The Harlem Renaissance

Honors Thesis

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Minor of History

In the School of History
at Salem State University

By

Jordan A. Hill

Dr. Jamie Wilson
Faculty Advisor
Department of History

***

Commonwealth Honors Program
Salem State University
2018

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements……... ……..ii
Abstract……. ……..iv
Chronology……... ……..1
Narrative……... ……..3
Biographies……... ……..12
James Weldon Johnson…… ……..12
Langston Hughes……. ……..15
Document Excerpts……... ……..18
The Mule Bone- by Langston Hughes and... ……..18
Zora Neale Hurston
Meet The Mama- by Zora Neale Hurston.... ……..20
Further Reading (bibliography)…… ……..29
Side-Bar 1……. ……..30

Acknowledgements

"I must never write when I do not want to write"-Langston Hughes

One of the first lessons that I learned from a very young age was to say "Thank You," for seemingly everything. At first, as a 6 year-old, I had no time to express such thanks. Imaginary adventures called. "I'll say 'Thank You' after I defeat this villain," I would say to myself. Gratefully, that version of me changed…only to be replaced by, "I'll say 'Thank You' after I update my Facebook and Twitter." Joking aside, please allow me this time to finally offer "thank you's" and gratitude.

The first "Thank You!" goes to Dr. J. Wilson of the Salem State History Department. Thank you for providing me with this dream of an opportunity. As a young child, I always said that I was going to be a writer. However, after years of writing for the grade, that dream became dormant. Your offer helped to revive a youthful part of me that had not expressed joy and excitement for some time since freshman year of High School. Thank you for taking a chance by choosing me. You only had a semester to examine me, and decide if you trusted me with this project. And for that I thank you. Being the only undergraduate on this project relayed your trust and confidence in me, and hopefully my work and effort was able to reciprocate that trust. Thank you for your patience in editing my work, correcting commas, and redirecting my attention when it drifted. I was, and still am honored, to have been able to work on this project.

The second "Thank You!" goes to Professor Scott Nowka, head of the Salem State Honors Department. In the colloquialism of today: You, Scott, are a "Real One." You are here for the students, and you let it show. You answered countless emails that I sent. You expressed no frustration as I sent in forms, abstracts, and assignments, seemingly religiously, on the day and nights of deadlines. I felt that you always wanted to help me out, in *any* way necessary. For example, how about the fact that I am in the Honors Program, and about to graduate *on time* despite joining spring semester Junior Year? You helped to waive courses, distribute credits, and walked with me until we were both able to sigh and say, "Well, now on to the easy part, what's your thesis on?" Thank you for your guidance and leadership.

The third “Thank You!” contains a lot of people. If I attempted to write out everything, we would have another 20-paged paper on our hands. Thanks to Meagan McNair. You listened to me spout nonsense, yell at my computer; watched me walk around a room while I read a book. You asked how it was going, when you saw that it was *definitely* not going. Thanks to my friends who understood and respected my drive, and did not take offense when I ditched them to learn about the 1920s. Thank you for the coffee and snacks, and the random texts to make sure I was alive. And then to all the people who expressed interest and “good lucks” throughout this project, thank you so much.

The last “Thank You,” and perhaps, the most important one, goes to my parents. I’m about to graduate with a soon-to-be-published piece. I’m about to graduate with honors from a state institution. You have walked with me, every step of the way. From college visits, through my 2-years at Middlesex Community College, and now to here. You guys have supported me in every way possible. And while you supported me, you never made me feel indebted to you; though I am. You allowed me the independence to make decisions, and mistakes. You never flinched when you received a random phone call informing you of a new bill. You expressed excitement in my education, and encouraged me to take chances. Mom, you reminded me of my dream to write, and encouraged me to take Dr. Wilson’s offer. Dad, you reminded me that, despite my reservations and insecurities, that there was something that made me stand out where others did not. You guys have a claim in this paper as much as the people above. Thank you.

Abstract

In the spring of 2017, I was approached by Dr. J. Wilson of the Salem State History Department, to join him in a writing project that will be published in 2019. The project is a volume called: *50 Events that Shaped African American History*. My contribution to this project is a chapter on the Harlem Renaissance. The Harlem Renaissance took place between 1920 and 1930. Once the decade passed, the Harlem Renaissance ended as quickly as it had begun. Using primary and secondary sources, I researched and learned about the various themes within the Harlem Renaissance. Such themes include: politics, literature, music, and black identity and culture. I had to write a chronology, a narrative, two biographies, and one sidebar. One biography is about Langston Hughes, and the other, James Weldon Johnson. The one side-bar comments on the concept of "The New Negro". Please enjoy.

The Harlem Renaissance

By Jordan Hill

Chronology

1896	*Plessy v. Ferguson* makes it so that segregation between white and black Americans is constitutional.
1896-1906	Paul Laurence Dunbar- published 16 books on poetry and fiction until his death. Dunbar is considered to be one of the "most successful black writers" before the Harlem Renaissance.
1909	NAACP created by a group of white and black activists
1912	James Weldon published *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* "the best novel written by a black before the Harlem Renaissance." It addressed the attempt of blacks to "come to terms" of with their own blackness (B.C. 67)
1915	The Great Migration starts. Former slaves and black Americans begin to migrate from the South to Northern cities in large numbers.
	Booker T. Washington dies. Washington was considered the leader of the Black communities in America, and his death allowed for other influential black leaders to lead.
1917	Marcus Garvey establishes UNIA (Universal Negro Improvement Association) in Harlem
1918	World War I ends
1919	Black Star Line Shipping created by Marcus Garvey in an attempt to create a black-economy for a separate black nation
February 1919	African American Veteran Parade. 2,900 Black soldiers who were overseas in World War I marched through Manhattan and Harlem. This show of militancy and pride began to usher in a new Black identity in America: "The New Negro"
1919 (Summer)	"Red summer". In the summer following the end of World War I, America erupts in racial riots. Black people; especially the veterans of WWI; were enthused with pride and the "New Negro Culture." These riots occurred not only down South, but also in the Northern cities. One of the most notorious were the riots in Chicago.
1920	Harlem emerges as the cultural capital of black America.
	James Weldon Johnson is appointed the first black executive secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People

	The 19th Amendment is ratified and gives all American women the right to vote. To solidify their victory, women voted in the next election.
1922	Dyer anti-lynching bill submitted but was eventually defeated.
1923	Langston Hughes leaves New York for a two year excursion in Europe.
	Jean Toomer publishes *Cane.*
1925	Marcus Garvey goes to prison for mail fraud and money solicitation.
1926	Carl Van Vechten publishes *Nigger Heaven*.
	Young black writers publish the magazine *Fire!!*
1929	The stock market collapses and the Great Depression begins.
1931	Alain Locke writes the obituary for the Harlem Renaissance.

Narrative

The Harlem Renaissance is a cultural and political movement centered in the predominantly African American neighborhood of Harlem, New York in the 1920s. Harlem was a middle class white and Jewish neighborhood before the Harlem Renaissance. Housing prices dropped in market value because of the collapse of the building boom in New York City in the early twentieth century and black realtors "brought a steadily increasing flow of black residents" into Harlem (Wintz 1988, 7). After 1915, the movement of African Americans to Harlem from other urban areas combined with the mass migration of African Americans out of the South to turn Harlem into the acclaimed capital of African American culture. With Harlem being practically empty, it provided a perfect opportunity for the black migrants, and they took advantage of it.

<Insert Sidebar 1>

In 1920, Harlem became "a primary destination for black people all over the world" (Ferguson 2008, 8) and as more black migrants arrived a new power seemed to arise within the community. The neighborhood represented the power and victory of black businessmen who were able to "[snatch] Harlem's newly developed real estate" from white hands and transform it into "the biggest and most elegant black community in the Western world." Harlem's black community became infused with a "youthful strength" and a feeling of "self-conscious sophistication" that began to hold sway (Huggins 1971,14). This youthful strength attracted the attention of older, more experienced black intellectuals and leaders including James Weldon Johnson, W.E.B. Du Bois, Alaine Locke, and Jessie Fauset who became architects of a Renaissance. As architects of the Harlem Renaissance, they helped attract younger artists and intellectuals to the burgeoning community and used their talents to show "a doubting and

skeptical world" the "evidence of Negro ability" to gain approval and validity (Huggins 1971, 27).

Johnson was a well-respected leader. Not only was he a successful author of *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*, but he also wrote poetry and was the principal of a high school and a lawyer in Jacksonville, Florida. He was a member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and in 1920 became the organization's first black executive secretary. As an activist he thought that "art and poetry would be the bridge between races in America" (Huggins 1971, 156) and that the creation of art and literature would further black people's political goals. He was of the assumption that "the final measure of the greatness of all peoples is the amount and standard of the literature and art they have produced," and believed that only then would the world recognize black culture as being equal to that of white peoples, namely those living in America (Gates 2011, 312). He mentored many of Harlem's young black writers and artists.

Alain Locke also had interest in helping to guide and lead the young group of new writers and intellectuals. Locke called them the "New Negro," and saw it as his responsibility to help "the Negro to look at himself afresh, to reject the stereotypes and clichés," and instead focus on the "integrity of race and personality" (Huggins 1971, 57). Locke, a well-respected professor, and others hosted dinners with young writers and artists. One of the goals of the dinners was to recognize the young writers and artists as the "future" of black culture. He noted that "the younger generation comes, bringing gifts. They are the first fruits of the Negro Renaissance. Youth speaks and the voice of the new Negro is heard" (Wintz 1988, 82). Locke believed that that in a new age of social sciences, the African-Americans could start the "process of telling himself and the world that he was worthy, had a rich culture, and could make

contributions of value" (Huggins 1971, 59). In order to do this, African American art and literature conscious and purposeful.

W.E.B. Du Bois had a vision for those involved in the Harlem Renaissance. In the days Renaissance, Du Bois was actively calling for African-Americans to band together and use the power of voting to be seen as equal Americans. He refused to "believe that the Negro vote counted for nothing" (Huggins, 31). His dream was that African-Americans could act as a "swing" vote of sorts, and thus demand the attention and respect of white politicians. He supported black troops fighting during World War I believing "they would return different men" and gain the respect of the country (Huggins 1971, 37). His dreams of African Americans changing the voting landscape never came to fruition and black World War I veterans never gained the respect they were entitled. Du Bois, nonetheless continued to seek meaningful changes in the lives of African Americans and the Harlem Renaissance was one such vehicle.

Du Bois, like Locke, argued that black art and literature had to be created with a political purpose. The artist had to create art to progress the rights of all black people. Du Bois makes his argument clear when he said "I do not care a damn for any art that is not used for propaganda" (Gates 2011, 332). Like many of his peers, Du Bois thought that if African-American culture was recognized on a higher cultural platform then political recognition and change would follow would follow for the race as a whole.

Jesse Fauset viewed the creation of literature as "the highest measure of a race's achievement and the most effective present tactic to advance her own race" (Lewis, 123). She received a master's degree in French through the University of Pennsylvania in 1919, as awarded Phi Betta Kappa key for her studies in classical languages in 1905, and taught French for fourteen years. In her role as editor of *The Crisis,* the magazine of the National Association for

the Advancement of Colored People, she published the works of younger writers including Langston Hughes. She insisted that African American literature should feature educated, dignified people" who can provide a positive image of the African American community.

Many young black artists were attracted to Harlem because "civil rights leaders soon encouraged [them] to flock to Harlem and market their products for the purpose of breaking down racial barriers." (Schneider 2006, 81). But not all of Harlem's young writers agreed with the idea of using their work for political purposes. Countee Cullen believed that art was "abstracted from race or any other condition of life" and thus resented being considered as a "Negro Poet" instead of simply a poet (Huggins 1971, 209). Instead, Cullen hoped that people would see him as a successful poet like all the others, except he happened to be black. By having the title of "a black poet," the success of his poetry would only be measured with success of previous black poets, severely limiting his impact in the literature world. Regardless of the different viewpoints, and the sometimes-fierce arguments and critiques, the works produced in the Harlem Renaissance are some of the most important publications of the twentieth century.

One of these works was Langston Hughes' poem "The Negro Speaks of Rivers." The poem is considered important for two reasons. First, the poem introduced many readers to the talent of the young Hughes when it was initially published and favorably received in *The Crisis*. Second, "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" was a significant publication because of the connections it makes made between and African heritage and contemporary African American culture. Hughes uses the imagery of rivers to show the longevity of African culture. Using the pronoun "I," Hughes describes how the African soul was like the ancient rivers of the world (Hughes, *The Negro Speaks of Rivers*). In so doing, he suggests that "[t]he black man…will persist because his soul has become one with the streams of life" (Huggins 1971, 67).

Another important piece of literature of the Harlem Renaissance was Jean Toomer's *Cane*. *Cane* was actually written prior to the Harlem Renaissance but helped to influence future writers like "Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, Zora Neale Hurston, Rudolph Fisher, and Wallace Thurmond" who "were deeply affected" after reading *Cane*. Toomer's writing helped to "[pioneer] much that would define the artistic quest of the Harlem Renaissance" and addressed "questions that other black writers" would try to address in their future works (Wintz 1988, 75-79).

Cane addresses themes of blackness, black people's geographic places of residence, and African American history. Toomer suggests that "the quest for Negro identity…is to look into the fullness of the past without shame or fear" (Huggins 1971, 186). He brings slavery into twentieth century African-American cultural narrative offering a challenge to narratives that DuBois and Johnson sought to introduce into the Renaissance. Their goal was to separate narratives of slavery from contemporary African Americans culture to focus on middle class concerns and uplift. Despite its limited publication, and the opinion from some older black intellectuals that his "characters did not suit" what they would call "good literature," *Cane* appeared to be effective to the new age black writers (Schneider 2006, 85).

Another important publication in the Harlem Renaissance came from a white writer. In 1927, Carl Van Vechten published his novel *Nigger Heaven* causing a political and intellectual maelstrom in white and black communities. In it, Van Vechten sought to "depict all facets of black life, and more importantly, he endeavored to shed some light on the complicated question of what it meant to be black in America" (Wintz 1988, 97). Though the title can be misleading, Van Vechten meant no disrespect or harm to the black community. Not everyone reacted with joy at the publication of Vechten's novel. W.E.B. Du Bois was one of the loudest and harshest

critics of *Nigger Heaven*. He thought that the novel was "salacious trash" and should not be read by anyone (Schneider, 85). Many in black communities responded in a similar fashion and resented Vechten's novel as exposing them to be critiqued by all. Though not entirely well liked, in the end *Nigger Heaven* offers several lessons. Perhaps the most important lesson is that there were friendships and partnerships between white and black intellectuals, writers, and publishers. It also demonstrates that black intellectuals like Du Bois and Johnson were not the only ones interested in expanding, evolving, and revealing black culture. Individuals in white communities also sought to show black culture in a positive and effective light.

African American magazines were able to publish the work of poets and writers, but they did not have the audience or the finances to make a writer truly successful, so black writers needed the assistance of white publishers and patrons who could publish and pay them their work and efforts. During the 1920s many white publishing houses and firms were genuinely interested and almost entranced by the new expressions of African American culture and identity. In addition, New York City's emergence as a publishing mecca meant that black writers could more easily obtain publishing contracts than ever before. Publishers often required different criteria before publishing books. Some desired material that invoked primitive themes and memories of Africa. Others wanted dialect poetry and poetry that came from the "heart and mind of the black race" (Wintz 1988, 171-172). A publisher's desire for a certain writing style, theme, or topic was oftentimes in conflict with what black writers wanted to write about and was often the root of creative disagreements between publishers and writers.

Black writers were also supported by white patrons who provided economic opportunities for them to pursue their art. At times patrons created contests with cash incentives to encourage the production of more black poetry and articles. However, like the relationships with publishers,

the relationships between patrons and black writers were often strained. It was common that many of the gifts and cash incentives provided had certain conditions included to sway the writer or artist in directions desired by the patron. Consequently, white publishers and patrons exerted a great deal of influence on Harlem Renaissance writers along with the black intellectuals who wanted to use the movement as a vehicle for political change.

The Renaissance as a Musical Movement

While literature played a key role, it was not the only art form of the Renaissance. There were visual artists like Aaron Douglass and Lois Mailou Jones who challenged their audiences with images inspired by African art and the African American experience. There were also musicians who created and played a new sound that would define the era, jazz. Jazz music of the Harlem Renaissance is remembered for its accessibility. When compared to literature, jazz made it easier for whites to cross the color line in Harlem. If well written, an essay or poem can be disagreed with, on the basis of one's political stances and relativity. With music, it is a little harder. Good music, and real musical talent is hard to deny.

Ironically, while intellectuals like Du Bois and Johnson pushed for an African American literature that would result in African American political empowerment and cultural acceptance by white mainstream society, jazz, undercut "habits of segregation much more immediately" than literature was able to (Schneider 2006, 86). Jazz may not have offered a means to the avenues of political power and equality, but it did provide opportunities for African American cultural production to become acceptable to segments of white society and even copied by white musicians.

Jazz originated in the Mississippi Delta region of the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. It was an amalgamation of musical ideas, intonations, and melodies from Africa, Europe, and the United States. Jazz arrived in Harlem and other northern urban communities by way of migrants escaping racism and segregation in communities throughout the South. It was part of a vibrant nightlife and could be heard in jazz clubs, speakeasies, and rent parties. Many well-known and some forgotten musicians were part of Harlem's jazz scene. The drummer Chick Webb was an innovator in the swing music, a subgenre of jazz. Louis Armstrong, the intrepid trumpet player, moved to Harlem to play with Fletcher Henderson's orchestra in 1924. His artistry would inspire later trumpeters including Dizzy Gillespie and Miles Davis.

Edward Kennedy "Duke" Ellington was one of most popular arrangers, composers, and pianist of the Renaissance. His goal was to use his music as "a means for breaking himself and other African Americans out of rigid categories" (Ogbar 2010, 35). His skill, along with others like: Bubber Miley, Jelly Roll Morton, Fletcher Henderson, and Don Redman, helped to fill nightclubs like the Cotton Club that used black talent to entertain its all-white clientele. Although jazz was not the movement of cultural elite or the movement the cultural elite were looking for to improve the lives of African Americans, it has become one of the most meaningful, American contributions to global music and art.

The Legacy of the Harlem Renaissance

The 1920s and early 1930s was a phenomenal and prolific time for black artists and there literary, visual, and musical renderings in Harlem and other urban black communities throughout the United States. Harlem was so vibrant and in constant demographic, political, and cultural

change, that it is almost as if Harlem was a world unto itself. Black men and women could dream dreams of grandeur and explore their artistic sensibilities. But, if we strip back the heady and grandiose veneer often associated with black Harlem in the 1920s, we see a New York City community beginning its process of ghetto formation. The great migration and Harlem Renaissance, brought in large numbers of black individuals and families who experienced overcrowded conditions, a limited adequate housing stock, and concomitant social and health problems. Prostitution, drugs, and high mortality rates were lived realities in Harlem and while the 1929 stock market crash devastated all Americans, it practically crippled the already delicate economy in Harlem. Income fell, and workers were cut, quickly turning "Harlem the ghetto" into "Harlem the slum" (Lewis 1971, 241).

As a political movement, the Harlem Renaissance failed to meet the expectations of its most vocal supporters. But as a literary moment, Renaissance writers influenced generations of white and black writers in the United States and throughout the world. Peter Abrahams, the South African writer, notes that after reading Alaine Locke's *The New Negro*, he realized that "the world could never again belong to white people only!" (Wintz 1988, 229). By focusing on class-consciousness, poverty, and the real lives of black people, writers brought attention to black peoples lived realities. 1920s jazz has inspired musicians across the globe to push boundaries of music. Most importantly, the Harlem Renaissance, according to historian Jeffrey Ogbar, laid the foundation for black freedom struggles of the mid to late twentieth century.

Biography

James Weldon Johnson (1871-1938)

James Weldon Johnson was born in 1871 in Jacksonville, Florida, to James Johnson and Helen Dillet, a West Indian immigrant. His family was well off by most standards of the mid to late nineteenth century. In the antebellum era his relatives were literate, free people of color in a nation that held millions of African American slaves. Johnson's father was the headwaiter for the Saint James hotel, one the finest lodgings in the state of Florida. His mother was one of the first women of color to teach in Florida's public-school system. Both his mother and father taught Johnson about his family's history which included his great-grandfather, who was an officer in Napoleon Bonaparte's army and his grandfather who was a freeborn politician in the Bahamas, a postmaster general, and inspector of police.

Johnson's family's home in Jacksonville was comfortable and was filled with music and books. His parents entertained notable African American leaders including, but not limited to, the abolitionist and statesmen Frederick Douglass, Bishop Daniel Payne, the Methodist minister, and journalist T. Thomas Fortune. As a young man he was educated by a Jacksonville physician and as he grew older received more specialized teachings that lead him to abandon African American Christianity and embrace American high culture.

Johnson became the proprietor of the first African-American daily newspaper in the nation, the first African-American lawyer to be admitted to the Florida Bar, and was a founder of the first Florida public high school for African-Americans. He was also a gifted musician who wrote operas and composed *Lift Every Voice and Sing*, a song commonly called the Negro National Anthem. In 1912, Johnson published his book: *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored*

Man, a book considered to be "the best novel written by a black before the Harlem Renaissance" (Wintz 1988, 67). He was also appointed the U.S. consul to Venezuela and Nicaragua in 1905, and was the first African-American executive secretary of the NAACP.

James Weldon Johnson often delivered speeches about African American civil rights and African American culture. When speaking to white audiences, Johnson highlighted the political injustices meted out to African Americans throughout the nation. In one speech he noted that despite rights enshrined in the U.S. Constitution, African-Americans were still suffering from daily "indignities of segregation, job discrimination, and the threat of racial violence" (Wintz 1988, 104). When speaking to black audiences, Johnson "called upon blacks to unite and assume the 'power' that their numbers should bring them" (Wintz, 104). In the second decade of the twentieth century, Johnson began to advocate for an African American literary movement that would help expand opportunities for black political advancement.

Johnson believed that America's white elite would recognize the value of African-American cultural production and grant blacks political equality if black writers produced materials that exhibited a certain cultural sophistication. In his preface to *Book of American Negro Poetry*, he wrote that "there is only one measure by which [a culture's] greatness is recognized and acknowledged," and that was through the amount and "standard of literature and art" that is produced (Huggins 1971, 227). This belief heavily influenced Johnson's efforts and activity in the Harlem Renaissance. By the time that the Harlem Renaissance was accepted as a literary movement, Johnson adjusted his approach and activity. Instead of trying to publish books, Johnson decided to serve as a critic and assist African American writers in the efforts to obtain publishing contracts and patronage.

As a critic and activist within the African-American community, Johnson had his own thoughts about the purpose of literature. African-American literature's and African American art's purpose was to expose a cultural intellect and was to be force for political change. However, he was not as adamant about the pragmatic purposes of African-American literature as W.E.B. DuBois who was noted to have said: "I do not care a damn for any art that is not used for propaganda" (Gates 2011, 332). In the end, Johnson believed that the most important issue for black writers was to find a publisher if only to show the skill and talent of the young writers.

James Weldon Johnson is not a household name like Langston Hughes, Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, and other famous Harlem Renaissance performers perhaps this is because of his absence within Harlem. He was known for his "distance from the active participants" of the movement and found that his geographical distance allowed him to be more effective as a mentor, critic, and advocator for the young writers (Wintz 1988, 110).

James Weldon Johnson saw the Harlem Renaissance as an important movement to further African American cultural production and politics. Without his efforts and the experiences he offered black writers, the contributions to the Harlem Renaissance read today might not have been published.

Langston Hughes (1902-1967)

James Mercer Langston Hughes is recognized as one of the greatest African American poets in United States history. As a published writer he is referred to as Langston Hughes and was born in 1902 in Joplin, Missouri, to Caroline Mercer Langston and James Nathaniel Hughes. Hughes grew up poor received, but was always intellectually engaged by his parents, relatives, and surroundings. On his mother's side, Hughes had impressive relatives. His mother's uncle, John Mercer Langston, was a graduate of Oberlin College, was the first dean of Howard University Law School, was a minister to Haiti, a chargé d'affaires in Santo Domingo, and was also a member of the U.S. House of Representatives for Virginia in 1888. He advised black youth that the only thing that could be an obstacle to their success in life was their unwillingness to work.

Another impressive relative of Langston Hughes was his grandmother, Mary Sampson Langston. During his childhood, Langston Hughes' mother was often absent from his life in search of gainful employment opportunities. During his mother's absence, his grandmother was his primary caretaker. She was the first African American woman to graduate from Oberlin College, a liberal arts college in Oberlin, Ohio. Her first husband, Sheridan Lewis Leary, had been part of John Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry in 1859. Her second husband, Charles Langston, was an abolitionist and helped African American slaves escape from the South in the Underground Railroad. During their time together, the young Langston spent hours listening to his grandmother's stories. Not only did her stories stir his imagination, but they also encouraged him to appreciate African American history.

Hughes' relationship with his father, James Nathaniel Hughes, was tumultuous. When Langston was a child his father and mother divorced. James Hughes left the United States and

settled in Mexico where he worked as a lawyer and rancher. On occasion Langston visited his father in Mexico, but the two were never able to develop the relationship that he desired. But without his father's money and assistance, Hughes would have had a hard time getting himself to Harlem. Through a compromise, Hughes was able to convince his father to pay for his college education at Columbia University in New York City. Eventually, Hughes left Columbia distanced himself from his father.

Langston Hughes' first poem "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" was published in 1921 in *The Crisis*, the magazine of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. It would be his first of many poems published during the Harlem Renaissance. In poems like "The Negro Speaks of Rivers," Hughes focused on elements of African American spirituality and connectedness. In those poems, Hughes describes and implies that the souls of black people will endure because beyond white supremacy and racism in this life lies an eternal life, an idea African Americans could embrace.

Hughes' work also captured the voice of every day working class and working poor African Americans. When Hughes first moved to Harlem, New York, it was not to be a part of the intellectual elite; instead, he wanted to fully experience the "vitality and life of blacks who resided there" (Wintz 1988, 23). In Harlem, African Americans' work and cultural entertainment intrigued Hughes and were featured in his early poetry. As Hughes became more experienced as a writer, his poetry considered different themes. Rather than writing solely about black experiences, Hughes began to write poems and essays that showed an appreciation for political perspectives opposed to early twentieth century United States racism. According to noted historian Cary D. Wintz, in 1932, Hughes took a trip to the Soviet Union and had "no reservations about what he saw in the Soviet Union" and when he returned to the United States

in 1933, he came back “a more committed revolutionary than when he left” (Wintz 1988, 202). Upon his return from the Soviet Union his poetry took on a more class-based consciousness. Like other progressives committed to social change, Hughes denounced communism in the 1950s, but themes of political and social struggle did not leave his work.

Langston Hughes’ contributions to the Harlem Renaissance, African American cultural expression, and American literature are undeniable. Well after the Harlem Renaissance ended, Langston Hughes continued to be a prolific writer. He died in 1967 having published multiple books in children’s literature, a dozen plays, and many books of poetry and prose. He sought to provide literary interpretation to the life of urban African Americans while many of his contemporaries called for over-glorified stories the black bohemian life in Harlem. His writings touched people on deep intellectual and spiritual levels and continue to inspire writers in the early twenty first century.

Document Excerpts

The play The Mule-Bone: A Comedy of Negro Life *(1931)—an example of drama in the Harlem Renaissance—was a stage production co-authored by writers Zora Neale Hurston and Langston Hughes. It was based on a folktale collected by Hurston during her anthropological study of Eatonville, Florida, the black town where she was born. By writing dialect to reflect the sound of the way people spoke—through the use of "misspellings," apostrophes, and the like—Hurston and Hughes sought to bring to the stage the authentic language of African American life in the South. The interactions and dialogue between characters also provide a lively glimpse into a rural Southern black community. However, a disagreement over the play led to a rift between the two authors. As a result,* The Mule-Bone *was not performed until 1991. Below is a snippet from Act I of the play.*

The play Meet the Mamma: A Musical Play in Three Acts *(1925), another example of drama in the Harlem Renaissance, was an early work written by prominent author Zora Neale Hurston. It takes place in New York City, aboard an ocean liner, and in Africa. What follows of the play is an excerpt from Act I.*

*Some may find the language in these entries offensive**

The Mule Bone

By Langston Hughes and Zora Neale Hurston

SETTING: The raised porch of JOE CLARK'S Store and the street in front. Porch stretches almost completely across the stage, with a plank bench at either end. At the center of the porch three steps leading from street. Rear of porch, center, door to the store. On either side are single windows on which signs, at left, "POST OFFICE", and at right, "GENERAL STORE" are painted. Soap boxes, axe handles, small kegs, etc., on porch on which townspeople sit and lounge during action. Above the roof of the porch the "false front", or imitation second story of the shop is seen with large sign painted across it "JOE CLARK'S GENERAL STORE". Large kerosine street lamp on post at right in front of porch.

Saturday afternoon and the villagers are gathered around the store. Several men sitting on boxes at edge of porch chewing sugar cane, spitting tobacco juice, arguing, some whittling, others eating peanuts. During the act the women all dressed up in starched dresses parade in and out of store. People buying groceries, kids playing in the street, etc. General noise of conversation, laughter and children shouting. But when the curtain rises there is a momentary lull for cane-chewing. At left of porch four men are playing cards on a soap box, and seated on the edge of the porch at extreme right two children are engaged in a checker game, with the board on the floor between them.

When the curtain goes up the following characters are discovered on the porch: MAYOR JOE CLARE, the storekeeper; DEACON HAMBO; DEACON GOODWIN; Old Man MATT BRAZZLE: WILL CODY; SYKES JONES: LUM BOGER, the young town marshall; LIGE MOSELY and WALTER THOMAS, two village wags; TOM NIXON and SIM MOSELY, and several others, seated on boxes, kegs, benches and floor of the porch. TONY TAYLOR is sitting

on steps of porch with empty basket, MRS. TAYLOR comes out with her arms full of groceries, empties them into basket and goes back in store. All the men are chewing sugar cane earnestly with varying facial expressions. The noise of the breaking and sucking of cane can be clearly heard in the silence. Occasionally the laughter and shouting of children is heard nearby off stage.

HAMBO: (To BRAZZLE) Say, Matt, gimme a jint or two of dat green cane -- dis ribbon cane is hard.

LIGE: Yeah, and you ain't got de chears in yo' parlor you useter have.

HAMBO: Dat s all right, Lige, but I betcha right now wid dese few teeth I got I kin eat up more cane'n you kin grow.

LIGE: I know you kin and that's de reason I ain't going to tempt you. But youse gettin' old in lots of ways -- look at dat bald-head -- just as clean as my hand. (Exposes his palm).

HAMBO: Don't keer if it tis -- I don't want nothin' -- not even hair -- between me and God. (General laughter -- LIGE joins in as well. Cane chewing keeps up. Silence for a moment.)

(Off stage a high shrill voice can be heard calling:}

VOICE: Sister Mosely, Oh, Sister Mosely! (A pause) Miz Mosely! (Very irritated) Oh, Sister Mattie! You hear me out here -- you just won't answer!

VOICE OF MRS. MOSELY: Whoo-ee.....somebody calling me?

VOICE OF MRS. ROBERTS: (Angrily) Never mind now -- you couldn't come when I called you. I don't want yo' lil ole weazley turnip greens. (Silence)

***Disclaimer**
When considering works of art, it is important to remember the context. Although some of the language used may be offensive to the modern reader, we have not edited or removed objectionable material in order to provide an accurate reflection of the attitudes of a specific time and place. In addition, in some cases artists may use objectionable language in order to make a statement.

Source:
Hurston, Zora Neale, and Langston Hughes. *The Mule-Bone: A Comedy of Negro Life in Three Acts*. Registered for copyright January, 1931. Manuscript/Mixed Material. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, https://www.loc.gov/item/hurston000004/. (Accessed November 30, 2017.)

Meet the Mamma
By Zora Neale Hurston

TIME: Present.

PLACE: New York, U.S.A.; the high seas; Africa.

PERSONS:
Hotel Proprietor - Peter Thorpe
His Wife Carrie
Her Mother Edna Frazier
His Friend, a lawyer -Bill Brown
The Cashier
The uncle in Africa Clifford Hunt
The Princess
Waitresses
Bell Hops
Warriors
Guests, etc.

ACT I. SCENE 1.
HOTEL BOOKER WASHINGTON, N. Y. C.

SETTING: One-half of stage (left) is dining room, the other is a lobby (right), with desk, elevator, etc. The dining room is set with white cloths, etc. Elevator is upstage exit (center). There is a swinging door exit right and left.

ACTION: As the curtain goes up, singing and dancing can be heard, and as it ascends the chorus of waitresses and bellhops are discovered singing and dancing about the lobby and dining room. (7-9 minutes).

CASHIER: (looking off stage right) Psst! Here comes the boss! (Everyone scurries to his or her position and pretends to be occupied. Enter boss, right, in evening clothes and cane. Walks wearily through lobby and dining room and back again, speaking to everyone in a hoarse whisper)

BOSS: Have you seen my mother-in-law? (Everyone answers "No".)
BOSS: It won't be long now before she comes sniffing and whiffing around. I aint been home since yesterday, and I got to have an alibi. What can I tell 'em? (He indicates mental anguish and strolls over to bell hop's bench.)

ONE BELL-HOP: Tell 'em you sat up with a sick brother Mason.

BOSS: Oh no,- can't say that. I'm supposed to have been at the bedside and funeral of every Mason in New York City. There aint supposed to be no more left.

ANOTHER: Tell her you went to a bone yard to meditate and see if you could make 'em get up and gallop like Man O' War.

BOSS: Nope, that wont do. Every time I mention bones I get the shinny in my wrist. I'm trying to fool her, boy, not tell where I was. I have been out having a yellow time.

BELL-HOP: What kind of a time is that?

BOSS: Well, I been riding in a yellow taxi with yellow girls and spending yellow money and drinking yellow whiskey. Can't none of you men (to the audience) help out a fellow? You fellows are she poorest bench of liars I even saw. I could kill that smart aleck Peter.

ANOTHER: What Peter?

BOSS: The one that killed Ananias.

SONG: "Now why did he kill Ananias"
(As the song ends, the mother-in-law enters (Right). Boss sees her Boss (stage whisper ambush! and steps backward into the open door of the elevator and is flashed upward.)

MOTHER-IN-LAW: (Advancing to center downstage) Where is your boss? (She glares about and puts ear trumpet to ear.)

CHORUS: I don't know.

MOTHER-IN-LAW: Just you let me lay my eyes on him! (She exits left). (Giggling by the chorus. Reenter Mother, left, and proceeds quickly to the elevator which is coming down.)

MOTHER-IN-LAW: I'll go upstairs and wait for him. (She pauses beside the elevator, but not where she can be seen by the persons on the elevator. As it reaches the floor, the door flies open and the boss dashes out toward exit, left, as she hurries toward elevator. They collide and both sit flat on the floor with feet and legs entangled. They sit there facing and glaring at each other for two full minutes. He speaks).

BOSS: Well, Madam, if you'll pick out what belongs to you, I'll be satisfied with what's left. (They both arise).

MOTHER-IN-LAW Where have you been? (Puts trumpet to ear).

BOSS: (Pretending drunken) Thass chuss what I been trying to fin' out.

MOTHER: You poor stretched out chocolate eclair- you! Just you wait till I put my mouth on you to my daughter, you ground hog!

BOSS: Listen.' (He strides angrily toward her and prepares to speak into the ear trumpet. She removes it before he can say another word and stalks majestically out (Right), leaving him

gesticulating wildly.) Five hundred dollars for a new cuss word! If she could hear without that trumpet, I'd set her ears on fire! (Enter lawyer friend (Left)

LAWYER: Why hello, Pete, how's tricks?

BOSS: (Sadly) Pretty low, pal -- suffering from an attack of mother-in-law.

FRIEND: (Laughs) Brace up. It's the first hundred years that worries a fellow.

BOSS: What can I tell my wife? I'm simply crazy about her, but her mother.' Gee, I wish I'd gone home last night!

FRIEND: I know, old man, how you feel.

BOSS: Say, how do you know? You're not married.
FRIEND: Oh, I had a wife once, but her husband came and took her back. I'm going to breeze over and talk to my sweet stuff. Here comes your wife. (he crosses to the desk and converses with the cashier. Boss exits (Left) hurriedly. Enter wife (right), beautifully dressed but sad.

WIFE: (To cashier) Is my husband here?

CASHIER: No, Mrs. Pete.

WIFE: Well, when will he be in?

CASHIER: He didn't say.

WIFE: He hasn't been home all night and I am terribly upset. He's so mean to me.

SONG: "Everybody's man is better to me than say own." (Exit wife right)

FRIEND: (Crosses to center) Say Pete, why do you put those boots on the girls?

BOSS: To keep the cake-eaters from gazing at their-er - limbx.

CUSTOMER: (Man at table) Say! (Bangs fist on table. Everybody starts) Can't I get any service here? (Two waitresses hurry to him. Both speak at once.)

WAITRESSES: What can we do for you?

CUSTOMER: You can take my order for one thing. (They take order books and prepare to write.)

CUSTOMER: Crab meat cocktail.

WAITRESS: (writing) Yes.

CUSTOMER: Hors de heovef

WAITRESSES: Yes

CUSTOMER: Russian Caviar

WAITRESS Yes.

CUSTOMER: Broiled guinea fowl.

WAITRESSES: Yes.

CUSTOMER: Endive salad.

WAITRESSES: Yes.

CUSTOMER: Hot apple pie, Tromage de Brie - black coffee.

WAITRESSES: Yes, anything else?

CUSTOMER: No, do you think you can fill that order?

WAITRESSES: We can fill anything.

CUSTOMER: (Drawing a pair of stockings from his coat pocket.) All right, then. Have these filled and serve with the dinner.

WOMAN DINER: Waitress, tell your boss I want to talk to him.

BOSS: Yes, madam, what can I do for you?

WOMAN: What can you do? You can have these teeth replaced that I broke out on those dunn dum bullets you served me for biscuits. I'll sue you good and proper!

BOSS: Now Madam –

MALE DINER: (rising) Say, do the cooks have to go into a trance to find out from the spirit world whether they ought to cook an order or not? Now, you just go back there and tell 'em not to break up a seance on my account. I've only been waiting an hour.

ANOTHER WOMAN: (Limps out of elevator) Fifty thousand dollars danages you got to pay to for ruining my shape on that bum killinator of yours. Oh, oh! Such pains.
(They surround boss, who tears his hair.)

BOSS: Great bobs of gun powder! The old jinx is after me all right. I'll kill myself! Gimme a gun!

WOMAN DINER: One of those biscuits would do just as well.

LAWYER: (Aside to cashier) I've got to do something to save my pal. He'll go crazy. (He exits right hurriedly).

ENTER WIFE: Oh, here
you are, sweetheart. (She weeps.) Oh, you'll break my heart yet, the way you do. Where were you last night?

BOSS: (He puts his arm about her, but does not speak.)

WIFE: (Angrily) You've got to answer me! (She thrusts his arm away.)

ALL: And us too! Yes, answer us too!

BELL-HOP: (Pushes thru the crowd) Telegram for the boss.

PETE: Here. Get out of here before I do a murder. Take it away!!
It's more trouble, I'll bet. (Exit customers running).

WIFE: (Snatches it) It's from some woman and you're afraid to open it before me. (He throws up his hands helplessly. She opens it and reads).

"Lualaba, West Africa. Mr. Peter Thorpe, New York City. "My dear Nephew: Have discovered rich diamond mine. Come "at once. Millions for you. Your uncle, Clifford Hunt". (She dances around and flings her arms about Pete's neck) Just think, Millions! Let's start at once.

PETE: I don't care half as much about a million as I do of one of your kisses - a really warm, affectionate kiss.

WIFE: (Kissing him) Well, why do you stay away from home?

PETE: Somehow a man just loves to roam.

WIFE: You often leave me all alone.

PETE: With contrite heart I do atone,
But men are creatures strong to do
The things that they will shortly rue
But such are we (He hugs her closely)

WIFE: I see, I see.I love you true.

PETE: And I love you. (He kisses her more - even her hands.)
If life should hold no other bliss
Than having you, I would not miss
The rest, dear sweetheart mine.
(They remain embracing for a moment.)

MOTHER-IN-LAW: (Enters left) Carrie! Are you kissing that reprobate!' (They spring apart.)

WIFE: Mamma, he's explained everything all right.

MOTHER: Oh, yes. He can make you believe the East River is not under Brooklyn Bridge!

WIFE: Oh, look, Mamma, he's got a telegram from his uncle in Africa. He's got diamond mines worth millions and he wants Petey dear to come. Here (Hands the telegram.) Read it!

MOTHER: Ha, ha! I know its the truth!

WIFE: But, Mamma, he wouldn't want us to come if he didn't have it!

MOTHER: Well, if he's got millions, he's got wines by the hundred. Do you want to take your husband to a place like that?

PETE: (Angrily) Now I'll be damned. (Mother removes the ear-trumpet. He swears silently) By heck, I'll go get one of those trumpets and hold to her head until I give her an earful!

WIFE: (Holding to Pete's arm) Honey, don't you think we'd better stay here and run the hotel? I've heard that Africa is very unhealthy for Americans.

PETE: No. I'm going and you're going to leave that walking bunch of trouble and go with me.

MOTHER: If you let that piece of tripe talk to me that way, you're no daughter of mine.

PETE: Oh, how I wish she wasn't.

MOTHER: Take ay advice, Carrie, and stay here. He treats you bad enough right where the law allows only one wife to a customer - don't go one step with him. (She draws Carrie to her).

PETE: (Snatches Carrie to him) This is my wife.

MOTHER: (Snatches her back) She is my child.

PETE: She'll go with me. (Jerks her back.)

MOTHER: She'll stay with me. (Snatches her again.)

PETE: Let Carrie speak for herself.

CARRIE: (Looks sadly from one to the other). I cannot say. Give me an hour to decide. (She kisses first Pete then Mother then Pete again and exits by the elevator. Pete starts to follow, but she rushes away.)

Pete and Mother stand glaring at each other for a full minute.

ENTER LAWYER: Well, Pete, I heard of your good luck. (Mother exits glaring) Can't you work me into the scheme somehow?

PETE: Sure. You know, I wouldn't want all that wealth without you to help me spend it. You and Essie get married and come along.

LAWYER: Sure. We've been engaged long enough now. How about it Essie?

ESSIE: (She comes out from behind the counter) No indeed. Jim hasn't got but one case, so I can't marry a man who can't support me in the style to which I want to get accustomed. Here, take your ring. I wouldn't got to Africa with anybody at all. I'll be in the same fix with Brownskin Cora.

LAWYER: Well, all I can do is grin and bear it, Essie. But what about this Cora?

ESSIE: Song "Belly Rub Rag."
(She returns to desk)
(Enter two men, one carelessly dressed; one rather soiled. Best dressed of the two advances to Pete. He speaks.)

BUM: How do, Misther Thorpe. Will you gimme a dollar? (He reels drunkenly.)

PETE: I know you Jim, You want to buy gin. No, I wouldn't give you a cent!
I don't give my money to liquor heads.

BUM: (Offended) You refuse me a drink?

PETE: Yes, I do!!

BUM: (To companion) Clarence, come here. This man wont give us no money--throw a louse on him.
(Pete makes a rush for him, he and his companion run to exit (left), here the man turns, bown politely but shakily. Iss a nice day. (Exeunt.)

ENTER DOWDY LADY (Right) Mr. Thorpe, will you assist a poor widow?
(She uses her handkerchief to her eyes) I know you will, you're so kind.

PETE: Anything I can do except work or lend you money.

WIDOW: Oh, it's nothing as bad as that. (She produces a piece of paper) Here s a song my dear husband wrote before he died, and I want you to sing it so I can sell it and make some money. You see, all of the life insurance money is spent now –

PETE: And if you can't sell this (she hands him the paper) You'll have to go to work.

WIDOW: Yes (sniffs) It's such a beautiful thing - so touching!
It was the last thing he did before he was killed. (She begins to weep)

PETE: (Patting her on the shoulder) There, don't cry. I'll sing it for you, or die in the attempt. (He unfolds it and reads title aloud)
Oh, Fireman, Save my Bustle!"
(To woman) Say, what was your husband thinking about?
Alright, I'll try to sing it for you. Come on boys.
(To the orchestra) Let's help the lady out.
Oh, why must love and duty call
Such distances apart
Any why should such a burden fall
Upon a human heart?
(She turns toward Pete)
My lover calls with outflung hands
The one true man who understands
My heart and has its keeping
(She turns to her mother)
But duty says 'go not away
Tarry with me, oh stay and play
With heart and mind asleeping.
(Both rush down stage to her sides and take her hands).

BOTH: You must decide.
(She draws her right hand away from Pete and clasps her Mother's neck. Her mother holds her. They hold the picture for a moment. Pete starts away). (Re-enter Bill)

PETE: (To Bill, bitterly) Let's be off then to Darkest Africa.- the darker the better.

BILL: (Produces papers) We can leave in an hour - we two heart-broken men.

CARRIE: (flied to Pete and catches his arm. He shakes her off; she flings herself about his neck)
I'll go with you. (Sings) I wish to spread my wings and try
The sea of love and romance
I do not fear a cloudy sky
For danger does but enhance.
(They embrace)
I steer my prow to the rising sun
And sail with you till the day is done.
(They kiss again)

I'll say good-bye to Mother.

PETE: We two must have each other.
---1ST QUICK CURTAIN, BUT UP AGAIN---

LAWYER BILL: To the ship, to the ship! away!

CHORUS: To Africa to stay.

---FINAL CURTAIN. –

Source: Hurston, Zora Neale. *Meet the Mamma: A Musical Play in Three Acts*. Registered for copyright July, 1925. Manuscript/Mixed Material. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, https://www.loc.gov/item/hurston000001/. (Accessed November 30, 2017.)

Further Reading

Ferguson, Jeffrey B. *The Harlem Renaissance: A Brief History with Documents*. Bedford: St. Martin's Press, 2008.

Gates Jr., Henry Louis, Jennifer Burton. *Call and Response: Key Debates in African American Studies*. New York: W.W Norton and Company, 2011.

Huggins, Nathan Irvin. *Harlem Renaissance*. London: Oxford University Press, 1971.

Hutchinson, George. *The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997.

Johnson, James Weldon. *The Book of American Negro poetry*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983

Lewis, David Levering. *When Harlem Was in Vogue*. New York: Penguin Books, 1997

Locke, Alain. *The New Negro; An Interpretation.* New York: Johnson Reprint Corp, 1968.

Ogbar, Jeffrey O.G. *The Harlem Renaissance Revisited: Politics, Arts, and Letters*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2010.

Ososfky, Gilbert. *Harlem: The Making of a Ghetto, 1890-1930.* New York: Ivan R. Dee, 1996.

nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/maai2/forward/text4/silentprotest.pdf

Schneider, Mark Robert. *African Americans in the Jazz Age: A Decade of Struggle and Promise*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2006.

Wilson, Jamie J. *Building a Healthy Black Harlem: Health Politics in Harlem New York, from the Jazz Age to the Great Depression.* Amherst, NY: Cambria Press, 2009.

Wintz, Cary D. *Black Culture and The Harlem Renaissance*. Houston: Rice University Press, 1988.

Sidebar 1

The Harlem Renaissance was part of new and more militant black political era, often referred to as the New Negro Movement. It emerged after one of the most horrific race riots in American history in East St. Louis, Illinois from July 1through on July 3, 1917. African American migration to Illinois before and during World War I created tensions between the white and black working classes throughout the state and especially in cities. In East St. Louis when tensions between whites and blacks were aggravated by white city official and developers, white workers responded with anti-black violence. Close to two hundred blacks were killed and thousands of homes were burned in East St. Louis' black neighborhoods forcing thousands of African Americans to flee the city.

African Americans throughout the nation were outraged. In New York City blacks responded with a peaceful silent anti-lynching protest march often called the Silent Parade on July 28, 1917, to encourage President Woodrow Wilson and congress to pass legislation to protect blacks from legal and extra-legal violence in the American South. The event was organized by NAACP organizers and close to ten thousand men, women, and children participated in the procession carrying an array of placards and signs. The march began on 59th Street and Fifth Avenue and ended at 23rd Street and Madison Square Garden. Several days before the march, two of its organizers, Reverend Hutchens C. Bishop and Reverend Charles D. Martin, the Harlem NAACP president and secretary, respectively, issued a stinging critique of the East St. Louis events and gave the community seven reasons why they were marching. The seventh reason was an unbridled and clear statement. It reads: "We march because of the growing consciousness and solidarity of race coupled with sorrow and discrimination have made us one: a union that may never be dissolved in spite of shallow-brained agitators, scheming

pundits and political tricksters who secure a fleeting popularity and uncertain financial support by promoting the disunion of a people who ought to consider as one."

The protest is often considered the first African American mass protest demonstration and as such it revealed a new determination from the national black community. It told the nations' white political elite that African American would no longer stay silent in the face of injustice.