alain Locke, "Sterling Brown: The New Negro Folk Poet," in which Locke examines Brown's style as one of the few truly outstanding of the Negro poets. Locke suggests that the reason is that too many of the Negro poets are conciliatory to the whites.

There follows a section titled, "Visual Arts: To Celebrate Blackness," that examines twenty-five pieces of art, including sculptures and paintings.

Afro-American Past - History and Folk Tradition; Visual Arts: To Celebrate Blackness Analysis

The story of Uncle Monday is interesting on several points, but perhaps most important is the use of the folk tales in the story. From the way the old man arrives - walking on water - to the fact that he's considered a "hoodoo" man, there are many aspects of the story that are based on superstitions. One of those is that he can "shed" any injured part of his body. Hurston tells of an apparent serious injury to Uncle Monday. Though the details of the injury are not told, Uncle Monday's arm was "shredded" and he seemed near to death. Later, two men see what they believe to be an alligator and this beast pulls off something that could have been a glove, buries it and then walks on two legs. The story takes on the tones of the "hoodoo" with the idea that this creature was Uncle Monday and that he was "shedding" his injured arm. It's also noted that Uncle Monday already knows the names of the people of the village when he arrives, and can find his way around without ever stopping to ask directions. These are considered ominous because it means Uncle Monday has some sort of perception above those of a normal, and is another detail pointing out Uncle Monday's role as the "hoodoo" man.

The story of Uncle Monday also includes a detailed report of how to capture a snake that has a "singing stone," which is a powerful but rare possession. Uncle Monday

reportedly has one of these stones, and this is the source of his power. Not only is the stone rare, retrieving it is dangerous and requires skill and cunning. Uncle Monday appears to have these skills. It's also noted that Uncle Monday claims to be unafraid of death and that he says he has already been to the place the dead go and has returned.

Uncle Monday's hoodoo is said to be powerful. He reportedly is ready with what's necessary for anyone who seeks out his services whenever that person arrives. On a particular day, a woman approaches a man and tells him to marry her daughter. It seems that the daughter is pregnant, but it could be merely that the girl's reputation is being bandied about. In either case, the man insists that he isn't interested and refuses to marry her, saying that she's had many other lovers. The mother goes to Uncle Monday, who is waiting with a looking glass, a gun, and a knife. The woman chooses the knife and the young man's appearance comes into focus in the mirror. She shoots the image, there's no shattering of the glass though the gun goes off, and the man drops dead.

Art or Propaganda? High or Low Culture?

Art or Propaganda? High or Low Culture? Summary

A portion of James Weldon Johnson's "From the Book of American Negro Poetry" details events and information about the Negro artists in general and several poets in particular. One of those is Phyllis Wheatley, who arrived in American as a child and was purchased by a man in Boston as a servant for his wife. The wife recognizes Phyllis's natural intelligence and gives her the opportunity to hone it, resulting in a volume of poems. Johnson cites Paul Laurence Dunbar as the first of the Negro poets to be able to "rise to a height from which he could take a perspective view of his own race." Johnson notes that this includes humor and desires as well as the superstitions and failures, and that Dunbar's view is objective. Another of the poets discussed by Johnson is Placido, a poet who uses the word "if" as the basis for a sonnet to his mother. Johnson admits that the average reader hasn't heard of some of these poets. There follows a poem by Johnson called, "O Black and Unknown Bards."

"The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain," an essay by Langston Hughes, delves into the racial stumbling block Negro artists face. The biggest of these, according to Hughes, is the tendency of many Negroes to mimic the lifestyles of whites. Hughes cites a promising poet who says that he wants to be known only as a poet, not as a Negro poet, and Hughes says that means the young poet is seeking to write like a white poet and, subconsciously perhaps, wishes to be white. Hughes says the young man's family has instilled this desire. The mother tells them not to "act like a nigger," meaning not to be badly behaved, and the father points out how well whites do certain things. Hughes writes that this is typical of middle and upper class Negro homes, and that the result is the subconscious belief that to be white is to be better, and that makes it incredibly difficult for any artist to see the beauty of the Negro race. Hughes adds that there's a tendency by Negroes to overlook artists of their own race until whites also notice that person. There follows a very brief poem by Hughes called "Hurt," in which he points out that artistic endeavors can be a release for the "hurt in your heart."

In "The Negro-Art Hokum," George S. Schuyler says that an influx of art from Negro artists has been expected for some time, and that they are still waiting for that event. He goes on to say that most of the contributions of Negro artists are indistinguishable from their white counterparts. Schuyler presents the idea that "Aframericans" don't produce art specific to the Negro race because they have effectively absorbed the ideals, tendencies, and practices of white Americans. As a comparison, Schuyler offers the suggestion that a person of European descent who has lived in America for three generations would likely be indistinguishable from a person who had lived in America for many generations.

Alain Locke's "Art or Propaganda" expose' poses the question of which is better. He writes that the main problem is that propaganda is a way of objecting to group inferiority but that it "perpetuates" that inferiority at the same time. Locke believes that there is little art that can be "sustained" without propaganda.

There follows a series of poems. "Dead Fires" by Jesse Redmond Fauset points out that pain is better than the "grey calm" of peace. Countee Cullen's "To John Keats, Poet, At Springtime," "For a Poet" and "Yet Do I Marvel" are next, with Cullen pointing out that though John Keats is a recognized poet, Cullen feels the need to extol the virtues of a particularly glorious spring.

In "Infants of the Spring," Wallace Thurman presents the story of a group of young literary talent invited to a "salon," or literary gathering. Thurman describes the host, a novelist named Raymond who has only recently found a new interest and fire in the work. Raymond receives a letter from Dr. A.L. Parkes suggesting the literary gathering. There is an eclectic array of guests, including Sweetie May Carr, a young woman who is able to captivate her audience by describing in great detail the southern town from which she claims to have come. She's said to be extremely funny but also vulgar. It's noted she could have a great career in writing these stories but chooses not to. Instead, she makes a living by selling a couple of stories each year and says that she can have a package of groceries delivered to her home by a hint dropped in the right place. Carr, unlike several of the others who gather, claims to know nothing of literary mechanics. Dr. Parkes opens the meeting by complimenting the work of those gathered, saying it's the first step in many, but then says that there is a "decadent strain" in their work and that they must reach back to their African roots and that they must have ideals. There is a moment of silence before several object, with a young man named Paul asking why he should focus on his African roots when he has German and Indian ancestors as well. The argument erupts in force with some leaving and others continuing to either support or denounce Parkes. It's noted that this is the last such meeting.

"The Banjo Player," a very brief piece of prose by Fenton Johnson, notes that the author has music inside and that it's the "music of peasant people." When he plays, someone is always willing to give him something to eat and drink and he's as beloved as Santa. His fear comes from the fact that he's been called a "troubadour," and he doesn't know what that means.

There follows two interviews, one written by Tom Davin from a "Conversation with James P. Johnson," and the second written by Nathan Irvin Huggins titled "Interview With Eubie Blake, October 16, 1973." James P. Johnson indicates that he wanted to be a pianist because he'd seen friends of his brother who had been accepted and welcomed everywhere because of their talent and that he wanted that for himself. He talks at length about the styles of the famous pianists, including the tendency to place a diamond ring at a particular point on his hand in order to catch the attention of some particular woman. Blake's interview focuses on the black vaudeville performers and notes that it was a common practice for a black performer to play a tune for a publisher who would decline to purchase the song but the performer would hear it being played commercially over the next few months - indicating the theft.

Art or Propaganda? High or Low Culture? Analysis

Language is discussed by Johnson. As has already been noted, the Negro has changed some aspects of the English language. Johnson says that it could be a lax attitude or a desire to use the vocal chords somewhat less than the language truly requires, but that the end result is a "softening" of the language and Johnson calls this a positive change.

Two of Cullen's poems in this section, "Yet Do I Marvel" and "To a Poet," seem to have deeper meanings that are immediately evident. In "Yet Do I Marvel," Cullen points out that flesh that mirrors God must die, and that God is the only one who could explain that particular aspect of life. It's interesting that these are not posed as questions, such as "why is the mole blind," but are statements, that the mole is blind, with Cullen pointing out that only God can explain why. This offering of statements of fact sets up the poem for the finishing lines, which read, "Yet I do marvel at this curious thing; To make a poet black, and bid him sing." Cullen seems to be pointing out that God has created the desire to write poetry in some people, and in some instances made that poet black. Cullen doesn't explain why this would be a problem, but it seems that he believes that to be the case.

The story, "Infants of Spring," includes an array of characters, apparently meant to represent the variety of artists. There's a recognized poet laureate named DeWitt Clinton who agrees fully with the statement that the artists gathered must reach back toward their African roots. There's also a poet named Tony Crews who is a college student and has already published two volumes of poems, though the host notes that Tony may not have been yet ready for that. The host also notes that Tony is either a very shallow person with nothing of substance to his personality, or is able to keep his thoughts and ideas to himself so completely that a normal person can't get him to open up. It seems significant that the array of artists is broad, representing several disciplines and several views. The endeavor to bring the group together fails because some can't tolerate freedom of ideals. It will later be revealed that this is the only novel about the literary Negroes of the 1920s by a Negro author.

Alien Gospel or Source of Inspiration?; Alienation, Anger, Rage

Alien Gospel or Source of Inspiration?; Alienation, Anger, Rage Summary

The section begins with "Go Down Death," a poem author James Weldon Johnson describes as a "funeral sermon." The poem describes what happens upon the death of a woman named Caroline who was released from the pain of suffering by God. Carline is then borne away into the waiting arms of Jesus, who wipes her tears and allows her to rest. In "Spirituals and Neo-Spirituals," author Zora Neale Hurston examines the origins of hymns, saying that spirituals did originate during times of slavery but that, contrary to what some believe, spirituals continue to be created. Hurston goes on to discuss the use of breathing in songs and sermons, saying that mechanics requires that the singer's breath not be heard but that Negroes use that intake or outpouring of breath as part of the art, and that it's not random.

There follows four poems by Countee Cullen. They are "Black Magdalens," "Simon the Cyrenian Speaks," "Fruit of the Flower," and "She of the Dancing Feet Sings." The next is a very brief poem by Waring Cuney called "Conception," followed by "The Suppliant" by Georgia Douglas Johnson, and "A Missionary Brings a Young Native to America" by Helene Johnson.

The section related to rage includes a series of poems beginning with "Brothers" by James Weldon Johnson, followed by several by Claude McKay. The first is "If We Must Die," in which McKay calls for those who would be killed "like hogs" to stand up for themselves and their race, and to die like men though death is inevitable. In "The Lynching," McKay discusses the sight of those gathered around a lynched man, including the young "lynchers to be" who danced with excitement. Other poems by McKay in this section include "The White House" and "America," a poem that expresses his love and hatred for America. Next are "A Black Man Talks of Reaping" by Arna Bontemps, "Old Black Men" by Georgia Douglas Johnson, "Hatred" by Gwendolyn Bennett, and "Remembering Nat Turner" by Sterling A. Brown. In the latter, Brown describes the tendency of people to claim first-hand knowledge to famed events. Brown tells of a woman who claimed that Turner was captured at a particular spot when he was caught miles away, and that it was in a particular house that Turner committed murder, though that house was built after Turner's death. Brown's poem ends with the question as to whether Turner is now at rest.

Three poems by Langston Hughes are next: "Dream Variations," "Song for a Dark Girl," and "Mother to Son." In the last, a mother explains to her son that she's not always had a straight path but that she's always attempted to rise, though it was sometimes with bare boards to walk on instead of carpeting, and sometimes with no light to guide her. The message is that the son should do the same. "Incident" and "From a Dark Tower,"

both by Countee Cullen, are followed by "A Southern Road" by Helene Johnson, in which Johnson describes a country road passing by what appears to be the site of a lynching.

The section concludes with an essay by George S. Schuyler called "Our Greatest Gift to America." Schuyler explains that many Negroes have spent time in the libraries doing research to write articles about the greatest contributions of Negroes because these articles have gained popularity. Schuyler notes that some will tout contributions back to "the Garden of Eden," when the greatest of these contributions is - in Schuyler's words - flattery. He explains his idea by citing examples of a poor white girl who works in a factory, a poor man who works in a mill, and a low-life grafter from Russia, all who know they are better than the Negroes of the country and that at least they can never fall that far. Schuyler says the reason democracy has worked so well in America is that skin color is the measure of a man's worth. He goes on to point out that without the Africans among them, life for the poor of America would have been very different.

Alien Gospel or Source of Inspiration?; Alienation, Anger, Rage Analysis

The poetry of this section is deep with secondary meaning with few clear meanings available to the casual reader. The exception of this is, perhaps, Cuney's "Conception." The poem is only three brief lines in length and presents, at least on the surface, a very simplistic version of the conception of Jesus. What's interesting about this poem is that there's no effort to hide the way many Negroes round off and change the English language. There are the words "ma" instead of "my" and "han" instead of "hand." This seems effective in this particular instance. In the poem "She of the Dancing Feet Sings," Cullen seems to be wondering what her role would be in Heaven, citing the fact that she sings "faery" songs and loves to dance and to be held by a man. Cullen seems to be indicating the very typical idea that Heaven is a serious, quiet place filling with cherubim singing quiet hymns.

Georgia Douglas Johnson's poem "Old Black Men" describes a scene in which old men have come to learn that life hasn't turned out as they'd planned. The descriptions are universal in several ways. The men, once young, dreamed "of glory, love and power." Those are typical of young men - and women - everywhere. These dreams of the young are what prompt progress and the dreaming is not reserved for a particular race of people. The poem ends with the men realizing that their lives have not turned out as they'd intended and the author points out that this is typical of many older people.

Schuyler's idea of the role of Negroes in America is not a unique perspective, but he puts it very plainly. He notes that the young girl who grows up to work in a factory is told, while still a child, that a "big nigger" will come get her if she's bad, and that she dismisses that as an adult but clings to the notion that there is a "big nigger" just waiting to rob her of her virtue. Schuyler points out that the poorest of the poor are always one step higher than the Negroes, regardless of the traits of any individual of that race.

Reflections on the Renaissance

Reflections on the Renaissance Summary

In "The Big Sea," author Langston Hughes talks about the role of Negroes in literature, music, and culture. He notes that Harlem in the 1920s was truly a place where the Negro performers were in demand by their own race, but that whites were beginning to take notice as well. Hughes points out that the Cotton Club was not for the common people and that it catered only to whites and influential or well-known Negroes, eliminating a great number of people. Other clubs were popular with the common people, and sometimes the influx of whites changed the shows to the point that the Negroes lost interest. As an example, Hughes points out a particular trend toward acrobatics that would have never occurred except that the performers were seeking to amuse the white patrons. Schuyler says that sometimes owners of clubs barred Negroes in favor of the white patrons, but the white guests almost immediately drop off because there seems to be no fun in the club without some Negroes to watch. Hughes says that the changes in the nightclubs prompt an increase in "rent parties." These were sometimes held to raise money for the rent with food sold at reasonable prices for those who gathered to participate in the entertainment.

Hughes then offers a description of a Negro magazine called "The Messenger." He notes that the editor, Wallace Thurman, wrote "vigorous" editorials and admitted that the magazine's policy was to make money, meaning editorials were based on whatever was popularly accepted at that point in time. It's to the Messenger that Hughes sells his first stories. Hughes cites Thurman's work, including "The Blacker the Berry" which is the story of a very dark woman who faces prejudice from whites and Negroes, and says that Thurman writes under a variety of pen names, including as women.

Hughes and Thurman join several others in an effort to create a Negro magazine they planned to call "Fire." They planned to each put in fifty dollars for start-up costs, though several didn't pay up by the first press time and Thurman and Hughes were forced to pay whatever they earned toward the thousand dollars it cost to print the first edition. Some noted literary talents of the day, including Dr. DuBoise, "roasted" the publication. Thurman later dies of tuberculosis in the charity ward of a New York hospital.

Claude McKay, in "Harlem Runs Wild," examines the causes and after effects of a riot that began in Harlem and was, according to McKay, aimed at Harlem merchants. McKay explains that a man named Sufi Abdul Hamid, leader of the Negro Industrial and Clerical Alliance, leads a group in picketing several large stores in Harlem, which refuse to hire Negros for clerical positions. The picket gets little notice until an influential church leader, the Reverend Adam Clayton Powell, lends his support. That prompts the creation of a group calling themselves the "Citizens' League for Fair Play," which has the support of all the major churches of Harlem. Meanwhile, some Jewish leaders had claimed that the protest was an "anti-Semantic movement" and Sufi Abdul Hamid is arrested and charged, but not convicted. Hamid himself denies the charges in an

interview with McKay. McKay notes that some clerks are hired but are soon let go, with merchants citing a drop in business.

W.E.B. DuBois in "A Negro Nation Within the Nation" points out that Negroes continue to be disenfranchised and that now, more than ever, there's a need for those of the race to stand up for themselves. DuBois notes that there are some whites who are concerned about the Negro race, but that most are simply not interested and that colored people, as a whole, are coming to accept this as fact. He also notes that there is little or no bitterness in this acceptance. DeBois says that it's up to those who have a degree of education to plan for the whole. He cites several major issues, including the fact that Negros cannot belong to a union and are commonly omitted from organized labor movements. On a positive note, he says that these issues are forcing some young "thinkers" into ideas and that they must be willing to step up into roles as leaders.

DuBois cites some positive trends, including that the number of votes being cast by Negroes and "other colored folks" is increasing, and will change the face of the office holders. DuBoise proposes that Negroes must help others of their race, supporting them with their skills as others hone their own skills in order to rise as a group. He asserts that this is possible. He then points out that the loss of control over education in segregated schools could be positive in that Negro schools need not always be the poorest of schools. DuBois concludes by saying that a united front will demand attention and action.

In "Forward to Challenge, Vol. I, March, 1934," author James Weldon Johnson writes that the biggest problem facing the young writers of the day is the dedication to put their craft to paper. Dorothy West, in an excerpt "From Challenge," next presents some letters from readers who offer encouragement to the magazine. Dorothy West's next piece is titled "Carl Van Vechten Comments," and offers the opinion that the period of the renaissance was a beginning for the current situation which is a period of advanced artists. In "Dear Reader," West offers the hope that readers will continue to write honest letters, and that her only regret is that there have been few worthy contributions from the young generation of writers. There follows an "Editorial" by the editors of the New Challenge, expressing the hope that the magazine will fill a gap that can't be breached by magazines supported by specific organizations and that the contributors need not be solely Negro.

Richard Wright offers a "Blueprint for Negro Writing" that has ten rules. The rules include that Negro writers have seldom had serious criticism from whites and that the church and traditional folklore has greatly impacted the work of artists of the race. Claude McKay, in an essay titled "For a Negro Magazine," writes that the renaissance resembled a "mushroom" and had little roots. In "Spiritual Truancy," Alain Locke writes that McKay, as one of the great members of the renaissance era, has remains unanchored. Locke goes on to say that he believes the biggest flaw of the era was the focus on exhibitionism and the lack of focus on nurturing the people.

In "Barrel Staves," author Arna Bontemps weaves the story of a young man named Skeeter who is a sneak and a con man. Skeeter, kicked out of his Harlem home by his

woman, arrives in the Bronx and convinces a building superintendent to give him a place to sleep in exchange for doing some odd jobs, such as carrying out trash. Skeeter then finds a full time job at a fruit stand. He works cleaning up and delivering fruit to customers around the neighborhood. Then Skeeter begins taking some fruit home to a woman in his building. On a particular day, the woman tells Skeeter of an event and promises to spend the day with him if he brings fruit for a picnic. He agrees and puts fruit in a basket in a storeroom with plans to return later to steal it. The owner realizes Skeeter's plan and is waiting. He drops the window onto Skeeter's body, effectively trapping him, and beats him with a barrel stave. Skeeter misses the bus and the woman leaves with another man, prompting Skeeter's decision to return to Harlem because the Bronx is simply bad luck.

The poems that follow are "Widow with a Moral Obligation" by Helene Johnson, "Poem" by Langston Hughes, "Always the Same" by Langston Hughes, and "Goodbye, Christ" by Langston Hughes. The final story of the book is "Long Black Song" by Richard Wright, the story of a black woman at home alone with her baby and awaiting the return of her husband, Silas, who has gone to town to sell their cotton. While she waits, a white salesman arrives and has sex with her. He leaves the graphophone he was trying to sell and forgets his hat, pencil, and handkerchief at the house. When Silas returns and finds the items, he quickly surmises what's happened and begins beating the woman with a whip. She runs away and manages to slip back around to get her baby from the house, then runs away again, planning to intercept the salesman the following morning so that he doesn't go to the house. She falls asleep and doesn't intercept the man. When Silas encounters the young man he beats him, and a second man gets out of the car belonging to the young salesman. Silas kills one of them and shoots at the car, but the other gets away.

The woman then goes to the house, begging Silas to run away. He refuses but tells her that she must leave before "they" return to kill Silas. She eventually gives in and is a short distance away when several cars arrive. Silas shoots from the house several times before the men outside set fire to the house. The woman waits for him to run out, but he never does and the house burns to the ground.

Reflections on the Renaissance Analysis

The term "renaissance" is used by several of the authors of this section. Generally, it seems to refer to a period in the 1920s during which a great number of whites take notice of Negro literature, art, and entertainment, and want first-hand seats to events involving Negro artists. Wallace Thurman, citing the fact that life had become too easy for the Negro artists because of this increase of attention, coins the phrase "niggeratti" to describe the Negro literati of the day.

McKay makes an interesting point related to the riot and subsequent demands for Harlem stores to hire Negroes for clerk positions. According to McKay, a group is formed to back the picketers and the organization of this group prompts capitulation by the merchants. Then members of the group begin to argue among themselves,

questioning whether the clerks should be the light-skinned or dark-skinned of the race. This tendency toward prejudice from within the race is not often the topic of discussion, though it must be more common than most people of other races realize as several writers have addressed this issue. It's noted that Wallace Thurman wrote a novel called "The Blacker the Berry" about a very dark-skinned woman who faces prejudice from both Negroes and whites because of her extremely dark complexion.

The tone of "Long Black Song" is darker than most of the essays and stories of the book. The story depicts the typical life of a Negro who has managed to save enough money to buy a small farm and hopes to eventually live a better life though his own hard work. The woman of the story admits that her husband treats her better than many Negroes treat their women. Throughout the story, the reader sees the continuation of the ideal that whites are superior and that Negroes tend to emulate what the whites do. It's noted that Silas has purchased land because that's what a successful white farmer would do. He also says he might hire a man to help farm additional land he's recently purchased, again citing the fact that a white farmer would do that. The wife notes that most Negro women have to work in the fields. At the opposite side of this emulation is a deep hatred. The wife says that Silas holds a bitter hatred for whites and the fact that his wife had a white man in his home seems to anger him more than the fact that she had sex with the man.

Characters

The New Negro

Described by A. Phillip Randolph, this is the person who is willing and able to stand up to an emerging situation in order to give the Negro race a step forward. Randolph cites the fact that some Negroes are being forced into acts of violence because police are unable to maintain control. Randolph says that the members of this new group are not willing to lie down and die. Instead, they hear the "primal law of self-preservation." This person is unwilling to allow a politician to make empty promises and wants a good job for good pay with the opportunity to purchase goods in a common marketplace. This person is mentioned by several authors and is referred to by a variety of names, but all identify this person as necessary.

The Unnamed Woman from Long Black Song

A woman who is alone with her baby and awaiting the return of her husband when a traveling salesman who is white arrives and pushes her into having sex with him. The woman longs for something more than she has, but feels guilty when faced with her husband's accusations. When she realizes that her husband is to be killed after having killed a white man, this woman accepts the blame, saying that whatever happens to her husband is the result of her actions. The woman bemoans the fact that black and white are tied in a continuing struggle and that there's a "river of blood" that pulls men like her husband into its tide. She points out that her husband hates whites and she seems herself to envy the life of whites.

The Old Negro

The term "Old Negro" is discussed at length by Alain Locke, and it's Locke who says that this person is really more of an ideal than a real person. The Old Negro is the subject of significant debate as whites try to help him up, keep him down, or make some other effort to change his life, for the better or the good. Locke then makes a contrast to the New Negro, saying that most don't know what to do with this person because they are accustomed to the old.

Arthur Harris

A man who leaves his wife waiting on a street corner and returns to find her struggling with a man who later is identified as a plain-clothes police officer. Harris struggles with the man and inflicts a fatal knife wound that prompts the riots of August, 1900, in New York.

Eight-Ball Eddy Boyd

The nickname for a young man who frequents Pop Overton's barber shop and who clashes there with a man named Dirty Cozzens in "Blades of Steel." Eight-Ball seems to be a decent man, though he eventually defeats Cozzens by using a razor taken from Pop Overton's shop.

Dirty Cozzens

The man who is noted to be an enemy of Eight-Ball and who almost comes to blows when the two argue over who is next for a haircut in "Blades of Steel." Author Rudolph Fisher cites Cozzens as having gotten the name "dirty" from the color of his skin and says that Cozzens had been pushed into being tough by his very nature and by his environment. Cozzens is ultimately defeated when he again clashes with Eight-Ball.

Paul

A young student in the story of "Cane" by Jean Toomer , Paul is attending school with whites, though he is apparently of a mixed race. Paul seems to be stressed about his ethnicity. Paul's roommate notes that Paul never offers up information about himself and that there are those who wonder about his ancestry. Paul seems to be very conscious of his difference and appears to feel a connection with the people of the Negro race. When he is out with a young lady for dinner and leaves the restaurant during a dance, a Negro doorman smiles in what seems to be a knowing way, which prompts Paul to return and tell the doorman that what is about to happen is something beautiful.

Wallace Thurman

Thurman is the editor of a Negro magazine called "The Messenger" in the 1920s and who lives near essayist Langston Hughes. Hughes notes that the best thing about the magazine is Thurman's editorials, which may take opposing view depending on the general attitudes about a particular subject at a particular point in time. Thurman is honest enough to tell Hughes that the viewpoint of "The Messenger" is whatever will pay the bills. Thurman enters into an endeavor with Langston to create a magazine called "Fire." The magazine is a costly failure and most of the copies are destroyed in a house fire, making the few that survive collector's items. Thurman dies of tuberculosis on the charity ward of a hospital.

Sufi Abdul Hamid

The leader of an organization called the Negro Industrial and Clerical Alliance in Harlem, as described by Claude McKay in "Harlem Runs Wild." Hamid is among the instigators of the riots against the Harlem merchants, according to McKay.

Skeeter Gordon

From "Barrel Staves" by Arna Bontemps, Skeeter is a sneak and a con man who is kicked out of his Harlem home by his woman and tries to turn over a new leaf in the Bronx but soon finds himself in trouble and ready to return to Harlem.

Silas

The husband from "Long Black Song" who shoots and kills a white man who Silas knows has had sex with his wife. Silas then makes a stand and is killed by the whites who come to the house after learning of the murder.

Objects/Places

Harlem

Located in New York, Harlem is said to be the place where a "renaissance" of Negro artistic endeavors occur in the 1920s.

Garveyism

A term used to describe the ideals of Marcus Garvey, including the plan to establish a nation in Africa as seen throughout the section titled the New Negro Radicalism.

The Cotton Club

Located at 142nd and Lenox Avenue, the Cotton Club is listed as one of the best-known nightclubs of Harlem as listed in the Urban Setting section. It's later noted that the club is overly-exclusive, which means it isn't frequented by the common people.

Ellis Island

Where those arriving in New York were taken in and examined. The procedure is described by Claude McKay in "A Long Way from Home."

Pop Overton's Barber Shop

Where Eight-Ball and Dirty Cozzens almost have a fight in "Blades of Steel" by Fisher.

West Illana

The freighter described by Langston Hughes in "Luani of the Jungles."

Jook

A word introduced by Zora Neale Hurston in "Characteristics of Negro Expression," which means "a bawdy house."

Belle Lake

Where Uncle Monday is first spotted in "Uncle Monday" by Zora Neale Hurston.

Rent Parties

Described by Langston Hughes in "The Big Sea," this is a party at the home of an individual. Food was reasonably offered with free entertainment, and the partygoers seldom know their host or hostess.

The Messenger

A Negro magazine that buys Langston's Hughes's first stories, as mentioned in several of Hughes's essays.

Niggeretti

A term coined by Wallace Thurman to describe the Negro literati who had found themselves at the heart of a vital movement, making their lives overly easy and "spoiling" them, as used in several of the essays.

Themes

Coming of Age

Alain Locke is the first to mention the words "coming of age" within this book, which is actually a series of essays, though many talk about the concept in different terms. In the case of Locke, he points out that the plight of the Negro has gained world-wide attention and that this attention has created some opportunities and responsibilities for the Negro. The ability and willingness to deal with this new responsibility requires a different kind of leader than that of ages past. A. Phillip Randolph uses the terms "New Crowd" and "Old Crowd" to define the leaders of today as opposed to those of years past, and goes so far as to generate a list of names of those no longer suited to leadership. Randolph isn't saying that these leaders haven't carried out their duties in their time, but that the world - and the Negro - is changing and that both must be willing to face the challenges of those changes. The coming of age in this case affects more than a single person or even group of people. While the Negroes are coming of age to meet the changes, the rest of the world must change to live with this new race.

Nature Versus Nurture

The question of nature and nurture is seen in several of the essays and stories, but perhaps one of the most outstanding is in "Blades of Steel" by Rudolph Fisher. In this story, Fisher introduces a character he calls Dirty Cozzens. The young man picked up the nickname from his color with someone initially calling him "dirty yallar" because of his skin tone. Fisher notes that Cozzens now has two facts against him - his friends have tagged him with this less-than-pleasing nickname and his environment has little in the way of positive reinforcement. Whether Cozzens would have been different in a different environment or with a different start in life is not a question explored by Fisher.

Another story in which the "nature versus nurture" theme is evident is "Barrel Staves." The author of this story uses as a main character a young man known as Skeeter who is nothing more than a con man and a sneak. Whether he can control his actions is not discussed in the story, but it is noted that he isn't lazy. In fact, he shows great initiative in getting jobs where no one was advertising the need for an employee and making himself a cart for delivering fruit for the vendor. His great endeavors and creativity, however, including finding ways to get by with things, ultimately cost him his newly acquired positions. What is interesting is that both his employers and a would-be girlfriend make him for a sneak upon first meeting him.

The Necessity of Evolution

Several authors, especially those in the early chapters, point out the need to be willing and able to evolve in response to the changing environment. This is especially true in the case of the "New Negro," a concept discussed in depth by Alain Locke and A. Phillip

Randolph. Both offer the idea that the "New Negro" must be willing to accept and teach a new philosophy. Randolph says that a new stance on the political and social front is necessary and goes on to list names of those who have proven themselves unwilling to evolve. It's also noted that the Negro's changes will impact their environment and that other races will also have to make adjustments.

Zora Neale Hurston describes the need for an evolution of language and says that is the mark of the highly developed civilizations. There are several authors who note the need for both individual and group evolution in order to hone skills and advance as a race.

Style

Point of View

The point of view changes from one story to the next, depending on the work, the writer, and the purpose of the piece. Some are written in third person with an omniscient perspective, others in third person with a limited perspective, and several are written in first person with a limited perspective. The changing of person and perspective is necessary for the collection of essays, poems, and stories presented, as is the change of perspective. The changes are not confusing as the reader will necessarily be expecting such changes with the variety of authors and writing samples and styles.

It should be noted that there are also some works of fiction included in the story, though there are many essays that are presented as opinions and are, therefore, non-fiction. These essays are typically presented as a non-personal first-person, meaning the word "I" is never or seldom used, but the article is absolutely written from the perspective of the author. Though the author in these cases may not say, "I believe" a specific fact or argument to be true, the wording indicates this to be the case.

Setting

The vast majority of the stories are related to Harlem, though there are a few with settings outside the area. Those not set in Harlem are included in the book because of their influence during the era known as the "Harlem Renaissance." It should be noted that the book includes many essays and that these have no definite setting, but address issues, people, and events relevant to Harlem. Harlem is described in great detail over the course of the stories and essays with the majority of these details offered by essayists who are talking specifically about events in Harlem, including the era known as the renaissance. For example, the Cotton Club is described by multiple writers with one referring to it as a very hot spot and another pointing out that it wasn't where the common people were allowed to gather. Many of the people and events described are real, including the riots over the refusal of Harlem merchants to hire Negroes as clerks and several writers and artists of the period. It should be noted that many of these are opinion pieces and should be taken as such by the reader.

Language and Meaning

With the array of authors represented in the book, there are an equal number of writing styles. There are also many different topics, and most readers will find they are interested in some, but not all. The selections range from politics to art. The writings are sometimes hopeful in tone and sometimes dark. It should be noted that the majority of the writers use the word "Negro" or "colored," which were arguably the most correct and generally accepted terms of the day. For the sake of continuity and to retain the same tone as the authors, these words are used throughout this study guide as well. There

are few derogatory racial messages, though there are writers who express their ideals in uncompromising terms. It should be noted that the word "nigger" appears occasionally, typically in the stories rather than the essays, though Langston Hughes points out a family in which the mother tells her sons that they should never "act like niggers." George S. Schuyler introduces the term "Aframerican" as he examines the reason art from members of the Negro race so closely resemble that of the white artists.

Structure

The book is divided into nine sections of varying lengths. Within these sections are multiple stories and essays, also of varying lengths. The sections are New Negro Radicalism; Harlem Renaissance: The Urban Setting; Afro-American Identity - Who Am I?; Afro-American Past - History and Folk Tradition; Visual Arts: To Celebrate Blackness; Afro-American Art: Art or Propaganda? High or Low Culture?; Christianity: Alien Gospel or Source of Inspiration?; Alienation, Anger, Rage; and Reflections on the Renaissance and Art for a New Day. The sections contain as few as two stories in the case of "Visual Arts," and as many as fifteen. Many of the stories are only one or two pages in length, though some range more than fourteen. The stories are titled and most titles offer some clue as to the content of the story.

Quotes

"The New Negro has arrived with a stiffened back bone, dauntless manhood, defiant eye, steady hand and a will of iron." If We Must Die, p. 22

"The tide of Negro migration, northward and city-ward, is not to be fully explained as a blind flood started by the demands of war industry coupled with the shutting off of foreign migration, or by the pressure of poor crops coupled with increased social terrorism in certain sections of the South and Southwest. Neither labor demand, the boll weevil nor the Ku Klux Klan is a basic factor, however contributory any or all of them may have been." The New Negro, Alain Locke, p. 49

"Negro Harlem is situated in the heart of Manhattan and covers one of the most beautiful and healthful sites in the whole city. It is not a fringe, it is not a slum, nor is it a 'quarter' consisting of dilapidated tenements." Black Manhattan, p. 65

"For, as the whites have their blonde and brunette, so do the blacks have their chocolate, chocolate-to-the-bone, brown, low-brown, teasing-brown, high-brown, yellow, high-yellow and so on. The difference on our side is so much more interesting and funny." A Negro Extravaganza, p. 134

"Death cut the strings that gave me life; And handed me to Sorrow; The only kind of middle wife; My folks could beg or borrow." Saturday's Child by Countee Cullen, p. 146

"They ain't nevah made a hole in me, for Ise got magic in mah skin foh protection, when you done got you souvenir there on you wrist, Banjo Boy." From Banjo, by Claude McKay

"Taint no law on earth dat kin make a man be decent if it aint in 'im." Sweat, by Zora Neale Hurston, p. 202

"The American Negro must remake his past in order to make his future. Though it is orthodox to think of America as the one country where it is unnecessary to have a past, what is a luxury for the nation as a whole becomes a prime social necessity for the Negro." The Negro Digs Up His Past, Arthur A. Schomburg, p. 217

"If we are to believe the majority of writers of Negro dialect and the burnt-cork artists, Negro speech is a weird thing, full of 'ams' and 'Ises.' Fortunately we don't have to believe them. We may go directly to the Negro and let him speak for himself." Characteristics of Negro Expression by Zora Neale Hurston, p. 236

"One of the most promising 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." The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain by Langston Hughes, p. 305

"Negroes are the only people in America not standardized. The feel of the African jungle is in their blood. Its rhythms surge through their bodies. Look at how Negroes laugh and dance and sing, all spontaneous and individual." Infants of the Spring by Wallace Thurman, p. 322

"The belief in the equality of all white folks - making skin color the gauge of worth and the measure of citizenship rights - has caused the lowest to strive to become among the highest." Our Greatest Give to America, George S. Schuyler, p. 363

"Negro writers must become truer sons of the people, more loyal providers of spiritual bread and less aesthetic wastrels and truants of the streets." Spiritual Truancy, by Alain Locke, p. 406

Topics for Discussion

Who, according to A. Phillip Randolph, are the "old crowd?" Who are the "New Negroes?" What are the roles of these two in the present and the future? Which other essayists and writers in this edition support those claims?

What was special about the "Cotton Club?" Compare the Cotton Club to a typical rent party as described by Hughes. What other events and entertainments were popular at this time? Describe the "salon" or literary meeting as detailed by Thurman.

Describe the reasons presented that a Negro artist should pull from his African roots. Describe the argument against this. Which do you believe to be correct?

Compare the character named Skeeter from "Barrel Staves" to the character named Eight-Ball Eddy in Blades of Steel. Compare each of these to the young student named Paul in "Cane." Compare each to Sykes in "Sweat."

Give three examples of writers who address the issue of Negroes who envy whites. What are the results in each case?

Give three examples of authors who address the similarities of Negroes and whites. What are the results in each case?

Schomburg presents the idea that Negroes have been actively involved in attaining their own freedom. List two authors who agree with this statement and two who disagree.

Who is "Uncle Monday?" What is the role of "hoodoo" men and women in Negro culture? Is the role positive or negative? Support your answer.