

Artists of the Harlem Renaissance

renaissance [REN-uh-sahns] noun

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a renewal of interest and achievement in the areas of art, music, and literature

After World War I ended in 1918, there were more jobs available in cities and African Americans began to migrate to large cities in droves. Most moved to major cities like Detroit, Chicago, and New York City. The 1920s shepherded in a new era for the black community. It was a time when more black artists, musicians, and writers began to make their mark on America than ever before. Many of these talented individuals lived in (or moved to) Harlem, a neighborhood in New York City and, as a result, this time period became known as the Harlem Renaissance.

There were so many African American writers, poets, artists, and musicians who contributed to this movement. Many of these artists crossed over to white audiences. This means they became popular to white audiences as well as black audiences. Many also played key roles in the Civil Rights Movement. Here is some information about a few of these talented individuals.



Louis Armstrong

Jazz music was a huge part of the Harlem Renaissance movement. And Louis Armstrong was a huge part of the Jazz movement. Armstrong was born in 1901 in New Orleans, Louisiana. He grew up to be one of the most influential musicians in jazz history. Armstrong played trumpet and sang. He is known for his unique trumpet style and several songs,

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including “What a Wonderful World.” Armstrong also helped make scatting a popular part of jazz. Scatting is singing using fun nonsense words like, “Scooby-do-wap-wap.” In 1937, Armstrong became the first black person to host a national radio show.



Augusta Savage

moved to New York City in the early 1920s and studied art at Cooper Union college. In 1929, she went to Paris, France to study sculpture. When Savage returned to the United States, she worked as a sculptor, taught art, and was a civil rights activist. In 1939, she was hired to create a sculpture for the New York World's Fair. She created “The Harp,” which was 16 feet tall.



Langston Hughes

Langston Hughes was a poet and a playwright (he wrote plays). Hughes was born in 1902 in Missouri. In 1921, he moved to New York City to go to Columbia University. While there, he published his first poem, “The Negro Speaks of Rivers.” In New York, Hughes became part of the Harlem Renaissance movement. He became a fan of jazz music and attended many live performances. He met and became friends with many other artists in Harlem. Hughes became known for writing about black themes and history in a way that everyone could relate.

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Zora Neale Hurston

Zora Neale Hurston was an author and civil rights activist. Hurston was the daughter of two former slaves. She was born in 1891 in Alabama, but grew up in Florida. She moved to Harlem in the early 1920s and quickly became part of the Harlem Renaissance scene. Hurston was a very serious student and got a scholarship to study anthropology at Barnard College. Anthropologists study how humans' social customs and beliefs began. Hurston was especially interested in folklore. She included African folklore in her most famous book, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, which was published in 1937.