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A COMPANION TO THE

HARLEM RENAISSANCE

EDITED BY

CHERENE SHERRARD-JOHNSON

WILEY Blackwell
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Introduction: Harlem as Shorthand: The Persistent Value of the Harlem Renaissance

Cherene Sherrard-Johnson

This Companion to the Harlem Renaissance provides a comprehensive guide to the literature and culture of a period of unprecedented artistic production in the African diasporic community of the United States. It includes cutting-edge work from eminent and emerging scholars about the genesis, aesthetics, genres, historical contexts, and lasting influence of the Harlem Renaissance on African American, African diasporic, and American literary traditions. Arising from the longer New Negro movement, which marked a transformative period in African American life and culture, the Harlem Renaissance, at its core, was an era of artistic activism most scholars agree began in the early twentieth century and waned prior to the Second World War. Harlem Renaissance studies are marked by vigorous debates about the relationship between race and art, history, gender, class, sexuality, politics, sociology, and philosophy. A Companion to the Harlem Renaissance unites diverse scholarship resulting from the collective study of this first, global, Black Arts Movement and its enduring influence. Building on the most innovative scholarship of the past century, this Companion helps cement the era as essential within American and African American literary and cultural studies. Broad in scope and comprehensive in coverage, the collection combines a thorough grounding in the primary texts and critical contexts of the Harlem Renaissance with the unique perspectives of scholars whose careers have been devoted to the study of this inter-artistic movement. Both reflective and forward-looking, it establishes the lasting significance of the Harlem Renaissance over the course of the twentieth and into the twenty-first centuries.

In an African American literary discourse dominated by explorations of trauma, perseverance, and vulnerability, Harlem’s reverberation has always represented
something special: an optimism intrinsic to the vanguard. As Robert Bone writes: “Renaissance Harlem is a place of love and laughter, not of struggle and oppression” (1958, 66). Notably, he does not reverse the terms, but identifies a “Harlemesque quality” in the literature arising from the distinctive “racial atmosphere which gave the Harlem School its revolutionary character” (66–67; emphasis original). In Langston Hughes’s postscript to his memoir *The Big Sea*, the era previously conceived as the New Negro and/or Black Renaissance collides with what Bone termed the “Harlem School” to become the Harlem Renaissance: “That spring for me (and, I guess, all of us) was the end of the Harlem Renaissance” (Hughes 1940, 334). That he uses the term at the finale of his autobiographical treatise resonates with Nathan Huggins’s endorsement and promotion of the Harlem Renaissance through his eponymous study as a lament that mourns what might have been and commemorates what was. Seven years later, Hughes’s close friend, fellow artist and collaborator Arna Bontemps, would publish his own account of “The Harlem Renaissance” in *The Saturday Review* (Bontemps 1947). Along with journalist St. Clair Bourne and the historian John Hope Franklin, surviving artists and emergent scholarship would begin to follow Hughes’s lead substituting “Harlem” for “New Negro.” Some, like poet and critic Sterling Brown, famously resisted: “when you say that I belong to the ‘Harlem renaissance,’ you are insulting me, but if you say I belong to the ‘New Negro Renaissance’ then I will feel … proud” (1982, 81).

Ultimately, it was the influence of Huggins’s study that would “virtually invent” the Harlem Renaissance as a subfield of American and African American literary and intellectual history (Arnold Rampersad qtd in Fearnley 2014, 80). Huggins—in claiming what was in the 1970s an incongruent label; in resurrecting Harlem as the “capital of the race” or the “intellectual center of the New Negro”—challenged the locale’s status as a ghetto by focusing on “[w]hat made Harlem special” (1971, 13). Huggins’s prominent book of 1971, *Harlem Renaissance*, coupled with his institutional prominence as the W.E.B. Du Bois Professor at Harvard, encouraged subsequent foundational historiographies and literary criticism to carry the Harlem Renaissance banner. However, scholars such as David Levering Lewis, George Hutchinson, Houston A. Baker, Jr, and Cheryl Wall all distanced themselves from Huggins’s pronouncement of the movement as a failure.³

**The Long Harlem Renaissance**

With the transnational and diasporic turn in African American studies, questions regarding the name have resurfaced. Current scholars voice the same concerns raised by Sterling Brown: is Harlem’s geography too limiting? These useful debates have broadened the scope and periodization of the era in compelling ways. The extension to the long Harlem Renaissance encourages expansiveness without sacrificing the geographic specificity of the moment. As a field-defining term, the Harlem Renaissance remains useful, not only because of its currency in academic and popular culture, but because
of its suppleness. Just as scholars of American literature have lengthened the chronology of the nineteenth century to include the cataclysmic events of the French/Haitian revolutions and the First World War, so too have other scholars productively conceived of a long Harlem Renaissance: an era that includes the vibrant literary production of the late 1890s, early 1900s, and the Depression-era writing of authors who emerged in the late 1930s (after the heyday of the 1920s).

Following the globalizing trend, in the shrewdly titled *Escape from New York: The New Negro Renaissance beyond Harlem* (2013), co-editors Davarian L. Baldwin and Minkah Makalani resituate the Harlem Renaissance—and the New Negro movement—in global political and cultural currents. This *Companion* is similarly driven by the impulse to recover broader New Negro experiences by placing the Harlem Renaissance in its proper global contexts, thus demonstrating the value as well as the evolving and transformative elements of the field. *Escape from New York* focuses on New Negroes from a national and transnational perspective. (One is hard-pressed to discern a clear divergence, however, from cross-currents already present in Harlem Renaissance studies.) As the Harlem Renaissance becomes more global, is there a risk of evacuating the “brand” of the movement’s particular resonance, not just within academic circles, but in global popular culture that recognizes and engages—virtually and visually—with the era as a unique period in US cultural and intellectual history?

In the special issue of *Modernism/Modernity* (2013, 20.3), co-editors Adam McKible and Suzanne Churchill investigate how Harlem Renaissance studies have transformed new modernist studies. What was once a subfield of a subfield has now generated far-reaching implications. Yet, how sacrosanct is the primacy of Harlem as we move in new transnational directions? Do we risk absorption into an inclusive, acquisitive modernism that desires invigoration without transformation? In other words: what is the persistent, as well as the perceived, value of #HarlemRenaissance on Twitter, for example? This *Companion* offers multiple answers.

The glitter of Harlem (romanticized and restrictive though it may be) has a particular resonance that scholars of its visual culture have been quick to recognize. Drawn by the very scholarship and art scrutinized in this volume, Sharifa Rhodes-Pitts’s memoir *Harlem Is Nowhere* provides a personal history that simultaneously engages past, present, and future Harlem in a nostalgic palimpsest, demonstrating how the space commemorates, reinvents, and capitalizes on its status as “the spiritual capital of black America” (2011, 7). Rhodes-Pitts cites Harlem Renaissance art and scholarship at almost every turn. She accesses a cosmopolitan Harlem through James Van Der Zee’s visionary photography: “Harlem is a province of extravagance, culture and high society;” for her, these images are “antidote to the destitute, shell-shocked image then attached to the neighborhood and formed a new iconography of its best days” (2011, 32). Although many of the era’s luminaries hailed from elsewhere, their material and figurative encounters with the materiality of Harlem streets—and the art, writing, performances that flow from and through them—were transformative. The rhetorical draw of Harlem’s specific geography persists in its depiction as a “mecca,” “city of refuge,” and “paradise.” It is precisely because of its renaissance
brand that the invocation of Harlem continues simultaneously to conjoin utopia and lament. Despite her best efforts to resist, Rhodes-Pitts’s memoir locates her as one of many contemporary artists and writers who continue to be drawn under Harlem’s spell. Following sentiments expressed in this volume’s first chapter, rather than nowhere, one has to concur with Carla L. Peterson, a contributor in this volume, who claims that Harlem is everywhere.

Extending the established boundaries of the Harlem Renaissance also means engaging in innovative recovery work—distinct, though not entirely separate, from the speculative efforts of black feminist scholars to unearth literary histories and construct theoretical frameworks for the reception of nineteenth-century black women’s writing. New recovery efforts (anthologies, biographies, essay collections, republished material) are rapidly altering the ever-expanding terrain of Harlem Renaissance discourse, with emphasis on the how the locality of upper Manhattan (namely, above 96th Street) has been transformed by hemispheric and transnational considerations of its literature. Another reason to preserve the Harlem Renaissance brand is that its persistent popularity is vital to preventing these recovered texts, biographies, and histories from going back out of print, a frequent occurrence with recovered texts if there is no relevant interpretative framework or sufficient critical reception and incorporation. Recovery also means recalling ambivalent relationships, such as the continually fraught role interracial patronage played in the politics, aesthetics, cultural infrastructure, and collaborative work of the era. Whereas interracial coalitions could be artistically generative, as in the case of Jean Toomer and the American pragmatists Waldo Frank and Sherwood Anderson, other interactions, like Zora Neale Hurston and Langston Hughes’s repressive dealings with Charlotte Osgood Mason, could be stifling. Alternatively, the intimate, editorial exchanges between Carl Van Vechten and Nella Larsen resulted in publication and promotion.6

These types of archival and conceptual recoveries dominate the Companion’s cutting-edge contributions.7 As exciting as the headline-grabbing discovery of an unpublished Claude McKay novel is (Cloutier 2013), equally significant is the scholarship emerging in response to the reprints that have brought Bruce Nugent’s sensual prose to a new generation of readers and scholars who have gone beyond the “gay Harlem renaissance,” to employ “queer of color” methodologies that grasp the aesthetic fluidity, the sway and vibe, of Harlem Renaissance salon culture.8 In this volume, Shane Vogel’s sensuous Harlem Renaissance provides the lens through which to view Soyica Diggs Colbert’s reading of Aida Overton Walker’s performances in the “Salon Culture” section. He illustrates how a sensate awareness “(re)imagines the desiring black subject in the New Negro movement and remains faithful to the queer Harlem Renaissance’s resistance to fixed and fixing racial-sexual norms.” Escaping from Harlem includes crossing hemispheric boundaries with Michael Soto to Cuba, Mexico, and other parts of Latin America in order to expand Langston Hughes’s archive. Or, exploring the Italian vistas within Zara Wright’s race melodrama as Rynetta Davis reveals the Chicago club woman’s cosmopolitan imagination.
This Companion also follows scholars beginning to move “Beyond Harlem” through new media. “Digital Harlem,” a searchable website, provides maps that reveal the intersections of the economically and ethnically diverse communities inhabiting Harlem during specific time frames. Prompted by the desire for a digital utopia based in the past, such forays represent new directions connecting Harlem Renaissance studies to the digital humanities. Journeying “beyond” via Virtual or Digital Harlem is another way of expanding the conceptual limits of the era while still acknowledging the city’s specific landscape. This yearning for geographic precision exists in a productive tension with the desire to break boundaries marked by articulations of escape and expansion. Naming reflects this precision: a twenty-first-century flâneuse, Rhodes-Pitts notes the different orientations and investments of the denizens who inhabit and move through Harlem. A tour guide, she recalls, “had a habit of calling Lenox Avenue, Fifth Avenue” (2011, 7). Acknowledging such slippage is important in Harlem’s rapidly changing socio-economic urban cityscape—one in which local color inhabitants vital to its tourist charm are endangered.

The Companion responds specifically to debates about expansion by considering the Harlem Renaissance within the broader spectrum of African American, black diasporic, and American literature. These essays engage such questions as: Was there a change between the amount and quality of the writing produced during the 1920s as opposed to the 1930s? How do we understand writers who moved through Harlem, but neither lived there nor published during the interwar period? How did the aesthetics of the Chicago Renaissance writers differ from those of their counterparts in Harlem? Essays also consistently contextualize the literature in relationship to historical factors such as the onset of the Great Depression and the Second World War. Ultimately, the broadly ambitious Companion to the Harlem Renaissance gathers rigorous scholarship to consider the era in its transatlantic and hemispheric contexts, exceeding the scope of collections featuring a more particularized focus. Sheer expansiveness and comprehensiveness, built from a convergence of literary historiography, criticism, and theory as well as interdisciplinary and inter-artistic crosscurrents, distinguishes this volume.

A Salon Anthology

Unlike conventional visual representations of the era, the Companion’s cover does not evoke the bodies of black subjects; instead, it recalls the spaces out of which black agents produced their art and intellectual discourse. The salon, then, functions as a space of labor and leisure. A’lelia Walker’s Villa Lewaro was one of many known and unknown spaces that generated and sustained the cultural production and discourse of the era. In a sense, this anthology is first and foremost an invitation to get gussied up and overstay your welcome. The view provided is necessarily voyeuristic: readers must mingle with the hosts and honored guests as well as the interlopers and party-crashers. In the Harlem Renaissance, the opulence and extravagance of the ballroom are always juxtaposed with an inseparable counterpart—the street. In fact, many past and present
authors have written about the “two Harlems” that co-exist in myriad relationships to each other (Bontemps 1945, 167). If the salon is the heart of this anthology, imagine the unseen, adjacent corridors as a hall of “darkening mirrors,” where Harlem is refracted in multiple directions and dimensions. Harlem is shorthand for the ticket, but the traversed landscape is vast.\(^\text{13}\)

What makes this latest iteration of Harlem Renaissance discourse compelling are the conversations occurring within and between the five sections of this volume: “Foundations,” “Spotlight: Readings and Genre,” “Salon Culture: The Visual, Performative, and Expressive Arts,” “Interracialism,” and “Beyond Harlem: New Geographies and Lasting Influences.” As editor, I would like to think of myself as the host of a “rent party” in a swanky or seedy Harlem brownstone or Washington, DC rowhouse, where experts, established and emerging, engage, argue, and retreat to their corners to write in-depth treatises on their subject.\(^\text{14}\) Imagine this Companion as a virtual salon: readers either tarry or pass through a series of interconnected rooms and breezeways privy to informed conversations and debates at this exciting moment in the early twenty-first century, nearly one hundred years after the Harlem Renaissance’s inauguration. The Companion’s structure both reflects and addresses the historical, geographic, and aesthetic debates characterizing the era. Rather than relying solely on chronology, the historicized sections reflect the sense of cross-fertilization and intellectual exchange that marked the era’s innovative style.

“Foundations” provides readers with a solid entrée into the period, its concerns, key questions, themes, and forms. As the essays by Carla L. Peterson, Andréa N. Williams, Jayna Brown, and Erin D. Chapman indicate, the centrality of Harlem to the New Negro Renaissance was neither a foregone conclusion nor a fixed assumption. These four chapters address the historical, philosophic, and aesthetic underpinnings that led to the self-conscious flowering known alternately, but not necessarily interchangeably, as the New Negro or Harlem Renaissance. Scholars agree that the movement began in the early part of the twentieth century; most position the starting point just after the First World War and the Red Summer of 1919.\(^\text{15}\) Authors locate how historical events such as the Great Migration from the South to the North spurred the Harlem Renaissance. Peterson takes up the central question “Why Harlem?” by providing a deep genealogy of how Manhattan’s bohemian culture co-existed with and fostered links between artistic and political activism. Williams’s “Postbellum, Pre-Harlem” asserts that proper comprehension of the era requires a consideration of writers associated with the literary 1890s—commonly referred to as “postbellum/pre-Harlem”—such as Paul Laurence Dunbar, Charles W. Chesnutt, Pauline E. Hopkins, and Frances Ellen Watkins Harper. She illustrates how their interracial collaborations with white litterateurs like William Dean Howells flourished into a fuller patronage system during the Harlem Renaissance proper. Brown’s “Harlem Nights” establishes how early black performance culture informed the construction and promotion of New Negro culture. She identifies the “nightclub” as a “contested terrain,” a “dive culture,” existing in productive tension with the salon culture so critical to the ideological debates and cross-genre, inter-artistic exchange that would become the movement’s hallmarks.
Finally, Chapman’s “The New Negro and the New South” reminds us that the New Negro was not exclusively a phenomenon of the urban North. Many New Negro artists constructed the South as the foil against which they shaped their identities, racial solidarity, and vision of freedom, but they also acknowledged that their “progressive vision of racial advancement” hinged on a complex relationship with “the burgeoning New South.” Though often figured as a site from which to escape, the South was also familiar home, a “site of rememory,” so palpable that one could still experience the “South in the City” (Williams 1982).

Well versed in the history and antecedents of the era, the midsections of the Companion encourage multiple conceptual journeys. Readers interested in a specific author can peruse and pinpoint the in-depth treatments found in the spotlight sections, while those drawn to the artistic exchange and collaboration fostered by the salon culture of the era can read about Kirsten Pai Buick’s treatise on Harlem sculptors, or “listen” to Lisa Hollenbach’s innovative exegesis of sound in Langston Hughes’s recordings. A cluster of essays represent well the emergent interdisciplinary field of performance studies, and recognize the era’s fluidity in addition to the significance of its expressive arts on literature.

The “Spotlight: Readings and Genre” section works to disrupt what cultural critic Erica R. Edwards terms the “charismatic scenario” (2012, xv) of the black male artist and theorist as a leading figure in the Harlem Renaissance. The spotlight essays refute the notion of the “great man” artist and shy away from reproducing the corollary narrative of black women as literary midwives. Instead, this section centralizes the work of so-called minor or marginal writers alongside essays rethinking the roles of instantly recognized figures such as Zora Neale Hurston and Hughes. Here readers find mavericks, modernists and middlebrows—all figures who challenge assumptions regarding which artist, and which genre, best exemplifies the quintessential Harlem Renaissance luminary. This section does not feature all the usual suspects. For instance, Jean Toomer, who has always occupied an uneasy space within the constellations of Harlem literati but nonetheless has achieved canonical status as the most modernist of Harlem Renaissance writers, does not appear under the “spotlight.” Rather, Michele Elam and Gary Edward Holcomb consider his work in the section on “Interracialism,” while Margo Natalie Crawford examines Cane as prophetic text of the Black Arts Movement in “Beyond Harlem.”

The personae of the Harlem Renaissance were true “Renaissance” men and women; they took on myriad career roles during their lifetimes and often wrote and/or created art in multiple genres. These single-author essays highlight their subjects’ versatility by illuminating their understudied or off-genre work. Maureen Honey continues her groundbreaking recovery of Harlem Renaissance women’s poetry as “Sapphic modernism” in Angelina Grimké’s oft-misunderstood love poetry. Honey removes the color line between Anglo-Modernism and Harlem Renaissance poetry, illustrating a cutting-edge, modernist aesthetic that blends explorations of female sexuality and same-sex desire. Verner D. Mitchell and Cynthia Davis’s co-authored bio-critical treatment of literary cousins Dorothy West and Helene Johnson follows the city as a
modernist trope in their fiction and poetry, respectively. As members of the “younger
generation” of the Harlem Renaissance, attentiveness to West and Johnson allows us
to discern links between Boston and Harlem as modernist locales. Rynetta Davis turns
the spotlight to the Midwest, recovering Zara Wright as a literary foremother to the
Chicago Renaissance, demonstrating the aesthetic continuities and variances between
these two Afro-cosmopolitan centers. Belinda Wheeler positions Gwendolyn Bennett’s
work as a novelist, columnist, short-story writer, and illustrator who cultivated a rich
print culture key to the Harlem Renaissance’s ethos of debate and cross-genre exchange.
Kathy Glass takes up questions of spirituality and religiosity often overlooked in
Larsen’s fictive narratives of passing. In “Nella Larsen’s Spiritual Strivings,” Glass pro-
vides insight into black women’s complex spiritual and psychological negotiations in
the modern world in the work of one of the era’s most celebrated, yet mysterious and
enigmatic, novelists.

Ivy G. Wilson admits that George Schuyler would only grudgingly agree to answer
in this roll-call of Harlem Renaissance luminaries. Fittingly, Wilson reads Schuyler as
“The New Negro Iconoclast” whose satires and whip-sharp wit modeled a uniquely
experimental mode of political critique. Sonya Posmentier proposes Sterling Brown’s
criticism, alongside his poetry, as a blueprint for cultivating New Negro readership.
(It is quite a pleasure to think of this maverick as a “Dean of African American letters”
at the crossroads between the “Black”/“Anglo” reading practices.) Jennifer Chang
reads Claude McKay’s pastoral aesthetic in his collection \textit{Harlem Shadows} (1922) as
both provocation and cure for his wanderlust, a mode for constructing a “poetic space
of cultural belonging.” In “Betwixt and between: Zora Neale Hurston In—and
Out—of Harlem,” Hurston expert Carla Kaplan analyzes the irony of Hurston’s
iconicity as the Harlem Renaissance novelist (and her recent appearance as a Google
Doodle!) given how little she resided in Harlem. Finally, Elizabeth M. Sheehan
examines Jessie Redmon Fauset’s fiction and nonfiction as politically progressive
experimentations with genre that exceeded the confines of domesticity to intervene in
the international dynamics of African American art and politics.

“Salon Culture: The Visual, Performative, and Expressive Arts” explores the inter-
artistic exchange that occurs as a result of the salon culture and exhibitions fostered
during the era. Essays in this section focus on actual salons, in Harlem and abroad,
such as the literary teas held by Jessie Redmon Fauset in Harlem and Georgia Douglas
Johnson in Washington, DC, as well as the nature of artistic exchange evidenced in
European and American modernist art and writing that arose from informal and formal
exchanges occurring in private/public circles, including Gertrude Stein’s home in
Paris. Topics in this section foreground the influence of music, dance, and the visual
arts on the literary and artistic culture of the era. andré m. carrington and Vogel both
locate the salon as a site of sensate pleasure and intellectual rigor. Vogel offers an
alternative account of sexuality and queer culture that turns toward the possibilities of
feeling, sensation, and perception—the sensuous—to imagine new experiences of
black pleasure and desire in the 1920s. carrington’s spatial analysis locates the artistic
cross-fertilization occurring among the New Negro intelligentsia in the salon, a space
of “cultural edification” that simultaneously functions as a gatekeeping mechanism that shifted “the cultural politics of American and black diasporic cultures.” Colbert’s “Changing Optics” extends Jayna Brown’s assessment of early black performance culture by focusing on Harlem Renaissance theater and precisely honing in on how Hughes and Hurston’s dramatic endeavors shaped bodily performances of paradoxical blackness. Hollenbach’s investigation of the sonic resonances of Hughes’s “The Weary Blues” goes beyond studies of the musicality of the Harlem Renaissance, illustrating Hughes’s versatility with genre while pinpointing sound recording as a new dimension to the technologies of the era. Art historian Buick explores the vibrant visual culture of the era through the gendered “politics of the parlor” at play in such works as May Howard Jackson’s sculpture Mulatto Mother and Child.

The section on “Interracialism” complicates the role of patronage during the Harlem Renaissance by considering not only artistic relationships but also philosophical and political debates about identity, authenticity, and mixed-race ideology. As carrington writes: “the charged atmosphere of salon environments where racial boundaries became affixed to exploitative dynamics … made patronage an ambivalent undertaking for all parties.” The nature of interracial collaboration has been nuanced by numerous studies of black/white partnerships that go beyond the mentor/mentee model and range from the salvific and romantic to the parasitic. J. Martin Favor’s “Authenticity and the Boundaries of Blackness” considers the Hughes/Schuyler debate along a continuum of discussions of black aesthetic diversity. Taking for granted the ways in which “our ideas of race are forged within and bounded by a variety of social concepts” he reads the “norms and ideologies of racial authenticity” as a “kind of disciplinary structure, ideas which we internalize and via which we regulate the action of others and ourselves.” Favor astutely asserts that even as the “social and psychological hierarchies” of racial discourse are difficult to overcome, artists, theorists, and ideologues attacked “racialized injustices from every possible angle.” Holcomb’s overview, “Black Marxism and the Literary Left,” centers the Harlem Renaissance in relationship to the “New Red Negro” and the popular front. Of particular relevance is the intersection of Holcomb’s exploration of Claude McKay’s “queer black Marxism” and Jennifer Chang’s reading of McKay’s poem “Enslaved.” Elam’s “Light, Bright, and Damn Near White” situates Toomer and Du Bois within the new mixed-race studies. Citing the Harlem Renaissance’s “fierce interest” in race-mixing as a “crucible for thinking about ‘mixed race’ both as an artistic theme and as a lived experience,” she explores how these authors anticipated contemporary rhetoric around ethnic ambiguity while using their art to generate social change.

Before exiting the volume, readers of the section “Beyond Harlem: New Geographies and Lasting Influences” are encouraged to think beyond the aesthetic, conceptual, national, and geographical boundaries of the era. This Companion treats the Harlem Renaissance as a global movement of the African/black diaspora and this particular section is a guide for traversing complex local/global binaries by considering regionalism and internationalism in the same vein. In addition to expanding conventional periodization to include other US cities, the northern and southern hemispheres,
pan-African affiliations, and even cyberspace, “Beyond Harlem” addresses questions concerning the era’s originality, cohesiveness, and lasting influence. Going beyond the transatlantic turn that has explored the Harlem Renaissance in Europe, this section takes readers to Ethiopia, South America, and, finally, into the digital realm of Virtual Harlem. First Soto traces Langston Hughes’s Latin American career across the borderlands and into the domain of Hemispheric Studies in “Mapping the Harlem Renaissance in the Americas.” Soto’s consideration of Hughes’s translations as transnational collaborations significantly highlights the Latino dimensions of the black diaspora. Nadia Nurhussein explores the “call of Ethiopia” as a “hypnotic beacon or homing device” in the poetry of the later Harlem Renaissance. More than simply a romantic metaphor, Nurhussein analyzes a deeply politicized poetics of engagement with global resistance to imperialism. Vaughn Rasberry recovers the supposed “lost” decade of the 1940s as an era where artists continued to forge collaborative bonds with the literary left and popular front throughout the interwar period. Rasberry demonstrates that rather than considering the period directly following the Harlem Renaissance as a decade of decline, we might instead view it as a decade of progress justifying the scope of the Companion’s argument for a “long” Harlem Renaissance. Crawford’s “The Aesthetics of Anticipation” disrupts oppositional views of the Harlem Renaissance and Black Arts Movement (BAM) by illustrating how certain Harlem Renaissance texts can “pass” as BAM literature. Crawford positions playwright Marita Bonner’s call in her experimental play Is It Time? as a prophetic echo of the BAM’s temporal insistence on “Nation Time.” This evocative essay demonstrates the inextricable interdependence of these two monumental movements of artistic activism in African American culture. Finally, the concluding essay of the Companion transports readers off the page and into the digital realm. Bryan Carter’s “Virtual Harlem” describes the launching of Virtual Harlem and Virtual Mo’Martre through Second Life as site for experiential learning, where students, readers, and tourists experience an augmented reality. Through an avatar and accurate mapping of the city’s geography and architecture, one can lindy-hop in a virtual cotton club or engage Du Bois in stimulating conversation.

Conclusion: Harlem Style/Harlem Toile

As the Harlem community of Manhattan continues to undergo dynamic shifts in population, it remains a wellspring of inspiration for imaginative artists. Stirred by the historical themes and pastoral motifs of eighteenth-century traditional French toile, designer Sheila Bridges created Harlem Toile: a unique wallpaper featuring playfully irreverent scenes—black and white illustrations emerge from a solid color background—evoking curiosity and pleasure. Bridges merges iconography from the antebellum United States, eighteenth-century France, and 1980s urban street culture. Dancers cake-walk to the music of a boom-box, three women engage in an antebellum toilette, while another competes in an equestrian relay that references the sinister comparison of human property (chattel) to livestock. The grace and elegance of nature,
French architectural design, and the romantic intimacy of a satirized pastoral picnic (watermelon and chicken legs!) comprise a tableau that signifies brilliantly on the salon aesthetics of the Harlem Renaissance.

Harlem Toile is the essence of Harlem Renaissance style: a persistent aesthetic at the forefront of African American art and culture. If the Harlem Renaissance is, as George Hutchinson asserts (2007), the most influential movement in African American literary history, it infuses explorations of its multi-genre, multimedia scope with “Harlem style,” an Afro-cosmopolitan aesthetic that moves along a historical continuum, fusing pleasure, excess, nostalgia, and modernist lampooning to address and articulate the aesthetic challenges facing New Negro Renaissance artists.

I imagine Harlem Toile as the wallpaper in Jessie Redmon Fauset’s parlor and Georgia Douglas Johnson’s foyer, the accompanying décor to the conversations, collaborations, and inter- and intraracial exchanges that were vital and sustaining to the era’s artistic production, its “vibe.” Carl Van Vechten and Fania Marinoff might have commissioned Harlem Toile to celebrate the publication of their protégé’s latest novel. The inanimate, florid witness to the moment when Irene Redfield drops her teacup upon the realization of Clare Kendry’s scheme to replace her as wife, mother, and New Negro socialite in a similar soirée dramatized in Nella Larsen’s novel *Passing*. Members of the Dark Tower Society held their meetings in A’lelia Walker’s 136th Street town house in a room painted with poetry, including Langston Hughes’s “The Weary Blues,” and Countee Cullen’s “The Dark Tower,” from which the literary club derived its name. The style and décor of the visual and literary culture of the Harlem Renaissance are more than window dressing. They are part and parcel of the era’s aesthetic ambitions. Architects and artists simultaneously perform and produce their “vogue,” leaving reverberations of their urgent pleasure and political imperatives in nostalgic traces of the Harlem Renaissance evident in the art and aesthetics of twenty-first-century Harlem style. Readers, I invite you to an unprecedented “salon” anthology, your *Companion* to all aspects of this thrilling journey into a fraught and fascinating moment in American literary culture.

**Notes**

In addition to thanking all my contributors, I am especially grateful to Gene Andrew Jarrett for his generous and essential feedback on this Introduction. Two graduate research assistants, Ruiling Erica Zhang and Jacqulyn Teoh, offered keen insight and organizational support over the long process of sifting, winnowing, and fine-tuning, that led to this final project.

1 Bone distinguished the “the Harlem School” from the “Negro Renaissance,” and a “rear guard” who “made the last serious attempt to orient Negro fiction toward bourgeois ideals,” although, like Huggins soon after, he would confine movement to “an unspectacular demise” (Bone 1958, 107).

2 For a comprehensive historiography of the term, see Fearnley 2014.


4 See Sherrard-Johnson 2013.

5 These terms suffuse Harlem Renaissance writing about the city. See, in particular,


7 Honey 2006 provides a monumental collection of Harlem Renaissance poetry. Recent and forthcoming Harlem Renaissance biographies include my own biography Dorothy West's Paradise: A Biography of Class and Color (Sherrard-Johnson 2012) and the collective biography on West's literary circle (Mitchell and Davis 2011); biographies of Countee Cullen (Molesworth 2012), The Sage of Sugar Hill (Ferguson 2005), Western Echoes of the Harlem Renaissance: The Life and Writings of Anita Scott Coleman (Davis and Mitchell 2008), and a biography of Eric Walrond by James Davis (2015). Biographies of non-artist/writers include that of Ethelene Whitmire on Regina Anderson Andrews, playwright, feminist ambassador, and Harlem Renaissance librarian (Whitmire 2014), and American Cocktail (Reynolds 2014), a memoir edited and annotated by George Hutchinson.

8 Roderick Ferguson’s ground-breaking term for a queer methodology that intersects with critical race theory (Ferguson 2012).


10 She asks: “Are the Negroes going to be able to hold Harlem?” (Rhodes-Pitts 2011, 20).

11 Hutchinson 2007, Ogbar 2010, and Kramer and Ross 1997 provide collections of literary criticism. The majority of Harlem Renaissance anthologies reprint primary texts from the era, such as the seven-volume series The Harlem Renaissance 1920–1940 (Wintz 1996).

12 The daughter of cosmetics tycoon Madame C.J. Walker and an eminent hostess of rau- cous parties promoting Harlem’s glamour; often satirized in the era’s fiction.

13 I borrow the term “darkening mirrors” from Batiste 2012.

14 A rent party is Harlem slang for a soirée thrown with a small entry fee to help the host make that month’s rent.

15 “Red Summer” refers to a period of widespread racial unrest following the return of the African American troops from the First World War. In addition to numerous lynchings throughout the South and Midwest, some of the highest casualties occurred during race riots in Chicago and Elaine, Arkansas.

16 Kaplan’s recent collective biography, Miss Anne in Harlem (Kaplan 2013), seeks to uncover the “messiness” of white women who chose “voluntary blackness,” eschewing white privilege, and even passing as black through their writing, their philanthropy, and their intimate relationships for a complex matrix of reasons. The actual physical space of Harlem is critical to the transformative effect choosing blackness had on this vexed, under-theorized figure.

References


Part I

Foundations