

Words to Define a Culture: The Complexities of the “New Negro” Identity in the Harlem

Renaissance

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Lennox Avenue and the cross streets of 125th and 140th were the cornerstones of the Harlem Renaissance's nightlife (Wintz, 2007, p. 35). Nightclubs, speakeasies and restaurants lined the streets of Harlem and fostered in various races, creeds, economic statuses and multiple sexual orientations. Many of these nightclubs, like the Cotton Club and the Café Society in New York City, catered to all white audiences and the performers consisted of black jazz musicians like Cab Calloway, Ethel Waters, Duke Ellington and Billie Holiday (Wintz, 2007, p. 36). In these nightclubs, many people came from all around the city to listen and immerse themselves in the migrant, black culture of Harlem, as Duke Ellington writes:

“Sunday night in the Cotton Club was the night. All the big New York stars in town, no matter where they were playing, showed up at the Cotton Club to take bow [...] It was all done in a pretty grand style. Harlem had a tremendous reputation in those days and it was a very colourful place...“When you go to New York,” people said, “you mustn't miss going to Harlem” (Wintz, 2007, p. 43-44).

This perspective of Harlem was truly Fitzgerald's vision of the “Jazz Age” or the Roaring 20s; this ideal historic time period of illegal booze, jazz and the roar of dancing.

Differing from the Jazz Age clubs obscured by white commercialization, the more populated black culture in Harlem was House-Rent parties; these parties were hosted by lower or middle class black workers (Wintz, 2007, p. 44). House-Rent parties were one of the “distinguishing” aspects of Harlem nightlife because it was an “egalitarian event originated as a way for cash-strapped Harlemites to raise money for their inflated rent payments - \$15 to \$30 more than white areas in Manhattan” (Wintz, 2007, p. 44). House-Rent parties were usually held on Thursday or Saturday because Thursday was “the night off for sleep-in domestic workers” and Saturday was payday for labourers who had Sunday off; these parties were, as Langston

Hughes described, a place where “working-class blacks could drink and dance without a white tourist looking over their shoulder” (Wintz, 2007, p. 44). These parties embodied the black culture attempting to reconstruct this identity and produce something that was not for white pleasure or consumption like the jazz clubs. While Hughes and many other black artists attended these house-rent parties to seek acceptance amongst other black people, black musicians were re-defining music within this sub-culture of the “radical” while performing for white audiences; Billie Holiday’s “Strange Fruit”, for example, was a radical, resistance song sung in front of white audiences (Margolick, 1999, p. 97). These two clashing cultures of resistance and assimilation constructed conflicting ideals of identity for emerging, black Harlem Renaissance artists. This identity, however, diverged amongst the influential leaders of the Harlem Renaissance, especially with two leaders: Langston Hughes, a poet, and Alain Locke, an intellectual. Despite Hughes and Locke’s revolutionary lifestyles regarding sexuality and the empowerment of black thought in America, Hughes and Locke differed in their writings about the purpose and power of Harlem and the meaning of the ‘New Negro’. Locke believed in returning to the ancestral arts of Africa, white patronage for black artists and the expression of the intellectual American Negro, whereas Hughes utilizes his poetry to embody the radical spirit of black Harlem and to humanize the black population, and he expresses this through independent black culture of jazz and African American vernacular.

Alain Locke was the first African American Rhodes scholar to attend Oxford University, England in 1910 (Nadell, 2007, p. 413). During his time in Oxford, Locke struggled with his race and nationality as he was confronted with ideas of colonial Britain and anti-American sentiments (Nadell, 2007, p. 416). Locke’s personal identity – American and black – influences his writings as he struggles with international empowerment and national discrimination. In Locke’s ultimate

work, *The New Negro*, he writes an essay about the influential ancestral arts of Africa and the immersion of African culture into Harlem Renaissance creativity. In his essay, “The Legacy of the Ancestral Arts”, he emphasises the need for African art’s influence on the American Negro and that the American Negro already has “an emotional inheritance” with the culture of Africa; Locke praises the “African spirit” and idolizes this spirit by describing the “disciplined, sophisticated, laconic” aspects of African art (Locke, 1925, p. 254). This mastery of spirit provides a “classical background” for the Harlem Renaissance writer to evolve upon and the “technical control” of an African sculpture perpetrates the perfect outlet for African Americans to discover artistic culture outside of white assimilated culture (Locke, 1925, p. 256). Locke’s belief that ancestral arts are a great influence on the empowerment of black artistry in America disassociates his belief with the power of Harlem: the metropolitan city of black America.

One of the hopes of the Harlem Renaissance was to liberate the past stereotype of the uncultured American slave. In the *New Negro*, Locke’s tone of writing creates an air of division; he refers to his people of Harlem as American Negroes and he writes that African Americans must be influenced by African art because of the rise of modernity increases the influence of western, European artistry. Locke is searching for the New Negro’s cultural identity in a continent that most black Americans have lost from colonialism and slavery. During the time of Locke’s *New Negro*, the Age of Empire’s grip on African states began to loosen during the inter-war period and Marcus Garvey, the leader and founder of the UNIA (Universal Negro Improvement Association), wanted to establish a “universal confraternity” among the black race around the world (Martin, 1983, p. 31). In Garvey’s footsteps, Locke is attempting to detach America’s colonial grip on African Americans as well as searching for an already cemented identity around the world. Locke struggles with his nationality and his race; he understands that

his very being contradicts the American dream and so he attempts to find this stolen identity in the lost, fatalistic arts of Africa.

Langston Hughes, in contrast to Locke, visits West Africa and has an inspiring experience, but he does not find his “blackness” there (Rampersad, 2007, p. 62). Hughes stated his “disconnect and connect” with his ancestors of Africa and writes poems of the geographical beauty and the colour of its native people that seems to resemble his own skin (Rampersad, 2007 p. 62). Hughes, however, describes his cultural identity of be-bop and jazz and utilizes his words to describe the unique culture of Harlem. Hughes attended Lincoln University in Pennsylvania: a historic university famous for having an elite, all-black student population (Rampersad, 2007, p. 61). Hughes, immersed in the prominent black community of his peers, differs from Locke as an Oxford and Harvard scholar. In the contrast of their educations, Hughes was an elite Harlemiter and he embraced the African American vernacular and this culture free from the constraints of white academia. Hughes embodied the metropolitan lifestyle of Harlem and in the Harlem streets and nightclubs was where Hughes found his poetic voice; he felt no emotional inheritance, as Locke described, to the African continent. He describes his outlook on his identity when feeling the pressure of other Harlem Renaissance writers to embrace his ancestral culture: “I was only an American-Negro – who had loved the surface of Africa and the rhythms of Africa – but I was not African” (Nadell, 2007, p. 428). Hughes believed African arts to be an inspirational form of art but African artistic expression was not the foundation of his cultural identity because he was not African – he was an American. Locke appreciated his nationality as an American and he advocated against generations of racial systematic oppression in America; however, Locke believed that African art was essential to the breeding of a new African American culture and this emphasis on ancestral arts would be able to distinguish black Americans from dominant

white society. Locke believed in recapturing the strength and tribal connections to African ancestors and Locke's sentiment of reconciling with the lost art of the "primitive" was shared with many white patronages of Harlem art; specifically one woman, Charlotte Osgood Mason.

During the Harlem Renaissance, many black artists credited their funding and the founding of the Harlem art scene to wealthy white patronage to the arts. White influence is undeniable on the black community of America and most of these influences were garnered in an innate racism towards the black community. Many Harlem Renaissance writers attempted to deconstruct the racist, dehumanized stereotype of the black American in their writing whereas some accepted patronage and funding from these white "masters". Locke was among these Harlem Renaissance writers and he fostered a close relationship with a wealthy Manhattanite, Charlotte Osgood Mason; Mason and Locke shared an admiration and desire for the African arts and attempted to open a Harlem Museum of African Art together (Nadell, 2007, p. 426). David Levering Lewis, a Harlem Renaissance historian and author of the 1982 book *When Harlem Was in Vogue*, described Locke as "a proud individual compromised by his pleasant servitude to the wealthy, white Mrs. Charlotte Osgood Mason" (Helbling, 1999, p. 45). Locke was not the only intelligent Harlem Renaissance writer to cater to Mason's expectations for the continuation of funding; Hughes, for a short time, was in Mason's care as well (Nadell, 2007, p. 428). Locke and Mason, however, both had an infatuation with the "primitive" aspect of African culture and African Americans (Nadell, 2007, p. 428). Locke's infatuation with the primitive was founded in his need for an identity with an already existing fruitful culture and Mason's infatuation with the primitive came from the very idea of the word patronage: the domineering and condemnation of the black American. This racist ideal that Harlem Renaissance writers – past slaves of the American South – needed rule and the maternal, soft touch of the superior whites is the ideal that

Hughes protested greatly in his Harlem poems. Mason believed, with her help, that African American leaders could reunite with the soul of their ancestors and “depollute” themselves from white culture: “I believed I could find leaders among themselves to react and publish far and wide the truth about their art impulse that daily lived in all their common acts” (Nadell, 2007, p. 427). Their “common acts” of black American vernacular, jazz and blues was not the Harlem that Mason envisioned for them; Mason’s vision was reverting black Americans to the shores of Africa from which they were kidnapped. Mason’s white ignorance and dominating influence of Harlem writers was evident when her and Hughes had a falling out (Nadell, 2007, p. 428). The controlling and possessive attitude of white patronage in Harlem was founded in the historical consequences of slavery and this attitude became one of Langston Hughes’ drives to write about his Harlem.

Hughes’ collection of his works and poems in 1951, *Montage of a Dream Deferred*, contained one of his most famous poems, “Notes on Commercial Theatre” (Rampersad, 2007, p. 67). In this poem, Hughes portrays the white commercialization of black artistic expression during the Harlem Renaissance. Hughes also outlines the abuse of the black person’s narrative to be manifested into the narrative of a stereotype for white consumption. Hughes’ message and literary techniques are profoundly powerful as he writes in the African American vernacular which is usually associated with slave in the American South: “You’ve taken my blues and gone--/You sing ‘em on Broadway/ [...] Yep, you done taken my blues and gone” (1940). Hughes’ emphasis on the blues and the African American vernacular reminds elite Harlem Renaissance writers and white patronages that his culture of Harlem is his expression; for Hughes, Harlem is the foundation of his identity as a black American. Unlike Locke’s relationship with Mason, Hughes does not believe in appeasing the white idea of black identity in America. In the

beginning of the poem, a sense of cynicism and defeat creep into Hughes' words as he struggles with the understanding of who he is to the society that uses him for his rhythmic soul, praises him in the darkness of the jazz club but then oppresses him and his people on the streets. Near the end of the poem, however, Hughes optimistically uses "me" as a tool of empowerment and describes himself as "black and beautiful" (1940). This first person narrative of Hughes' poem defies the generations of suppression of the black voice in America and humanizes him as an American; Hughes is not looking to Africa for freedom of racial discrimination but within himself. Hughes' utilization of African American vernacular, commonly associated with the black slave, disrupts the cycle of oppression and submission with race relations in America. Compared to Locke's use of third person and academia as a form of expression, Hughes understands the importance of language as a form of identification and he attempts to reconstruct the voice of his ancestors found in the American South – not on the shores of Africa. The last line of Hughes' poem truly captures the individualistic spirit and rejection of white ignorance: "I'll reckon it'll be me/me myself" (1940). Hughes' belief in the independent expression of black thought was not radical or demanding segregation from other races; his belief was in freedom sought through words, communities and the power of the black individual. Hughes and Locke observed the paternal power of white people in opposite ways as Hughes wrote about white commercialization and Locke accepted the funding and control of white patronage. White consumerism, however, went beyond the funding of white patronage and commercialization. The most popular form of white consumer culture in Harlem was the all-white audience in a black community with all black performers.

During the Harlem Renaissance, many jazz clubs and black jazz artists gain prominence from white audiences at certain nightclubs like the Cotton Club and Café Society:

The most significant result of the Negro vogue was the encouragement that black musicians, writers, and other artists received from white audiences and important white individuals. Jazz and blues thrived and defined the mood of the period. Black musicians - Roland Hayes, Duke Ellington, Louis Armstrong, Bessie Smith, among others - came to public attention (Karmer and Russ, 1997, p. 61).

The Café Society, in particular, was historically remembered in Fitzgerald's Jazz Age and by other famous authors of the time who wrote about the glamour of the Roaring 20s. This nightclub, however, was not like any other nightclub in New York City at the time because it was the "only integrated nightclub, where blacks and whites fraternized on and off stage" (Margolick, 1999, p. 96). It was here, in the Café Society, that Billie Holiday first sang her riveting song "Strange Fruit". After her first performance, Holiday received wide praise for her eloquent voice; some described her voice as "a startling, most dramatic and effective interpretation [...] incomparable and filled with bitterness" and other described her performance as "superb, with a hint of a Southern accent" (Magrolick, 1999, p. 97-100). Holiday's performance was moving and spine tingling but it was met with shock and confusion as Holiday recounts the ovation and response she received from the audience (Margolick, 1999, p. 98). The lyrics of "Strange Fruit", originally written by a man named Meeropol, were written not with the sole intention of Holiday singing this song - for she was never involved with social politics - but Holiday took the song and made it her own (Margolick, 1999, p. 98). The lyrics are incredibly moving and haunting, however Holiday's distinctive voice brought this song to the forefront of the audience's mind. Holiday described the images of racial violence in the South so vividly that the uncomfortable topic of racist vindictive murder was looming in the Café Society. Holiday managed to bring this poem to life with her velvet withering voice and she encompasses the

sorrow and the bitterness felt by the black community at the time. In his essay, “Jazz as Communication”, Langston Hughes described the power of jazz and blues:

I’m not a Southerner. I never worked on a levee. I hardly ever saw a cotton field except from a highway. But women behave the same on Park Avenue as they do on a levee: when you’ve got hold of one part of them the other part escapes you. That’s the Blues!
(Hughes, 1956, p. 1).

Holiday was not a Southerner, but her reaction and the power behind her voice when singing about lynching and atrocities of racial violence proves that black American identity is a national connection. The blues was one of the revolutionary aspects of black America that somewhat altered the image of the African American in white America’s eyes. Blues brought forth the power and talent of the black community and begins to divide the “New Negro” from the image of the uncivilized, barbaric black slave in white society. Jazz and blues were both a defining aspect of black identity in the 20th century and founded one of the most respected expressions of black art.

The lyrics for “Strange Fruit” were written in response to a photo of a public, double lynching that took place on the Mason-Dixie Line in Marion, Indiana (Margolick, 1999, p. 95). In 1939, when Holiday first performed “Strange Fruit”, The NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People) continued a long campaign for a federal anti-lynching law (Margolick, 1999, p. 94). Racial violence in the American South was not illegal – nor was it socially frowned upon – and it ran rampant in the reconstruction period after the Civil War and the abolishment of slavery. “Strange Fruit” and Hughes’ poem, “Mulatto”, deconstruct this perfect concept of the historical Antebellum South through a radical voice of the Harlem Renaissance.

“Strange Fruit” by Meeropol refers to the “southern trees” and the “southern breeze” and describes this southern charm of the hot sun, the shade and the fruitfulness in the soil (1937). This illustration, however, becomes tarnished as the “the black body swinging in the Southern breeze” becomes a stark difference of the pure South (Meeropol, 1937). In this “pastoral scene of the gallant South”, the vivid imagery of the black bodies swinging, the stench of death and of racially charged hatred fills this poem (Meeropol, 1937). The use of the “pastoral” criticizes the white Christian soul of the South and disillusions the belief in the merciful white man. Langston Hughes set this imagery of the same gallant south in his poem, “Mulatto”, as he illustrates the “Georgia dusk” in the backdrop of racial injustice and racial interrelations (1927). Hughes’ uses vulgar, descriptive language used by white masters to dehumanize and devalue black people, especially young children who were the result of sexual violence:

What’s a body but a toy?

Juicy bodies

Of nigger wenches

Blue black

Against black fences.

O, you little bastard boy,

What’s a boy but a toy? (Hughes, 1927)

In response to racial discrimination and white superiority, Hughes applies racial slurs originally used to stabilize a racial hierarchy and he attempts to transform the power of these words to be used against racial superiority. By utilizing demeaning language against his skin tone, Hughes understands his history but he does not accept it as the truth of his place in American society. Hughes and Meeropol utilize the horrific history of their ancestors in the American South to find

this voice; this identity that was instituted in unnecessary bloodshed, slavery and racial injustices. Hughes and Meeropol find their identity in the struggles of their ancestors; whereas Alain Locke did not believe in his identity in American society, he believes it to be lost on the shores of Africa and in the ancestral arts. Locke and Hughes believe that an important part of their black identity in America is found through their ancestors, either from Africa or the plantations in the American South. Locke sought the ideology of the primitive high culture in the ancestral arts of Africa and Hughes strived to empower the African American through redefining the authority of racial slurs.

One of the main differences between Locke's scholarship and Hughes' poems is the definition of the radical during the Harlem Renaissance. Locke was among the Rhodes scholars, Harvard academia, and white patronages while Hughes attended local parties held by low to middle class black people and immersed himself in the jazz and be-bop culture. These differing lifestyles did contribute to their opposing beliefs on identity; however, both were quite progressive in their outlook on life. Locke and Hughes had some form of an affair with each other, which was alluded to quite heavily in their letters exchanged; Locke expressed great interest in Hughes and propositioned him a few times to advance their relationship (Nadell, 2007, p. 425). Despite their short-lived exchange and their common sexual fluidity, Hughes and Locke defined separate meanings of the New Negro in the modern age of Harlem.

Locke's meaning of the New Negro was defined through his definition of the old and how the New Negro should become more active and self-assured than the old. Locke argued that the Old Negro was "more a formula than a human being" and the Old Negro was repressed to stay in "his place" (Nadell, 2007, p. 420). Locke also believed that the Old Negro was only a something to be debated or an ideology to be defended or abused (Nadell, 2007, p. 420). Locke's

Old Negro had the persona of an American slave and was controlled by white masters, and so his ideal New Negro liberated himself from this objectification. Locke's meaning of the New Negro was the establishment of "renewed self-respect and self-independence" and "a spiritual Coming of Age" (Nadell, 2007, p. 420). Locke observed the New Negro as a rebirth, a true Renaissance, because all the prior stereotypes or enslaved personas were not the true definition of the African American. The New Negro is modern black man that is active, giving and progressive to American democracy; this is evident through his "New Negro" essay from his anthology of various authors and works, *The New Negro: An Interpretation*. Locke's essay outlines the challenges and expectations of this New Negro and how he shall contribute to the society from which he invests in. Locke discusses the need for African Americans to neglect the "outer" aspects of society that have been enforced by past institutions and for the new Negro to look in himself for "his own objections" (1925, p.10). Although Locke does encourage the New Negro to look into himself for progress, Locke still praises the outer life already existing in America despite racial hierarchies. Locke argues that the inner progress of the New Negro has yet to be formed and for it to be formed there must be a new psychology in the black American (1925, p. 10). Locke alludes that the progress of the New Negro does not necessarily come from advocacy for race relations but to prove the intelligence of the New Negro on other white political matters like democracy.

In regards to the "radical", Locke debates the need for black radicalism to construct the New Negro. In 1925, Locke was the editor for the "Survey Graphic" in New York City and he changed one title of a poem submitted by Claude McKay, a Jamaican Harlem Renaissance writer (Nadell, 2007, p. 422). Locke changed the title from "The White House" to "White Houses" to diminish the angry, bitter stance against white superiority; Locke also believed some of McKay's

poems to be “too combative” for his “pluralistic New Negro aesthetic” (Nadell, 2007, p. 422). In his essay, he debates the meaning behind the black radical and the need for radicalization of the Harlem Renaissance movement: “But fundamentally for the present the Negro is radical on race matters, conservative on others, in other words, a “forced radical”, a social protestant rather than a genuine radical” (Locke, 1925, p. 11). Locke argues that radicalization of the New Negro is because of race relations and race situations and that the situational climate of the time distinguished African American as radicals. Locke argues that these radicals are socially conditioned to call for action, a social activist movement, instead of genuinely becoming a cultural radical. The radical, for Locke, was not established in African American culture but through institutions of racial oppression and the ideal New Negro must be founded in his identity on race relations and the universal fraternity of Garveyism in international races; Locke criticised this because the radical was focused on the American identity. Locke’s early view on the New Negro foreshadowed his prediction for the end of the Harlem Renaissance. Near the beginning of the Second World War, American society shifted from the glamour of the Jazz Age and prepared for the Nuclear Age. Harlem Renaissance, along with American culture, began to reveal the true lifestyle of the black migrant within racial hierarchal society: “A ghetto, a slum, an area blighted by poverty and discrimination. Burned-out storefronts might be fertile ground for political action, but not for art, literature and culture” (Wintz, 2007, p. 49).

Hughes, unlike Locke, embodied the radical New Negro persona in his poetry; his radicalism, however, did not protest or advocate violence or mass change from white superiority. Hughes reconciles the radical with American identity; he focuses his poems on the center of Harlem and he embraces the “social protestant” situational activism that Locke believed to pollute the true philanthropic, philosophical New Negro. One of Hughes’ poems, “Theme for

English B”, was taken from his collections, *Montage of a Dream Deferred*; this collection “captured the community’s hopes and disappointments, its successes and its failures, its accomplishments but also its poverty, crime and shiftlessness spawned largely by racism” (Rampersad, 2007, p. 67). In “Theme for English B”, Hughes is writing an assignment for his English class, in which he is the only coloured student. In the last stanza, Hughes possesses the resistance towards white assimilation but also humanizes Harlem’s people by distinguishing the innate connection between Americans:

You are white –
 Yet a part of me, as I am a part of you.
 That’s American.
 Nor do I often want to be a part of you.
 But we are, that’s true!
 As I learn from you,
 I guess you learn from me –
 Although you’re older – and white –
 And somewhat more free. (Hughes 1951).

Hughes’ ideal New Negro utilizes radicalism to foster relationships and better race understanding. Hughes realizes the physical differences and societal privilege of white Americans, but he does not deny his nationality of being an American. In the line, “yet a part of me, as I am a part of you”, Hughes (1951) establishes the connection between black and white and he does not deny the inevitable desegregated culture of America. He also idealizes America, or the American Dream, in this poem and describes America as nationally mixed-race society. Since the origins of America, immigration and the preached ideals of liberty and freedom,

American ideology has been rooted in the declaration that all men are created equal. Hughes portrays this all-American ideal expected of the patriotic American countryman. Hughes, however, questions this blind faith in American liberty when he states the obvious: the white man is “somewhat more free” (1951). Unlike Locke, Hughes believes the New Negro chooses to be radical because this protest creates this new black identity: an identity that is not synonymous with white superiority. Hughes alludes that the foundation of the New Negro was fostered in the artistic opposition of societal oppressions but nevertheless associated with American identity as well.

During their lifetime, Hughes and Locke were not blatantly opposed to each other’s works because they were both striving for a better world for African Americans. Both believed in the empowerment of the black artist and redefining a new identity that was not tarnished with the cruel treatment of their ancestors by the hands of their fellow citizens. Locke and Hughes dedicated their lives’ works to the revitalization of black American identity and the humanization of the New Negro, and both men experienced racist violence and racial slurs in the New York City artist scene of the 1930s. Hughes, however, used this harsh discrimination and encouraged his fellow black artists to embrace this “racial culture” and “racial individuality” to foster the inspired ideal of being “Negro enough to be different” (Helbling, 1999, p. 199). In contrast to Hughes, Locke encouraged interracial relations and aspired his fellow Harlem Renaissance writers, radicals and New Negroes to connect with “enlightened minorities of both race groups” (Nadell, 2007, p. 421).

The Harlem Renaissance literary and musical movement was avant-garde for Western civilization in post-WWI society. Most of Harlem’s black population, however, was living under the poverty line, housing conditions were horrible and white landlords increased the rent for all-

black tenants (Wintz, 2007, p. 47). Job opportunities consisted of basic trade jobs, such as elevator mechanic and in-house domestic work, and as a result of living under the poverty line many African Americans resorted to petty crimes that were exaggerated by white America's stereotype of the black "criminal" (Wintz, 2007, p. 47). In reality, most of Harlem was a slum because of segregation and systemic racial oppression in America. The Harlem Renaissance movement created this white fascination in the black migrant community and the music produced by black Americans. Lennox Street, 125th street and 140th street produced this facade of glamour that captured many metropolitan, white Americans during the 1920s and brought the momentary spotlight on African American talent and artistic expression. Langston Hughes once described the distorted image of the black migrant in Harlem to white consumers when writing about the white patronage of Charlotte Osgood Mason: "she possessed the power to control people's lives – pick them up and put them down when and where she wanted" (Nadell 428). Perhaps the concept of the perfected Harlem Renaissance was envisioned in Archibald Motley's 1943 painting, *Nightlife*. Motley paints the ideal scene of the Harlem Renaissance as black patrons of differing skin tones drink, sing and dance amongst each other as the black musicians play the jazz, the blues, the be-bop and the scat (1943). Although this painting was created in the midst of the Second World War and set in a popular nightclub in Chicago, Motley manages to capture the idealized scene of the Harlem Renaissance; the scene where all black patrons are listening to all black musicians, immersed and empowered by their identified culture created by their own unique sound of music far from the atrocities in the American South. In the Cotton Club or Café Society, black artists performed for white audiences and black audiences alike, and because of this Holiday's "Strange Fruit" was met with uncomfortable applause. Holiday was capable of bringing these bitter, horrific words to life with her talent and it was met with

uncomfortable resistance because it was a resistance song; it provoked an image that was repressed by fellow white countrymen.

White commercialization and consumerism of black culture was a continued strand of this violent assimilation and repression of black American citizens. Langston Hughes denied this white assimilation and influence on black expression during the Harlem Renaissance and he attempted to construct a New Negro through African American vernacular, culture of jazz and poetic resistance. Alain Locke also believed modern racism to have been forged in the American South and through the dehumanization of the black slave by barbaric violent means. Locke, however, believed white patronage and consumerism as an extended olive branch by white Americans. Locke and Hughes differing belief in the radicalization of the races and accepted white patronage was their most prominent difference between their works and this belief contributed greatly to the establishment of the New Negro identity in the Harlem Renaissance. Locke and Hughes helped advance black expression in America and recognized black potential in the reality of racial violence, segregation and blatant discrimination. Despite the differences between their theories on identity, Locke and Hughes both contributed to the foundation and continuation of black identity in 20th century America and both authors immortalized the Harlem Renaissance in African American history.

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