



Denver Center
Theatre Company

Inside Out

A STUDY GUIDE

PRODUCED BY THE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

MARCH 1998

Blues for an Alabama Sky

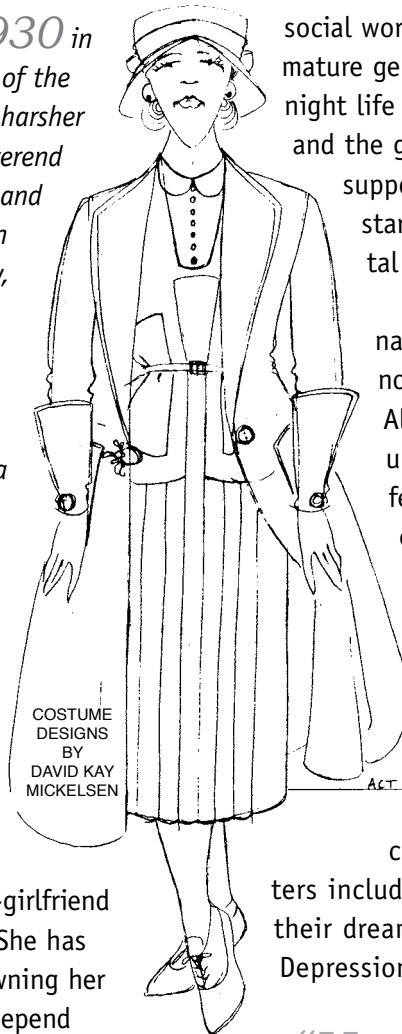
What's Happening, Where It's Happening and Who It's Happening To

"It is the summer of 1930 in Harlem, New York. The creative euphoria of the Harlem Renaissance has given way to the harsher realities of The Great Depression. Young Reverend Adam Clayton Powell is feeding the hungry and preaching an activist gospel at Abyssinian Baptist Church. Black Nationalist visionary, Marcus Garvey, has been discredited and deported. Birth control pioneer, Margaret Sanger, is opening a new family planning clinic on 126th Street and the doctors at Harlem Hospital are scrambling to care for a population whose most deadly disease is poverty. But, far from Harlem, African-American expatriate extraordinaire, Josephine Baker, sips champagne in her dressing room at the Folies Bergere and laughs like a free woman."

—Pearl Cleage, *Blues for an Alabama Sky, Time and Place.*

Angel Allen is a down-and-out back-up singer and the recent ex-girlfriend of an Italian-American gangster. She has lost her job at the Cotton Club and is drowning her bad luck in booze. Once again, she must depend upon her roommate, Guy Jacobs, for support. Guy is a brilliant, flamboyant, homosexual costume designer (also fired from the Cotton Club) who dreams of sailing off to Paris to design clothes for the internationally renowned black, singer/actress, Josephine Baker.

Across the hall lives Delia Patterson, a dedicated young



social worker, who is being courted by Sam Thomas, a mature general practitioner, who embraces Harlem's night life in order to forget his unending work days and the grinding poverty of his patients. Both are supportive of the new birth control movement started by Margaret Sanger and are instrumental in advocating a clinic for Harlem.

Into the mix comes Leland Cunningham, a naïve young man who has just moved to notorious Harlem from a small town in Alabama following the death of his wife and unborn child. He is a hard-working, God-fearing Christian who is appalled at the libertarian life-styles he finds in Harlem, that is, until he meets and is smitten with Angel.

Filled with humor, love, hope, fear and survival, the play deals with personal and social issues. Though the play takes place in 1930s Harlem, there is a sense of the 1990s in the conflicts taking place. Cleage's five characters include winners, losers and users who all have their dreams in the difficult time called The Great Depression. ■

"Harlem, I grant you, isn't typical—but it is significant, it is prophetic." —Alain Locke

The Playwright and the Harlem Renaissance

Pearl Cleage was born in Springfield, Massachusetts in 1948, the daughter of a minister and a teacher. She attended Howard University, Yale University, the University of the West Indies and did graduate work at Atlanta University. In 1969, she married Michael Lucius Lomax, an elected official of Fulton County, Georgia, and had one child, Deignan Njeri.

Her works include two books of poetry, *We Don't Need No Music* (1971) and *One for the Brothers* (1983), and several plays including *Good News*, *Essentials*, *Flyin' West*, *Late Bus to Mecca* and *Hospice*. *Blues for an Alabama Sky* was originally commissioned by the Alliance Theatre Company in Atlanta and was presented as part of their Cultural Olympiad in conjunction with the Olympic Games in the summer of 1996.

Cleage says her writing reflects her blackness and femaleness. In an interview in *American Theater* magazine she says: "We as black people have to be responsible for ourselves and our own communities. As a playwright I don't want to spend all my time fussing at white racism, but as a feminist, I don't want to spend all my time fussing at men. We as conscious, intelligent, strong women have to take responsibility—(we have) to tell the complete truth."¹

BACKGROUND OF THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE

"No race can prosper till it learns that there is as much dignity in tilling a field as in writing a poem."

—Booker T. Washington, *Up from Slavery* (1901).

In 1915, nearly half a century had passed since the Emancipation Proclamation. What better time, then, to declare the past of slavery and servility dead and to proclaim the new day of the liberated and independent black. It was the 20th century now and black Americans, like white Americans, were becoming an urban rather than a rural peo-

ple. Large numbers of blacks had streamed into northern cities, forced out by the poverty of southern agriculture and the brutality of southern bigotry. Harlem gained from that migration, as well as from the waves of blacks who came to work in industries created by World War I. The greater num-

"We as black people have to be responsible for ourselves and our own communities.

As a playwright I don't want to spend all my time fussing at white racism, but as a feminist, I don't want to spend all my time fussing at men. We as conscious, intelligent, strong women have to take responsibility
—(we have) to tell the complete truth."

ber of blacks meant new power. Thus, astute black businessmen bought Harlem's newly developed real estate from fearful, fleeing white middle-class owners and converted it into the biggest and most elegant black community in the Western world. By 1920, Harlem's borders extended from 130th Street to 145th Street, from Madison Avenue to Eighth Avenue. Harlem had developed both the significant mass of residents and a number of strategies to forge an African-American identity.

At the same time, a rift was developing between the established black leadership under Booker T. Washington and the young intellectuals such as James Weldon Johnson and W.E.B. DuBois. Washington had encouraged industrial and agricultural training for blacks, but he tended to be anti-intellectual and saw problems from a rural and small town perspective. He preached conciliation and patience on the part of the blacks, while he depended on white good will in the South and white philanthropy in the North. He courted Republican

patronage to
reward the select
few and stifled
criticism and
threats to his power.

In 1903, W.E.B. DuBois published his book, *Souls of Black Folk*, in which he revealed his strong support of black social equality in opposition to the conservative views of Booker T. Washington. In his eyes, a man with ability and talent would rise, while those without would not. Society would be "color-blind" and race would not figure in the equation of human worth. To attain this aspiration, DuBois advocated political aggressiveness and protest efforts to awaken both black and white America. He founded the Niagara movement (1905), a group in opposition to Booker T. Washington's views, which evolved into the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).

It was this sense of possibility and power that drew many black men and women of promise to Harlem. Those young intellectuals flocked around DuBois, James W. Johnson, Alain Locke, Langston Hughes and others hoping for personal and racial success. "[They] saw Harlem as the retort where the best achievement of colored people would be crystallized into the hard permanent stuff of the race's positive future."² The stage was now set for the Harlem Renaissance.

"Liberty trains for liberty. Responsibility is the first step in responsibility."

—W.E.B. DuBois, *The Legacy of John Brown*, 1909.

HARLEM AND THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE

"'Renaissance' are acts of cultural construction, attempting to satisfy larger social and political needs."

—Henry Louis Gates³

"Liberty trains for liberty. Responsibility is the first step in responsibility."

— W.E.B. DuBois, *The Legacy of John Brown*, 1909



In 1658, Peter Styvesant, Dutch governor of New Netherlands (later named New York by the British), estab-

lished the settlement of Nieuw Haarlem, named after Haarlem in the Netherlands. Through the 18th century, Harlem was a farming and pastoral area. In the 19th century, it became a fashionable residential district with many houses used as summer retreats. Apartment houses rose during the building boom of the 1880s. High rates of vacancy, in the years following the financial panic of 1893, led property owners to rent to blacks, especially along Lenox Avenue, and by World War I much of Harlem was firmly established as a black residential and commercial area. The community presented a picture of tolerance with salons run by Irish, restaurants by Greeks, fruit stands by Italians and grocery and haberdashery stores by Jews. The Harlem concentration of Blacks created a lively culture, a new black consciousness, a black elite and a determination to be assimilated into the professions. It also expressed itself in jazz and style. Harlem

embraced a wide range of individuals, from the conservative church-goer to those with more liberal and artistic lifestyles.

What we now call the "Harlem Renaissance" flourished from the early 1920s until the onset of the Great Depression (1929-30) and it was then known as the "New Negro Renaissance." Though African-American writing existed before these years, a new generation of black writers and artists, born around the 1900s, led this intellectual and literary movement. Among its best

CLEAGE continued from page 3

known figures were Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, Countee Cullen, Claude McKay and Jean Toomer, though they had been preceded by novelists, Charles Waddell Chestnutt and James Weldon Johnson, as well as by the poet, Paul Laurence Dunbar. These new young writers felt they had a dual mission: to create art and, at the same time, to bolster the image of their race. Sterling Brown, a lesser known writer of the time, identified the five themes underlying the movement:

- 1—Africa as a source of racial pride,
- 2—black American heroes and heroines,
- 3—racial political propaganda,
- 4—the black folk tradition,
- 5—candid self-revelation.⁴

Evoking these themes, the Harlem Renaissance writers produced literature that was not only outstanding, but also paved the way for succeeding generations of black writers who would use the Harlem Renaissance

“Chant another song of
Harlem; Not about the wrong
of Harlem, But the worthy
throng of Harlem Proud that
they belong to Harlem—.”

Anonymous, “Harlem.”⁵

as the root of their cultural traditions. Also essential to the movement were the supporting cast of editors, patrons and hostesses—both black and white—who provided the “grease” necessary to move the operation and to spotlight its accomplishments.

Added to this literary boom were jazz musicians, producers of all-black revues and Uptown bootleggers (purveyors of illegal liquor). While not everyone read the works of the intel-

lectuals, a number of New Yorkers and others responded to the lure of Harlem’s night world. The white trade gravitated to the top three clubs: the Cotton Club, Connie’s Inn and Small’s Paradise. The Cotton Club boasted such performers as Duke Ellington, Cab Calloway, Ethel Waters, Edith Wilson and the Berry Brothers in their extravagant, Ziegfeldesque floor shows. In Harlem’s “low-down” district at 135th Street and Fifth Avenue were the “working-class” speakeasies that attracted a more racially mixed crowd. They drank bootleg liquor, poured from falsely labeled bottles or indulged in cocaine and marijuana as they danced on tiny, over-crowded dance floors.

In addition, there were private parties hosted by the “literati” or their patrons. A’Lelia Walker, whose mother made her fortune in the hair-straightening empire, put her money into developing a Harlem high society at her townhouse, which she dubbed the “Dark Tower.” A’Lelia, despite her limited attention span for intellectual conversation, surrounded herself with the leaders in music, art and literature as well as the min-

ions of Wall Street and the social register.

Wall Street’s financial crash of October 29, 1929 marked the close of an epoch; the era of the black

artist and intellectual, speakeasy and dissolute lifestyle was replaced by insecurity and breadlines. The white patrons who had supported black artists had to turn to more pressing financial matters and many intellectuals such as Alain Locke, Charles S. Johnson and James Weldon Johnson left for greener pastures. Though Harlem night life flourished until 1933, the repeal of the Volstead Act ending Prohibition finished off the Uptown nightclubs.

JOSEPHINE BAKER

AND THE FRENCH CONNECTION

“[The moment I set foot in France I] recaptured for the first time since childhood the sense of being just a human being. I was suddenly free-free to be merely a man.”

—James Weldon Johnson, 1905.⁶

After World War I, black soldiers who had served in Europe returned home to a racial situation which was worse than ever, so many black men decided to go back to countries without segregation. Will Marion Cook provided an opportunity for black musicians to get to Europe in 1919 when he organized a European tour for a group he called the Southern Syncopated Orchestra. Langston Hughes, already a published poet, worked his way across the Atlantic as a cabin boy, landing in Rotterdam in 1924. From there, he went to Paris where he became a doorman at a club on the rue Fontaine. Other figures of the Harlem Renaissance spent significant amounts of time in 1920s Paris including Jean Toomer, Jessie Fauset, Walter White and Alain Locke. “It was the diminishment, the constant specialization of identity in America, as much as overt discrimination that black Americans hoped to escape. They wanted to go where they could be people, not black people.”⁷ Since the late 1800s, Paris had been the city above all others that valued African art. Art and artifacts, acquired by French trade and scientific expeditions, had been sent to

BAKER continued on page 5

BAKER continued from page 4

France in sufficient numbers that by 1874, a museum was required to house these tribal artifacts. The Ethnographic Museum of Scientific Missions opened in 1878; it was the immediate ancestor of the Musée de l'Homme (Museum of Man) in the Trocadero Palace. This collection has had a great influence on the art of Matisse, Derain, Picasso, as well as other 20th century artists.

In 1925, Josephine Baker came to Paris with *Revue Negre* and became the reigning queen of "le jazz hot." To Europeans, this star of the *Follies Bergere* represented the high voltage, comic energy and primitive passion thought to characterize the black race. Born in 1906, she left her impoverished childhood in Kansas City, Missouri at the age of 13 when she joined a traveling show and worked as a dresser for the star. She also had the opportunity to dance occasionally and play small comic parts. She auditioned for the revue *Shuffle Along* but was rejected for being too small, too thin and too young. She followed the show to New York where she was eventually hired as a chorus girl. Her comic antics delighted the audiences and captured the attention of the show's producers, Noble Sissle and Eubie Blake, who wrote a special part for her in their next production, *Chocolate Dandies*. She was billed as "that comedy chorus girl" because of her out-of-step, cross-eyed

clowning. In 1925, Baker was picked to go to Paris with Caroline Dudley's *Revue Negre* where she was an immediate sensation. Making her entrance upside down on the shoulders of a large black man, dressed only in pink flamingo feathers placed at strategic points, she symbolized to Parisians the romantic primitive conception of blacks. She constantly changed her style and act into the 1940s.

During World War II, Baker worked for the Resistance movement and served with the Free French forces in North Africa and for her services she was awarded the Legion of Honor, the Rosette of the Resistance and the Medallion of the City of Paris. She and her husband, Jo Bouillon, adopted a dozen children of all races and attempted to bring them up on a country estate in France, but the result was a personal and financial disaster. In 1973, she returned to the United States for concerts in Carnegie Hall and Harlem. In 1975, she appeared in a new revue in Paris to celebrate her 50 years in show business but died four days after the opening. ■

"—They said I was homely, that I danced like an ape. Then I was less homely—cosmetics. I was hooted then I was applauded—I am moral, they said I was the reverse—I sing and dance still."

—Josephine Baker, 1931.⁸



MARCUS GARVEY

"We are not engaged in domestic politics, in church building, or in social uplift work; but we are engaged in nation building."

—Marcus Garvey, speech,
New York, 1922.

Marcus Garvey, still considered by many to be the most extraordinary black leader of the 20th century, excited and organized blacks in the United States and Latin America with his program of self-help, race pride and African nationalism in the post-World War I era. Garvey was born in 1887 in Jamaica, the youngest of 11 children. He was self-educated and well-read. He left Jamaica in 1910 after losing his job as a printer due to his leadership in a strike and after his efforts to publish his own newspaper failed. He worked and traveled the next few years in Central America and Europe, where he learned firsthand how blacks throughout the world were oppressed. As a result, he returned to Jamaica in 1914 to start an organization that would promote racial pride and love, uplift blacks in Africa and elsewhere and promote black self-help. The organization was the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA).

In 1916, Garvey came to the United States to raise funds for his organization and, of course, landed in Harlem. Slowly, he built a small following with the help of his *Negro World* weekly and caught people's attention with his superb oratorical style as he preached racial self-respect to black

GARVEY continued on page 6

GARVEY continued from page 5

Americans. Garvey and his organization reached the peak of their popularity in the early 1920s when he held an international convention in Harlem that attracted delegates from around the world, founded an all-black shipping company—the Black Star Line—to compete in the all-white shipping industry and announced an ambitious project to colonize Africa with New World blacks. None of his programs and goals was realized. A combination of poor management skills on Garvey's part, the hiring of ill-prepared subordinates and opposition from influential American blacks destroyed Garvey's chances. He was found guilty of mail fraud in connection with the collection of money for the shipping company. The Liberian government thwarted his plans for African colonization and his UNIA organization split into several factions after Garvey was deported in 1927, after having served more than two years in the Atlanta Federal Penitentiary. He returned to Jamaica and then moved to London where he tried to continue his campaign to win "Africa for the Africans" until he died of a stroke in June, 1940.

Marcus Garvey was a man of great contrasts. On one hand, he had a dynamic personality that made him the most charismatic black leader of the 20th century. Thousands of blacks were drawn to him and gave up their savings for the causes he advocated. On the other hand, his inability to manage his money and choose his associates, along with his difficult personality, contributed to his downfall. ■

"I believe that woman is enslaved by the world machine, by sex conventions, by motherhood and its present necessary child-rearing, by wage-slavery, by middle-class morality, by customs, laws and superstitions."
—Margaret Sanger, 1914.⁹

MARGARET SANGER

Margaret Sanger was born Margaret Higgins in Corning, New York on September 14, 1879, the daughter of immigrant Irish parents and one of 11 children. She trained to be a nurse but in 1902 married William Sanger. Despite societal pressure, she combined marriage and her profession. She bore three children, but in 1914, left both husband and children as a "necessary sacrifice to ideals that take possession of the mind."¹⁰

As a nurse, she felt that the poor needed to control the size of their families. It was illegal to distribute birth-control information, but she wrote booklets and opened clinics to advise people on the subject. When she opened a birth-control clinic in Brooklyn in 1916, she was arrested for creating a public nuisance. Her struggle with the law dramatized her cause and won doctors the right to dispense birth-control information to their patients.

In 1930, she secured a \$5,000 grant from Sears and Roebuck merchandising magnate, Julius Rosenwald and obtained equivalent matching funds to open a clinic in Harlem. It was endorsed by the powerful black

newspaper, *The Amsterdam News* and by establishment political and religious leaders in Harlem, including W.E.B. DuBois and Reverend Adam Clayton Powell.¹¹ Yet it never developed a steady following. Part of the problem may have been the inevitable class and racial tensions between clinic personnel and clients. Part was the fact that many poor women, then as now, derive critical self-esteem and personal satisfaction from their child-

bearing. There were also ideological differences in the community itself. Harlem preacher and organizer, Marcus Garvey's separatist philosophy rejected fertility control as genocidal; he embraced traditional Biblical values and boldly encouraged black women to have babies. Though he was discredited in 1929, suspicion of contraception endured into the 1930s.

Sanger was sensitive to the predicament and hired black physicians to improve patient rapport in the clinic and a black social worker to reach out to the community. After five years, Margaret turned the clinic over to the New York chapter of the American Birth

"Fifty years ago I realized what was coming—the population explosion."

—Margaret Sanger, *Parade Magazine*.

Control League who closed it in 1936.

But Margaret would never admit defeat, as president of the International Planned Parenthood Foundation, she encouraged sex education and research on simple contraceptive methods. She was more than 80 years old when scientists first marketed the oral birth control pill. She died in 1966, renowned as the foremost pioneer in the birth-control movement. ■

ADAM CLAYTON POWELL, SR.

Adam Clayton Powell, Sr. was perhaps the most famous black clergyman in the United States during the first half of the 20th century. Born in Franklin County, Virginia, the son of a German planter and a part-black, part American-Indian woman, Powell had only a few years of schooling in his youth. He worked at a variety of odd jobs and lived a carefree and hedonistic life until he was converted at a revival meeting in 1885. After his conversion, he attended Virginia Union University, graduating from both the theological school and the normal academic department in 1892. Subsequent to holding successful pastorates in St. Paul, Philadelphia and New Haven, Powell was named pastor of the venerable Abyssinian Baptist Church in New York City in 1908.

Powell combined superb business sense with an impressive preaching style and he managed to enrich his congregation both materially and spiritually. He was one of the first black leaders to buy land in Harlem (for the church). By 1923, a new building had been constructed for the congregation on 138th Street and the church made a fine profit on the real estate transaction. Powell turned the church into a community center that dispensed aid to needy persons while he preached against immorality and racism.

Powell was involved in religious, interracial and civil rights activities between 1908 and the outbreak of World War II. He was a founder of the National Urban League, an early leader of the NAACP and a proponent of race pride. The few goals he did not attain in life—to enter politics and be elected to Congress—were reached by his son, Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., who was the first black to represent New York City in Congress. ■

"It is the duty of the younger Negro artist—to change through the force of his art that old whispering 'I want to be white,' hidden in the aspirations of his people, to 'Why should I want to be white? I am a Negro—and beautiful!'"

—Langston Hughes, *The Nation*
"The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain."— June 23, 1926.

Langston Hughes, poet laureate of Harlem, read and discussed in most of the world's major languages, is a legend whose work runs like a creative avalanche from early poems like "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" to his death in 1967. His creative range (poetry, fiction, opera, drama, translation, gospel song-plays, history and biography, anthology and humor) is staggering and his influence on other writers is a testament to the quality of his expression and his vision. His work during the Harlem Renaissance is an important but small part of his life's work.

Born in Joplin, Missouri in 1902, Hughes gave early promise of his creative abilities—class poet of his grammar school (1915) and senior editor of his class yearbook. He went to Mexico City to live with his wealthy father but left him in anger and returned to America to study at Columbia University in New York (1922). Columbia proved disappointing, but nearby Harlem and glittering Broadway proved irresistible. By spring 1925, he had published several poems in *The Crisis*, met W.E.B. DuBois, given his first public reading and aroused the interest of Alain Locke. Soon after he shipped out on the SS *Malone* and encountered, in the words of one of his poems, "My Africa: Motherland of the Negro peoples!" His experiences on this trip were the inspiration for such stories as *Luani of the Jungle* and *Burutu Moon* and poems such as "Danse Africaine," "Liars," and "Fog." His work was published in a special Harlem issue of the magazine *Survey Graphic* in 1925. In November, 1924, Hughes came back to Harlem and then moved to Washington, DC to live with his mother.

In the next year, Hughes made several trips to New York and met most of the influential individuals, black and

white, who collectively comprised the Harlem Renaissance. "Discovered" by the white poet, Vachel Lindsay, Langston Hughes soon became the best-known black poet in America. He won poetry prizes in contests held by *The Crisis* and *Opportunity* and was published in *Vanity Fair* magazine and other journals by the end of the decade. In 1926, Alfred Knopf published *The Weary Blues* and a second volume of poetry, *Fine Clothes to the Jew*, in 1927. He gave poetry readings in several Northern cities, began a novel, *Not Without Laughter* and traveled south to research folklore with Zora Neale Hurston.

LANGSTON HUGHES

In 1931, Hughes sailed for Cuba and Haiti and his work took a new direction toward fiction and drama rather than verse. During the 40s and 50s, he turned to autobiography as well as a series of dialogues that evolved the "Jesse B. Semple" character, a street-smart, canny compassionate voice who spoke for the ordinary African-American. Four volumes of "Semple" stories eventually resulted. In 1961, he was elected to the National Institute of Arts and Letters, a recognition that had been a long time in coming.

Langston Hughes's major contribution to the Harlem Renaissance was his fresh, often earthy, bittersweet, racially sensitive poetry. But he was also an assistant editor on Wallace Thurman's literary magazine *Fire!!* and his manifesto "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain" served notice that the new generation of black writers was determined to create its own art. ■

**"Negro blood is sure
powerful—because just
one drop of black blood
makes
a colored man.
One drop—you are
a Negro!—Black
is powerful."**

—Langston Hughes,
Semple Takes a Wife, 1953.

Other Personalities of the HARLEM RENAISSANCE

EUBIE BLAKE was a pianist and composer who teamed with the lyricist Noble Sissle to form a song writing and vaudeville team. Later the two men pooled their resources to produce the successful show, *Shuffle Along*.

STERLING BROWN was considered the folk poet of the New Negro Renaissance. In his book, *Southern Road*, he created numerous black folk characters and revealed his understanding of spirituals, blues, jazz and work songs.

CAB CALLOWAY was a singer/bandleader who frequently played the Cotton Club. He also performed in several films in the 1930s and '40s.

CHARLES W. CHESTNUTT was a writer of short stories and novels whose use of folk-lore and analysis of upper class society forecast the awakening of the Harlem Renaissance.

COUNTEE CULLEN was a poet whose works appeared in both white and black publications. He won several awards before he even completed graduate school. He admitted a debt to the English Romantics and his work was characterized as "genteel" thus he rarely exploited racial subjects and this fact made him lose popularity in Harlem.

DUKE ELLINGTON was a composer and musician who played the Cotton Club. His popularity with white audiences out-lived the Harlem Renaissance and he catered his entertainment to their tastes.

JESSIE REDMON FAUSET was a writer but had more influence on other writers as literary editor of *The Crisis*, a black magazine. She encouraged

the work of Jean Toomer, Countee Cullen and Langston Hughes.

ZORA NEALE HURSTON was a writer who collected folklore of the South and published articles about it. Her anthropological perspective was apparent in her plays and short stories and in three novels written in the 1930s. With her work, she added a rich sense of Southern folk roots to the Harlem Renaissance.

CHARLES S. JOHNSON founded *Opportunity* magazine in 1923, which featured works of black writers. His encouragement of and influence on black writers made possible the Black Arts movement of the succeeding generation.

JAMES WELDON JOHNSON was perhaps the most versatile and accomplished black person in 20th century America. Author, diplomat, songwriter, lawyer, educator and advocate of civil rights, Johnson was a leading figure of the Harlem Renaissance. As executive secretary, he expanded the membership of the NAACP; as writer and editor he tried to demonstrate the contribution of blacks to American culture.

ALAIN LOCKE was a critic and educator whose book *The New Negro* (1925), an anthology of black writers and artists, generated the cultural Renaissance in Harlem. He helped promote and support talented individuals by introducing them to wealthy white patrons who were willing to provide financial support. He was also active in promoting black interests abroad, especially in France.

CLAUDE McKAY was a poet and novelist. His

book, *Home to Harlem* (1928), was the first novel by a Harlem writer to be a best-seller.

RICHARD BRUCE NUGENT was an illustrator and writer whose wit and striking good looks made him the *enfant terrible* of Harlem. His perfumed prose and satiric illustrations appeared in Alain Locke's *The New Negro* and then in Wallace Thurman's *Fire*. In the years following the Harlem Renaissance, he amassed a large collection of Afro-Americana that was an invaluable resource to scholars and writers.

WALLACE THURMAN was a leader of the younger writers and artists who met at his home on West 136th Street that he dubbed the "Niggerati Manor." His novels, *The Blacker the Berry* (1929), *Infants of the Spring* and his play *Harlem* (1929) were brutally frank and shocking in their picture of black life.

JEAN TOOMER wrote the novel *Cane*, based on his experiences in Georgia. The book was a financial failure but a critical success and was hailed as a benchmark in creative achievement. His interest in mysticism and spiritual thought led to his decline as a writer.

ETHEL WATERS was a singer and actress who played the Cotton Club but went on to Broadway musicals such as *Africana* and *As Thousands Cheer*. Her most memorable role was as Bernice in Carson McCuller's play, *Member of the Wedding*.

IKE HINES' PLACE was on West 35th Street. Though not in Harlem, it collected black musicians and entertainers and they, in turn, attracted scores of white pleasure-seekers. ■

Notes

1. Langworthy, p. 22.
2. Langworthy, p. 45.
3. Henry Louis Gates, p. 165.
4. Watson, p. 9.
5. Watson, p. 6.
6. Rose, p. 74.
7. Rose, p. 75.
8. Malbert, p. 89.
9. Chesler, p. 98.
10. Chesler, p. 141.
11. Chesler, p. 462.

Sources

Chesler, Ellen. *Woman of Valor*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992.

Huggins, Nathan Irwin. *Harlem Renaissance*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1971.

Kellner, Bruce. *The Harlem Renaissance: A Historical Dictionary for the Era*. Westport, CT.: Greenwood

Press, 1984.

Langworthy, Douglas. "Making our History." *American Theater*. New York: July-August, 1996.

Lewis, David Levering. *When Harlem Was in Vogue*. New York: Knopf, 1981.

Malbert, Roger, ed. *Rhapsodies in Black*. Gates, Henry Louis. "Harlem on our Minds." Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997.

"Margaret Sanger." *World Book Encyclopedia*. Vol. 17. Chicago: Field Enterprises Educational Corporation, 1972.

Rose, Phyllis. *Jazz Cleopatra*. New York: Doubleday, 1989.

Watson, Steven. *The Harlem Renaissance*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1995. ■

Before the Play— —Who Am I?

Ask students to look up and list contributions from these famous people of the first half of the 20th century.

Marcus Garvey
Adam Clayton Powell, Sr.
Margaret Sanger
Langston Hughes
Josephine Baker
Booker T. Washington
W.E.B. DuBois
Alain Locke
Zora Neale Hurston

Research the following during the early part of the 20th century

1. Harlem
2. The Harlem Renaissance
3. The Cotton Club
4. Popular music and dances of the late 1920's and early 1930's, especially in Harlem.
5. The economy of the late 1920s and early 1930s
6. Fashion of this period
7. Emancipation Proclamation
8. The Great Depression
9. The Stock Market Crash of 1929
10. Speakeasies
11. Prohibition

After the Play — Characterization:

1. Identify some strengths and weaknesses of each character. (Angel, Guy, Delia, Sam, Leland)
2. Did you have strong feelings about the character? Were they positive or negative feelings? What motivated the character's actions? Did you feel compassion for the character?
3. Name some of the things that caused the character to react. What do you think the character's life was like before the time of the play?

Questions:

1. At the time of the play, abortion was illegal in the United States. What are the arguments you hear today on both sides of this controversial issue?
2. This play takes place just as the Great Depression begins. What was the Depression? What effect does the economic condition of the country have on each character?

3. What is family planning? Why was the idea of family planning controversial at the time of the play? Why did many leaders of the African-American community oppose it? Is family planning still controversial? If yes, for the same reasons?

Creative Writing Project

Continue the story, this time focusing on Guy and Delia's trip to Paris. Include the characteristics that shaped these two in *Blues for an Alabama Sky*. Guy has his humor and a belief in his own ability. Delia has a drive to make life better for other people and she is still suffering from her loss of Sam. She also has a naïve approach to life. What do you think happens when Guy meets Josephine?

Reading List

(Reading list and list of poets are courtesy of Gwen Thomas, Metropolitan State College and The African American Task Force.)

1. Bontemps, Arna. *American Negro Poetry*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1996.



2. Childress, Alice. *Like One of the Family*. Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 1992.
3. Dubois, W.E.B. *Souls of Black Folk*. Michigan: Candace Press, 1996.
4. Fauset, Jessie. *Plum Bum*. Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 1990.
5. Fisher, Rudolph. *The Walls of Jericho*. New York: Arno Press, 1969.
6. Huggins, Nathan I. *Voices from Harlem Renaissance*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1974.
7. Hughes, Langston. *The Ways of White Folks*. New York: Vintage Books, 1990. *The Best of Simple*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1989.
8. Hurston, Zora Neale. *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1991.
9. Larsen, Nella. *Passing*. Salem, New Hampshire: Ayer, 1989.
10. Lewis, David Levering. *When Harlem Was in Vogue*. New York: Penguin, 1997.
11. Thurman, Wallace. *Infants of the Spring*. New York: Macaulay Company, 1987.
12. Toomer, Jean. *Cane*. New York: Modern Library, 1994.

Major poets of the Harlem Renaissance era:

Arna Bontemps
Claude Brown
Sterling Brown
Countee Cullen
Waring Cuney
Paul Laurence Dunbar
Langston Hughes
Fenton Johnson
Georgia Douglas Johnson
James Weldon Johnson
Claude McKay
Jean Toomer

Themes

Sterling Brown identified the five themes of young black writers:

1. Africa as a source of race pride
2. black American heroes and heroines
3. racial political propaganda
4. the black folk tradition
5. candid self-revelation

Discuss the importance of these themes to African Americans. Are these themes universal? Do all groups identify what gives them pride, have heroes and heroines, political propaganda, folk tradition and candid self-revelation? Are there any other themes that you can think of that make people proud of who they are? ■

Timeline of Afro-American History

1920 61 reported lynchings; Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association meets with 3,000 delegates; the Republican National Convention declares that African Americans must be admitted to state and district conventions; the KKK operates in 27 states with over 100,000 members; Charlie "Bird" Parker is born; boxing champ "Sugar Ray" Robinson is born.

1921 64 reported lynchings; A major race riot in Tulsa, Oklahoma leaving 30 dead; first African American appointed detective sergeant in N.Y. Police Department; *Roots* author and Pulitzer Prize-winner Alex Haley is born; Bessie Coleman is first black American worldwide to become a licensed airplane pilot; first large show of African-American artists is held at the 135th Street Branch of the New York Public Library; Roy Campanella is born, he will play for Brooklyn Dodgers and be named National League's MVP three times.

1922 57 recorded lynchings; Marcus Garvey is arrested and framed for mail fraud by integrationist black Americans; Harold Washington, the first black American mayor of Chicago, is born; first black American elected to Congress is born (Parren James Mitchell); Jazz bassist Charlie Mingus is born; actress Dorothy Dandridge, entertainer Carmen McRae and theatre director Lloyd Richards are born; Samuel Gravely, Jr. (first black American to become an admiral in US Navy) is born.

1923 33 recorded lynchings; Marcus Garvey is found guilty of mail fraud, fined and sentenced to five years in prison; martial law is declared in Oklahoma with governor decrying the rebellious activities of the KKK; Garrett A. Morgan, inventor of the gas mask, receives the patent for the automatic traffic light.

1924 16 recorded lynchings; The Democratic National Convention is held in New York without segregation of the 13 blacks who attend; the KKK continues to grow, reaching 4.5 million members; new immigration law excludes blacks from African descent from entry into the United States; Shirley Chisholm, the first black American woman elected to Congress is born; The National

Negro Finance Corporation is created with \$1 million to foster business expansion and development; cancer research biologist Jewel Plummer Cobb is born; the first world series of the Negro League teams is held.

1925 17 recorded lynchings; The number of states with anti-lynching legislation is now 13; Hailie Q. Brown, president of the National Federation of Colored Women's Clubs, leads a walkout of more than 2,000 delegates at a convention of the International Council of Women in Washington, DC, when attempts are made to segregate the event; Malcolm Little, aka Malcolm X, is born; Blues guitarist, Riley B.B. King, is born.

1926 23 recorded lynchings; Attorney Violette N. Anderson of Chicago is the first black American woman admitted to practice before the U.S. Supreme Court; Negro History Week instituted, in 1976 expanded to Black History Month.

1927 16 recorded lynchings; U.S. Supreme Court decides that state laws forbidding blacks from voting in primary elections are unconstitutional and in direct violation of the 14th amendment; Harlem Globetrotters are organized.

1928 Oscar DePriest, a Chicago Republican, is elected to Congress, the first African-American representative in the 20th century and the first ever from the North.

1929 7 recorded lynchings; Martin Luther King born; three major black American-owned life insurance companies merge to form the Supreme Liberty Life Insurance Company with assets of \$1.5 million.

1930 20 recorded lynchings; The NAACP successfully campaigns to defeat confirmation of Supreme Court nominee who opposed voting rights for black Americans; public school segregation is legally mandated, \$44.31 is spent annually on each white child and \$12.57 on each black child; Ray Charles, jazz, soul and pop singer is born; playwright Lorraine Hansberry is born.

1931 12 recorded lynchings; The arrest of nine black American youths for allegedly raping two white women on a freight train; the conviction of the "Scottsboro Boys," based on hearsay evidence, will cause national and international protest and result in several appeals and retrials. Only by 1950 will all nine men be free as a result of appeal, parole, or escape; in 19 major U.S. cities with large black American populations, at least 25% of all black men and women are unemployed. In Detroit 60% of

black men and 75% of black women are unemployed; Toni Morrison, first black American to win the Nobel Prize for literature is born; Daniel Hale Williams, heart surgeon and founder of Chicago's Provident Hospital dies; Duke Ellington composes "Mood Indigo"; Tony-Award winning actor James Earl Jones is born; Della Reese is born.

1932 six recorded lynchings; The NAACP publishes "Mississippi River Slavery—1932" after investigating the conditions of African-American workers on federal flood control projects. It will lead to a U.S. Senate investigation and to the setting of federal standards for minimum conditions and wages; civil rights leader Andrew Young is born March 23 in New Orleans; among the 117 black American institutions of higher education, 36 are public, 81 are private (74 of which are church-affiliated), and five offer graduate-level instruction; at the Olympics, Eddie Tolan wins a gold medal in a record 100-meter dash; Ralph Metcalfe is a close second. Tolan also wins a gold in the 200 meter run and Ed Gordon earns a gold in the long jump.

1933 24 recorded lynchings; President Franklin D. Roosevelt brings several prominent black Americans into government to serve in the "Black Cabinet," an advisory group; NAACP begins a widespread campaign against segregation by filing suit on behalf of Thomas Holcutt against the University of North Carolina. The suit is lost; the Works Project Administration initiates adult education programs that teach 400,000 black Americans to read and write; Louis Eugene Walcott is born May 11 in New York. As Louis Farrakhan, he will become national representative of Elijah Muhammad's Nation of Islam, and on Muhammad's death, lead a faction of the movement; Quincy Jones, is born; Benny Goodman, a white bandleader, begins using black American musicians in recording sessions. In 1936, he will be the first major bandleader to have blacks and whites playing together. ■

—From *Timelines of Afro-American History* by Tom McCowan and Jack Maguire

Inside Out is intended for students and teachers but may be enjoyed by audiences of all ages.



Denver Center
Theatre Company

Donovan Marley, Artistic Director
A division of The Denver Center for the Performing Arts



Sally Gass, Contributing Writer
Linda Eller, Editor

The Student Matinee program
is sponsored by

