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Harlem

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Between the end of World War I (1914-18) and the beginning of the period of economic hard times called the Great Depression (in the early 1930s), there was a thriving time of the African American life and culture in Harlem, a section of New York City which is a African American Community. This period knew as the “Harlem Renaissance”.¹ African American had made many arts before Harlem Renaissance but they had not paid more attention as much as they did in Harlem Renaissance. According to this, African Americans are proud of their culture and use this culture to be the model of current culture. Culture is one of the great thing in this period. Defining the reason for Harlem Renaissance’ s culture popularity is its concept and style. Culture its own and reflects many aspects for readers.

This cultural explosion showed the ability of African American to white American and led to the equality between black and white Americans. Culture is the important factor because it tells about Africa American story. The main themes of culture in Harlem Renaissance are about the African American history, use of the Blues and Jazz tradition, and the exploration of individual identity. There were many poets who had participation in making

¹ “Harlem Renaissance” *Paul P. Reuben* 15 October 2012
<<http://www.csustan.edu/english/reuben/pal/chap9/9intro.html>>

the reputation of Harlem Renaissance, for instance, Phillis Wheatley, James Weldon Johnson, Countee Cullen, Claude McKay, Arna Bontemps, Sterling Brown.²

African American history was about racism and slavery. Racism was a problem between black and white Americans. It seemed like whites did not accept blacks in every way. In “If We Must Die”, a Claude McKay’s poem, there was violent attack between white and black Americans due to a racism. According to a poem, a poet stated that whites brutally killed blacks like hungry dogs. Blacks begged for death with mercy rather than cruelty if he must die. He also supported every blacks to fight back by giving reason that if black do nothing, the murders still continue.³ There was a calling for the equality and freedom of blacks in “Let America be America Again”, a poem written Langston Hughes. It is said that every blacks who immigrated to America or minor groups in America never got rights, such as, rights in job.⁴ Another poem of Langston Hughes related to racism is “Democracy”. In this poem, it is said that everybody has their birthrights, but why blacks and whites was not equal. Another problem of blacks was slavery. Slave had no freedom in everything and had to do anything what his or her master command. Many blacks were slaves for whites. For example, George Moses Horton, a slave of William Horton, composed “The Hope of Liberty”. In this poem, it is about suffering in African American slave. They had to be a slave

² “Harlem Renaissance” *Wikipedia, The Free encyclopedia* 6 March 2011
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harlem_Renaissance>

³ “If We Must Die” *Hamlet Pericles* 26 August 2010
<<http://www.helium.com/items/802718-poetry-analysis-if-we-must-die-by-claude-mckay>>

⁴ “Let America be America Again” *Wikipedia, The Free encyclopedia* 24 January 2013
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Let_America_Be_America_Again>

since they born and had no rights in studying.⁵ In “Negro”, a Langston Hughes’ s poem, it is stated that African Americans were slaves and had to do their slaves’ work, for instance, cleaning door-steps, brushing boots.⁶

In Harlem Renaissance, there was an use of several elements of folk tradition, for example, Blues and Jazz which have their roots in the History of African American. Blues and Jazz tradition did not similar as in the past because in Harlem Renaissance put the element of European music together with the Blues and Jazz. According to this, it made whites be interested in this new kind of music and led to lift up of the African American social.⁷ Josephine Baker is good example of people whom respected by whites. At the beginning, she was just a part in the chorus line. She became the queen of “Le Jazz hot” in Paris which was a popular term of music in nightclubs at Paris. Later, she got three medals from the French government.⁸ In 1920s, the most of growth and change in African American’ s music, white musicians had more interaction with black musicians. Moreover, many white composers, such as, Aaron Copland, Frances Poulenc, Erik Satie, Igor Stravinsky, and Maurice Ravel initiate to use the elements of Blues and Jazz in their works.

In Harlem Renaissance, it was a time that black Americans wanted to themselves to white Americans as “New Negro”. Visual artists were the

⁵ “The hope of liberty” *The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill* 31 January 2013
<<http://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/hortonlife/summary.html>>

⁶ “Negro by Langston Hughes” *Amanda A.* 2 December 2007
<<http://amandafa.blogspot.com/2007/12/negro-by-langston-hughes.html>>

⁷ “Harlem Renaissance: The Making of American Music” *The Kwanzaa Guide* 11 April 2010
<<http://kwanzaaguide.com/2010/04/harlem-renaissance-the-making-of-american-music/>>

⁸ “Josephine Baker” *Wikipedia, The Free encyclopedia* 29 January 2013
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Josephine_Baker>

important key in showing the New Negro identity in this period. For instance, Palmer C. Hayden, Laura Wheeler Waring, Sargent Claude Johnson, and Malvin Gray Johnson. These artists depicted appearance and life of African American by drawing portraits. Bold and modern portraits was used in describing African American as a new Negro.⁹ First example is “Mask” by Sargent Claude Johnson. It is a mask made by copper and shows a face of African American—an oval and flat face.¹⁰ Another example is “Jeunesse” by Palmer Hayden. In this picture, African Americans are dancing at the Savoy, the most famous jazz club in Harlem. This picture reflect a habit of African American in that period. They liked to go to pub, listen to jazz, and meet other people for their enjoyment.¹¹ Last, “Nightlife” by Archibald J. Motley is a picture describing about the nightlife of African Americans. In this picture, artist drew from Chicago’s Bronzeville neighborhood which is a city of African American population in 1930s. This picture reflects a place where African Americans assembled when they were free. They enjoyed the music and danced with other people in a pub.¹²

In conclusion, a culture in Harlem Renaissance make people know about African Americans. This culture influence still alive in today’s world as the heritage of black American. Harlem Renaissance’s culture is amazing after seeing exactly what they do. Harlem Renaissance period created the great jobs

⁹ “African American Art” *Richard J. Powell* April 2005

<http://www.artlex.com/ArtLex/a/african_american_4.html>

¹⁰ “Mask by Sargent Claude Johnson” *The University for Creative Careers*

<<http://www.scadmoa.org/art/collections/2-mask>>

¹¹ “Jeunesse” *Emma Watry* 16 March 2012

<<http://emmawatry.blogspot.com/2012/03/jeunesse.html>>

¹² “Nightlife” *The Art institution of Chicago*

<<http://www.artic.edu/aic/collections/exhibitions/AfricanAmerican/Nightlife>>

making white American accept in a ability of black American and give a equality to them. This period make African American have something to be proud of themselves, learn from it, and use this culture to be an example in today' s culture. However, if you study more about a culture and study from it, it can be more than a culture. It can be an imagination, inspiration, and civilization. Culture is more than you can imagine.