A Companion to African American History
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CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

Identity, Protest, and Outreach in the Arts

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The Early Twentieth Century, 1900–19

The early decades of the twentieth century witnessed a significant growth in the development of African American literary activities, in the form of increased artistic production of novels, plays, poetry, and short stories, in addition to scholarly efforts in the humanities and social sciences. Scholars such as McHenry also note the important role of black literary societies in promoting black citizenship rights, and encouraging skills development and education among black citizens (McHenry 2002: 19). These positive developments, including the growth of the black press during this era, must be viewed against the harsh realities of the Age of Segregation and its proscriptions on the economic, social, and political life of black Americans. During these years, white southern terror resulted in the deaths of hundreds of American citizens, mostly blacks, in the Deep South and the border states of that region (see Tolnay and Beck, *A Festival of Violence*, 1995: 30, 37). Thus, as African Americans fought to advance their contributions to literature, music, the fine arts and scholarly endeavors, they had to wage a constant struggle to protect the black community from violence, discrimination, economic oppression, and psychological warfare. In reality, black literary activities, although complex in nature, were also created to offer a group protest against the inhuman conditions facing African Americans.

There were 21 significant voices among black men and women thinkers, writers, scholars, and leaders of this period. The 11 African American men who dominated the literary period were: W. E. B. Du Bois (1868–1963), Paul Laurence Dunbar (1872–1906), James Weldon Johnson (1871–1938), Charles W. Chestnut (1858–1932), Robert S. Abbott (1870–1940), Carter G. Woodson (1875–1950), Marcus Garvey (1887–1940), William Stanley Braithwaite (1878–1962), Benjamin Griffith Brawley (1882–1939), Booker T. Washington (1856–1915), and Kelly Miller (1863–1939). On the other side of this group stood 10 African American women: Ida B. Wells-Barnett (1862–1931), Mary Church Terrell (1863–1954), Mary McLeod Bethune (1875–1955), Bessie Smith (1894–1937), Georgia Douglass Johnson (1886–1966), Frances Ellen Watkins Harper (1825–1911), Alice Ruth Moore Dunbar-Nelson (1875–1935), Angelina Weld Grimke (1880–1958), Anne Spencer

(1882–1975), and Henrietta Cordelia Ray (1849–1916). Collectively, these men and women represented the giants among black intellectuals of the first two decades of the twentieth century. They were the leading "race men and women of their era," who viewed their personal struggles for success and the building of their careers as part of an ongoing challenge to encourage and strengthen the black community, and to promote the economic, political, and social development of the African American people.

They worked to achieve these goals through education, teaching, writing, publishing, and building black organizations. The key leaders in the organization of protest in this era were W. E. B. Du Bois, Ida Wells-Barnett, James W. Johnson, Marcus Garvey, and (secretly) Booker T. Washington. Du Bois' first efforts bore fruit with the Niagara Movement (1905), a black group attacking white discrimination against black rights in the United States (Frazier 2001*:* 192). This was followed in 1909–10 by the creation of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), with support from Du Bois, Wells-Barnett, and J. Johnson Garvey, of course, is given credit for creating the largest black-base movement organization in American history, the Universal Negro Improvement Association, formed in the USA in 1916 (Lewis 1988*:* 59). Washington was the single most important black leader of this period and, though he stressed in public a position of accommodation to white interests, he also privately sought to reduce the violence and racism suffered by blacks in America (Harlan 1972*:* 297–8).

Black writers are the most prominent element on this list. In fact, every individual noted above used the written word in some way to advance their leadership position, express their viewpoints to the world, and advance human knowledge and understanding. Among the poets of this group are Dunbar, the leading black male poet of the period, James Weldon Johnson, Georgia Douglass Johnson, Harper, Dunbar-Nelson, Grimke, Spencer, and Ray. Their work expressed the determination of the African American community to achieve personal and group freedom, and the need to give something of beauty to the world, from an African American perspective.

Chestnut was a major novelist of the era; and three important critics are Braithwaite, Brawley, and Miller. Robert S. Abbott was the most important black journalist of his day, and edited the *Chicago Defender* between 1905 and 1940 (Wolseley 1971: 36–8). Bessie Smith was the leading black woman blues singer and composer of her era. Wells-Barnett, Terrell, and Bethune were key players in the black women's club movement of the period, and collectively they did much to advance the causes of black women in America (Hine and Thompson 1998: 94–200, 250–1).

Ten major issues and themes dominated the literary considerations of African Americans during the years 1900–19. Black intellectuals faced and sought answers to all ten:

1 Should blacks support industrial or liberal education for the masses of black Americans?
2 Did black literary activities represent a first commitment to a race consciousness (or black focus) or were they an attempt to seek American integration for black literature?
3 How important was the African past to black Americans?

4 Should black leaders support the migration of blacks from rural to urban areas in the South and North?
5 How could black Americans overcome the Color Line in America?
6 When and how could blacks help to end the violence of lynching in America?
7 Should blacks leave the United States *en masse* and return to Africa, or move elsewhere in the world?
8 What roles were blacks to play in the First World War?
9 Should black writers use "black" English or traditional "white" English in their writing? and
10 What was the greatest problem facing black women in America: racism, sexism, or classicism?

Historians have focused on the major issue of black leadership in America during the period 1900–19. David Levering Lewis, in *W. E. B. Du Bois: Biography of a Race, 1868–1919* (1993), offers a comprehensive view of the leading black scholar produced in America. Unlike Booker T. Washington, W. E. B. Du Bois strongly supported liberal education for the black community, *versus* Washington's emphasis on industrial education. Like Lewis, V. P. Franklin's *Black Self-Determination: A Cultural History of the Faith of the Fathers* (1984) also notes the central importance of leadership in Black History, and in particular the key role of Du Bois. R. Douglas Hurt's edited collection, *African American Life in the Rural South, 1900–1950* (2003), places the above issues in the context of the lives of the masses of blacks, most of whom still lived in the South in 1900–19. A clear pattern of black protest emerges: "Migrate from the South, if at all possible," became a constant cry of black people. If this was not possible, then migrate to southern cities, but escape the very worst of life on the plantations and southern farms.

Finally, the voices of black women historians, such as Melba Joyce Boyd, author of *Discarded Legacy: Politics and Poetics in the Life of Frances E. W. Harper, 1825–1911* (1994), noted the challenges facing black women writers and leaders. No case is more complex than Harper's. Like many of her contemporaries, she had fought to bring an end to American slavery, while seeking to advance the cause of black women in American society. She did this as an abolitionist, lecturer, educator, and writer, using all of her skills and talents to overcome the problems of her lifetime. Paula Giddings, in *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America* (1984), places Ida B. Wells-Barnett in the midst of the struggles of her age, with a focus on lynching and issues involving women. Both these studies highlight the central roles of black women in the early history of the twentieth century.

These issues remained at the forefront of black intellectual concerns for decades. Each question posed a major challenge to the black community, and there were no easy solutions to such complex problems. Many black thinkers took the long view, and worked to achieve gradual change in a very racist society. They focused on promoting liberal education and the religious traditions of black Americans, developing black organizations (such as the NAACP, the National Urban League, and the Universal Negro Improvement Association), strengthening the black family, promoting racial consciousness – especially through black culture, and the study of history in America and Africa by way of Carter G. Woodson's Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, formed in 1915 – and encouraging black music (gospel, blues and jazz, which would help to lift the black community), as well as

writing poetry, novels, plays, and short stories that sought to reflect the complex rural experiences of most blacks, but also the change to urban life and industry that more and more African Americans were making.

The Harlem Renaissance, 1920–1935

A second major black literary period, generally referred to as the Harlem Renaissance era, extended from 1920 to 1935. This cultural movement holds a special place in the history of African Americans. Also called the Black Renaissance, the period witnessed a tremendous outpouring of literary, historical, and artistic productions by black people in the United States; with Harlem, New York, serving as the major vantage point of the movement (Valade, *The Essential Black Literature Guide* 1996*:* 165–7).

The Black Renaissance occurred during a critical period of modern black American history. Politically, socially, and economically, an Age of Segregation still gripped black life in America, especially in the South. With the increased demand for labor during the First World War and on into the 1920s, many blacks sought to escape the harshest consequences of American racism. Hundreds of thousands left the South, and took their talents and skills with them to the North. When combined with the native northern black populations, the black population in the United States was transformed from a largely rural people to one concentrated in cities. One scholar estimates that "at the end of the 1920s there were 164,566 black people living in Harlem, making it the most densely populated black area in the world" (Marks, *Farewell, We're Good and Gone: The Great Black Migration* 1989*:* 121).

Black writers, artists, intellectuals, and leaders were especially attracted to New York City, because of its major importance in the economic, cultural, and political life of the nation. New York was the largest city in America, the center of banking and commercial activities, the press, foundations, book publishing, and other cultural institutions; hence its role in bringing together a large range of black talent.

The list of outstanding black figures who contributed to the Black Renaissance – and made New York their home at some stage of their career – reads like a who's who among African Americans of the twentieth century. In addition to those mentioned already – James Johnson, Marcus Garvey, W. E. B. Du Bois, Alice Dunbar-Nelson, Angelina Grimke, Georgia Johnson, and Anne Spencer – other prominent names included Jean Toomer (1894–1967), Jessie Fauset (1882–1961), Walter White (1893–1955), Countee Cullen (1903–1946), Langston Hughes (1902–1967), Eric Walrond (1898–1966), Rudolph Fisher (1897–1934), Nella Larsen (1891–1964), Claude McKay (1890–1948), Wallace Thurman (1902–1934), Arna Bontemps (1902–1973), Zora N. Hurston (1891–1960), May Miller (1899–1995), Alain Locke (1885–1954), Charles W. Chestnutt (1858–1932), Katherine Dunham (1910–), and Ira De A. Reid (1901–1968). Yet, it must be understood that the Black Renaissance also took place in many other cities, such as Chicago, Washington, DC, and Atlanta.

Although the Harlem Renaissance had perhaps its greatest impact in the area of literary production – poetry, stories, plays, and novels – the movement also encouraged expansion of black jazz, gospel, and blues; other fine arts, such as painting, sculpture, and theatre; education; and the study of Africa and blacks outside of the mother continent, especially black history, life, and culture in the United States.

Certainly the impact of the movement was impressive. Scholar Nathan Irvin Huggins notes that the Harlem Renaissance: "left its mark as a symbol and a point of reference for everyone to recall . . . the very name continued to connote a special spirit, new vitality, black urbanity, and black militancy. Through the activities, the writings, the promotion of Negroes in the 1920s, Harlem had become a racial focal point for knowledgeable black men [and women] the world over" (Huggins 1971*:* 303).

Black poets were central figures in the Harlem Renaissance. Two of the best known black male poets were Countee Cullen and Langston Hughes. Their works were respected for exploring the complexities of the black experience and for writing on universal themes, such as beauty, the search for truth and freedom, and human understanding (Emanuel and Gross 1968*:* 173; Wagner 1973*:* 283–347; Rampersad 1986*:* 50–1). During the highlight years of the Harlem Renaissance, Cullen was famous for such poems as "Heritage," "Shroud of Color," "Yet Do I Marvel," and "Incident." His poem "For A Poet" reflects the richness of his lyric style and mood:

> I have wrapped my dreams in a silken cloth,
> And laid them away in a box of gold;
> Where long will cling the lips of the moth,
> I have wrapped my dreams in a silken cloth;
> I hide no hate, I am not even wroth
> Who found earth's breath so keen and cold;
> I have wrapped my dreams in a silken cloth,
> And laid them away in a box of gold. (Early 1991: 109)

Like Cullen, Langston Hughes was a giant among the figures of the Harlem Renaissance. Examples of his best work from the period include: "The Weary Blues," "Dream Variation," "The South," and "Mother To Son." An early poem of Hughes' which reflected the new mood of the Black Renaissance was "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" (1921):

> I've known rivers;
> I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than the
> flow of human blood in human veins.
>
> My soul has grown deep like the rivers.
>
> I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.
> I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.
>
> I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.
> I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln
> went down to New Orleans, and I've seen its muddy
> bosom turn all golden in the sunset.
>
> I've known rivers:
> Ancient, dusky rivers.
>
> My soul has grown deep like the rivers. (Hughes [1926] 1954: 36)

Three black women novelists were exceptional figures during this era. They were Nella Larsen, author of *Quicksand* (1928) and *Passing* (1929); Jessie Fauset, who wrote *The Chinaberry Tree* (1931); and Zora Neale Hurston, famous for her novels *Jonah's Gourd Vine* (1934) and *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937). Such writers were cultural workers in the promotion, growth, and development of the culture, creativity, and spirituality of blacks in America and around the world (Whitlow, *Black American Literature* 1984*:* 92–6, 104; Hine, King, and Reed, *We specialize in the wholly impossible*, 1995: 509).

During the Harlem Renaissance, black intellectuals were faced with ten major issues and themes. They were:

1 Should black artists continue to seek "respectability" from Americans, or stress their own experiences, growing out of the black experience, and try to first reach a black audience in the struggle for black literary achievement?
2 How should black intellectuals express black pride, racial consciousness, and uplift in their artistic works?
3 What kinds of protest should be employed in black literary production?
4 Should black writers support the continued movement of blacks in the Great Migration?
5 What special role should black Americans play in anti-colonial struggles, especially in Africa?
6 Was there a place for disillusionment, militancy, and anger in black arts?
7 How were black women's voices to be heard in the movement?
8 Should black writers focus on racial themes and avoid overt political statements in their artistic creations?
9 How would blacks deal with the new issue of the diversity of the black population in urban centers – local blacks, migrants from the South, and immigrants from Africa and the Caribbean?
10 Where should blacks publish their manuscripts: with all-black publishers, or on the open American market (with white publishers)?

Scholars of the Harlem Renaissance have noted its central place in the advancement of black American culture in the 1920s and early 1930s. In this connection, an early, major work was Nathan Irvin Huggins' *Harlem Renaissance* (1971). A later study, which also places Harlem in historical perspective, but emphasizes the contributions and issues facing black women, is Darlene Clark Hine and Kathleen Thompson's *A Shining Thread of Hope: The Black Women in America History* (1998). Issues surrounding the major black male poet of the movement are refined by Arnold Rampersad in *The Life of Langston Hughes*, Volume 1: *1902–41*, *I Too, Sing America* (1986). This work is counter-balanced with a treatment of Countee Cullen and other writers, by Houston A. Baker, Jr, in *Long Black Song: Essays in Black American Literature and Culture* (1972).

As in the past, such themes were complex and offered no easy solutions to contemporaries of the 1920s and early 1930s. Group concerns and the realities of living in a segregated society meant that most blacks had to be practical and flexible in their artistic work. Yet, as scholars Robin D. G. Kelley and Earl Lewis note, "The idea of the 'New Negro' took hold in many influential publications in the 1920s,

and the term itself was used as the title of a book edited by Howard University professor Alain Locke in 1925. In his introduction Locke proposed two complementary principles underlying this new perspective. New Negroes insisted on the rights embodied in 'the ideals of American institutions and democracy.' They also promoted 'self-respect and self-reliance' among African Americans, with a distinct emphasis on race pride" (Kelley and Lewis, *To Make Our World Anew* 2000*:* 400). Thus, the Harlem Renaissance brought "a fresh faith in blackness and a fervent racial pride . . . [and] the Harlem Renaissance marked a major watershed in black, and consequently, in American literary history" (Hirsch 1991: 56–7). Indeed, the movement witnessed a national birth of black creativity, and saw the creation of thousands of black artifacts, which reflected the talents and skills of black artists as they sought to speak their minds on the human condition at home and abroad, and to continue and refine the earlier black artistic traditions.

The Age of Richard Wright, 1935–59

The Great Depression of the 1930s was a period of extreme economic hardship for the American people. The bright hopes reflected in the Harlem Renaissance were crushed by the economic crisis of the new period. Nonetheless, black literary efforts continued in the period 1935–59, but at a slower pace. The critic Blyden Jackson called this "the Age of Wright," because Richard Wright emerged as the most outstanding black writer and thinker of his generation and produced a masterful body of creative work (Jackson 1976*:* 203–4). Wright was especially known for *Uncle Tom's Children* (1938), a collection of short stories; the novel, *Native Son* (1940); *12 Million Black Voices* (1941); and *Black Boy: A Record of Childhood and Youth* (1945), among other works (Rowley 2001*:* 593).

Wright's work and that of many other black intellectuals reflected a growing radicalism in artistic productions and outlook during this period. For Wright, this took the form of using Marxist analysis to reflect upon society and the human condition. Socialism became a major theme in the work of many artists, when they could secure publication or production of their works. Some, like Wright, were able to turn to publications on the left for support, including *New Masses*, *New Challenge*, *Left Front*, and *Partisan Review*. The new mood among black artists was very critical of American society and of the continued harsh realities facing black Americans, due to racism, lynching, and general discrimination against blacks and other marginal groups in American life.

Twenty major black voices can be identified in the life and work of artists during the Age of Wright. Ten significant black male figures were: Richard Wright (1908–1960), Langston Hughes (1902–1967), James Baldwin (1924–1987), John Hope Franklin (1915–), Martin Luther King, Jr (1929–1968), Paul Robeson (1898–1976), Ralph Ellison (1914–1994), Melvin B. Tolson (1898–1966), Sterling A. Brown (1901–1989), and Robert Hayden (1913–1980).

The ten major black women figures of this era were: Zora Neale Hurston (1891–1960), Gwendolyn Brooks (1917–2002), Margaret Walker (1915–1998), Marian Anderson (1897–1993), Lorraine Hansberry (1930–1965), Rosa Parks (1913–), Naomi Long Madgett (1923–), Ella Baker (1903–1986), Alice Childress (1916–1994), and Margaret Danner (1915–1984).

The work of the black intellectuals of the late 1930s through the 1950s signaled a further development of the protest tradition among black artists. Although the artists of this generation created a very complex body of work, they felt a need to demand even stronger statements and works that called for black human and civil rights in the United States and abroad. Thus, their creative works, teaching activities, and organizational work stressed the need for black advancement and achievement, against the odds of American racism, discrimination, and oppression of the black community. Among the creative artists, black novelists, and poets are dominate figures for the period. After Richard Wright came the novels of Langston Hughes, *Not Without Laughter* (1930) and *Tambourines to Glory* (1963), James Baldwin, *Go Tell It On the Mountain* (1953) and *Giovanni's Room* (1956), Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (1952), Zora Hurston, *Moses, Man of the Mountain* (1939) and *Seraph On the Suwanee* (1948), and Gwendolyn Brooks, *Maud Martha* (1953).

A fine selection of black poets were representative of the period, and included: Langston Hughes, Melvin B. Tolson, Sterling A. Brown, Robert Hayden, Gwendolyn Brooks, Margaret Walker, Naomi Long Madgett, and Margaret Danner. Poets called for a new spirit and connection to the African past, in such poems as this one of Danner's:

> This is an African worm
> but then a worm in any land
> is still a worm.
>
> It will not stride, run, stand up
> before the butterflies, who
> have passed their worm-like state.
>
> It must keep low, not lift its head.
> I've had the dread experience, I know.
> A worm can do nothing but crawl.
>
> Crawl, and wait. (Danner, "This Is An African Worm," in Ward 1997: 168)

The search for freedom is also expressed in Robert Hayden's "Frederick Douglass":

> When it is finally ours, this freedom, this liberty, this beautiful
> and terrible thing, needful to man as air,
> useable as earth; when it belongs at last to all,
> when it is truly instinct, brain matter, diastole, systole,
> reflex action; when it is finally won; when it is more
> than the gaudy mumbo jumbo of politicians:
> this man, this Douglass, this former slave, this Negro
> beaten to his knees, exiled, visioning a world
> where none is lonely, none hunted, alien,
> this man, superb in love and logic, this man
> shall be remembered. Oh, not with statues' rhetoric,
> not with legends and poems and wreaths of bronze alone,
> but with the lives grown out of his life, the lives
> fleshing his dream of the beautiful, needful thing. (Robert Hayden, "Frederick Douglass," in Ward 1997: 150)

Other intellectuals who significantly influenced their areas of expertise during this era were: John Hope Franklin, historian, and author of *From Slavery To Freedom* (1947); the civil rights activists, Martin Luther King, Jr and Ella Baker; the activist Paul Robeson, who supported many anti-racist causes in his lifetime; Marian Anderson, a concert artist; and the important playwrights, Lorraine Hansberry, author of *A Raisin the Sun* (1959); and Alice Childress, noted for her plays *Florence* (1949) and *Trouble in Mind* (1955), among others.

Black intellectuals were still faced with many of the same major issues and themes as in the Harlem Renaissance era, but for the period 1935–59 their ten main challenges were:

1 What economic, social, and political analysis should black intellectuals employ in their creative works: capitalism, socialism, or communism?
2 How should black separatism or integration influence black literary activities?
3 Should black Americans support the Republican or Democratic parties?
4 What role should protest themes play in black artistic productions?
5 How should the lives of black women, men, and children be reflected in black literature and the arts?
6 What roles should black Americans play in the future development of Africa?
7 Was there a place for race, or black consciousness, in African American literature?
8 Was there a special role for the black press to play in black American affairs and literary activities?
9 What steps should the Civil Rights Movement take to advance black American human and civil rights? and
10 What role should black colleges and universities play in staging black artistic productions?

Historians have noted the controversial, radical positions involving black writers and artists of the Age of Wright, especially on political issues centering around the roles of capitalism, socialism, and communism in black American life and affairs. Certainly the key figure of the period was Richard Wright, in terms of his interests in the American Left and the US Communist Party of the 1930s, though he later lost interest in communism and broke with the party. Such issues are explored by Hazel Rowley in *Richard Wright: The Life and Times* (2001). The work of Langston Hughes during these years is further explored by Arnold Rampersad, in *The Life of Langston Hughes*, Volume II: *1941–1967, I Dream A World* (1988). A major artist, in terms of music, films, and political activism, is studied by Martin Duberman, in *Paul Robeson* (1988). The attempts by black writers to promote their works during the Age of Wright are studied in: A. A. Johnson and R. M. Johnson, *Propaganda and Aesthetics: The Literary Politics of Afro-American Magazines in the Twentieth Century* (1979).

As in earlier artistic periods, black intellectuals in the Age of Wright were faced with many challenges and most adopted a stand of continued protest, combined with faith and hope in the future endeavors and struggles of black people and black culture. The individual and group creative spirits led most black intellectuals to support the Democratic Party, as did a majority of black Americans from 1932 forward; most held out hope for a democratic America, with faith that American

institutions could be reformed over time through black struggle and with support from Congress, the justice system (especially the courts), religious institutions, and improved educational opportunities and literary efforts for the American people. Meanwhile, black artistic productions had to reflect the complexities of the black experience in America and, as in the past, draw upon the rural and urban dimensions of that background, while also offering a didactical summary of black life in this nation. Thus, the Black Arts had to advance human understanding, while stressing the beauty and universal nature of black life, and there was a continued place and role for black colleges and universities in this struggle for black advancement. Yet blacks had a right, if not an obligation, to seek the continued desegregation of white-controlled educational, business, and cultural institutions in the United States.

The Black Arts Movement, 1960–79

Like the Harlem Renaissance of the early twentieth century, the Black Arts Movement, at the last quarter of the century, witnessed a significant rebirth of all of the arts in black America. It was a period of tremendous new opportunities for black artists and creative people. Every artistic and scholarly field was impacted. In essence, the Black Arts Movement refers to the period between 1960 and 1979, when black intellectuals began a call for a radical new state of black consciousness in the United States, and with a demand that black artistic production must reflect the black aesthetic. Poet and critic Larry Neal observed that a central reason for the Black Arts Movement was a need to promote "artistic responsibility to a Black community, employing an aesthetic derived from Black experience" (Neal 1989: 222). In a period of rapid social change, it must be observed that the Black Arts Movement was also connected to the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Power Movement. Indeed, the Black Arts Movement can be viewed as the cultural struggle of blacks to seek freedom in America, just as the other movements sought to end American segregation, and the economic, social, and political oppression that blacks suffered in the twentieth-century America.

The Black Arts Movement also had important consequences for related black institutions and life in the 1960s and 1970s. For example, with the increased outpouring of black poetry, novels, essays, short stories and plays, came developments in African American education, especially noted in the Black Studies Movement of the same period; in fashion design and hair-care concerns; in the expansion of black music, especially jazz, gospel, and rhythm and blues; in a special focus on black American and African history; and in a renewal of black press and publishing companies, which published, distributed, and critiqued the new work.

Thirteen black male figures are especially noteworthy during this period: Amiri Baraka [LeRoi Jones] (1934–), Haki R. Madhubuti [Don L. Lee] (1942–), Dudley Randall (1914–2000), Etheridge Knight (1931–1991), Raymond R. Patterson (1929–2001), Kalamu ya Salaam (1947–), Sterling D. Plumpp (1940–), Eugene B. Redmond (1937–), Larry Neal (1937–1981), Addison Gayle, Jr (1932–1991), Malcolm X (1925–1965), Marvin X (1944–), and Hoyt W. Fuller (1923–1981). Ten women figures are representative of the extraordinary efforts of black women to promote and help develop black arts during the Black Arts Movement. Two have already been mentioned – Gwendolyn Brooks and Margaret Walker – and the others

were Maya Angelou (1928–), Mari Evans (1923–), Audre Lorde (1934–1992), Sonia Sanchez (1934–), Nikki Giovanni (1943–), Lucille Clifton (1936–), June Jordan (1936–2002), and Carolyn Rodgers (1945–). These writers were powerful cultural workers in the efforts of African Americans to focus public attention on black literacy, on the social well-being of the black community – with a greater understanding and appreciation of black literature and artifacts – and on the continued relationship between black struggles in the arts, with the political, economic, and social campaigns of blacks in their never-ending search for freedom and liberation in modern America.

Some writers from the 1940s and 1950s were still prominent – James Baldwin, Gwendolyn Brooks, Alice Childress, Lorraine Hansberry, and Margaret Walker – and other members of the Black Arts Movement included Houston A. Baker, Jr (1943–), Toni Cade Bambara (1939–1995), Claude Brown (1937–2002), Sterling Brown (1901–1989), Margaret G. Burroughs (1917–), John Henrik Clarke (1915–1998), Pearl Cleage (1948–), Eldridge Cleaver (1935–), Harold Cruse (1916–), Angela Davis (1944–), Ossie Davis (1917–), Thomas C. Dent (1932–1998), Addison Gayle, Jr (1932–1991), Paula Giddings (1947–), Sam Greenlee (1930–), Alex Haley (1921–1992), Nathan Hare (1934–), Calvin C. Hernton (1934–2001), Jewel Latimore [Johari Aminil] (1935–), Haki R. Madhubuti [Don L. Lee] (1942–), Pauli Marshall (1929–), Anne Moody (1940–), Toni Morrison (1931–), Gloria Naylor (1950–), Larry Neal (1937–1981), Ann Petry (1908–1997), Dudley Randall (1914–2000), Ishmael Reed (1938–), Kalamu ya Salaam (1947–), Ntozake Shange (1948–), Askia Muhammad Toure (1938–), Alice Walker (1944–), and Helen Washington (1941–). In essence, the social backgrounds and lives of such figures are representative of the creative artists who promoted racial identity and protest during this era.

Although the people mentioned were born all over the United States, it is noteworthy that the majority (47) were born in the South. This can be explained by the fact that until the mid-twentieth century, most African Americans continued to live in the South, in spite of the loss of tens of thousands of blacks in the Great Migration, between 1900 and the 1940s. Twelve American cities were significant as birthplaces of Black Art Movement figures. These cities (and the number of births) were: Chattanooga, Tennessee (1); Nashville (2); Greenville, Mississippi (2); St Louis, Missouri (2); New Orleans (2); Washington, DC (2); Birmingham, Alabama (4); Atlanta, Georgia (4); Chicago (4); Detroit (4); Philadelphia (5); and New York City (11). Many of those born in New York City came from Harlem. Many of these American cities were the concentration points of most Black Arts Movement activities in the 1960s and 1970s, and helped to focus the energies of the movement among large numbers of people, both in the North and South.

Four broad categories seem to capture the occupational interests of most Black Arts Movement personalities. Since most were creative writers, they were generally known as poets, dramatists, novelists, short story writers, or non-fiction writers. However, many had long and varied careers, where their artistic interests often expanded over time. Thus, many were journalists, artists, actors, dancers, community activists, directors, commentators, and especially educators, at all levels of the United States educational system. Such flexibility greatly advanced the careers of many movement workers.

The black press and publishers were very important in promoting the achievements of the Black Arts Movement. Key journals, newspapers, and publishers included, from New York City: *Black Creation*, *Black Theatre*, *The Crisis*, Emerson Hall Publishers, *Freedomways*, *Liberator*, and Third Press; from Chicago: *Black Books Bulletin*, *Chicago Defender,* DuSable Museum Press, Johnson Publishing Company, *Negro Digest/Black World*, Nommo, and Third World Press; from California: the *Black Panther*, the *Black Scholar* and Press, the *Journal of Black Poetry*, the *Journal of Black Studies*, *Soulbook*, the *Los Angeles Sentinel*, and Yardbird Press; from Detroit: *Black Arts Magazine*, Broadside Press, Lotus Press, and the *Michigan Chronicle*; and from Washington, DC: the *Afro-American*, Associated Publishers, Drum and Spear Press, *Howard University Magazine* and Press, the *Journal of Negro Education*, and the *Negro History Bulletin*, among many others. These publications and publishers were very active in helping to increase and distribute the artistic and scholarly productions of the Black Arts Movement, including poetry, works for radio, television, and film, book reviews, essays, short stories, novels, reports, plays, biographies, and autobiographies, and scholarly studies across the curriculum in American higher education.

The leading black writer of the Black Arts Movement was Amiri Baraka, especially noted for his poetry, in collections such as *Preface to a Twenty Volume Suicide Note* (1961), and his famous plays, including *Dutchman* (1964), *The Slave* (1964), and *The Toilet* (1964), among others. Baraka's body of work expressed the new radical mood among African American intellectuals, and demanded a change in society, but especially in outlook among blacks themselves on their position in American society. The power of Baraka's best work is shown in "Preface to a Twenty Volume Suicide Note (For Kellie Jones, born 16 May 1959)":

> Lately, I've become accustomed to the way
> The ground opens up and envelops me
> Each time I go out to walk the dog.
> Or the broad edged silly music the wind
> Makes when I run for a bus . . .
>
> Things have come to that.
>
> And now, each night I count the stars,
> And each night I get the same number.
> And when they will not come to be counted
> I count the holes they leave.
>
> Nobody sings anymore.
>
> And then last night, I tiptoed up
> To my daughter's room and heard her
> Talking to someone, and when I opened
> The door, there was no one there . . .
> Only she on her knees, peeking into
>
> Her own clasped hands. (Baraka, "Preface to a Twenty Volume Suicide Note," in Ward 1997*:* 297–8)

Three important godfathers of the movement were Dudley Randall, Hoyt W. Fuller, and Addison Gayle, Jr. This group of critics and editors helped greatly to promote the movement, to advance the black aesthetic, and to encourage participants. Randall was the founder of Broadside Press, in Detroit in 1965, and published hundreds of poets and other writers. Fuller was editor of *Negro Digest/Black World*, a leading publication which supported the movement, and also published hundreds of its writers. Gayle was a chief theoretician of the movement, who promoted the black aesthetic. These figures were also important creative writers in their own right (Thompson 1999*:* 25, 30).

Black women were a powerful voice in the Black Arts Movement, and Nikki Giovanni is a representative of the new, revolutionary black poets of the period. Her excellent poetry was best represented in such works as "Nikki-Rosa" –

> childhood remembrances are always a drag
> if you're Black
> you always remember things like living in Woodlawn
> with no inside toilet
> and if you become famous or something
> they never talk about how happy you were to have
> your mother
> all to yourself and
> how good the water felt when you got your bath
> from one of those
> big tubs that folk in Chicago barbecue in
> and somehow when you talk about home
> it never gets across how much you
> understood their feelings
> as the whole family attended meetings about Hollydale
> and even though you remember
> your biographers never understand
> your father's pain as he sells his stock
> and another dream goes
> And though you're poor it isn't poverty that
> concerns you
> and though they fought a lot
> it isn't your father's drinking that makes any difference
> but only that everybody is together and you
> and your sister have happy birthdays and very good Christmases
> and I really hope no white person ever has cause
> to write about me
> because they never understand
> Black love is Black wealth
> and they'll probably talk about my hard childhood
> and never understand that
> all the while I was quite happy. (Giovanni, "Nikki-Rosa," in Ward 1997*:* 419)

Ten major issues and themes can be identified as significant to participants in the Black Arts Movement during the years 1960–79:

1 Who would support, and who oppose, the black aesthetic philosophy?
2 How would blacks deal with disagreements among themselves over political participation, either in black separatist organizations, such as the Nation of Islam, or in mainstream Democratic and Republican Party politics, and who would win the support of the black masses? Should blacks support an independent black political party?
3 Where should black authors go to publish – to all-black publishers or white publishers?
4 How were blacks to deal with religious division in the community, especially among black Christians, Muslims, and those in traditional African religions?
5 What did the domination of the Black Arts Movement by black men mean for the movement, and for the future roles of black women in the movement?
6 Which major cities would command the best talent and productions of the Black Arts Movement: New York, Chicago, Detroit, Los Angeles, Atlanta, Washington, or Philadelphia perhaps?
7 Should white Americans be encouraged to review black artistic productions, or only black critics and thinkers?
8 How should black Americans approach blacks on the continent of Africa and other areas of the Diaspora, in terms of political, economic, social, and cultural cooperation, to uplift the entire black world?
9 What should be the roles of black intellectuals in the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements of the era? and
10 How would blacks deal with the issue of continued violence against the black community in modern America, including the large number of blacks imprisoned?

Historians and critics of the Black Arts and Aesthetic Movement represent two schools of thought on the figures of the period 1960–79. Scholar Arthur P. Davis was very critical of the writers of the era in a famous essay entitled "The new poetry of black hate" (1970), whereas Eugene B. Redmond generally praised the writers of his generation and earlier times, in a powerful study published as *Drumvoices: The Mission of Afro-American Poetry* (1976). Addison Gayle, Jr, a major supporter of the movement, created the policy manual of the period with his edited volume *The Black Aesthetic* (1972). Several scholars agree that the issue of black leadership, political development, and organized black struggle defines the Black Arts Movement (Boyd 2003; Kent 1990; Melhem 1987; Brown 2003). The key theme of the political roles of black women is discussed in Joanne Grant, *Ella Baker: Freedom Bound* (1998) and two lives of Fannie Lou Hamer – Kay Mills, *This Little Light of Mine* (1993) and Chana Kai Lee, *For Freedom's Sake* (1999). The relationship of African Americans to Africa is considered in Alex Haley's *Roots* (1976) and Lorraine Williams (ed.), *Africa and the Afro-American Experience: Eight Essays* (1977).

In general, black intellectuals of the 1960s and 1970s supported a new radical twist in terms of black political, social, economic, and cultural developments. A central issue was a look inward to focus on black consciousness, and black determination to forge ahead, certainly in the continuing struggle to overthrow segregation and discrimination, but also to support black separatism/nationalism. These were seen as especially reflected in the promotion of black institutions, such as the family,

and in economic matters, political activity, self-help, black cultural interests, and the Black Studies Movement.

Many Movement participants were distrustful of white intellectuals, critics, editors, and publishers. Many sought publication of their work with black publishers, such as Broadside Press, Third World Press, and Lotus Press. The worldwide condition of black people became a major focus of black thinkers, and attention was given to black affairs and needs in Africa, the West Indies, South America, and other regions. Black women became more outspoken during this period in demanding their rights, and especially in the long struggle to overcome racism, sexism, and classicism in society. In fact, black women intellectuals emerged during the 1960s and 1970s as major players in the production of black artistic materials, and as master teachers and leaders in black arts. Social issues such as violence and prison conditions in the USA became another source of special concern to black intellectuals, and this was reflected in the body of works produced by the movement. Although the black aesthetics were not adopted by all black intellectuals during this period, the new philosophy certainly had great impact on the way many black artists viewed their artistic creations and their roles in black and American society. This focus on black consciousness and the black community became a major contribution of the Black Arts Movement to black America.

The Hip-Hop Generation and New Cultural Definitions since 1980

In the period after the Black Arts Movement came a new movement called "the hip hop generation and the emergence of a distinctive black youth culture" largely based on a rap style of music, dress, hair care, and outlook (Kitwana 2002: xiv). The Hip-Hop Cultural Movement has had a profound impact upon American youths, as well as youth in other societies. Much of its message has been viewed as controversial, radical, abusive of women, and representative of lower-income blacks who live largely in the major cities. Nonetheless, the new black culture has dominated the artistic scene in the United States from the 1980s to the present. Yet, the spirit and challenges of the Black Arts Movement are still present today, since a large number of the leading participants of the former movement are still alive and continue to be active as artists and writers.

Since 1980, a number of new voices have joined the older generation of black artists in interpreting the Black Experience in the United States. Ten black males are representative of black culture in this period: Tupac Shakur (1971–1996), Houston A. Baker, Jr (1943–), E. Ethelbert Miller (1950–), Quincy Troupe (1943–), Al Young (1939–), Askia Muhammad Toure (1938–), 50 Cent [Curtis Jackson] (1976–), Common [Lonnie Rashied Lynn] (1972–), Nelly [Cornell Haynes, Jr] (1978–), and Haki R. Madhubuti (1942–). Among prominent black women of this era are Alice Walker (1944–), Toni Morrison (1931–), Jayne Cortez (1936–), Ntozake Shange (1948–), Wanda Coleman (1946–), Harryette Mullen (1960–), Rita Dove (1952–), Queen Latifah [Dana Owens] (1970–), and Angela Davis (1944–).

As in the long black past, much of the Hip-Hop Culture and rap music tradition have had to deal with the realities of living in America. Thus, many Hip-Hop artists

have focused a considerable body of their work on dealing with black problems in society, poverty, unemployment, racism, the criminal justice system, and the health care system, among other-themes. Other artists have treated topics such as personal relationships, friendships, disagreements between artists, and playing the dozens, often referred to as gangsta rap.

Ten major themes and issues have dominated the Hip-Hop generation since the 1980s:

1 How should traditional African American culture influence the Hip-Hop generation?
2 What should Hip-Hop culture emphasize?
3 How can blacks continue to control the Hip-Hop movement; and is there a major role for whites to play in the movement?
4 Has the gangsta rap segment of Hip-Hop been too negative with many of its rap lyrics on black women?
5 What role should the Hip-Hop movement play in American politics?
6 What is the role of older black artists in the Hip-Hop movement?
7 Have black men been the dominant voices in the Hip-Hop culture?
8 What role should black women play in the movement?
9 Have opportunities for black artists and writers increased or decreased in the United States since the Black Arts Movement era?
10 Will the Hip-Hop cultural movement have a lasting impact on American life and institutions?

Some contemporary scholars have offered praise for the positive achievements of the Hip-Hop generation, while offering a critical review of the shortcomings of the movement, especially the negative treatment of black women by some Hip-Hop artists and a lack of political activity by some artists and their supporters. Bakari Kitwana's study, *The Hip Hop Generation* (2002), is a major contribution to this perspective. Likewise, Nelson George, in *Buppies, Notes On B-Boys, Post-Soul Baps and Black Bohos Culture* (1992), takes up the challenge to study the new Black Culture. Other studies, such as James L. Conyers, Jr, *African American Jazz and Rap* (2001), highlight the continued historical significance of traditional black music, as represented by jazz, but they note the new themes and the impact of rap on all aspects of African American culture.

The continuing influence of the Black Arts Movement, however, is still apparent in the theme of several magnificent studies: Molefi Kete Asante, *Kemet, Afrocentricity, and Knowledge* (1990); Haki R. Madhubuti, *Tough Notes: A Healing Call For Creating Exceptional Black Men* (2002); Joyce Ann Joyce, *Warriors, Conjurers and Priests: Defining African-Centered Literary Criticism* (1994); and Maryemma Graham (ed.), *On Being Female, Black and Free: Essays by Margaret Walker, 1932–1992* (1997). Voices expressing the determination of black women for justice and equality have also been very active in the modern era. These include the works of Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* (1983), and Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (1991). Even black prisoners have found new attention in Alton Archer, *Black Prison Movements USA* (1995).

Thus, as the Hip-Hop generation continues to dominate contemporary black arts in the United States, the traditional artists – especially from the Black Arts Movement – remain a major force for identity and protest. This is especially true of many black poets, novelists, playwrights, and other artists. Thus, we have a phenomenon in black America, a situation whereby the traditional voices of the past are now mixed with, and in competition with, the new voices (largely from the Hip-Hop generation). A struggle has now ensued to control who can discuss, write on or sing about the complex nature of black life in the United States, as well as how, when, and where they create their works and distribute them in the market place of ideas. As yet, it is not clear who will win the struggle, but it will be a fight to the finish. And the rich and complex nature of African American life suggests there is still a need for a variety of viewpoints, perspectives, and outlooks to explore its questions of identity and protest in the arts.

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