

**Gueyes Selhoué**

Lycée de Villaroy (Guyancourt)

2024-2025

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# Spécialité

## "ANGLAIS MONDE CONTEMPORAIN"

**SUBJECT : *Harlem Renaissance.***

**General Topic : Relation to the world**

***Axis : Power and influence***

Question : What impact did the Harlem Renaissance have on American society in the 1920s and What is its impact today's American society ?

## List of documents :

- **-Doc A** /iconographic document : Great Migration-African American history
- **Source** : <https://www.britannica.com/event/Great-Migration>
- **-Doc B**/"The New Negro" (Essay by Alain Locke-1925) -by Amardeep Singh ;  
2022-01-09-Lehigh University
- **Source**: <https://scalar.lehigh.edu/african-american-poetry-a-digital-anthology/the-new-negro-essay-by-alain-locke-1925>
- **Doc C** / Press article : "Jazz Is Profoundly American"- Apr 1, 2025-Time
- **Source**: <https://time.com/7273135/preserving-jazz-america-essay/>
- **-Doc D**/ iconographic document:(1963) Josephine Baker, "Speech at the March on Washington" -November 03, 2011 / Contributed By: BlackPast
- **Source**:<https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/1963-josephine-baker-speech-march-washington/>
- **-Doc E**/Press article : The Harlem Renaissance-By Ishmael Reed -Aug. 29, 1976
- **Source**:The Harlem Renaissance - The New York Times<https://www.nytimes.com/1976/08/29/archives/the-harlem-renaissance-the-guest-word.html#s>
- **-Doc F**/Press article : « The Harlem Renaissance : expansive exhibition celebrates a vital cultural era » By Veronica Esposito ; 4 March 2024- *The guardian*.
- **Source**: <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2024/mar/04/harlem-renaissance-metropolitan-museum-review>

**Doc A :**

## **Great Migration** **African American history**



## **DOC B :**

# **"The New Negro" (Essay by Alain Locke) (1925)**

THE NEW NEGRO

ALAIN LOCKE

In the last decade something beyond the watch and guard of statistics has happened in the life of the American Negro and the three Norns who have traditionally presided over the Negro problem have a changeling in their laps. The Sociologist, the Philanthropist, the Race-leader are not unaware of the New Negro, but they are at a loss to account for him. He simply cannot be swathed in their formula. For the younger generation is vibrant with a new psychology; the new spirit is awake in the masses, and under the very eyes of the professional observers is transforming what has been a perennial problem into the progressive phases of contemporary Negro life.

Could such a metamorphosis have taken place as suddenly as it has appeared to? The answer is no; not because the New Negro is not here, but because the Old Negro had long become more of a myth than a man. The Old Negro, we must remember, was a creature of moral debate and historical controversy. His has been a stock figure perpetuated as an historical fiction partly in innocent sentimentalism, partly in deliberate reactionism. The Negro himself has contributed his share to this through a sort of protective social mimicry forced upon him by the adverse circumstances of dependence. So for generations in the mind of America, the Negro has been more of a formula than a human being—a something to be argued about, condemned or defended, to be “kept down,” or “in his place,” or “helped up,” to be worried with or worried over, harassed or patronized, a social bogey or a social burden. The thinking Negro even has been induced to share this same general attitude, to focus his attention on controversial issues, to see himself in the distorted perspective of a social problem. His shadow, so to speak, has been more real to him than his personality. Through having had to appeal from the unjust stereotypes of his oppressors and traducers to those of his liberators, friends and benefactors he has had to subscribe to the traditional positions from which his case has been viewed. Little true social or self-understanding has or could come from such a situation.

## Doc C:

Apr 1, 2025 1:00 PM CET

### Jazz Is Profoundly American

By Elizabeth Alexander

In November 2024, I went to see the jazz pianist Jason Moran perform at the Village Vanguard in New York City. Playing the music of Duke Ellington, this visionary artist of the hip-hop generation crafted a magical set, sampling a scrap of this and scrap of that, interpreting the songs of the jazz legend Ellington into something new and equally powerful. Across the various polyrhythms, Moran modeled how jazz can make more than one thing happen at the same time, and do so harmoniously. The effect was profound—and deeply American.

As I was reminded throughout that evening, jazz is the most fundamental expression of innovation and creativity in American society, and as such must be both uplifted and protected. Shaping and infusing the arts and culture in their many different forms in our country, jazz lies at the heart of our great experiment. It was first pieced together in New Orleans by the cornetist King Buddy Bolden, who was born the year Reconstruction ended, and who drew on both the Blues traditions of Black evangelical churches and the ragtime of French-speaking Creole Black musicians. From its very beginnings, jazz has been a Black art form that is quintessentially American, and the first original art form to be invented in our young country. By the 1930s, nearly all of the number one musical artists in the United States were considered jazz artists; in the following decades, jazz musicians like Fats Waller, Benny Goodman, Ella Fitzgerald, and Nat King Cole topped the charts. Drawing on the creative roots of jazz today are rap and hip-hop, among the most popular music genres in our country, and emblematic of the kind of artistic resourcefulness that the poet Amiri Baraka has characterized as “the digging of everything.” Out of the privation, the challenge, and the censure of slavery and the unfulfilled promise of post-Reconstruction justice, Black musicians embraced experimentation and innovation, ingenuity and joy, and a multigenerational call and response speaking truth to power that endures to the present day.

“Jazz is freedom,” Duke Ellington said in 1945. “Jazz is the freedom to play anything, whether it has been done before or not. It gives you freedom.” His words lay bare what makes the multivocality and polyphony of jazz so constitutive of Americanness. Our country is a place made of many places. Our primary language is one made of many languages. We are not by any measure “mono”—not monotheistic, not monoracial, not monolithic in our media or markets, our education or endeavors, our political beliefs or backgrounds. What we are is multivocal, multicultural; and we are free.

It’s no wonder then that jazz and the freedom it carries and conveys have long flourished in New York City, and those places like the Village Vanguard where I heard Moran remix and reimagine Ellington’s work. The long, slim, cheek-to-jowl island of Manhattan is a place where so much unique culture has been unbridled in its cultivation. The Vanguard, for example, is the oldest continuously run jazz club in the world.

## Doc D:

# (1963) Josephine Baker, “Speech at the March on Washington”

November 03, 2011 / Contributed By: BlackPast



*Josephine Baker, March on Washington, August 28, 1963*

Josephine Baker is remembered by most people as the flamboyant African American entertainer who earned fame and fortune in Paris in the 1920s. Yet through much of her later life, Baker became a vocal opponent of segregation and discrimination, often initiating one-woman protests racial injustice. In 1963, at the age of 57, Baker flew in from France, her adopted homeland, to appear before the largest audience in her career, the 250,000 gathered at the March on Washington. Wearing her uniform of the French Resistance, of which she was active in World War II, she and Daisy Bates were the only women to address the audience. Baker spoke just before Dr. Martin Luther King gave his “I Have a Dream” oration.

**DOC E :**

# ***The Harlem Renaissance***

**By Ishmael Reed**

- Aug. 29, 1976

(...)

With the Depression, the Renaissance came to an end, critics say. The whites stopped going uptown. The speak-easies closed; the publishers were no longer interested in books written by “New Negroes.”

Recently, the Harlem Renaissance has come under fire. Some say the writers weren't militant enough. That they were writing for white people. That they drank too much gin. Wallace Thurman was a novelist, playwright, screen writer, editor, and publisher of a magazine called *Fire*, but some contemporary critics seem only interested in the quantity of gin he drank. There was that extraordinary statement printed in *Black World*, a literary magazine that recently ceased publication, the organ of Black Aesthetic criticism, which said that the Harlem Renaissance was part of a conspiracy to divert attention from the more militant figures of the time.

In other words, every time Cullen, McKay, and Hughes wrote a poem they thought, “How can I make this poem divert attention from the more militant spokesmen of these times?”

Some sullen, humorless critics of the Black Aesthetic movement seem to have long since abandoned rational argument and take their lead from Addison Gayle Jr. who at the conclusion of his new book, “*The Way of the New World*,” recommends the eradication of those who disagree with him, surely a sign of intellectual insecurity. A literary Banana Republic approach to things by those who've forgotten that the mainstream aspiration of Afro-America is for more freedom and not slavery—including freedom of artistic expression.

Perhaps the civil rights movement lost its steam because people noticed that blacks weren't practicing civil rights among themselves. Apostles of the Black Aesthetic held “writers' conferences,” which served as tribunals where those writers who didn't hew to the line were ridiculed, scorned, mocked and threatened. The ringleader, Addison Gayle Jr., a professor at Bernard Baruch College, argues that the aim of black writing should be to make “black men feel better,” as if we didn't have enough Disneylands. Others, usually critics safely tenured at heavily endowed colleges, have charged the Renaissance writers with having patrons, as though a patron wrote something as beautiful and as meaningful as Hughes's “*The Negro Speaks of Rivers*.”

Hughes, Cullen, McKay, Thurman and the others aren't here to defend themselves, but I'm sure that they would agree: That just as with airline pilots, teachers, students, advertising men, actors, carpenters, editors, publishers and cat burglars, you judge workers by the quality of their work, not by how much gin they drink, or how many men or women they kiss, or who their friends are, or which parties they attend, or whether they've successfully created a plan to end the world's evils, or have prevented the universe from collapsing.

Doc F:

# **The Harlem Renaissance: expansive exhibition celebrates a vital cultural era**

**By Veronica Esposito -Mon 4 Mar 2024**

“The Harlem Renaissance should be central to how we think about the modernist period. It should be essential to the way we define and articulate not just African-American identity but American identity.” The Met curator Denise Murrell recently shared with me the animating idea behind her new blockbuster exhibition, *The Harlem Renaissance and Transatlantic Modernism*, which brings together an amazingly diverse grouping of some 160 pieces to reveal the true breadth and depth of the work made by Black artists from the 1920s through the 40s. The show’s lofty aspiration is to redefine how we understand the Harlem Renaissance and the modernist art movement.

Murrell’s exhibition is the first major survey of the Harlem Renaissance in New York City since Studio Museum’s *Harlem Renaissance: Art of Black American* in 1987, and it is both welcome and overdue. It casts an extremely wide net, giving a rare, comprehensive look at how Black creators portrayed the texture of Black life in early 20th-century America. From cityscapes to portraiture to jazz-age nightlife, community elders and activism, the show gives Black Americans the agency long denied to them to tell their own stories.

( ... )

Murrell’s show is impressive for its comprehensive nature, bringing in a truly authoritative range of styles and subjects. It demonstrates that Black artists were true innovators, using all of the tools of the modernist art movement to explore the values and aesthetics of their community, and to assert their place in the fabric of American and European society. “It was about breaking down this idea that to be American was to be white, to be European was to be white, and to show the multicultural aspect of both of these populations in the 1920s through the 1940s,” Murrell said.

( ... )

*The Harlem Renaissance and Transatlantic Modernism* also very much captures the sense of debate and contention among Black artists as to what they, as a group, stood for. The feeling of viewing the multitudes of contrasting styles and viewpoints is that of a community very much exploring and having deep and passionate conversations about itself. “There were discussions and debates within the Black community about what art would best represent themselves,” said Murrell. “The movement did inspire a change in attitudes within the community about its own culture.” Murrell also noted that the way these artists lived and worked was very much a model to inspire others in the community.



