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Harlem

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Harlem is a neighborhood in New York City in the United States. It was initially lived by the Dutch from seventeenth to eighteenth century.¹ Then when the time of the great migration came---as a result of the beginning of World War I and the industrial revolution that needed labors to produce weapons---the black people from the rural south states escaped from the place where equality was limited and migrated to the northern cities in order to find safe places with more opportunities and less discrimination.² The lives of the African Americans in Harlem started and continued with many obstacles. Obviously, their lives had to face the racism problems. To overcome the racism dilemmas, they used their wisdom and the creation of cultures such as literatures, arts, and music. The measures they used to encounter the situation were part of the Harlem Renaissance movement which was between the end of World War I and the beginning of the Great Depression.³ This movement was the great creation of cultures by African Americans that caused the change in economic situation which led to the ability to empower and control the community, and this resulted in the establishment of civil rights and equality of black people.

Before the era of the Harlem Renaissance (also known as the “New Negro Movement), it was the time of the great migration which was the phenomenon that

¹ Maurrasse, David. *Listening to Harlem: Gentrification, Community, and business*. 2006. p.14.

² “Harlem Renaissance.” *Biography*. 3 Sep. 2012. <<http://www.biography.com/tv/classroom/harlem-renaissance>>

³ Rowen, Beth. “The Birth of Harlem Renaissance.” *Infoplease, All The Knowledge You Need*. 3 Sep. 2012. <<http://www.infoplease.com/spot/bhmharlem1.html>>

brought more than seven-million black people from the south to the major northern cities like Chicago, Cleveland, and New York City.⁴ Here, in the northern cities, the blacks found better opportunities such as better jobs involved in the industrial field, better schools and the rights to vote.⁵ Thus, as the massive stream of the blacks moved and began to gradually migrate to Harlem, causing the growth of Harlem's blooming black population, there was a necessary need for the places to live. However, the whole New York City was developing substantially as well. Hence, there are so many residential properties. However, the whites denied to rent and to sell real estates to the blacks and limited the number of blacks in some particular jobs.⁶ This was the obvious circumstance that presented the white resistance to the uptown immigration. Nevertheless, from the higher majority of black people especially when the quality ones like doctors, lawyers, famous artists and business people, it influenced the whites to abandon the town. Therefore, the blacks finally got their real estates and be able to continued their lives in Harlem.

Generally, as more people moved, more the institutions and businesses bloomed such as Urban League which counseled the black immigrants, the NAACP which fought for the civil rights, the UNIA-ACL which advocated African Americans to come together and feel proud of their race, social service agencies and small businesses like salons.⁷ These institutions acted as self-government for African Americans and provided them with some semblance of self-determination. This

⁴ Wikipedia contributors. "Great Migration (African American)." *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. 3 Sep. 2012. < [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Migration_\(African_American\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Migration_(African_American))>

⁵ Maurrasse, David. *Listening to Harlem: Gentrification, Community, and business*. 2006. p.19.

⁶ Maurrasse, David. *Listening to Harlem: Gentrification, Community, and business*. 2006. p.18.

⁷ "Harlem Renaissance." *Biography*. 3 Sep. 2012. <<http://www.biography.com/tv/classroom/harlem-renaissance>>

helped them from the hindrances to empower the city. Importantly, the African American civil rights activists used mainstream cultures, for instance, jazz music and literature, by employing the artists and writers for the civil rights and equality instead of using direct political means. This method could bring the attention to the American population. This results in the emergence of great African American cultures, economic and identity affirmation in American society and this was known as the Harlem Renaissance.⁸

The characteristics of the Harlem Renaissance were the idea which represents their racial pride, fights against discrimination and boosts social integration in virtue of the creation of literatures, arts and music. The cultures during the Harlem Renaissance were the door to African American for the expression, the race uplifting and professional success. Consequently, the neighborhood became a haven for black artists, writers, painters, poets and musicians. The works of bigwigs such as Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, W.E.B. Dubois, and numberless others created and sustained this renaissance that Harlem has become legendary.

The themes illustrated throughout the Harlem Renaissance were influenced by the African American southern lives such as being a slave, the acceptance of African Americans' origin and race, the blacks' feelings about what they faced and Harlem which was the main place for the movement. The works of this period were mainly promoted by the black-owned magazines such as *Opportunity* and *The Crisis*, which became the prominent voice of black cultures.⁹ The black cultures varied from fictions to poetry, from performing arts to music and from paintings to sculptures.

⁸ "The Harlem Renaissance Multimedia Source." *John Carroll University*. 3 Sep. 2012.
<<http://www.jcu.edu/harlem/index.htm>>

⁹ "The Harlem Renaissance." *Kura Hulanda Museum*. 3 Sep. 2012.
<<http://www.kurahulanda.com/temporary-harlem-renaissance>>

Most of the fictions are based on the story of black people who tried to prove themselves for the acceptance from the whites and overcame the racial prejudice; the examples of such fictions are “There Is Confusion” by Jessie Fauset, “Drenched in Light” by Zora Neale Hurston and “Passing” by Nella Larsen. These fictions drew the attention from the public. The poems of the Harlem Renaissance usually portrayed the concealed pain of being in the situation of harsh discrimination, prejudice and even lynching. The partial masterpiece were “I, Too” by Langston Hughes, “Yet Do I Marvel” by Countee Cullen and “If We Must Die” by Claude McKay. The performing arts that black people involved were Broadway, blackface minstrel and the musical revue, for instance, “Shuffle Along”.¹⁰ Above all, the music in this age acts as the key to help blacks and whites connect and interact with each other. Jazz and blues, which were performed in the club such as the Cotton Club, were the main success during this time.¹¹ Besides, there were also the visual arts; paintings, for example, the artworks of William H. Johnson that portrayed black people with their strength and the affluence of their culture through colors and details, and sculptures that depicted African American beauty such as “African Dancer” by Richmond Barthe. In short, all of these masterworks provided the aspects of African American cultures which could prove their humanity and original goals, and catch the attention from the whites to experience black cultures.

As black cultures flourished, the economic development flourished as well. When the black cultures were at their extremely peak, both blacks and whites tended to come to Harlem more and more. Thus, the revenue of Harlem increased. Businesses and employment thrived. Poverty was slowly fading. The lives of people

¹⁰ Howes, Kelly King. *Harlem Renaissance*. 2001. p.70-73.

¹¹ Howes, Kelly King. *Harlem Renaissance*. 2001. p.84.

in Harlem were improved with better opportunities and ownership. Consequently, the ownership generated the power and control. Since the African American had the empowerment, it's the foundation to their civil right struggle afterwards.

Though the Harlem Renaissance was ended by the Great Depression that caused the economic recession and led to the culture downturn, the legacy from this era changed how American and the world felt about African Americans. The movement changes people's perception on black people from filthy laborers to intellectuals. The Harlem Renaissance gained its achievements because it possessed the sociological development both politically and economically through racial integration using their cultures to merge the blacks and the whites collectively. Harlem was the place where black culture bloomed with their racial pride, rights, and better quality of life converged. Importantly, the improvement throughout the time made them received not only the acceptance from the whites, but also their desired equality.