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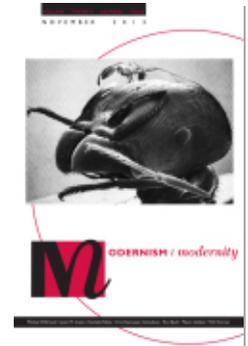
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## Questionnaire Responses

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**436 What figures, connections, or areas of inquiry require further attention or reflection? What aspects of the Harlem Renaissance are we missing or ignoring?**

Much interesting work is being done to expand our acquaintanceship with important but relatively unexamined figures of the period. A biography of Harold Jackman—which includes a comprehensive collection of his correspondence—is currently under way. Thomas Wirth is spearheading the development of an online collection of the correspondence of Countee Cullen that will contribute layers to our appreciation of Cullen and his world. Biographies of influential and productive writers, like Jessie Fauset and Wallace Thurman, are needed. More studies on the role of women in this male-dominated movement in general are needed. More work on the roles played by class, gender, and sexuality in the New Negro movement and the ways each determined its course would be illuminating. There has been surprisingly little work done on the importance of theater during the Harlem Renaissance. The lives and work of actors like Rose McClendon, Abbie Mitchell, and Fredi Washington merit serious attention.

The James Weldon Johnson Collection, housed at the Beinecke Library at Yale University, contains an enormous amount of material related to the Harlem Renaissance that has yet to be explored. For instance, there is a rich and substantial collection of Chester Himes correspondence waiting to be assembled and annotated. There is more material waiting to be explored at other archives, such as the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in New York, the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center at Howard University in Washington, D.C., and the Countee Cullen/Harold Jackman Memorial Collection in Atlanta.

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**Anne E. Carroll**

**What figures, connections, or areas of inquiry require further attention or reflection?**

I started learning about the Harlem Renaissance when I was a graduate student. I was drawn to the movement by the connections forged among its writers, artists, musicians, and performers. I came to understand many of its features as modernist: the innovativeness of its participants, the ways they challenged the beliefs and practices established by their elders, the ways they linked texts in various media to offer new images of African Americans and new ideas about how texts could do cultural work—or not. I taught courses in which my students and I explored the modernism of the Harlem Renaissance, and I argued—in classes and in my research—that understanding the Harlem Renaissance as modernist helps us better understand both movements.

Now, though, when I teach the Harlem Renaissance, it's to high school juniors, and much of that intellectual framework has fallen away from how I talk about it. My sixteen- and seventeen-year-old students aren't necessarily interested in literary movements, and they don't particularly want to talk about the implications of how the texts are written. But they do want to talk about the people involved in the Harlem Renaissance: how they lived, why they did what did, and how they knew each other. And it turns out that the things that make the Harlem Renaissance modernist *are* interesting to them. It resonates with my students that the younger generation of Negro artists, as the creators of the avant-garde journal *Fire!!* called themselves, were explicitly rebelling against their elders. The fact that participants in the movement integrated the arts draws in those students who are more interested in music, the visual arts, or performance than literature. And the idea that so many of the participants in the Harlem Renaissance—young and old—were trying to “make it new” as they redefined African Americans appeals to students who don't simply want to do things the way they've always been done.

As a scholar of the Harlem Renaissance who is teaching the movement to high school students, then, my challenge is to translate my understanding of the movement and its modernism into ideas and activities that engage my students. Simply presenting the idea of the Harlem Renaissance as modernist does not work at the high school level; if I do that, I have veered into the dreaded arena of “lecturing.” Really, though, the same was true when I was teaching introductory-level courses on the college level. Students who were taking Introduction to Literature courses just to fulfill their general education requirements did not come to my classes with an inherent interest in literature for literature's sake.

Presenting the Harlem Renaissance to these students, then, makes me wish for more scholarship on how to teach the movement, with an emphasis on classroom activities. Essays and even a few books on teaching the Harlem Renaissance do exist, but the focus of much of this scholarship is on background information that teachers can then present to students. That's helpful, certainly, particularly for teachers who don't know much about the Harlem Renaissance and suddenly find themselves needing to insert a unit on it into their American literature or other survey courses. But how do we bring the Harlem Renaissance to life?

My high school students often want to do projects—multimedia, collaborative, and creative—not papers, and these kinds of projects provide some ways into the Harlem Renaissance. What if I have them create group portraits like *The New Negro*? Or radical magazines like *Fire!!*? Or illustrated texts like those created by the poets and writers of the Harlem Renaissance?

Take, for example, the concept of group representation, which I see as the central mission of Alain Locke's massive 1925 anthology, *The New Negro*. When I talk to students about the need Locke and other participants in the Harlem Renaissance felt to redefine African American identity through texts by and about them, my students understand the concept, but it remains a bit abstract to them. That changes if I ask them to create a group portrait of the students at Elizabeth Seton High School. Sud-

438 denly, the issue of whom to include—not only which individuals but also what groups of people—becomes far more immediate. Of course they want to include visual images—photographs or even videos—but what should they show? And what should the written texts say, and how should it relate to those images? Who is the intended audience? What’s the purpose of our portrait? To attract new students, to impress parents, to make Seton seem fun? What are the administrators going to think? How much diversity should we show? Suddenly, *The New Negro* becomes a source of ideas and strategies.

During the 1920s, Locke’s emphasis on positive representation was, of course, challenged by those who chafed against the idea of putting African Americans’ collective best foot forward in texts—and the idea that artists, writers, and performers had a duty to do so. That resistance and the corresponding desire to put forth new and different ideas about African Americans is behind the radical journal *Fire!!*. For my students, creating their own radical text helps them appreciate the dilemmas and strategies that faced the creators of *Fire!!*. In this case, we can use our school website as a stand-in for the kind of representative texts created by the older generation of participants in the Harlem Renaissance. Of course the website presents our school positively, with students who look happy, engaged, and friendly. What if my students want to show an edgier side of our school? How could my students represent that side of the school in visual and written texts? Would they be able to get their version published? Would they get in trouble if they showed certain kinds of images? I can also frame this issue in terms of how my students’ parents or even grandparents expect them to look or behave, as opposed to what my students think is appropriate and acceptable. The debates about what they should or should not put online is a perfect present-day parallel to the controversy over *Fire!!*, and it helps my students identify with Wallace Thurman, Langston Hughes, and the other contributors to *Fire!!*.

Thinking along these lines about teaching the Harlem Renaissance brings up many similar kinds of projects that can get students engaged with the impulses behind the Harlem Renaissance. For example, students can create illustrated versions of Harlem Renaissance texts, using Aaron Douglas’s illustrations for Langston Hughes’s or James Weldon Johnson’s poems as models. They can put on a variety show inspired by the movement and dance the Charleston, act out scenes from plays like *Color Struck* or *Mule Bone*, perform one of Bessie Smith’s songs, or “intone” one of Johnson’s sermon poems. They can even create videos, modeled after the “race movies” of the 1920s, to bring the Harlem Renaissance to life.

Once my students get engaged with projects like these, they understand the Harlem Renaissance as a movement that’s intensely relevant to their own creative and intellectual interests. That highlights the aspect of the movement that’s always been the most compelling to me: that the participants in the Harlem Renaissance were a group of people with a huge range of interests, talents, and skills who were trying to figure out how to best express themselves. Their modernism is important to that, since the old texts and ideas no longer fit, and that’s part of what keeps modernism and the Harlem Renaissance relevant to generation after generation of students.

**Anne E. Carroll**, the author of *Word, Image, and the New Negro: Representation and Identity in the Harlem Renaissance* (2007), has also published essays, book chapters, encyclopedia articles, and book reviews about the Harlem Renaissance, African American literature, and the relationship between literature and the arts. She has taught at the University of Maryland, Wichita State University, and Anne Arundel Community College, and now is teaching at Elizabeth Seton High School in Bladensburg, Maryland.

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## **Barbara Foley**

My responses to various questions in this survey all revolve around the need for a stronger Marxist presence in scholarship on the movement that is routinely known as the Harlem Renaissance.

### **How do you understand the relationship between the Harlem Renaissance, modernism, and/or modernity?**

There's no doubt that the Harlem Renaissance is now seen as integral—indeed central—to U.S. modernism. But when we contemplate the question of modernity, signifying more broadly an entire historical epoch, the dominant historical narrative still requires revision. One place to start is to reconsider the rubric “Harlem Renaissance.” Not only does this term focus a movement that was national—and to some degree international—around its “capital”; more problematically, it pronounces the movement a predominantly cultural one, analogous to the “renaissance” accompanying European modernity. The alternative term “New Negro movement” not only more accurately reflects the movement’s contemporaneous self-concept (it became known as a “renaissance” primarily in retrospect) but also leaves open the connection between economics and politics, on the one hand, and art and literature, on the other.

### **What aspects of the Harlem Renaissance are we missing or ignoring?**

It is widely acknowledged that Alain Locke’s *The New Negro: An Interpretation* (1925) played a key role in defining the New Negro as culture hero rather than anti-capitalist militant. Locke’s highly influential intervention should be seen, I believe, as a form of class struggle in the realm of ideology, one that sought to diminish the impact of political radicalism and to promote a class collaborationist and quietistic culturalism. While it is evident that, in the wake of the Red Summer of 1919, the leftist upsurge lost some of its immediate energy, it is also evident that the Bolshevik revolution had a continuing and mounting impact throughout the decade. The proletarian movement of the 1930s cannot be attributed solely to the effects of the Great Depression; its origins in the post–World War I radicalism that was inspired in large part by the establishment of socialism in the Soviet Union cannot be effaced. The routine designation of the Harlem Renaissance as a cultural “flowering” beginning in the 1920s—even if it is seen to continue to 1940, as the *Norton Anthology of African American Literature* proposes—deflects attention from these crucially important postwar political roots.