

Contents

About This Volume, Christopher Allen Varlack	vii
The Harlem Renaissance: The New Negro Intellectual and the Poetry of the Sociopolitical Imagination, Christopher Allen Varlack	xv

Critical Contexts

Dawn in Harlem: Exploring the Origins of the Harlem Renaissance through Image and Text, Carolyn Kyler	3
Apathetic Critiques Revisited: Jean Toomer's <i>Cane</i> and Its Importance to the Harlem Renaissance, Gerardo Del Guercio	22
Sugar Cane and Women's Identity in Selected Works of Zora Neale Hurston, Allyson Denise Marino	37
Mobile Subjects in Faulkner, Larsen, and Thurman: Racial Parody and the White Northern Literary Field, Cheryl Lester	53

Critical Readings

The New Negro: The Politics and Aesthetics of the Harlem Renaissance

"Hectic Rhythms": Unseen and Unappreciated Knowledge in Harlem Renaissance Fiction, Jericho Williams	71
Toward a Theory of Art as Propaganda: Re-Evaluating the Political Novels of the Harlem Renaissance, Christopher Allen Varlack	89
"The Bitter River": Langston Hughes and the Violent South, Seretha D. Williams	104

Across the Color Line: Racial Passing and the Harlem Renaissance

Racial Connections in "Time Space": A Chronotopic Approach to Johnson's <i>The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man</i> , Holly Simpson Fling	120
Framing Racial Identity and Class: Magnifying Themes of Assimilation and Passing in the Works of Johnson and Hughes, Charlotte Teague	135
"Why Hadn't She Spoken That Day?": The Destructive Power of Racial Silence in Nella Larsen's <i>Passing</i> , Holly T. Baker	152
Just Passing Through: The Harlem Renaissance Woman on the Move, Joshua M. Murray	168

Black Woman/Black Mother: Toward a Theory of the New Negro Woman

Grimké's Sentimentalism in <i>Rachel</i> : Subversion as an Act of Feminism, Lisa Elwood-Farber	184
Where is that "Ark uv Safty"? Tracing the Role of the Black Woman as Protector in Georgia Douglas Johnson's Plays, Brandon L. A. Hutchinson	202
"Don't knock at my door, little child": The Mantled Poetics of Georgia Douglas Johnson's Motherhood Poetry, Michelle J. Pinkard	217
The New Negro Revisited: New Readings of the Harlem Renaissance	
Writing Across the Color Line: Carl Van Vechten's <i>Nigger Heaven</i> and the Insatiable Hunger for Literature of Black American Life, Christopher Allen Varlack	233
Dancing Between Cultures: Claude McKay and the Harlem Renaissance, Lisa Tomlinson	248
"Blue Smoke" and "Stale Fried Fish": A Decadent View of Richard Bruce Nugent, Tiffany Austin	265
Going Back to Work Through: The Return to Folk Origins in the Late Harlem Renaissance, Karl Henzy	281

Resources

Chronology of the Harlem Renaissance, Christopher Allen Varlack & Karl Henzy	301
Works of the Harlem Renaissance	311
Bibliography	315
About the Editor	319
Contributors	321
Index	327

Largely noted for its unparalleled growth in the art and literature of the African American community, the period of cultural rebirth known as the New Negro movement, also known as the Harlem Renaissance, has been a consistent source of interest for readers and scholars alike. With its production of key authors, from Langston Hughes to Claude McKay, among others, the Harlem Renaissance saw the rise in creative endeavors by black artists and writers eager to celebrate the unique characteristics of black life and to challenge the institutionalized racial hierarchy pervasive within twentieth-century American society. These creative thinkers, certainly intellectuals in their own right, used their poetry, short stories, novels, and plays as a vehicle to critique the longstanding issues within society that limited socioeconomic mobility for blacks while perpetuating startling stereotypes about a community too long oppressed. Because of its undeniable impact in shaping the American cultural imagination regarding blacks and on the larger American literary canon, the Harlem Renaissance has since been heavily studied as the most significant period of artistic as well as cultural explosion the African American community has ever experienced. With a series of past studies on this vital period, including Australia Tarver and Paula C. Barnes' 2006 *New Voices on the Harlem Renaissance* and Jeffrey O. G. Ogbar's 2010 *The Harlem Renaissance Revisited*, this volume finds its place within an expansive, yet constantly growing, field of scholarship seeking to trace the core themes (intra- and extra-racial color politics, passing, the concept of the New Negro, etc.) that remain the lasting legacy of an era so important to American life.

Though the field of scholarship surrounding the Harlem Renaissance is so extensive, there are noticeable voids that *Critical Insights: Harlem Renaissance* seeks to correct, offering not only expanded readings of the central themes that have long captivated the attention of scholars across time, but also providing valuable

insight into the texts, authors, and critical perspectives too often overlooked. Early reviews of Jean Toomer's *Cane* (1923), for instance, criticized its fragmentary nature, citing it as the source of the novel's poor reception among both black and white readers rather than recognizing its application of modernist principles akin to the style of Irish novelist and fellow modernist, James Joyce. Similarly, Claude McKay's *Home to Harlem* (1928) has suffered from its early criticism, too often described through the lens of primitivism that has since clouded other critical views. As J. Martin Favor notes in *Authentic Blackness: The Folk in the New Negro Renaissance*, "By privileging certain African American identities and voices over others, the critic of African American literature often restricts too severely his or her scope of intellectual inquiry" (3)—a flaw that has contributed to the perpetuation of these (and other) past oversights. With Jean-Christophe Cloutier's 2009 discovery of an unpublished manuscript by Claude McKay, *Amiable with Big Teeth*, and the renewed interest in the Harlem Renaissance that such a discovery brought with it, this volume is all the more important in filling in some of those persistent gaps, opening the scope of intellectual inquiry, and adding to the necessary conversations the era advances about race, class, and gender identity.

In the introduction, "The Harlem Renaissance: The New Negro Intellectual and the Poetry of the Sociopolitical Imagination," Christopher Allen Varlack, for example, examines poetry of the time and the ways in which authors, from Sterling Brown to Claude McKay, engage the overarching political motivations the progenitors of the movement set in place. Through works such as "He Was a Man" and "America" respectively, these authors responded to the hostile racial climate of the early to mid-twentieth century, most evident through the rise in lynchings as well as membership in the Ku Klux Klan. Here, Varlack traces the political impulse of the era's poetic works as a starting place for much larger conversations about the Harlem Renaissance and its effort to add a new dimension to the American racial debate. From there, the collection introduces four critical contexts essays that expand these key themes by tracing the history of the era in addition to introducing valuable critical and

comparative perspectives necessary to understanding the spirit of the time. In “Dawn in Harlem: Exploring the Origins of the Harlem Renaissance through Image and Text,” Carolyn Kyler, for instance, examines the intersections of visual and literary works in the era’s most noted print publications, from the Harlem issue of *Survey Graphic* to *Fire!!*. In an attempt to probe the ways in which art and poetry combine to usher in a new dawn for the African-American community, Kyler emphasizes the multiplicity of artistic visions that comprised this diverse and celebrated period.

In his essay, “Apathetic Critiques Revisited: Jean Toomer’s *Cane* and Its Importance to the Harlem Renaissance,” Gerardo Del Guercio highlights the history of apathetic criticism regarding the novel *Cane* by Jean Toomer. Now considered an important modernist work, *Cane* was heavily criticized upon publication for what critics perceived as artistic missteps and inconsistencies within Toomer’s work. Del Guercio seeks to trace that history of criticism and the overall importance of the novel as a unique undertaking in the Harlem Renaissance. Focusing on another author who often defied traditional artistic and racial conventions, in “Sugar Cane and Women’s Identity in Selected Works of Zora Neale Hurston,” Allyson Denise Marino calls attention to Hurston’s short fiction and *Their Eyes Were Watching God* with a particular emphasis on the presence of sugar cane in these works. For Marino, sugar cane represents a history of racial and economic oppression for women that is a core theme across many of the era’s most noteworthy texts. She thus expounds upon a materialist, feminist, and postcolonial lens in order to present this critique. This final critical contexts essay, “Mobile Subjects in Faulkner, Larsen, and Thurman: Racial Parody and the White Northern Literary Field” by Cheryl Lester, examines the urban North as an invaluable setting for the exploration of racial anxieties and the reconfigurations of a national identity in early twentieth century texts. Focusing on three novels with an emphasis on nation and race—Thurman’s *The Blacker the Berry*, Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury*, and Larsen’s *Quicksand*—Lester provides a comparative perspective that helps us better understand the intersecting artistic and intellectual threads of the time. Together,

the four essays in this section offer a framework for understanding the Harlem Renaissance, its criticism, and the overarching goals that its authors sought to achieve.

In its endeavor to explore the key themes and directions of the Harlem Renaissance period, *Critical Insights: Harlem Renaissance* then engages fourteen critical readings essays across four sections, with the first entitled, The New Negro: The Politics and Aesthetics of the Harlem Renaissance. These essays introduce the core artistic and political movements that shaped the literature of the time and inform our understanding of its central themes. In his essay, “‘Hectic Rhythms’: Unseen and Unappreciated Knowledge in Harlem Renaissance Fiction,” for example, Jericho Williams examines Claude McKay’s *Home to Harlem* and Wallace Thurman’s *The Blacker the Berry* as a response to the Du Boisian concept of the talented tenth. Essentially arguing that these works posit an alternative to classical education, he interrogates the era’s debate regarding the educated elite and the merits of the “low down” folk. In “Toward a Theory of Art as Propaganda: Re-Evaluating the Political Novels of the Harlem Renaissance,” Christopher Allen Varlack also seeks to examine the ideology of W. E. B. Du Bois, discussing how Walter White’s *The Fire in the Flint* anticipates the notion of art as propaganda, while George Schuyler’s *Black No More* provides a clear political response to the history of lynching rampant in the twentieth century. Finally, Seretha D. Williams in “‘The Bitter River’: Langston Hughes and the Violent South,” traces the ways in which the poet laureate of the Harlem Renaissance, Langston Hughes, uses his poetry to call attention to the oppression and exploitation of blacks. In doing so, Williams expands the timeframe of the Harlem Renaissance, noting the much farther-reaching discussion of lynching that continues well into the 1940s. Together, these essays provide insight into the purposeful intellectual and political projects of the Harlem Renaissance literary intelligentsia.

The next section, Across the Color Line: Racial Passing and the Harlem Renaissance, offers a look into one of the central topics explored in much of the era’s literature: passing and the notion of racial indeterminacy. In Holly Simpson Fling’s essay,

“Racial Connections in ‘Time Space’: A Chronotopic Approach to Johnson’s *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*,” she uses M. M. Bakhtin’s notion of the chronotope as a vehicle to explore racial passing in one of Johnson’s most celebrated works. For Fling, the journey of the unnamed protagonist in the novel parallels the very real experience of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, calling attention not only the impulses that drive one to pass, but also the fears of white society that gave life to the color line. Charlotte Teague, in “Framing Racial Identity and Class: Magnifying Themes of Assimilation and Passing in the Works of Johnson and Hughes,” then expands upon this present discussion, exploring the ways in which literature of the time probes the very real difficulties of the Negro question and the pervasive color line. For Teague, Johnson and Hughes integrate issues of assimilation and passing within *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* and *Not Without Laughter* in order to reach a better sense of conclusions about racial identity and class. Like Teague, Holly T. Baker also addresses the complications of passing in one of the era’s most noteworthy texts. In her essay, “‘Why Hadn’t She Spoken That Day?’: The Destructive Power of Racial Silence in Nella Larsen’s *Passing*,” she examines the trend of intra- and extra-racial silence or silencing that proves destructive in American society. Under this lens, racial passing is not only a source of discomfort for the white community, but also for those in passing—a fact that reinforced the need for more open conversations about race and racial indeterminacy as the American racial landscape continued to change. The final essay of this section, “Just Passing Through: The Harlem Renaissance Woman on the Move” by Joshua M. Murray, offers a comparative perspective on the era’s passing novels, including White’s *Flight*, Jessie Redmon Fauset’s *Plum Bun: A Novel Without a Moral*, and Nella Larsen’s *Quicksand*. By tracing the racial and geographical shifts that each protagonist explores, Murray highlights themes of liminality and transition as authors of the Harlem Renaissance sought to probe the experiences of black women in the United States.

Section three, entitled Black Woman/Black Mother: Toward a Theory of the New Negro Woman, is a particularly important

section in expanding the definition of the New Negro, typically a figure gendered male. These essays trace the vital role of female characters and female-authored texts in shaping the discourse of the Harlem Renaissance. Lisa Elwood-Farber, for instance, in her essay, “Grimké’s Sentimentalism in *Rachel*: Subversion as an Act of Feminism,” traces Rachel’s refusal to marry and have children—the traditional norms for women at the time—as an apparent form of protection for her unborn children, given the era’s hostile racial climate, but also as a move toward social change for the black mother. Elwood-Farber highlights the unique concerns of black women far different from the concerns of their white counterparts. Similarly, in “‘Where is that Ark uv Safty’?: Tracing the Role of the Black Woman as Protector in Georgia Douglas Johnson’s Plays,” Brandon L. A. Hutchinson also centers her discussion around the mindset of the black mother at a time of rampant lynchings. Hutchinson explores three works by Johnson, each tracing the ways in which the black mother responded to this consistent threat. Similarly, in her essay “‘Don’t knock at my door, little child’: The Mantled Poetics of Georgia Douglas Johnson’s Motherhood Poetry,” Michelle J. Pinkard highlights the shifting conceptions of black motherhood and the complications with that definition during the Harlem Renaissance era. In the process, she foregrounds the role of the New Negro female poets in pursuing a type of sociopolitical agency otherwise denied them twofold as a result of their gender and race.

The final section, *The New Negro Revisited: New Readings of the Harlem Renaissance*, attempts to move beyond what Miriam Thaggert describes as the worn-out themes and approaches to the Harlem Renaissance, offering new insights into the era’s most controversial, as well as under-examined, texts (16). In “Writing Across the Color Line: Carl Van Vechten’s *Nigger Heaven* and the Insatiable Hunger for Literature of Black American Life,” Christopher Allen Varlack attempts to review this text outside its traditional primitivist lens. Here, he focuses on the often-ignored discussion that the black intellectual Van Vechten incorporates into his text and his engagement of one of the core discussions of the time—how the black intellectual finds (or fails to find) harmony

between the life of the folk and the life of the mind. In “Dancing Between Cultures: Claude McKay and the Harlem Renaissance,” Lisa Tomlinson strives to explore those intersections of McKay’s early Caribbean poetry and his later work after emigrating to the United States or travelling abroad. As Tomlinson argues, scholarship insisting on isolating these works vastly misrepresents McKay’s artistic and intellectual project, as McKay expounds upon his themes of class and race oppression in his most celebrated post-emigration texts. In “‘Blue Smoke’ and ‘Stale Fried Fish’: A Decadent View of Richard Bruce Nugent,” Tiffany Austin reintroduces the work of the only openly gay Harlem Renaissance figure, placing particular emphasis on *Salome* and a short story published in the only issue of the Niggerati’s *Fire!!* Austin resurrects an author largely forgotten in Harlem Renaissance scholarship, his novel, *Gentleman Jigger*, only published decades after his death. The final essay in this section, “Going Back to Work Through: The Return to Folk Origins in the Late Harlem Renaissance” by Karl Henzy, then continues the work of resurrecting and revisiting. Here, Henzy focuses on four key novels from Hurston’s *Jonah’s Gourd Vine* to Arna Bontemps’ *God Sends Sundays*. Henzy focuses on the novels’ return to folk origins, the intellectual underpinnings of these works, and the ways in which these authors reflect on the Harlem Renaissance at large.

This volume concludes with an extensive chronology of the Harlem Renaissance era—one that attempts to call attention to key literary and artistic works that best define the spirit of the age. Few past studies on this period include a detailed chronology—David Levering Lewis’ 1994 *The Portable Harlem Renaissance Reader* and George Hutchinson’s 2007 *The Cambridge Companion to the Harlem Renaissance*, for instance—and so, with recent discoveries and publications in the field, including several posthumous works, it is long overdue for an updated timeline to accurately reflect the era’s continued and evolving work. In its endeavors to push the boundaries of critical thought regarding the Harlem Renaissance, *Critical Insights: Harlem Renaissance*, we believe, is a valuable and much-needed contribution, which seeks to expand our understanding of an era that fundamentally resists boundaries to the core. “Like

any complex cultural movement in which persons learn from each other, the Harlem Renaissance (and its continuing study) must be seen as a series of interrelated events, which reverberate down into our present consciousness. It is for such reasons that we [too] return to this project” (Kramer 1), as many have done before, in hopes of offering a few new points of consideration on an era that continues to heavily resonate in the American spirit and culture even today.

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“Don’t knock at my door, little child”: The Mantled Poetics of Georgia Douglas Johnson’s Motherhood Poetry

Michelle J. Pinkard

“One of the Least of These, My Little One”

The infant eyes look out amazed upon the frowning earth,
A stranger, in a land now strange, child of the mantled-birth;

Waxing, he wonders more and more; the scowling grows apace;
A world, behind its barring doors, reviles his ebon face:

Yet from this maelstrom issues forth a God-like entity,
That loves a world all loveless, and smiles on Calvary! (Johnson 120)

Georgia Douglas Johnson’s brief poem is one of the featured motherhood poems published in her 1922 collection *Bronze: A Book of Verse*. Contained in these dense couplets are the gender and race motives, ideologies and relationships that arguably reflect the driving force behind the Harlem Renaissance. Many characteristics of Renaissance writing are included: a version of spirituality that honors the virtues of the oppressed, vivid depictions of the imprisoning forces of marginalization, and the push toward something better, to be something better. But, beyond fulfilling most of the content criteria for Renaissance poetry, this poem includes another cultural trope that is often overlooked as a component of the movement by critics both within and beyond the era: motherhood and, specifically, the experience of mothering within an oppressed reality. While the mother in this poem is not explicitly present in the lines of Johnson’s work, it is she who is capable of viewing the world through both the weariness of the oppressed and the innocence of an infant. Her only source of solace to a child burdened by a “mantled” birthright is a daunting comparison to the crucified Christ. Johnson’s

poem is indicative of the work Harlem Renaissance women poets were doing to articulate their individualized disillusionment with their respective marginalization and to define, for themselves, their unique gendered role in the burgeoning racial movement of uplift. A close reading of her poetry will show that the conceptualization of black motherhood is at the center of this poem and the progression of the Harlem Renaissance Movement.

Johnson's contribution to the literary movement is an impressive feat. She is the most productive female poet of the Harlem Renaissance, publishing three volumes of poems—*The Heart of a Woman* (1918), *Bronze* (1922), and *An Autumn Love Cycle* (1928)—between 1918 and 1938 at a time where few women published even one volume. While Johnson also wrote short stories, one-act plays, and songs, her reputation rests on poetry, as she was the most anthologized woman poet in the New Negro movement. Claudia Tate sheds light on the poet's placement in the Harlem Renaissance:

Neither a subscriber to Victorian ideology nor a fully modern woman, Johnson stood between those of the generation who understood sex as the husband's conjugal right, race as fixed and poetry as sedate, speculative wonder on one extreme, and those of the next generation who assumed sexual liberty, fluid racial identities and poetic sensibility of social activism on the other. (xix)

Much of Johnson's motherhood poetry presents a speaker confounded in her role to raise a "mantled" child. The word *mantled*, meaning "cloaked in darkness," is a central motif in *Bronze*. What distinguishes Johnson's motherhood poetry from other women poets of the era is her focus on the intra-cultural pressure to silence gendered concerns. In this context, writing poems that break the silence becomes a radical pursuit.

Though the construction of black motherhood has long been a pressing concern in cultural studies, few have considered the issue in the context of the Harlem Renaissance. Scholars like Maureen Honey, Cheryl Wall, Claudia Tate, and Gloria Hull have made significant strides in rescuing New Negro women's poetries from obscurity by securing the placement of women writers in the Harlem Renaissance

canon. However, examining New Negro Women poets and their work through the analytical framework of *intersectionality*—which considers the lived experience of those who embody multiple layers of marginalization—illuminates the gendered aspects of this race movement and the women writers’ responses to it. Intersectionality, in turn, offers scholars the necessary tools to approach New Negro women’s poetry as a contribution to a legacy of resistance via strategic measures in representation. Revisiting poets like Johnson, writers who were analyzing and theorizing their own Intersectionality before Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term in 1989, provides insight into this historically significant moment.

“The Damnation of Women:” Renaissance Leaders Discuss Motherhood

The construct of Black motherhood is especially intersectional, as it is both gendered and raced. Motherhood would become a central focus of the Harlem Renaissance movement, at one time serving as its primary symbol in its ability to personify uplift, strength, and renewal. The men of the era were acutely aware of the symbolic power of mothering in Black communities and often evoked the concept to fight negative cultural imaging. While gender has too often been removed from race discussion, what has become clear is that the New Negro woman’s primary gift, sacrifice, and obligation to the racial uplift movement was motherhood. Kevin Gains depicts this cultural atmosphere of the movement in *Uplifting the Race*, explaining that “amidst the violent racism prevalent at the turn of the twentieth century, African-American cultural elites struggling to articulate a positive black identity developed the middle-class ideology of racial uplift” (4). Ultimately, the belief that one could escape social and political injustice by indoctrinating middle-class values gained momentum within the Renaissance and beyond. Notably, these values, which lauded education and a version of sexual morality rooted in class, became the very premise of racial uplift.

Intersectionality argues that it is reckless to review middle-class ideology without peeling through its race and gender implications.

A Du Bois essay, poignantly titled “The Damnation of Women,” illuminates most sharply black women’s obligatory contribution and sacrifice to the movement via motherhood:

The world wants healthy babies and intelligent workers. Today we refuse to allow the combination and force thousands of intelligent workers to go childless at a horrible expenditure of moral force, or we damn them if they break our idiotic conventions. Only at the sacrifice of intelligence and the chance to do their best work can the majority of modern women bear children. This is the damnation of women. All womanhood is hampered today because the world on which it is emerging is a world that tries to worship both virgins and mothers and in the end despises motherhood and despoils virgins. (164)

As empathetic as Du Bois’ review may be, the essay ends with the familiar lauding of an idealized strong black woman and her ability to endure her predestined, “damned” role of Negro mother. He writes: “Today the dreams of the mothers are coming true. We have still our poverty and degradation, our lewdness and our cruel toil; but we have, too, a vast group of women of Negro blood who for strength of character, cleanness of soul, and unselfish devotion of purpose, is today easily the peer of any group of women in the civilized world” (Du Bois 186). Though seemingly complimentary, within Du Bois’ description are gender expectations tantamount to sacrifice and submission in the name of racial progress. The cost of this imaging would be that black women were socialized into sacrificing their sexuality and individuality for the race movement.

Yet, while many black women, informed and inspired by uplift, would use motherhood/mothering as a site for resistance to raise empowered children who reject racial stereotypes, they hardly conformed to the patriarchal dicta that demanded they accept maternal suffering in silence. Nor did they consider themselves relegated solely to the domestic sphere. Even women like Johnson, who arguably subscribed to tenants of Black Victorian respectability and gentility, would become “race women” in their community activism, educational aptitude, and professional success.

For many women who struggled with negotiating the public sphere of race and the domestic sphere of gender, poetry would become an accessible outlet to express their disillusionment with being asked to mother like the culturally idolized, middle-class white mother, but without the access to white privilege—a salient concern in working, middle, and “leisure” classes (McDougald). In the face of crippling racist imaging, Black male leaders wanted to prove that the New Negro woman was the epitome of femininity; she would be celebrated with the crown of “strength” for her ability to fulfill gender roles under the shared umbrella of race. A comparison of poetry by Langston Hughes and Johnson will help to illustrate this gender-specific approach to racial uplift.

Consider Hughes’ famed poem “Mother to Son.” Encased in domesticity, as both the setting and metaphor of the poem is a staircase, the mother’s sole purpose is to encourage her male child toward progression by modeling her strength of character, her determination, and her courage. In reference to her socially worn, “splintered” condition, the mother asserts the following:

I’ve been a-climbin’ on,
And reachin’ landin’s,
And turnin’ corners,
And sometimes goin’ in the dark
Where there ain’t been no light (Hughes lines 9–20)

Hughes’ mother reflects the archetypal black mother who frequently appears in black male-authored literature. She is elevated through an inner strength. Her modesty is larger than life. She survives by putting her head down and burrowing forward. And, not as apparent, but certainly understood, she is asexual. Her lack of reference to a mate with the singular “I” equally depicts this women’s struggle toward ascension as singular.

The poem is thus participating in the aforementioned racial uplift response of confronting extremely negative race imaging with extremely positive race imaging. Anne Stavney explains, “Defending their women against these primarily white, racist assertions, black males produced an idealized image of black womanhood in the

form of the ‘moral mother.’ From civic leader to politician to writer to artist, black men of the 1920s and 30s promoted an ideology of glorified black motherhood” (534). What Hughes is depicting, if not arguably endorsing, in “Mother to Son” is the raced woman’s intersecting role to nurture, sustain, and prepare her children for life in a racist society. His speaker has mastered this technique as she is unflinching in both the lived response to oppression and in her instructions to the son as she demands:

So boy, don’t you turn back.
Don’t you set down on the steps
‘Cause you finds it’s kinder hard.
Don’t you fall now— (Hughes lines 14–17)

Hughes’ mother speaker not only overcomes her oppression in her ability to continue to endure it; as noted in her closing remarks, “I’s *still* climbin’ [emphasis added]” (line 19), she does so without complaint. Her instruction, while inspirational on its face, is not so much about change as it is about endurance. And, her gendered example of endurance would appear to be her most significant contribution to the movement.

By contrast, Johnson’s motherhood poems reveal a more conflicted and vulnerable woman. Her construction of the New Negro mother is not as absolute as Renaissance leaders often presented. Johnson’s mother persona is fluid, contemplative, and responsive. In lieu of crafting a stoic mother who personifies the willing representation of racial uplift, Johnson’s motherhood poems primarily present a woman who is arrested in doubt. This layering of race and gender is evident in “Shall I say, ‘My Son, You’re Branded?’” The poem explores the reality of having to make children aware of their own oppressed existence. Unlike Hughes’ determined speaker, Johnson’s mother-speaker experiences a doubt-ridden paralysis in her inability to negotiate the gendered call to nurture with the racial uplift mandate to educate. Consider the following lines of the poem:

Shall I say, “My son, you’re branded in this country’s pageantry,
By strange subtleties you’re tethered, and no forum sets you free?”

Shall I mark the young lights fading through your soul-enchanelled eye,

As the dusky pall of shadows screen the highways of your sky?

Or shall I, with love prophetic, bid you dauntlessly arise,
Spurn the handicap that clogs you, taking what the world denies,
Bid you storm the sullen fortress wrought by prejudice and wrong
With a faith that shall not falter, in your heart and on your tongue!
(Johnson 121)

The gendered expectation to nurture and protect the male child is disrupted by racial norms and conditioning. The mother's tumult is in conversation with the very principles of racial uplift. With this work, Johnson questions the prioritization of race from both a mother's perspective and from a lived experience. This duality, again, fractures the mother-identity from the individual identity, all of which shows the multidimensionality of the speaker's experiences. She is not solely a mother; implied in her indecision is an experience with the world that pushes beyond the maternal sphere. That experience has inspired a series of questions that not only trouble her mothering, but speak to the core of a marginalized identity. To what degree does awareness of this "branded" condition help the oppressed? To what degree does the awareness hinder? The question is not resolved in this poem, but a point is made in the asking. While the speaker does not come to a resolution, the mother's frustration is understood with the emphatic exclamation point that concludes the work. Johnson's intersectional analysis of New Negro motherhood offers a more comprehensive review of gendered elements of racial formation.

Yet, despite efforts like those of Johnson, it was the image of the strong, racial champion New Negro mother that prevailed during the era. This subsuming mother became a symbol of the entire movement as evidenced in the 1925 publication of *The New Negro*. Notably, at this Renaissance moment, the movement had found its footing and was diving into the American conscience with a surge of artistic creativity unparalleled by any black cultural movement that preceded it. Artists strategically used literature, music, and art to fight social ills, to give voice to silenced communities, and to testify

to their own humanness. Renaissance leader Alain Locke edited and released *The New Negro* in a celebrated effort to document the movement's progression. The collection's frontispiece, titled *The Brown Madonna*, which depicts a young Negro mother and her infant child, exemplifies women's role in uplift, while symbolizing the spirit of rebirth that mobilized the movement.



Fig. 1. Winold Reiss, *The Brown Madonna*. *The New Negro* (1925)

Locke's decision to use *The Brown Madonna* is particularly telling when we consider the purpose-driven nature of the collection. While proclaiming the objective for racial renewal and redefinition, the portrait also promotes a non-sexualized, domesticated version of black womanhood. Emily Orlando points out that the image, created by Austrian painter Winold Riess, exemplifies the ironically virginal black mother role heralded by men of the era:

So here again the image of the Madonna is revisionist in that she is Africanized—as a gesture of race pride—yet it serves to send a message to black women that the role of self-sacrificing attendant is one of the few available to her. Further, the reference to the Immaculate Conception recalls Christianity's emphasis on the Madonna's reliance upon a male savior for redemption. She is not so very empowered after all. (65)

Chronology of the Harlem Renaissance_____

Christopher Allen Varlack & Karl Henzy

The Precursor to the Harlem Renaissance: 1903 to 1919

- 1903** April, W. E. B. Du Bois publishes *The Souls of Black Folk*. September, W. E. B. Du Bois publishes “The Talented Tenth.”
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- 1905** Thomas Dixon publishes *The Clansman: An Historical Romance of the Ku Klux Klan*, which contributes to a rise in Klan membership and the negative stigmatization of the African American community post-Reconstruction. Jessie Redmon Fauset also graduates from Cornell University with a Bachelor of Arts in classical languages.
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- 1906** September, the Atlanta Race Riots occur, resulting in the deaths of twenty-five to forty African Americans.
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- 1907** Alain Locke graduates from Harvard University with degrees in literature and philosophy, becomes the first African American Rhodes Scholar, and attends Hertford College, unable to obtain admission to several colleges at Oxford University due to racial discrimination.
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- 1909** February, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) is founded.
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- 1910** November, Du Bois publishes the first issue of *The Crisis*, originally titled *The Crisis: A Record of the Darker Races*. Throughout the year, the Great Migration begins as approximately 1.6 million African Americans begin to migrate from the South by 1930.

Works of the Harlem Renaissance

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McKay, Claude. *A Long Way from Home*. 1937.

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Bonner, Marita. *Exit: An Illusion*. 1929.

_____. *The Purple Flower*. 1928.

Grimké, Angelina Weld. *Rachel*. 1916.

Hughes, Langston. *Mulatto*. 1935.

_____ & Zora Neale Hurston. *Mule-Bone: A Comedy of Negro Life*. 1930.

Hurston, Zora Neale. *Color Struck: A Play in Four Scenes*. 1926.

Thurman, Wallace & William Jourdan Rapp. *Harlem: A Melodrama of Negro Life in Harlem*. 1929.

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Cullen, Countee. *Ballad of the Brown Girl*. 1927.

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Johnson, James Weldon. *God's Trombones: Seven Negro Sermons in Verse*. 1927.

Christopher Allen Varlack is a lecturer in the Writing and Rhetoric Division of the Department of English at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, where he teaches courses in composition and creative writing. He earned a BA in communications from Loyola University Maryland and his MFA in creative writing from the University of Southern Maine's Stonecoast MFA Program. He is also a PhD candidate at Morgan State University, where he is now writing his dissertation on the alternative intellectual projects of the Harlem Renaissance with particular attention to the fiction works of the rebel sojourner and *l'enfant terrible*, Claude McKay. As a writer and scholar, Varlack is interested in how literature can preserve or reclaim the voices of the past, shedding new light on the struggles and the people who define who we are today. Much of his scholarship thus focuses on the literature of the Harlem Renaissance—arguably the most important movement in the burgeoning African American literary tradition. Always in search of his next major project, his recent publications include chapters in *Critical Insights: Zora Neale Hurston* (2013), *Critical Insights: The Slave Narrative* (2014), *Baby Boomers and Popular Culture: An Inquiry into America's Most Powerful Generation* (2014), and *Critical Insights: Virginia Woolf & 20th Century Women Writers* (2014).