

# **Sociocultural Influences of the Great Migration, 1915 - 1930**

Michael Müller

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## **ABSTRAKT**

Během dvacátých let 20. století se Afroameričané účastnili jedné z nejvýznamnějších demografických změn v historii Spojených států. Kombinace různých sociálních a ekonomických faktorů zapříčinila přesun přibližně jednoho a půl milionu Afroameričanů během let 1915 až 1930. Tato práce se zabývá zásadními sociálními, ekonomickými, demografickými a kulturními dopady, stejně tak jako rasovými problémy, které následovaly migraci. Zároveň tato práce představuje snahu Afroameričanů o prokázání jejich sociálního postavení kulturním úsilím, které kulminovalo v „Harlemskou renesanci“. Jako výsledek tato práce prokazuje, že Velká Migrace dala lidem příležitost ke změně, kulturní rovnosti a svobodě, což jsou základní pilíře současné demokratické společnosti.

Klíčová slova: Velká Migrace, Afroameričané, Harlemská renesance, hnutí „New Negro“, Harlem, Chicago, rasová povstání, afroamerická kultura, dvacátá léta

## **ABSTRACT**

During the twentieth century, African Americans participated in one of the most significant demographic events in the United States history. Urged by variety of push and pull factors, over one million African Americans migrated between 1915 and 1930. This bachelor thesis present profound social, economic, demographic, and cultural changes as well as racial issues which found their way into northern cities. Additionally, it displays rising African American eagerness to prove worthiness, social position by culture activity, which resulted in “the Harlem Renaissance.” In conclusion, it proves that the Great Migration gave people the opportunity for change, together with cultural equality and freedom, which are main pillars of the current democratic society.

Keywords: The Great Migration, The Harlem Renaissance, African Americans, Harlem. Chicago, racial riots, The New Negro Movement, Harlem, African American Culture, 1920's

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## INTRODUCTION

“The United States was born in the country and moved to the city.”<sup>1</sup> During the Gilded Age, science, technology, urbanization and immigration reshaped the United States, still controlled by village values, individualism, laissez-faire and a “divinely ordained social system.”<sup>2</sup> In response to this reshaping of American society, Americans embarked on a search for order known as the Progressive Era. The Great Migration was among the most important events of this era. This significant demographic shift of over one million African Americans between 1915 and 1930 from largely rural areas of the southern United States to northern cities altered the “economic, social, and political fabric of American society.”<sup>3</sup> Southern racial injustice, lynchings, and natural disasters provided strong incentives to migrate, as did the northern labour vacuum created by World War I, media propagation and visions of greater freedom. Urged by a variety of these push and pull factors, African Americans created a migration stream that lasted until 1960. Nevertheless, northern life proved far from easy, as African Americans migrants often met with racial segregation, inadequate housing, expensive rents and work discrimination. Despite these challenges, African Americans began to build political organizations, lodges, clubs, professional baseball teams, social service institutions, newspapers, and businesses. Furthermore, the Harlem Renaissance, a literary, artistic, and intellectual movement, ignited the desire to develop a new black cultural identity known as “the New Negro.” Even though the Great Depression stymied these efforts, a solid foundation for further African American urbanization and cultural development had been laid.

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Robert J. Allison, "Great Migration: What Caused the Great Migrations?," *History in Dispute* 3 (2000): 70;

<sup>2</sup> Book cover of Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R.* (New York: Vintage Books, 1955).

<sup>3</sup> Spencer R. Crew, "The Great Migration of Afro-Americans, 1915-40," *Monthly Labor Review* 110, no. 3 (1987): 34.

## 1 CAUSES OF THE GREAT MIGRATION

In 1900, only 10 percent of the entire African American population lived in the northern part of the United States. Of these 881,000 African American northerners, 70 percent lived in urban areas. Of the 90 percent of African Americans living in the South, 75 percent lived in rural areas.<sup>4</sup> However, a significant demographic shift was about to occur, as African Americans would soon migrate in large numbers from the rural South to the urban North, forever changing American society.<sup>5</sup> Urged by a variety of push and pull factors, between 1910 and 1930, over one million African Americans moved north, most during the World War I years.<sup>6</sup> Among the push factors were the boll weevil, flooding, disfranchisement and ongoing racial injustice, while employment and racial tolerance served as pull factors.<sup>7</sup> First, understanding the South at this time is crucial to understanding the “exodus” and those who made it.<sup>8</sup>

### 1.1 Push factors

#### 1.1.1 Southern economic situation

Compared to the rest of the country in 1910, the South was economically isolated and backwards. African Americans, frustrated by inferior education, low literacy levels, a lack of basic services and poor communication with the government began to migrate in a manner resembling the Gold Rush a century earlier.<sup>9</sup> Making matters worse for African American Southerners, a boll weevil infestation led to a diversification of farm production, thereby lowering labor force requirements.<sup>10</sup>

Economic historians stress that these factors created a disparity of wealth between the rural South and urban North. According to historian Robert J. Allison, in 1916 a black laborer in Chicago could earn as much in a day (\$2.50) as black laborer in the South could earn in a

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<sup>4</sup> Robin D.G. Kelley and Earl Lewis, *To Make Our World Anew* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 345.

<sup>5</sup> Crew, "The Great Migration of Afro-Americans, 1915-40," 34-36.

<sup>6</sup> Carole Marks, "Black Workers and the Great Migration North," *Phylon* 46, no. 2 (1985): 148; Carter Godwin Woodson, *A Century of Negro Migration* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1969), 107.

<sup>7</sup> Robert J. Allison, "Great Migration: What Caused the Great Migrations?," *History in Dispute* 3 (2000): 70-77; Joe William Trotter, "The Great Migration," *OAH Magazine of History* 17, no. 1 (2002): 31-33.

<sup>8</sup> Jack Temple Kirby, "The Southern Exodus, 1910-1960: A Primer for Historians," *Journal of Southern History* 49, no. 4 (1983): 587.

<sup>9</sup> Marks, "Black Workers and the Great Migration," 154-155.

<sup>10</sup> Kelley and Lewis, *To Make Our World Anew*, 351.

week. Although living expenses were higher in urban settings, the black northern laborer still came out on top.<sup>11</sup> Some economists view this wage rate difference as major motivating factor for migration.<sup>12</sup>

Other scholars consider natural disasters, the boll weevil infestation together with floods, to be the most infamous “push” factor. Infested areas specializing in cotton production suffered from immediate and lasting negative effects and land value declined dramatically. The majority of southern farmers refused production diversification, but those who did diversify required less labor force. Furthermore, a small number of land owners began mechanizing production, further lowering the labor requirements.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, some scholars still do not think that natural disasters, diversification, and mechanization were enough to cause a mass “exodus” of blacks from the South.<sup>14</sup>

Another factor was that by 1900, only one-fourth of all black Southerners owned the land they tilled. To buy land, plant a crop, and support themselves and their families until harvest, black farmers required loans. One bad harvest, which often served as collateral for the previous year’s loan, resulted in an “unstable grip” on land ownership and often the loss of the land.<sup>15</sup> Renting land either for cash or on a sharecropping basis often became the only feasible option for African Americans farmers. Sharecroppers were paid in “furnishes,” payments determined by the landowners after the harvests. In order to cover regular expenses, sharecroppers borrowed money. The inability to cover the expenses created a vicious cycle of debt.<sup>16</sup>

The unstable and erratic agricultural economy fueled desperation, leading to a distribution shift in the Southern work force. Firstly, African Americans sought different types of work, such as “cutting lumber at sawmills, extracting turpentine, cooking, and cleaning.”<sup>17</sup> Secondly, black workers moved to southern urban areas, where economic

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<sup>11</sup> Allison, "Great Migration," 3-4.

<sup>12</sup> Neil Fligstein and Peter H. Rossi, *Going North: Migration of Blacks and Whites from the South, 1900-1950* (Burlington: Elsevier Science, 2013), 2-3.

<sup>13</sup> Allison, "Great Migration," 3-4; James N. Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora: How the Great Migrations of Black and White Southerners Transformed America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 24; Alan L. Olmstead, Fabian Lange, and Paul W. Rhode, "The Impact of the Boll Weevil, 1892-1932," *Journal of Economic History* 69, no 3 (2009): 714 – 715.

<sup>14</sup> William J. Collins, "When the Tide Turned: Immigration and the Delay of the Great Black Migration," *Journal of Economic History* 57, no. 3 (1997): 622.

<sup>15</sup> James R. Grossman, *A Chance to Make Good: African Americans, 1900-1929* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 347.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 347-349.

<sup>17</sup> Allison, "Great Migration," 3-4.

conditions were better than in rural areas. This interregional migration provided a certain degree of autonomy to skilled and confident African Americans.<sup>18</sup>

### 1.1.2 Southern political and racial situation

Sociologist Stewart Tolnay, among others, insists that economic reasons were not the only factors that forced the migration. Certain noneconomic and social factors influenced black southerners to consider migration as a “possible remedy.” Inferior educational opportunities, restrictions caused by Jim Crow segregation laws, and racial violence are among the most frequently mentioned.<sup>19</sup>

Education was a motivating factor for migration, as southern education, denied to blacks before the Civil War, was of low quality in the postbellum era. Only 58 percent of children aged 6 to 14 attended school. Furthermore, few children remained in school beyond 5<sup>th</sup> grade. Plus, out of 1,238 southern high schools, only 64 offered education for black children.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, the quality of southern schools reportedly varied from “inadequate to abysmal.”<sup>21</sup> White civic leaders considered African American education redundant and extravagant, as they “wanted black children in the fields, not wasting their time sitting on the crude benches of a one-room schoolhouse.”<sup>22</sup> Additionally, some schools functioned for only two months a year, only when manual work in the fields was not required.<sup>23</sup>

Regarding the racial situation in the South, most white southerners continued to believe that African Americans are a lower stage of civilization.<sup>24</sup> Widespread “Jim Crow,” a wide-ranging set of local and state statutes, declared that the races must be segregated. Furthermore, lynching remained a relatively-common practice. Sociologist John Dollard stated, “every Negro in the South knows that he is under a kind of sentence of death; he does not know when his turn will come, it may never come, but it may also be any time.”<sup>25</sup> Of the estimated 1,893 African Americans lynched between 1882 and 1910, one-third were in

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<sup>18</sup> Marks, "Black Workers and the Great Migration," 149.

<sup>19</sup> Stewart E. Tolnay, "The African American 'Great Migration' and Beyond," *Annual Review of Sociology* 29 (2003): 215.

<sup>20</sup> Diane Ravitch, "A Different Kind of Education for Black Children," *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* 30 (2000-2001): 98.

<sup>21</sup> Kelley and Lewis, *To Make Our World Anew*, 376.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*; Julie Kárová, "Velká migrace Afroameričanů v letech 1916-1930 a její dopad na afroamerickou společnost a kulturu" (bachelor's thesis, Charles University, 2010), 9.

<sup>24</sup> Kelley and Lewis, *To Make Our World Anew*, 357.

<sup>25</sup> Quoted in W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *Under Sentence of Death: Lynching in the South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 7.

Mississippi and Georgia.<sup>26</sup> Tolnay and Beck proved a connection between the Great Migration and lynchings, as “southern blacks were more likely to leave areas where mob violence was greatest.”<sup>27</sup>

## 1.2 Pull factors

During 1915 and 1916, the war in Europe influenced industry in the American north. The immigrant labor force rapidly declined from over 1 million new arrivals in 1914 to only 110,618 in 1918. Furthermore, the United States adopted more-restrictive immigration policies, further fueling the rapid decline.<sup>28</sup> Additionally, thousands of European workers returned to their native countries.<sup>29</sup> As a result, the northern industrial market experienced a labor vacuum for the first time since the U.S. Civil War. Black workers presented a large and readily available substitute for this new labor shortage. Job opportunities acted as pull factor for them.<sup>30</sup>

Racial prejudices against African Americans allowed European immigrants to occupy even menial positions. Additionally, African Americans, being such a small minority in the North prior to 1915, were unable to force the general community to respect their status.<sup>31</sup> However, the sudden change in workforce supply and distribution forced the northern industrial recruiters to look for another source of labor, while African Americans remained the only feasible option.<sup>32</sup> After the United States joined World War I in 1917, the labor shortage further increased. Mills, factories and railroads previously prohibiting African Americans from entering the workforce now required their labor.<sup>33</sup>

## 1.3 Migration process

The Great Migration was a complex process. Firstly, specific migration movements took place in southern regions. Between 1900 and 1920, the majority of African American

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<sup>26</sup> Stewart E. Tolnay and E. M. Beck, "Racial Violence and Black Migration in the American South, 1910 to 1930," *American Sociological Review* 57, no. 1 (1992): 104; Kárová, "Velká migrace Afroameričanů v letech 1916-1930 a její dopad na afroamerickou společnost a kulturu," 9.

<sup>27</sup> Tolnay and Beck, "Racial Violence and Black Migration," 113.

<sup>28</sup> Tolnay, "The African American 'Great Migration' and Beyond," 215.

<sup>29</sup> Milton Charles Sernett, *Bound for the Promised Land: African American Religion and the Great Migration* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 38.

<sup>30</sup> Kirby, "The Southern Exodus," 590.

<sup>31</sup> Woodson, *A Century of Negro Migration*, 107.

<sup>32</sup> Kirby, "The Southern Exodus," 590.

<sup>33</sup> Woodson, *A Century of Negro Migration*, 107.

southerners migrated from rural areas to southern cities.<sup>34</sup> They then made use of existing railroad connections to move north, usually on a direct axis.<sup>35</sup> For instance, North and South Carolinians headed to New York, Philadelphia, and Baltimore, while those from Alabama and Kentucky often ended up in Pittsburgh, and those from Mississippi, Louisiana and Tennessee headed for Chicago.<sup>36</sup> Yet, secondary streams developed upon arrival to northern cities, as African American migrants looked for the most feasible and economically valid option.<sup>37</sup>

Furthermore, a stream of messages describing working opportunities, salaries and racial dignity led to referring the North in enthusiastic Biblical terms. Migrants were on a “Flight out of Egypt,” and “Going into Canaan” or to “the Promised Land.” African Americans seemingly viewed the Great Migration as a God-ordained and God-blessed escape from racial oppression, segregation and political injustice. Firstly, railroad employees who travelled back and forth between the north and south shared information.<sup>38</sup> Secondly, written communications in form of letters and publications emphasized the benefits of the migration.<sup>39</sup> The *Chicago Defender*, a major black newspaper with a print run of between 150,000 and 300,000 per issue, constantly posted stories of career opportunities and the freedom from racial oppression that could be found in the North.<sup>40</sup> Published statements about the North, among them, “our people are in a different light” and “up here, a man can be a man,” sustained this belief and served as a catalyst for action.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, northern labor agents published targeted ads to attract black laborers to specific northern employers.<sup>42</sup> Additionally, many African Americans learned about possibilities of transportation, jobs and housing via family and friends networks.<sup>43</sup> The combination of these factors helped to create, spread and sustain “the moving fever.”<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Trotter, “The Great Migration,” 31-32.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Kelley and Lewis, *To Make Our World Anew*, 389.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.; Kárová, “Velká migrace Afroameričanů v letech 1916-1930 a její dopad na afroamerickou společnost a kulturu,” 13.

<sup>38</sup> Trotter, “The Great Migration,” 31-32.

<sup>39</sup> Collins, “When the Tide Turned,” 622.

<sup>40</sup> Jonathan Holloway, “Jim Crow and the Great Migration,” Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, accessed March 12, 2017, <https://www.gilderlehrman.org/history-by-era/jim-crow-and-great-migration/essays/jim-crow-and-great-migration>.

<sup>41</sup> Trotter, “The Great Migration,” 31-33.; Marks, “Black Workers and the Great Migration,” 149.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Trotter, “The Great Migration,” 31-32.

<sup>44</sup> Marks, “Black Workers and the Great Migration,” 155.

A combination of push and pull factors thereby created one of the most significant migrations in modern history. Southern social conditions such as Jim Crow measures, poor education and the threat of racial violence, combined with a negative economic situation, affected by a boll weevil infestation and a declining demand for African American labor, functioned as push factors.<sup>45</sup> At the same time, World War I increased the need for black labor in northern industry, providing the economic motivation for migration. An overly optimistic view of the North sustained the interest and motivation.

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<sup>45</sup> Tolnay and Beck, "Racial Violence and Black Migration," 103-106.

## 2 RISE OF URBAN TENANTS

Although black urban migration was occurring before World War I, a combination of push and pull factors dramatically increased the flow of migrants. Pre-war, African Americans mainly emigrated to Chicago, Philadelphia and New York, the major industrial cities at the time. However, in search of the “Promised Land,” African Americans now moved to urban areas throughout entire North and West.<sup>46</sup> For instance, the city of Hartford, Connecticut was home to 1,745 African American in 1910, but by 1920 that number had jumped to 4,199, and by 1930 to 6,510, an almost fourfold increase.<sup>47</sup> In larger industrial urban areas such as Cleveland, Pittsburgh, Detroit and Milwaukee, the “percentage of black men employed in industrial jobs increased from an estimated ten to twenty percent of the black labor force in 1910 to about sixty to seventy percent in 1920 and 1930.”<sup>48</sup> Growing cities created an immense need for new infrastructure, yet those needs were seldom fulfilled.<sup>49</sup>

### 2.1 Seeking shelter

A wartime housing shortage presented difficulty for most migrants. Grossman gives an example of a family arriving in Chicago that lived for a week on the pavements of the South Side ghetto before finally settling into a five-room apartment, small yet sufficient and probably larger than the farmhouse they left behind in the South.<sup>50</sup> With limited possibilities emerging, African American ghettos provided starting points in the largest cities. As a matter of expediency, new migrants also commonly moved in with friends and family who had migrated previously.<sup>51</sup> Large urban ghettos such as New York’s Harlem and Chicago’s South Side were well known among Southerners. African American author Richard Wright presented Harlem in his 1940 *Native Son* as “the real town” and the “place to go.”<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Michael B. Katz, *The "Underclass" Debate: Views from History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 58-59.

<sup>47</sup> Peter Tuckle, Kurt Schlichting, and Richard Maisel, "Social, Economic, and Residential Diversity within Hartford's African American Community at the Beginning of the Great Migration," *Journal of Black Studies* 37, No. 5 (2007): 712 – 713.

<sup>48</sup> Trotter, "The Great Migration," 31- 33.

<sup>49</sup> Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R.* (New York: Vintage Books, 1955), 174 – 175.

<sup>50</sup> Kelley and Lewis, *To Make Our World Anew*, 388.

<sup>51</sup> Tolnay, "The African American 'Great Migration' and Beyond," 219.

<sup>52</sup> Richard Wright, *Native Son* (New York: Harper and Bros, 1940), 112.

The Great Migration further bolstered the pre-existing Jim Crow segregation in these locations.<sup>53</sup> Furthermore, local geography played an important role in certain cases. Cincinnati's hills and lowlands, Chicago's flat area, or New York's Manhattan Island resulted in different neighborhoods. Pittsburgh lacked a single district. Instead, migrants created a series of segregated communities around steel mills.<sup>54</sup>

By 1920, a northbound migrant was excluded from most of the black neighborhoods, increasing the likelihood of having white neighbors. By 1930, ghetto segregation and expansion, combined with "white flight," became so prominent that this likelihood almost completely vanished.<sup>55</sup> Using different methods, whites confined African American housing. As James Gregory states, "real estate brokers and neighborhood associations organized the market, using housing covenants and zoning ordinances to back up the informal system of racial exclusion."<sup>56</sup> Violence and terror often served as instruments to keep African Americans in predetermined borders.<sup>57</sup> Incidents of damaged or destroyed houses by either fire or explosives were reported in northern cities during the 1920s. Take for instance Dr. Ossian Sweet, whose Detroit house was located outside the black belt. Despite attempts at self-defense, white mobs bombed and destroyed his house.<sup>58</sup>

Little possibility to move beyond ghetto borders resulted in overcrowding.<sup>59</sup> As Holloway states, "brownstone apartment buildings originally designed for five families, for example, would be carved up to hold five or six times as many people, significantly compromising sanitation and public health."<sup>60</sup> The majority of residents, unable to find individual rooms, crowded into the same room and often even the same bed: "sometimes as many as four and five sleep in one bed, and that may be placed in the basement, dining-room or kitchen where there is neither adequate light nor air."<sup>61</sup> Men working different shifts would even share beds. The lack of running water and sewage connections created serious sanitation issues. Cooking was often by "coal or wood stoves or kerosene lamps."<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Tolnay, "The African American 'Great Migration' and Beyond," 219.; Tuckle, Schlichting, and Maisel, "Social, Economic, and Residential Diversity," 720 – 722.

<sup>54</sup> Kelley and Lewis, *To Make Our World Anew*, 388-389.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora*, 101.

<sup>57</sup> Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992), 290.

<sup>58</sup> Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora*, 101.

<sup>59</sup> Kelley and Lewis, *To Make Our World Anew*, 390.

<sup>60</sup> Holloway, "Jim Crow and the Great Migration."

<sup>61</sup> Woodson, *A Century of Negro Migration*, 114-116.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

The residential containment further amplified effects of job discrimination, racial segregation and especially black housing costs.<sup>63</sup> Higher housing costs were often created artificially by real estate speculators who purchased homes on the ghetto borders at reduced prices by frightening the white owners with the probability of “Negro invasion,” and then selling the homes to African Americans at inflated rates.<sup>64</sup> In the 1920s, Harlem rents were at least 20 percent higher than prices for comparable accommodations for whites.<sup>65</sup> In such areas, rents reached almost half of all family expenses. This phenomenon forced some families to take in lodgers, who were often people from their southern social network.<sup>66</sup> Even so, some still found the means to send part of their earnings to their families in the South.<sup>67</sup>

All ghettos were not necessarily slums, certainly not before Great Migration. Harlem, in particular became the “mecca of black culture” and home to such figures as W. E. B. DuBois, James Weldon Johnson, and Marcus Garvey.<sup>68</sup> Furthermore, Harlem was the initial center of media attraction as well as a haven for artists.

On the other hand, Chicago offered migrants “some of the city’s most deteriorated neighborhoods.”<sup>69</sup> Yet, this housing was for many still better than southern dwellings. In Chicago, the majority of migrants headed to the South Side ghetto or to State Street. South Side and State Street suffered serious overcrowding and sanitation problems. Occupants often moved, but were restricted within the borders of the ghetto. This made quality-of-living improvements difficult.<sup>70</sup> Despite the surplus in housing in other parts of Chicago during 1919, a severe housing shortage in the African American community resulting in race riot that year.<sup>71</sup>

## 2.2 Finding a job

Racial segregation affected the labor market. Employers usually offered the least desirable jobs to black workers. The majority of African American men occupied unskilled positions in foundries, meatpacking companies, services (porters, janitors, cooks and

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<sup>63</sup> Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora*, 101.

<sup>64</sup> Kelley and Lewis, *To Make Our World Anew*, 390.

<sup>65</sup> Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora*, 101.

<sup>66</sup> Kelley and Lewis, *To Make Our World Anew*, 390.

<sup>67</sup> Woodson, *A Century of Negro Migration*, 115.

<sup>68</sup> James R. Grossman, *Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 4.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 135.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 135 – 138.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

cleaners) or railroads. Furthermore, African American women's possibilities of industrial employment were limited, and hence the majority of black women worked in service-oriented positions. Yet, some women found employment in the garment industry, packing houses, and steam laundries.<sup>72</sup>

Black workers generally earned less for the same work than white workers.<sup>73</sup> In some cases, employers even hired black workers as scab labor in order to break a local union or to stop white workers' strikes. Unfair treatment motivated many migrants to quit or change jobs frequently.<sup>74</sup>

Furthermore, some African American workers had little experience with industrial work. One, recalling "his first day in a steel mill near Chicago," stated, "I was scared to death. I had never seen anything like it in my life."<sup>75</sup> Out of employed black southerners, 63 percent were listed as agricultural workers.<sup>76</sup> Of these black southerners, many needed to adapt to indoor work conditions. Additionally, job flexibility was essential. Even skilled southern craftsmen had to adapt, as continuing in their acquired qualification was unlikely.<sup>77</sup>

Additionally, different work time organization played a role. Cotton and other crops had a work schedule based on crops needs. Over the course of a year, fluctuations between intense labor and less-demanding activities occurred, allowing for occasional leisure activities.<sup>78</sup> However, industrial employment required adaptation to a continuous and faster pace, and regular attendance with set working hours. Furthermore, African American southerners used songs to synchronize and alleviate the stresses of the southern farm work patterns. Yet, singing was considered disruptive and undesirable by the majority of northern employers. Adaptation to these different working customs presented notable problems for many migrants.<sup>79</sup>

Yet, migrants trying to find a job on their own often met with frustration, despite the *Defender* work advertisements and social network help. State employment offices favored white workers. Nonetheless private agencies, churches, and organizations among others, the

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<sup>72</sup> Crew, "The Great Migration," 35-36

<sup>73</sup> Kelley and Lewis, *To Make Our World Anew*, 390.

<sup>74</sup> Holloway, "Jim Crow and the Great Migration."

<sup>75</sup> Grossman, *Land of Hope*, 181.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 183.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 182; Kárová, "Velká migrace Afroameričanů v letech 1916-1930 a její dopad na afroamerickou společnost a kulturu," 18.

<sup>78</sup> Grossman, *Land of Hope*, 194.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 193; Kárová, "Velká migrace Afroameričanů v letech 1916-1930 a její dopad na afroamerickou společnost a kulturu," 19.

YMCA, YWCA and Negro Fellowship League, helped blacks find work. In order to place migrants, they had to undergo interviews, which were for the majority of them unfamiliar and difficult, as it was scarcely a common practice in the South.<sup>80</sup>

Despite the difficulties and the racial discrimination, the ability to change jobs and explore new opportunities together with a regular wage evoked a sense of freedom for many African Americans. Furthermore, regular wages allowed African Americans to freely manage their money, which led towards economic emancipation.<sup>81</sup>

### 2.3 Education

School attendance with equal standards and courses compared to white education presented an appealing opportunity. However, whites used school districting to assure that only a small number of schools were available for African Americans.<sup>82</sup> African American migrants therefore predominantly attended overcrowded and substandard schools. Exceptions like Chicago's Wendell Phillips High School, which possessed exceptionally modern equipment and facilities, were rare.<sup>83</sup> Yet, northern urban schools were still superior to those in the South. Furthermore, northern urban schools encouraged students to attend year-round, as opposed to the southern educational system, based on agricultural seasons. Despite the rare enforcement of compulsory attendance, migrants eagerly accepted the opportunity.<sup>84</sup> However, discrimination was a common practice. Entry tests scores were low since the majority of children had parents with only a primary-school education. Thus, African American children were often deemed slow, defective or retarded, despite their well-developed social skills.<sup>85</sup> Additionally, schools profiled migrants and placed them in considerably lower grades compared to their ages. Discouraged and embarrassed, many black children therefore left school at age 14, which was the minimum age for leaving.<sup>86</sup>

Racial educational segregation extensively affected high schools as well. Predominantly white school officials allowed for racial segregation. Black students entering high school were unwelcomed and occasionally transferred by school officials. Even if officials allowed for black students, white students often physically forced them out.

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<sup>80</sup> Grossman, *Land of Hope*, 187.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> Grossman, *Land of Hope*, 127-128.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 249-250.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> Ravitch, "A Different Kind of Education for Black Children," 102.

<sup>86</sup> Grossman, *Land of Hope*, 249-250.

Furthermore, principals of most schools refused to hire black teachers. The Raymond School, with a majority of black students, employed only 6 black teachers out of 40.<sup>87</sup> Additionally, blacks perceived higher education as unnecessary due to employment discrimination.<sup>88</sup>

## 2.4 Social structure

Despite apparent homogeneity, black urban communities had class separation. A few black professionals with white community connections formed an upper class. Successful businessmen closely followed. Postal workers and porters constituted the majority of the middle class, followed by workers with solid stable incomes. Yet, stable incomes and accumulated wealth became an increasingly uncommon phenomenon within the black community.<sup>89</sup>

Seemingly homogenous ghettos contained both southern migrants and indigenous northerners. However indigenous African American northerners criticized migrants' habits, clothing and cuisine. Furthermore, northerners viewed migrants as a potential threat to the racial status quo.<sup>90</sup> True, northern blacks were more likely to be independent, and twice as likely to be literate, but southern black migrants were more likely to find jobs. In other words, social and economic differences were not the reasons for the boundaries that appeared within northern black communities.<sup>91</sup>

Upper class blacks feared the impact of new black institutions, believing that their social lives would be anchored within the black community, which they were trying to escape. Yet the emerging middle class, containing editors, politicians and ministers, developed new institutions and organizations at a quick pace. In Chicago between 1890 and 1915, new African American leaders established "a bank, a hospital, a YMCA, an NAACP

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 254.

<sup>88</sup> Christopher Robert Reed, *Rise of Chicago's Black Metropolis, 1920-1929* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2014), 13.

<sup>89</sup> Grossman, *Land of Hope*, 129.

<sup>90</sup> Stewart E. Tolnay, "The Great Migration Gets Underway: A Comparison of Black Southern Migrants and Nonmigrants in the North, 1920," *Social Science Quarterly* 82, No. 2 (June 2001): 237.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 247-249.

chapter, an infantry regiment, effective political organizations, lodges, clubs, professional baseball teams, social service institutions, newspapers, and a variety of small businesses.”<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Grossman, *Land of Hope*, 130.; National Urban League, “Mission and History,” National Urban League, accessed February 27, 2017, <http://nul.iamempowered.com/who-we-are/mission-and-history>.; Gilbert Jonas, *Freedom's Sword: The NAACP and the Struggle against Racism in America, 1909-1969* (London: Routledge, 2007), 13-17. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was established in 1909 in Illinois, for the purpose of advancing the interests of African Americans. It organized peaceful protests, printed and disseminated materials against racism, and supported legal efforts at racial equality. The YMCA (and YWCA), a Christian youth organization, established black chapters in many north cities.

### 3 WHITE RESPONSE AND RIOTS

Despite the greater freedom, many African Americans remained concerned about the rapidly escalating racial violence. The 1915 release of D.W. Griffith's movie, *The Birth of a Nation* based on Thomas Dixon's novel *The Clansman*, portrayed blacks as "buffoons, mummies, or sexually insatiable rapists." The Ku Klux Klan reappeared, and its numbers surged as a result of the newfound popularity. Despite not directly correlating to the film or the Klan, spasms of racial violence appeared across the United States. Furthermore, Communism inspired a series of aggressive impulses.<sup>93</sup>

Of these race riots, the 1917 East St. Louis race riots were among most notorious. Striking white workers attacked black scab laborers at aluminum factories. Despite the police presence, officers let whites attack the black workers, using fists, clubs, and knives. Approximately fifty people died, and thousands of black families were left homeless. In response, the NAACP organized a silent march down New York's Fifth Avenue. Three weeks after the riots, approximately ten thousand blacks marched from Harlem to Manhattan's center, accompanied with muffled drum beats and banners reading, "Mr. President, why not make America safe for Democracy?" or "Mother, do lynchers go to heaven?"<sup>94</sup>

The reelection of Mayor William H. Thompson in Chicago in 1919 further incited racial political antagonisms, since some whites perceived Thompson as a "nigger-lover." European immigrants feared the black influx's harmful effects on their power and status. Furthermore, the migration of blacks could enhance the power of black Republicans at the expense of white Democrats in the South Side area. Together with the competitiveness in the workplace, tensions and incidents of racial violence increased accordingly to the growth of the black population. Extreme tension inside the meatpacking houses resulted in occasional assaults on black workers during the work commute. Housing-related fears reached their peak between 1917 and 1919 as whites threw twenty-four bombs at black houses that were located outside Black Belt boundaries. Public parks became dangerous, as white youth gangs "defended public space against racial contamination." These gangs often allied with ward politicians and enrolled young men for election-day protection and neighborhood protection.

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<sup>93</sup> William M. Tuttle, Jr., "Violence in a 'Heathen' Land: The Longview Race Riot of 1919," *Phylon* 33, no. 4 (1972): 324-325.; Jonathan Holloway, "Jim Crow and the Great Migration."

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

Nevertheless, police scarcely offered protection, and occasionally even assisted or initiated the racial attacks.<sup>95</sup> Following the 1917 East St. Louis race riots, some blacks armed themselves for protection. Notwithstanding, violent attacks on blacks multiplied between 1917 and 1919 and peaked with the return of black soldiers from World War I, ultimately culminating in race riots in 1919.<sup>96</sup>

On July 27, 1919, a white crowd attacked a young black swimmer who had ventured into the unmarked white swimming section, causing him to drown. Police refused to arrest the accused whites but arrested blacks instead for minor crimes. Blacks refused to accept the racial injustice and attacked the white policemen. Incident reports spread throughout Chicago, initiating riots across the South Side mainly in the “Black Belt” section. Despite dispatching four-fifths of Chicago’s 3,500 police officers, the “police was unable-and in most cases unwilling-to suppress the violence.” Even though many blacks stayed home, white mobs torched their houses. The white rioters had sufficient numbers and firepower superiority. The street battle lasted from July 27 to July 31 with occasional attacks for another week. The deployment of the Illinois National Guard restored the order. Estimates state that by August 8, twenty-three blacks and fifteen whites were dead, 537 Chicagoans suffered injuries, and about a thousand people, mostly black, were left homeless.<sup>97</sup>

Furthermore, other racial riots occurred in summer 1919. Between April 14 and October 1, race riots occurred in at least 22 cities and towns in United States, mostly in the South and Mid-west. Approximately 74 blacks were lynched. Black American author James Weldon Johnson called this rash of racial violence in 1919 “the Red Summer,” a term still used today to describe a summer during which at least 120 people were killed over race.<sup>98</sup> The “New negro” mentality had resulted in a new willingness to use force in self-defense. Black American writer Claude McKay captured the fighting spirit in a widely-republished sonnet, “If We Must Die,” which documented blacks responding to violence with violence.<sup>99</sup>

Part of the violence occurred due to the reappearance of Ku Klux Klan. The 1920s Ku Klux Klan thrived in cities. Many native white Protestants perceived migration as a threat

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<sup>95</sup> Grossman, *Land of Hope*, 177-180.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*; Holloway, “Jim Crow and the Great Migration.”

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*; Grossman, *Land of Hope*, 177-180.; Karlson Yu, “Chicago Race Riot, 1919,” BlackPast.org, accessed March 18, 2017, <http://www.blackpast.org/aah/chicago-race-riot-1919>.

<sup>98</sup> Tuttle, “Violence in a ‘Heathen’ Land,” 324-326; Stanley B. Norvell and William M. Tuttle Jr., “Views of a Negro during ‘The Red Summer’ of 1919,” *Journal of Negro History* 51, no. 3 (1966): 209-212.

<sup>99</sup> Barbara Foley, “The Color of Blood: John Brown, Jean Toomer, and the New Negro Movement,” *African American Review* 46, no. 2/3 (2013): 237-239.; Tuttle, “Violence in a ‘Heathen’ Land,” 324-326.

and joined Klan in response. Some estimates say that half of the Klan's membership between 1915 and 1944 resided in cities larger than 50,000 residents.<sup>100</sup> Reasons for this rapid reappearance include urban heterogeneity and economic, technological, and social change. The Klan had the greatest influence in the Mid-west and West. Its membership predominantly consisted of relatively uneducated, lower middle-class, blue collar workers. Despite the violence, the Klan gained the most of its appeal through a combination of religious, political and social activities.<sup>101</sup> Some estimates indicate Klan membership peaked in the 1920s at approximately 4,000,000.<sup>102</sup>

Despite the highly-publicized racial violence, instances of black-white labor solidarity also occurred. In Bogalusa, Louisiana, three white lumber workers died defending a black union organizer from company thugs. Such instances, notes Barbara Foley, developed "a possible metonymy for the labor movement of the future."<sup>103</sup>

Since migrants anticipated some degree of white unfriendliness, the riots did not disturb the migration stream. More blacks arrived in Chicago than left. Of those who left, most headed for other northern cities. Furthermore, most migrants interviewed by the Chicago Commission on Race Relations identified Chicago as a "place where they could feel free" and affirmed continuing to tout Chicago to friends. Rather than mixing with whites, blacks sought equality in citizenship privileges and institutional access. Nevertheless, it was impossible to avoid whites in these institutions, and conflicts continued to occur.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Roger K. Hux, "The Ku Klux Klan in Macon, 1919-1925," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 62, no. 2 (1979): 155.

<sup>101</sup> William M. Tuttle, Jr., review of *The Ku Klux Klan in the City, 1915-1930* by Kenneth T. Jackson, *Journal of Negro History* 53, no. 2 (1968): 192-193.

<sup>102</sup> Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform*, 294-298.

<sup>103</sup> Foley, "The Color of Blood," 237-238.

<sup>104</sup> Grossman, *Land of Hope*, 177-180.

## 4 HARLEM RENAISSANCE AND THE “NEW NEGRO” MOVEMENT

Following the end of the world war, African Americans, eager to prove worthiness and social position, became more culturally active, politically aggressive and urbane.<sup>105</sup> As a result, African American writing, arts, teaching and modified history approaches emerged.<sup>106</sup> The atmosphere of “mixed emotions—rage and fear as well as faith in the future and a growing pride and self-awareness” started the Harlem Renaissance.<sup>107</sup>

Despite being located in New York, a white cultural center, Harlem became one for blacks as well. On the one hand, Harlem was home to many black institutions such as businesses, churches, community groups, and newspapers, which allowed for this new center of African American life to emerge. On the other hand, many poor people still lived in Harlem and were only marginally affected by this renaissance. Nevertheless, material advantages, community spirit, and the exciting atmosphere of Harlem attracted many intellectuals, writers, musicians, and artists.<sup>108</sup>

Historian Nathan Huggins, among others, described the twenties in Harlem as a turning point in black artistic creativity. Motivated by the political impulse to improve their social position, black artists, musicians and writers began construction of a new black identity. Harlem afforded a space for self-definition and provided an opportunity for black intellectuals and political leaders to increase black consciousness. Despite the fact that African American fiction or poetry had been rarely produced prior to the Harlem Renaissance, a dozen or more authors appeared during the movement.<sup>109</sup>

Despite the Harlem Renaissance importance, historians could not agree on the exact starting moment. Many scholars, among others, historian David L. Lewis, frequently cite the return of 69th Infantry Regiment to Harlem at the end of World War I as the beginning of the new era. In the magazine *Crisis*, W.E.B. Du Bois published a military parade picture together with a middle-class male montage anticipating an optimistic and youthful future.

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<sup>105</sup> Jonathan Scott Holloway, “Harlem Renaissance Scholars Debate the Route to Racial Progress,” *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, No. 8 (1995): 60.

<sup>106</sup> John Hope Franklin, “The New Negro History,” *Journal of Negro History* 42, no. 2 (April 1957): 89.

<sup>107</sup> Kelly King Howes and Christine Slovey. *Harlem Renaissance* (Farmington Hills: Gale Boulder, 2004), 11, accessed January 21, 2017,

<http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/eBooks?ste=22&docNum=CX3425799999>.

<sup>108</sup> Harold Bloom, *The Harlem Renaissance* (Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 2004), 115-117.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*

Of others potential beginnings, some scholars point to the 1917 Silent Protest Parade or the opening of the Broadway play *Shuffle Along*.<sup>110</sup>

Of the renaissance significant figures, W.E.B. Du Bois was recognized as a leading black intellectual of the early twentieth century. In his influential book, *The Souls of Black Folk*, he presented African Americans' problems and concerns and opposed Washington recommendations. Du Bois publicly endorsed the fight against violence and discrimination. Through the influences of the NAACP and its *Crisis* magazine, Du Bois encouraged the influence of the "Talented Tenth" and believed that African Americans would achieve proper position in American society via cultural recognition. Furthermore, *Crisis* provided exhibition space and motivated future renaissance authors via reviews and literary contests.<sup>111</sup>

Yet, radical approaches emerged as well. Jamaican immigrant Marcus Garvey founded the Harlem-based Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) in 1914. Through radicalism and the newspaper *Negro World*, it gains public appeal. The goal of the organization was to return Africa to Africans and achieve complete freedom from white oppression. Despite the high improbability of these ambitions, the organization became popular. The 1920 UNIA convention hosted delegates from Africa, Brazil, Columbia, Central America and the West Indies. Ultimately, Garvey founded the shipping line, the "Black Star Line," the first to be exclusively owned by blacks. But, it failed. Furthermore, prior to his imprisonment and deportation, Garvey often criticized DuBois, Johnson, and Randolph for their non-radical and optimistic approach. Yet, even after his imprisonment, the organization remained popular and was one of the essential movements providing ethnic identification in the twentieth century.<sup>112</sup>

Among others prominent figures of Harlem Renaissance, James Weldon Johnson balanced the seriousness of Du Bios and further helped the NAACP development. Johnson used his extensive work experience and education in his novel *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*, which presented a complex psychological image of the black protagonist. Furthermore, Johnson could comfortably communicate with white society. This was vital for the black literary development, as cooperation with the white literary circle was

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<sup>110</sup> Daylanne K. English, "Selecting the Harlem Renaissance," *Critical Inquiry* 25, no. 4 (1999): 812-814.; Howes and Slovey, *Harlem Renaissance*, 23-24.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 11-15.; Harold Bloom, *The Harlem Renaissance* (Philadelphia: Chelsea House, 2004), 115-117.

<sup>112</sup> Nathan Irvin Huggins, *Harlem Renaissance* (London: Oxford university press, 1991), 41-47.

necessary. Firstly, publishers were predominantly white, and it was crucial to have access to publishing mechanisms. Secondly, Harlem authors fought for better social understanding and position in American culture. Notwithstanding, that white motivation was often merely exotic literature fascination. Classified as exotic literature, white publishers usually accepted only a small number of black works.<sup>113</sup> Johnson also valued the African American folk traditions and proposed that black artists should recall this rich cultural heritage.<sup>114</sup>

Jessie Redmon Fauset, the literary editor of *Crisis* between 1919 and 1926, also influenced the younger Harlem Renaissance writers. She reviewed and promoted the works of talented Harlem Renaissance writers such as Langston Hughes, Jean Toomer, Countee Cullen, and Claude McKay. Furthermore, she wrote “some of the renaissance most renowned novels,” including *There Is Confusion* and *Plum Bun: A Novel without a Moral*.<sup>115</sup>

Of other renaissance periodicals, *Opportunity*, established in 1923 by the National Urban League, gained extensive public appeal. Edited by sociologist Charles S. Johnson, *Opportunity* helped the cultural development of the African American community by publishing Harlem Renaissance writers’ and artists’ works. Additionally, the magazine held annual literary contests that brought recognition and rewards to many talented blacks. Additionally, C. S. Johnson organized a historic gathering at Manhattan’s Civic Club. This celebration on March 21, 1924 bolstered the literary productivity of emerging authors, among others, Eric Walrond, Jessie Fauset, Gwendolyn Bennett, Countee Cullen, Langston Hughes, and Alain Locke.<sup>116</sup>

The black press during the Harlem Renaissance had a large following, power and influence. The era’s most popular publications attracted many readers who gradually changed their positions on racial problems, and some of them adopted aggressive, even militant or radical attitudes. Among the issues of the day, black journalists felt most strongly about violence against the African American community, especially lynchings and white mob attacks. “Many black newspapers encouraged blacks to fight back, and they reported on and applauded the actions of those who used force to stand up to white attackers.”<sup>117</sup>

In 1925, philosopher and social critic Alain Locke edited *The New Negro*, a collection of poems, essays and short stories of thirty-four African American contributors and four

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<sup>113</sup> Bloom, *The Harlem Renaissance*, 5-12.

<sup>114</sup> Howes and Slovey, *Harlem Renaissance*, 17.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 17-18.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*; Bloom, *The Harlem Renaissance*, 125 – 127.

<sup>117</sup> Howes and Slovey, *Harlem Renaissance*, 17-18.

whites. Many scholars agree that this collection of Harlem-based culture production represents the start of the “New Negro Movement.”<sup>118</sup> Despite originating from a magazine without interest in arts, *The New Negro* described a post-war arts attitude among blacks. Among others aspects of change, Locke described a more complex life, and the change from rural to urban environments as the main reasons. Furthermore, the mixing of diverse backgrounds, interests and environments allowed for common conditions and problems, leading towards a better amalgamation of African Americans.<sup>119</sup> Locke suggested that the emerging group of intellectuals should guide the “Negro” from “medieval America to modern.” Self-assertiveness and sufficiency together with rejecting old assumptions, were to be the main goals of the “New Negro” race. Locke assumed that the “Negro” based on cultural and historical references would become a “conscious contributor and participant of American civilization.”<sup>120</sup>

Constructing the “New Negro” personality necessitated a heritage rediscovery. African American folk traditions and its importance for American culture were essential in creating the movement foundation. The majority of these rediscovered raw folk materials originated from common African American stock. Among others, Arthur Huff Fauset and Zora Neale Hurston researched and collected folk materials, yet with different approaches. Fauset used an approach without interpretation, simply recognizing interculturality originating from Europe, Asia and Africa. Hurston interpreted the stories with the aid of her imagination, creating sentimental and artificial images. Nevertheless, folk materials helped develop the African American intellectuals’ self-consciousness and self-confidence and laid the foundation for further creations.<sup>121</sup> Of these, Hughes’s early poetic inspiration originated from anonymous black communities and their rhythms, dialects and lifestyles.<sup>122</sup>

Perceiving themselves as a group associated with scholars such as Alian Locke and Charles S. Johnson, the Harlem artists did not found a literature “school” in the traditional sense. These artists (Langston Hughes, Arna Bontemps, Zora Hurston, Rudolph Fisher, Wallace Thurman, Eric Walrond and Jean Toomer, among others) rather followed the trend. Although the lack of a single literary philosophy allowed for diversity,<sup>123</sup> poet Sterling

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<sup>118</sup> Holloway, “Harlem Renaissance Scholars Debate,” 60.

<sup>119</sup> Huggins, *Harlem Renaissance*, 56–59.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.; Holloway, “Harlem Renaissance Scholars Debate,” 60.

<sup>121</sup> Huggins, *Harlem Renaissance*, 72–75.

<sup>122</sup> Bloom, *The Harlem Renaissance*, 50.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 5–7.

Brown identified racial pride expression, African American achiever and hero worship, black race advancement, the African American folk tradition, and self-identity exploration as five main artistic themes. Furthermore, these themes often intertwined in different works, personalities, and ideas.<sup>124</sup>

W.E.B. Du Bois among others, refused “art that did not help to promote equality for black people.” Many black leaders and artists shared the opinion that African Americans should be portrayed in the best possible light. This viewpoint hoped that whites would re-evaluate their opinions and eventually stop discrimination based on race. Due to this belief, many art forms served as a “tool in race-building.” Nevertheless, African Americans had little cultural knowledge prior to the Great Migration. Viewing American culture as “alien to the fresh and rough American,” Europe often served as inspiration. Eager to provide the knowledge, the arts and letters often served just to build a “New Negro” construct that was artificial and contrived.<sup>125</sup>

On the other hand, the new generation of artists, among others Wallace Thurman, Langston Hughes and Richard Bruce Nugent, insisted on portraying the whole African American society with an unbiased approach and opposed the optimism of previous generation. Of these authors, Nella Larsen contrasted the textual optimism of the older literary generation in novels *Passing* and *Quicksand*. Yet, older leaders like Du Bois opposed this raw and honest approach. As a result among other examples, Du Bois optimistically misread *Quicksand* and *Home to Harlem* in his 1928 review of them.<sup>126</sup> Additionally, these artists frequently used jazz and blues music rhythms, Harlem slang and rural dialect. Furthermore, they created a Harlem portrait that included “prostitutes, homosexuals, rent parties, and poverty.”<sup>127</sup> Claude McKay presented Harlem as “the pit of sex and poverty” and a “suffocating ghetto of colour consciousness” in the novel *Home to Harlem*.

Some Harlem Renaissance writers considered the movement a failure. Hughes’s *The Big Sea* and Thurman’s *Infants of the Spring* evaluated the renaissance satirically, even cynically.<sup>128</sup> Furthermore, writers such as Gates criticized discrepancies between reality and cultural reference. Gates notes that some Harlem writers described urban life and cultural references with optimistic and middle-class bias.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Howes and Slovey, *Harlem Renaissance*, 35-38.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 60–65.

<sup>126</sup> English, “Selecting the Harlem Renaissance,” 812-817.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 809.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 810.

## 4.1 Drama

Despite lesser general public appreciation during the Harlem Renaissance compared to musical and literary counterparts, African American theatre provided important views of African American culture. All major figures of the renaissance shared an interest in black drama, despite not directly contributing. Prior to the Harlem Renaissance, black characters usually appeared stereotyped, and thanks to Jim Crow, were often performed by white actors. Of such stereotypes, Georgia Minstrels, founded by Charles Hicks, represented the black character as “childlike, vulgar, lazy, slow-moving, self-indulgent, irresponsible, and always eager for music, food, and sex.” Blacks agreed to play the role for a reasonable payment and acclaim.<sup>130</sup> Furthermore, plays for black audiences predominantly consisted of successful white playwrights’ adaptations. White theatres either provided segregated balconies or banned black audiences. Black playwrights’ plays were scarce. Despite continuous efforts Bob Cole, Will Marion Cook, Paul Lawrence Dunbar, Bert Williams, and George Walker, among others, the expansion of black drama was slow.<sup>131</sup> Furthermore, black playwrights faced difficult circumstances, among others a lack of interest from the commercial stage and white audiences and ambiguity in its definitions.<sup>132</sup>

Nevertheless, following the end of the world war, a play created by African American authors (Flournoy Miller, Aubrey Lyles, Eubie Blake, and Noble Sissle), *Shuffle Along*, initiated an era of black musical revue. Similar black musical revues, among others *Strut Miss Lizzie* (1922), *Seven Eleven* (1922), and *Liza* (1923), followed the trend. Predominantly white audiences on Broadway visited the plays. Nevertheless, Du Bois criticized the approach as, in his vision, black theatre should have been “about us..., by us... near us”<sup>133</sup> A different approach was taken by the Krigwa Players Little Negro Theatre, Harlem based, a purely African American theatrical company. Other Harlem Renaissance theatre groups included the serious drama-focused Negro Experimental Theatre.<sup>134</sup>

Willis Richardson, with repertoire of 42 plays, was perhaps the best known black playwright of the Harlem Renaissance. Ethiopian Art Players presented his critically acclaimed play, *The Chip Woman’s Fortune*, in Harlem, which later became the first black

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<sup>130</sup> Howes and Slovey, *Harlem Renaissance*, 71.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 69-72.; Freda L. Scott, “Black Drama and the Harlem Renaissance,” *Theatre Journal* 37, no. 4 (1985): 428-429.

<sup>132</sup> Scott, “Black Drama and the Harlem Renaissance,” 438-439.

<sup>133</sup> Howes and Slovey, *Harlem Renaissance*, 77-80.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*

serious drama played on a Broadway stage. Of other black plays, Garland Anderson's *Appearances* and Wallace Thurman's *Harlem* made Broadway appearances.<sup>135</sup>

Yet white playwrights also presented plays concerning African Americans, which avoided stereotypical portrayals of black people. Among others, Ridgely Torence, Eugene O'Neill and Paul Green frequently featured acclaimed black actors, including Rose McLendon, Julius Bledsoe, and Abbie Mitchell, and used different approaches towards black stereotypes.

In all, the Harlem Renaissance theatrical scene perhaps lacked the successfulness of musical and literary counterparts. The combination of Broadway-featured black plays and changes in white playwrights' approaches toward blacks created a solid foundation for future black drama. Furthermore, organizations such as the Krigwa Players Little Negro Theatre helped the emerging generation of new black playwrights.<sup>136</sup>

## 4.2 Music

Even though the general public recognized African American jazz and blues music prior to the Harlem Renaissance, the sudden cultural shift affected its development. Additionally, jazz and blues music provided both controversy and inspiration for literary and visual artists. Du Bois criticized the new black musical forms as stereotypical, "uncivilized and vulgar." Nevertheless, many Harlem Renaissance writers, like Langston Hughes, found inspiration in the new forms of black music.<sup>137</sup>

The young form of jazz experienced major growth during the Harlem Renaissance. Prior to the Great Migration, New Orleans, often identified as the birthplace of jazz, hosted influential black musicians. Yet, following the movement trend, many black musicians moved north. Among others, Joe Oliver and Louis Armstrong moved to Chicago and then to New York during the 1920s. Oliver founded the Creole Jazz Band, which became the first black band to make jazz records in 1922. Oliver's next band, the Dixie Syncopators, followed the success with popular songs such as "Canal Street Blues," "New Orleans Stomp," and "Mournful Serenade." Although Oliver's career proved short-lived,<sup>138</sup> his fellow cornet player Louis Armstrong made a permanent impact on jazz. By 1927, Armstrong's band the Stompers produced famous records, among them "Willie the Weeper"

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Scott, "Black Drama and the Harlem Renaissance," 438–439.

<sup>137</sup> Howes and Slovey, *Harlem Renaissance*, 80–85.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 85–92.

and “Weary Blues,” and performed in Harlem’s famous night clubs. Additionally, Armstrong performed on Broadway as well as in several European tours. Despite the success, some critics accused Armstrong of fueling white stereotypes. Nevertheless, Armstrong remains one of the most universally-recognized black artists. Of other famous figures of the Harlem jazz scene, Fletcher Henderson and Duke Ellington helped originate the popular “Big Band” sound, pianists such as Charles Roberts, James P. Johnson and Thomas Waller altered and accompanied the development of piano-playing techniques and styles.<sup>139</sup>

Besides the jazz evolution, blues music evolved as well. The blues musician and publisher W.C. Handy established the standard twelve-bar blues musical structure, with lyrics written in a three-line rhymed pattern based on southern local musicians. Furthermore, Handy’s influence shifted some popular music towards blues-altered ballads. Along with popular songs like “Joe Turner Blues,” “Beale Street Blues,” and “Harlem Blues,” Handy also arranged folk songs and ballads. Of other influential blues artists, Ma Rainey, among the first blues-performing women, developed a unique singing style combining rural blues and urban sophistication. Another singer, Mamie Smith, created the “Crazy Blues,” the first solo recordings by an African American artist, which later became largely successful. Other female musicians such as Ethel Waters, Clara Smith, and Victoria Spivey further influenced the development with unique approaches.<sup>140</sup>

Nevertheless, some Harlem Renaissance leaders hoped that African Americans would express their unique experiences through classical music, considered a “high” art form, superior to jazz and blues. Black folk music and spirituals provided the foundation for the majority of black classical pieces. Prominent creations include Harry T. Burleigh’s *Plantation Melodies for Violin and Piano* (1916) and Clarence Cameron White’s violin piece *From the Cotton Fields* (1925). Furthermore, William Grant Still composed symphonic music and ballets, including *Darker America* (1924), *Africa* (1930), *La Guiablesse* (1927) and *Sahdji* (1930). Among the black operas of the period were Robert Nathaniel Dett’s *Chariot Jubilee* (1921), based on the spiritual “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot,” Harry Lawrence Freeman’s *Vendetta* (1923) and *Voodoo* (1928), and Clarence Cameron White’s *Oanga* (1930–1931).<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 85-92.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 90-98.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 98-105.

The National Association of Negro Musicians, formed in 1919, promoted African American composers and performers. Of these artists, Roland Hayes performed at New York's Town Hall accompanied by the Negro String Quartet, and classical baritone singer Jules Bledsoe performed on Broadway, as did opera singers Caterina Jarboro and Lillian Evanti. Furthermore, the 1928 premiere of *Yamekraw* played by an all-black orchestra and composed by black musicians successfully presented spirituals as well as blues songs at Carnegie Hall.<sup>142</sup>

Among the important influences of black music was the interaction with white musicians. White composers such as Aaron Copland, Frances Poulenc, Erik Satie, Igor Stravinsky, and Maurice Ravel incorporated elements of jazz and blues into their works. Additionally, composer George Gershwin and jazz musicians such as Irving Berlin, Paul Whiteman, Benny Goodman, and Artie Shaw frequently visited Harlem for inspiration.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.; Louise Burton, "Fascinatin' rhythm: When Ravel Met Gershwin in Jazz Age New York," Chicago Symphony Orchestra, May 26, 2015, accessed February 14, 2017, <http://csosoundsandstories.org/fascinatin-rhythm-when-ravel-met-gershwin-in-jazz-age-new-york/>

## 5 END OF THE FIRST GREAT MIGRATION PHASE

The Great Depression and the “New Deal” reforms broke the “twenties mood” and slowed the migration stream. “National income dropped by 50 percent and unemployment rose to an estimated 25 percent of the total labor force.” Due to the constant migration, black urban unemployment reached over 50 percent, more than twice the rate of whites. By 1933, African Americans had minimal chances to find agriculture or industry jobs. Furthermore, white workers fought against black labor with rallies and slogans such as “No Jobs for Niggers Until Every White Man Has a Job” and “Niggers, back to the cotton fields—city jobs are for white folks.” Additionally, New Deal agencies initially discriminated against blacks. Together with constantly rising rents, living standards in many African American ghettos rapidly declined.<sup>144</sup>

Nevertheless, Roosevelt's inauguration brought some attitude changes toward African Americans, among them, an anti-lynching bill. Yet, Roosevelt failed to protect blacks against “discriminatory employers, agency officials, and local whites.” Furthermore, some anti-racist movements appeared, such as one based around anthropologist Franz Boas, which encouraged the lowering of racial barriers in American society. Moreover, African Americans developed their own “new deal,” including mutual children care, emotional support and family resource management.<sup>145</sup>

Many scholars consider the start of the Great Depression as the end of the first phase of the Great Migration. In the second phase, between 1940 and 1960, approximately three million African Americans left the South, in an exodus almost twice as large as that of 1910-1930. Yet, the first phase created an important foundation for African American urbanization and cultural development.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Joe W. Trotter, “African Americans, Impact of the Great Depression on,” U.S. History in Context, 20014, accessed January 23, 2017, <http://link.galegroup.com/apps/doc/CX3404500017/UHIC?u=sand55832&xid=c5d29dd4>.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora*, 12-17.

## CONCLUSION

In 1900, only 10 percent of the entire African American population lived in the northern part of the United States. Although black urban migration had occurred before, a combination of push and pull factors dramatically increased the flow of migrants between 1910 and 1930. Southern social conditions such as Jim Crow measures, poor education and the threat of racial violence, combined with a negative economic situation, affected by natural disasters and a declining demand for African American labor, provided incentives for migration. At the same time, World War I increased the need for black labor in northern industry, providing the economic motivation for migration. Additionally, an overly-optimistic view of the North sustained the interest and motivation.

African Americans seemingly viewed the Great Migration as a God-ordained and God-blessed escape from racial oppression, segregation and political injustice. Nevertheless, the expectation of “the Promised Land” they sought was often far from reality. Due to the African American population growth in the Northern cities, competition among the migrants for employment and living space increased. Whites often used violence and artificially raised rents in order to keep the blacks within the ghetto borders. Little possibility to move beyond these borders resulted in overcrowding and serious sanitation issues. Possibilities for black employment were limited and blacks usually only had access to the least desirable jobs. Additionally, African American migrants predominantly attended overcrowded and substandard schools. Southern racial segregation found its way into northern cities and made racism a national issue.

The racism and prejudice led to interracial conflicts, which further aggravated the racial situation. The Ku Klux Klan reappeared, and its numbers surged as a result of the newfound popularity related to the 1915 release of D.W. Griffith’s movie, *The Birth of a Nation*. Spasms of violence occurred across the country and culminated in racial riots, such as those in East St. Louis and Chicago. During “the Red Summer” of 1919, race riots occurred in at least 22 U.S. cities and towns, and approximately 74 blacks were lynched.

Nevertheless, African Americans, eager to prove worthiness and social position, became more culturally active, politically aggressive and urbane. African American writing, arts, teaching and modified history approaches emerged. This era, known as “the Harlem Renaissance,” motivated black artists, musicians and writers towards a new black identity construction. Some leading figures, among others W.E.B. Du Bois, believed that African Americans would achieve a proper position in American society via cultural recognition.

Others, such as Marcus Garvey, used radical approaches to gain popularity and power. Nevertheless, this era marked a great progress in black literature, art, and music and laid the foundation for future cultural development. Furthermore, the “New Negro” movement represents a crucial point in the newly-emerged African American mentality.

The migration decreased in the 1930s due to the Great Depression, and many scholars consider it the end of the Great Migration’s first phase. Despite that the start of the Second World War marked beginning of an exodus that lasted until 1970 and was almost twice as large, the Great Migration of 1915-1930 created an essential foundation for African American urbanization and cultural development and left behind a great demographic change. Additionally, it gave people the opportunity for change, together with cultural equality and freedom, which are main pillars of the current democratic society.

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