

# The Harlem Renaissance

## Cultural Contexts

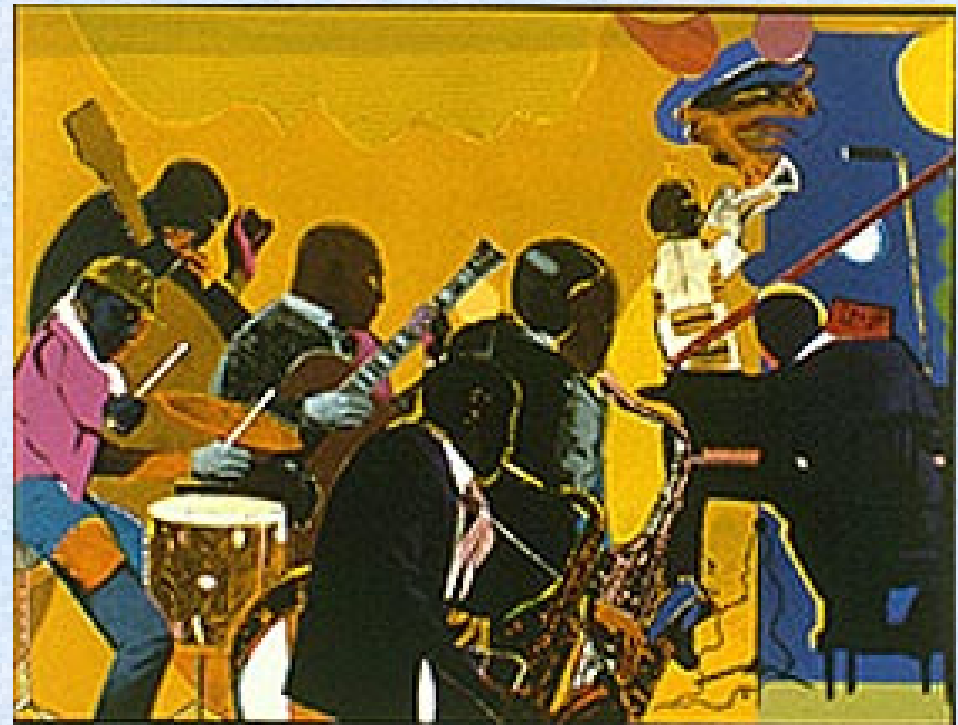


Aaron Douglas, "Idylls of the Deep South" (1934)

- Massive increase of the black population in NYC and elsewhere because of migration from the South
- W.E.B. Du Bois' magazine *Crisis* propagates pride in black identity
- flourishing of African American music, art, dance, writing (**ca. 1920-35**)
- common themes: alienation, outsider status of blacks, suffering, racism, memories of life in the South
- Alain Locke, *The New Negro* (1925; anthology of black writing)



Jacob Lawrence, "Dreams"



Romare Bearden, "Jazz"



Bessie Smith (1894 - 1937),  
known as “the Empress of the  
Blues”



Louis Armstrong (1901 - 1971),  
known as “Satchmo” or as “the  
Ambassador of Jazz”

## The “New Negro”



"The New Negro Has No Fear" — supporters of Marcus Garvey parade in Harlem during the U.N.I.A. convention in 1920.

## W.E.B. Du Bois (1868 - 1963)



- *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903)
- fostered pride in African-Am. culture
- founded the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People] in 1909
- speaks of the “two-ness” or “double consciousness” of African Americans:

“After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world,—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this **double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others**, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels **his twoness,—an American, a Negro; two warring souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings**; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.

The history of the American Negro is the history of this **strife**,—this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self.”

# Langston Hughes (1902 - 1967)



- Moved from Missouri and Kansas to Harlem, became (one of) the most prominent Harlem Renaissance writers
- poet, dramatist, short story writer, essayist
- best-known poetry collection: *The Weary Blues* (1926)
- condemned American imperialism in Cuba and Haiti; spent a year in Russia --> socialist outlook
- founded the leftist Suitcase Theatre
- newspaper columnist for the *Chicago Defender* for 20 years
- uncompromised love of his race and foregrounding of the beauty, humanity, and endurance of African Americans

## Zora Neale Hurston (1891 - 1960)



- anthropologist, novelist, short-story writer, essayist
- born in Eatonville, Florida, the first black incorporated town in the U.S.; went to NYC to study anthropology at Barnard and Columbia
- writing on rural black folk; captures their cultural practices of storytelling and folklore
- ***Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937)**
  - often called the first black feminist novel,
  - the protagonist Jamie moves from girlhood and dependence to liberated womanhood.
- Hurston was criticized by Harlem Renaissance writers for concentrating on the celebration of black folk traditions rather than protesting against white oppression.