

## **ARTICLE**

# **The “New Negro”: A Study of the Changing Social, Economic and Political Status of the African-American in the Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century**

**Kevin Ramsden**

## **Introduction**

The years of the First World War, and those immediately after, proved to be extremely important regarding the position, of the African-American. As one historian points out, ‘Blacks found themselves fighting abroad and working at home to “save democracy”.<sup>1</sup> Almost 400,000 African-Americans served in the armed forces, with over a half of these posted overseas. Those who served in Europe were often accorded an equality quite unknown in the places that they had come from.<sup>2</sup>

On the home front, African-American workers began to find jobs in industries, whose doors had previously been closed to them. This was a result of wartime emergency measures, the draft, and a sharp decline in immigration from Europe (1.2 million in 1914 to 327,000 in 1915).<sup>3</sup> These conditions brought about one of the most significant events of the World War One period; the “Great Migration”. The Great Migration was the movement of up to half a million African-American people, from the South to the northern regions of the United States. This mass movement of African-American people into northern cities was to shape the future of American race relations for the rest of the century, and up to the present day.

Taking the World War One years as the main starting point of this study, I will look at the social, economic and political forces behind the thinking and activities of the urban African-American in the early 20th century. In the first section, I will survey the impetus behind, and the effects of, the Great Migration on the African-American population. In the second, examine the social and political organisations of the African-American, and the extent to which their work influenced and furthered the cause of the people they represented. And finally, assess the importance of the literary and artistic movement known as the ‘Harlem Renaissance’ on the period, and its influence on African-American life of the time.

## **Migration: For Better or For Worse?**

There were two main causes behind the mass migration of America's black population from the southern states to those of the North. The first was largely based on economic conditions, and the second on increasing racial discrimination and violence by white southerners. The prominent African-American leader W.E.B. Du Bois said, 'Those who blamed black unrest on anything other than "natural resentment against wrong" were clouding the issue ... and are attempting to shift the responsibility for the half century of lynching, disenfranchisement, peonage, 'Jim-crowism' and injustice of every sort practised on the negro.'<sup>4</sup>

It was during the war years that the first large internal migratory flow of African-Americans from the South began. The large industries of the North, expanding as a result of the great war effort, required labour, and found a cheap and bountiful supply in the shape of southern black people. The African-American population of the South cloaked as they were in great poverty, and suffering unfair treatment, responded well. They viewed the North as a 'promised land' of better conditions and opportunities. Between 1910 and 1920 net migration of African-Americans out of the South totalled 454,300.<sup>5</sup> The other trend shift came in the change in figures for regional distribution. In 1910, 73% of African-Americans lived a rural existence. In 1960, a census report showed that figure reversed, with 73% of them residing in urban environments.<sup>6</sup> The first great push into the cities of the North East actuated this swing.

The lot of the southern black had always been far from idyllic, even after emancipation. Many had moved to the North before the start of the 1915 migration, notably during times of acute economic crisis. Two prominent times of previous African-American migration would have been, toward the close of the depression of the 1870s and at the height of the Populist-agrarian agitation around 1890.<sup>7</sup> There was a minor depression that hit the United States on the eve of World War One, and the typical black tenant farmer in the South was affected to some extent by this. As the southern system of landholding kept him in debt, by the need to continually seek advances and loans on expected crops, he was nearly always at the mercy of the landlord, and local merchants.

The arrival of the boll-weevil from Mexico in 1892 was to cause untold damage to the cotton growing states of the South.<sup>8</sup> The insect spread its destruction throughout the region and brought financial ruin to many planters. It affected the black tenant farmers possibly the most, because they were unable to obtain loans from banks, as they could not grow cotton. In this way, the boll-weevil also played its part in driving many African-Americans into southern cities, and further north. Labour agents from northern industries, and African-American newspapers in the North worked hard to encourage the southern black population to migrate. The 'Chicago Defender' was probably the prime example of this, with its militant editor Robert. S. Abbot,<sup>9</sup> writing articles praising the advantages and attributes of northern life.

So African-Americans went north, in search of better conditions. They looked for improvement in education, wages, and housing, and they sought to escape the lynchings and violence handed out by southern white supremacists. At the end of the war, those who

The "New Negro": A Study of the Changing Social, Economic and Political Status of the African-American in the Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century( Ramsden )

had found employment and a better standard of living in the northern cities were to meet with something of a shock. In one particular area of industry, shipbuilding, many of the African-American workers employed in wartime were to be laid off. In 1919, George. E. Haynes, director of Negro Economics at the U.S. Dept. of Labor, stated that, of the 24,637 African-Americans employed during the war, only 14,075 remained: 20% of those laid off were skilled workers. Overall, there had been a decrease of 20.7% of skilled African-American workmen and a decrease of 48% in the unskilled ranks.<sup>10</sup>

## **The White Backlash**

African-Americans returning from the war in Europe were discouraged to find that things had not changed much at home. African-American servicemen were beaten and sometimes lynched, while still in uniform, in the South. They found their families and friends still living in fear of their lives in some areas, and living in squalid, often slum like housing in run-down areas of the cities. Many were forced into ghetto style living because any attempts to move to other areas were often met with mob violence, perpetrated by white citizens. Segregation, while not exactly legal in the North, faced the African-American, just as it had done in the South. Alphonso Pinkney notes, 'While black servicemen were fighting for "democracy" abroad, their families were fighting for physical survival in the streets of America.'<sup>11</sup>

In May of 1919, in an article in the magazine 'Crisis', W.E.B. Du Bois responded to the treatment of returning black soldiers in the strongest terms, stating, 'We are cowards and jackasses if now that the war is over we do not marshal every ounce of our brain and brawn to fight a sterner, longer, more unbending battle against the forces of hell in our own land.'<sup>12</sup> The summer of 1919 produced many battles in several states. The infamous 'red summer' as it came to be known, saw race riots in Charleston, South Carolina in May, Longview, Texas and Washington D.C. in July, and one of the bloodiest in Chicago, that same month. Racial tensions had been heightened after the war because of the intense competition for jobs between blacks and whites. Housing was another issue that provoked confrontation, there never being enough to satisfy the increasing urban population. The war years had opened up more opportunities to African-Americans generally, and they were not prepared to give up the gains they had made. This change in the attitude of the African-American scared the white population. The "new negro" wanted to have a greater say in his own affairs, and that of his community. He wanted economic and political independence and stability, and he was prepared to fight for it.

White Americans responded with greater violence, particularly in the South. There were 847 African-Americans lynched between 1910-1920, and a further 304 between 1920-1927.<sup>13</sup> African-Americans retreated into the ghettos, driven by the need for mutual protection from rejection and to maintain their pride. By 1920, the total African-American population of New York, Chicago, Philadelphia and Detroit had increased by three quarters of a million.<sup>14</sup>

African-American owned magazines and newspapers kept up the battle to draw

attention to the numerous injustices. The 'Crisis' actually published an annual lynching toll<sup>15</sup>, and the Chicago Defender, in its editorials, regularly prompted African-Americans to assert themselves. One for example read, 'The white man seeks the farthest corners of the globe, if he thinks he can better himself, why should we not do likewise.'<sup>16</sup>

Efforts were made to keep the African-American population from migrating into the cities, and to remain on the land. The 'Defender' published a report by the United States Chamber of Commerce on the 'Economic Value of Negro Education', part of which read,

'The most important and fundamental need for education for the negro from an economic point of view is rural and agricultural training, for the colored man is essentially a dweller in the country and is the best there ... it is therefore manifestly in the interests of the South that the negro laborer on the farm be better educated and consequently more efficient in all agricultural ways.'<sup>17</sup>

In the South, whites greatly opposed the migration and tried to make it difficult for blacks to leave. They made laws requiring northern labour agents to hold a licence to recruit African-American labor, usually on excessive terms. For instance, in Macon, Georgia the licence fee was \$25,000, and in Birmingham, the fee could rise as high as \$1,280 annually.<sup>18</sup> But still African-Americans migrated, and the ghetto communities grew larger and increasingly more militant in their attitudes. Meier and Rudwick state, 'White attitudes of racial animosity, which demanded the exclusion of blacks from white residential areas, was the basic factor responsible for the creation and expansion of the ghettos.'<sup>19</sup>

The feeling of solidarity, which came about as a result of the African-American population forming these large communities, began to manifest itself in calls for greater political independence and economic change. Black nationalism became very important, and in the 1920's showed up in two extremes. One, shown in the work of organisations like the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) and the NUL (National Urban League) to use growing black consciousness to work towards an integrated society, and the other, to a separationist position and a move back to Africa. The latter finding its chief advocate in the form of Marcus Garvey. Both these viewpoints, as well as the African-American position with regard to labour unions and industrial relations had a real impact on the northern urban environment.

### **Economic And Political Changes:**

The progressive years in American politics in the early twentieth century were frustrating ones for African-Americans. Successive progressive Presidents, from Theodore Roosevelt to Woodrow Wilson, generally ignored the problems facing African-Americans, despite their support for them when election time came around. True, Roosevelt did follow some policies of equal rights with regard to appointing African-Americans to Republican jobs, but the positions were really not numerous or high up enough to give them any real

The "New Negro": A Study of the Changing Social, Economic and Political Status of the African-American in the Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century( Ramsden ) distinction.

From the late nineteenth century to the World War One period, the African-American had been largely conditioned by the accommodationist school of thought, forwarded by Booker T. Washington following the 'separate but equal' doctrine, which more militant African-American leaders like Du Bois denounced. Du Bois had actually said in 1916, that 'black youth should stop spouting platitudes of accommodation and remember that no people ever achieved their liberation without armed struggle.'<sup>20</sup>

Despite opposition to Washington's political policies, Du Bois and other militant African-American leaders supported his stand on economic matters. It was thought that to compensate for political inactivity, African-Americans could progress through economic development. The accommodationists, however, sought to gain the respect of whites within a segregated society and the militants wanted equality and total desegregation. By 1920, the accommodationist viewpoint had all but left the African-American population. Washington died in 1915, and an article of his in the 'New Republic' published after his death, revealed he too had finally changed tack, it read,

'In all my experience, I have never yet found a case where the masses of the people of any given city were interested in the matter of segregation of white and colored people; ..... If the negro is segregated it will probably mean that the sewerage in his part of the city will be inferior; that the streets and sidewalks will be neglected; that the street lighting will be poor; that his section of the city will not be kept in order by the police and the authorities.'<sup>21</sup>

Now at the beginning of the twenties, conflict between black leaders in America seemed to be becoming gradually resolved. The work of the NUL and the NAACP in particular, separated previously by the conflicting opinions of Washington and Du Bois, benefited from an increase in collaboration between the two organisations. Both provided important help to the African-American community, but often in diverse ways. The NUL worked to improve conditions for African-Americans in the areas of housing, employment, and labor relations. The NAACP centred its work in the courts and the legislatures, where voting rights, segregation in housing, and lynching remained major problems.<sup>22</sup>

The National Urban League, as an organisation, grew relatively slowly. It was formed in 1911 by, as Meier says, 'a group of conservative negroes and white philanthropists and social workers'.<sup>23</sup> Inter-racial in its structure, it worked hard to bring about changes in attitudes on the race question. Up until the war years, the league tried to expand its programmes throughout the southern states, as most of the African-American population was based there. However, faced with the overt racism of many southern towns and cities, they found it increasingly more difficult to further their work in that area. At the end of the war, and as more African-Americans headed north, the league turned its attentions to the plight of its people in northern cities.

The league worked to maintain good relations with employees in an effort to find decent employment for the black population. Jobs were few, and employers were more likely to offer work to whites before blacks. In 1921, the NUL set up a research

department in New York City, headed by the sociologist Charles. S. Johnson.<sup>24</sup> Johnson organised studies of African-American workers, and met with employers to stress the problems facing black people. African-Americans had often been used as strikebreakers during industrial disputes, and then unceremoniously fired when strikes were resolved. A good deal of animosity had come about through this, and African-American entry into labour unions was often restricted or outrightly rejected.

In 1917, the AFL (American Federation of Labour) failed to support a resolution, stating an end to disenfranchisement, and an end to lynching.<sup>25</sup> This put the AFL on record as favouring discrimination and inequality. The AFL itself was very selective in its membership, excluding most women, foreigners and black workers. These groups constituted mostly unskilled labor, and the AFL consisted of mainly white, skilled, male workers. The AFL officials, for the most part, awarded themselves big salaries and were often seen in the company of important employers and the social elite, on a non-business basis. The union rank and file generally thought the same way as their bosses. Writing in 1913, W.E.B. DuBois stated, 'The net result of all this has been to convince the American Negro that his greatest enemy is not the employer who robs him, but his fellow white working man'.<sup>26</sup>

Faced with the indifference of the established unions, African-Americans tried to organise their own labour unions. Most of the attempts to organise the workers were, however, unsuccessful. The most noteworthy African-American leader to involve himself in these activities was A. Phillip Randolph. He helped to form both the 'United Brotherhood of Elevator and Switchboard Operators' in 1917, and the National Brotherhood Workers of America in 1919, but it must be said, without any real success. The urgency Randolph felt in trying to organize African-American workers was largely due to the wide discrepancy in earnings among workers in America. In 1910, the average wage of an African-American worker was about one third that of his white counterpart.

Then, in 1925, Randolph organised the 'Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters and Maids'. Randolph had been fighting the railroads and the racist elements in the AFL for years, and the new union, as the name suggests, represented the interests of African-Americans who worked on the country's trains. He went head-to-head with the board of the Pullman company, the most powerful of the railroad interests, and with great eloquence and determination pressed his members' case. At first, the Pullman company refused to recognise the union, but after much pressure from the NUL, NAACP and eventually the AFL, some recognition was afforded. This was recorded as a positive step forward in African-American labour relations.

Randolph also went after other industries and areas where African-Americans were being denied equality. Number one on his list was the defense industry. Seventy five percent of defense contractors refused to hire African-American workers in any capacity. Lester Granger of the Urban League said of this situation, 'state employment services refused to register skilled Negro workers at their trades or failed to refer them to jobs when they were registered or referred them only when employers clearly expressed a preference for Negroes'.<sup>27</sup>

During the same year, 1925, the IWW (Industrial Workers of the World) stated that

they had issued about 100,000 membership cards during their lifetime, to African-Americans.<sup>28</sup> The IWW, or "Wobblies" as they came to be called, wanted to organize all workers into "one big union" undivided by race, sex or skills. This union was basically a coalition of socialists, anarchists and radical trade unionists from all parts of the United States.<sup>29</sup> The IWW were both militant and courageous, and were known to constantly flout the law by bringing both African-Americans and women into meetings and conventions, a very dangerous practice in states where legislation existed that forbade it.

In 1925 also, the NUL founded the Trade Union Committee for Organising Negroes, which sought to discourage the use of African-Americans as strikebreakers.<sup>30</sup> It was vitally important that the NUL and the NAACP pressed for the rights of African-American workers. Despite the early part of the twentieth century being labelled the "Progressive period" by white scholars, the rights of African-American labor were by and large passed over and ignored. Although some organizations like the IWW attempted to help, other white labor and socialist leaders were often sadly remiss in their efforts. Ray Ginger writes of Eugene Debs, the leader of the Socialist Party, 'When race prejudice was thrust at Debs, he always publicly repudiated it. He always insisted on absolute equality. But he failed to accept the view that special measures were sometimes needed to achieve this equality'.<sup>31</sup>

The NUL found its main area of work in the northern cities, particularly New York, but the other main inter-racial organisation in the northern cities at this time, the NAACP, was just as influential. Founded in 1910, the NAACP brought together an alliance of black militants and white progressives, but it is best noted that W.E.B. Du Bois was the only African-American officer of the organization between 1910 and 1917. During these years, his major achievement was to be the setting up of the magazine 'Crisis', which was to become a very influential organ in African-American affairs. Through its militant approach to racial affairs it drew a great deal of attention from black and white Americans alike. In 1918, the U. S. Dept. of Justice warned its editors, that it had adopted a too radical tone.<sup>32</sup> The NAACP directed its most vociferous attacks on the issue of lynching, as Clift states, 'throughout the 1920s and 1930s, the major thrust of the NAACP programme was directed toward securing a federal anti-lynching law'.<sup>33</sup>

By 1920, the NAACP leadership had become largely African-American. In this year, James Weldon Johnson became its first African-American secretary, and also the NAACP agent in the struggle for the liberation of Haiti. He travelled there to investigate reports of torture and barbarity practised by U.S. Marines on the civilian population. He used the information he gathered for articles outlining the conditions in Haiti. Some of Johnson's findings were actually used by Harding, during the 1920 election campaign, and Harding did make some changes in Haiti once elected President.

Johnson and Du Bois were very active in lobbying congress to act against lynching. Johnson offered the assistance of the NAACP to a Missouri Representative, L. C. Dyer, who forwarded an anti-lynching bill on April 11th, 1921.<sup>34</sup> The NAACP devoted much of its time and resources thereafter to get the bill passed through congress. The bill was eventually dropped by the Senate in 1922, in the face of stern southern democratic opposition. James Weldon Johnson said of the Republican senators, 'they had done their

duty and cleared their own skirts.<sup>35</sup> Low further states, 'The Dyer bill passed in the house but lost in the senate because of the Republican party's indifference in the face of a southern filibuster.'<sup>36</sup>

The NAACP, without doubt, worked very hard in its battle against disenfranchisement and segregation. It battled hard with the litigation designed to secure the enforcement of the fourteenth and fifteenth amendments. In the 1920s, the Association took up the almost endless fight against the white primaries, but progress was slow. Meier and Rudwick best sum up the NAACP position when they say,

'The Association, despite its immediatist philosophy, was compelled to use an essentially gradualist approach, attacking one small aspect of discrimination at a time, hacking away piece by piece at the structure of discrimination. Though recognition of the negroes constitutional rights was still a long way off, the NAACP could at least point to a corpus of definite accomplishment.'<sup>37</sup>

### **Black Nationalism: Marcus Garvey**

A much different approach to the problems encountered by African-Americans in the northern ghettos was presented by Marcus Garvey. New York was the city where the highest density of the African-American populace was to be found in the North, and it was here that Garvey was based. Garvey opened the convention of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), in August of 1920 at Liberty Hall, in Harlem.<sup>38</sup> He shouted from the podium, 'Africa for the Africans, those at home and those abroad.'<sup>39</sup> These words sum up, in part, the hopes and aspirations of the man and his movement.

Garvey had come to America in 1916, and organised the first branch of the UNIA in America, in Harlem, the following year. By 1919, thirty branches were operating in the United States.<sup>40</sup> Taking his economic ideas from Booker T. Washington, he believed in the advancement of the ghetto dwelling black people through economic self help and business ownership. To all aspects of his campaign, Garvey contributed his own brand of grandeur and style. His colourful parades through the streets of Harlem, and his impassioned speeches and writings, appealed to thousands of African-Americans. Many were keen to attach themselves to something that would alleviate the tension and depression of their surroundings.

Garvey's movement proceeded along two main themes of thought. The first being to establish African-American businesses in the cities, so that African-Americans could maintain some sort of economic independence, and secondly, using the impetus of this economic programme, effect a return to Africa for those who so desired.

Attempts by a black leader to create links between African-Americans and Africa were not at all a new idea. Throughout the nineteenth century, African-Americans had taken steps to organise closer relations with the 'homeland' of Africa. Washington (no great militant in his views) had organised the "African Union Company" scheme to promote trade between African-Americans and the Gold Coast.<sup>41</sup> Most of the work for this

The "New Negro": A Study of the Changing Social, Economic and Political Status of the African-American in the Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century( Ramsden ) unfortunately was destroyed by the interruption of Atlantic trade routes during World War One.

Garvey's ideas and methods came under attack, however, and in the main, from Du Bois. Though both were Pan-Africanists, each favoured different interpretations on the theme. Du Bois, a true intellectual, was engaged primarily with the civil rights work within the NAACP and derived his main support from the black and white bourgeoisie. Garvey, on the other hand, drew his support from the masses, and developed his own ideas around those of Booker. T. Washington, whom Garvey had always admired greatly. Cruse explains this by saying,

'Negro nationalism in American could not have arisen under the leadership of Marcus Garvey without an economic philosophy having been laid down by Booker. T. Washington. And Marcus Garvey could not have been inspired to put Washington's philosophy into practice without the added ingredient of African nationalism, given impetus of release through the international shock of World War I, which shook European imperial capitalism to its very foundations.'<sup>42</sup>

Garvey's economic programme was centred around the "Negro Factories Corporation" and the "Black Star Steamship Line".<sup>43</sup> The Factories Corporation set up a number of small businesses to promote African-American independence within their own communities: restaurants, grocery stores, etc. But the Black Star Line was really the most important, and ambitious aspect of Garvey's plans. He intended to buy and use the ships of the line to take African-Americans back to the homeland. In addition to this, the line was also to open new trade links between Africa and America. The Black Star Line was, in fact, to be the downfall of Garvey and his dream.

The Black Star Steamship Corporation was founded in 1920.<sup>44</sup> Garvey used his mass appeal to raise the money for the vessels, by selling shares of stock to the African-American masses. He did not want wealthy African-Americans and whites to provide the capital. By 1922, the Line was badly in debt brought about by poor business practice, inept management and outside interference. In January 1922, Marcus Garvey was arrested and charged with misuse of the mails to defraud through the selling of stock.<sup>45</sup>

Garvey was convicted of the charge in 1923, but remained out on appeal until 1925. In 1925, he was sent to Atlanta prison to start his five-year sentence. President Coolidge commuted his sentence in 1927, but Garvey was deported as an undesirable. He travelled to Jamaica, and then on to London, where he lived until his death in 1940. Although Garvey's work was never completed, he did manage to provide the masses who followed him with some hope, and insert in them a feeling of pride and personal worth in being black. His work also influenced many African-American leaders to follow him, most notably Malcolm X in the 1960s.

It is also worth mentioning that on a social level, no other group or organisation did more than the churches, in their efforts to assimilate the new population into city life. The main influence of African-Americans from the South caused the churches considerable difficulties. Many migrants moved away from the established black churches and turned

to Holiness and Pentecostal sects.<sup>46</sup> Small congregations met in abandoned stores and created the 'storefront churches'. These small units helped many disappointed by the conditions they had found, and unfamiliar with the terrain.

The churches also began to assume an important place in the political arena of the cities as well. More often than not the church formed a voter base for erstwhile politicians who sought the African-American vote. The churches also created "institutional centres" which pledged to help the new arrivals make their way in the big city. An article in the 'Crisis' summarises the role of the churches well, when it says,

'The city, too, as a sociological environment was equally decisive insofar as work and the structures of congregation were concerned. Persons moving from the intimacy of the rural south had greater need for supportive relationships in the matrix of the hostile city... The leadership of the NAACP, the Urban League and the Y's freely acknowledge their indebtedness to the black churches.'<sup>47</sup>

The Garvey movement did a considerable job in the early 1920s, to raise levels of consciousness in the African-American masses. The black nationalism movement in economics and politics helped develop self-help and race pride. The forces and conditions behind the rise of the Garvey movement also gave rise to another aspect of black nationalism, that which found its voice through the cultural movement.

### **The Importance of Black Expression: "The Harlem Renaissance"**

While Garvey's efforts can lay some claim for the fuelling of the literary and artistic fires of America's body of black writers and artists, it is also true that African-American writers had been slowly changing in their attitudes, since the beginning of the century. Some African-American colleges had introduced courses in African-American history before World War One, and in 1915, Carter. G. Woodson founded the "Association for the Study of Negro Life and History".<sup>48</sup>

White authors also helped to effect a change in literary style, which highlighted some of the African-American works and brought them to a wider audience. 'Realism' and 'Naturalism' in literature attempted to show all the ugliness and hardship of real life. Henry James and William Dean Howells being two of the most prominent exponents of these styles.<sup>49</sup>

It was all the ugliness and hardship of the ghetto lifestyle that some of the new African-American writers talked of. Sometimes the essays and poems were strongly militant, other times reflections on black heritage and the African homeland. What many of the individuals involved in the movement wanted, was to say through their works that the African-American was ready to stand up and be counted, ready to contribute fully to mainstream society. Nathan Huggins says of the people involved in the Harlem Renaissance, 'It is a rare and intriguing moment when a people decide that they are the instruments of history-making and race-building... these Harlemites were so convinced

The "New Negro": A Study of the Changing Social, Economic and Political Status of the African-American in the Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century( Ramsden ) that they were evoking their people's "Dusk of Dawn", that they believed that they marked a renaissance.<sup>50</sup>

Perhaps the most important people behind the Renaissance were the ones who brought the work of the artisans to public attention. Both white and black persons can claim responsibility for this. The most notable white patron of African-American art was Carl Van Vechten, with W. E. B. Du Bois and Charles S. Johnson, two of the most prominent African-Americans. White patronage was considered very important to the movement. In describing Van Vechten, Huggins says, 'he was a teacher, a guide, and judge; his search for authentic negro voices was dictated by his own needs. Without the help and friendship of white men and publishers, there probably would have been little production of commercial black art in the 1920s.'<sup>51</sup> Other leading lights of the Renaissance, like Zora Neale Thurston, Louise Thompson and Langston Hughes, all benefited greatly from white patronage. Yet many African-American artists were also to be criticized for losing their "blackness" to the whims of their white patrons.

Of the African-American supporters, Du Bois and Johnson, along with the scholar Alain Locke, did probably the most to promote the new writers and artists. Du Bois published African-American writers in the 'Crisis' and Johnson published new talent in the magazine 'Opportunity', the home organ of the NUL. They held annual literary competitions, with a view to finding new writing talent. One of the first winners, in the 1924 competition, was one Langston Hughes, then only twenty-three years old. The winning poem was called 'The Weary Blues' and embodied many facets of ghetto life. As Anderson says, 'Here to begin with, was another example of the attention that Harlem Renaissance poetry was devoting to the urban mass experience... But more important, "The Weary Blues" captured, as no other black poem had, both the rhythmic and the human qualities of the blues - certain moods of the big-city street scene, and the naturalness of ordinary talk.'<sup>52</sup>

Unlike Hughes, not all Renaissance writers appealed directly to the masses, many aspired to 'high culture'.<sup>53</sup> They thought that an alliance of artistic talent at the top would bring about a healing of social wounds. As Huggins says, 'Despite a history that had divided them, art and culture would reform the brotherhood in a common humanity'.<sup>54</sup> Despite this elitist outlook, the common man did respond to the new African-American writings. They saw African-Americans moving in high circles, being feted by important whites, given recognition for their work. They construed this as achievement for the black race, and were reminded of it by articles in African-American magazines and newspapers.

One of the more romantic authors of this time was Countee Cullen. One of the only renaissance writers to actually be born in New York City (1903),<sup>55</sup> Cullen concentrated much of his poetry on non-racial subjects, love and death being favourites. However, despite his attempts to be known as a poet rather than a 'black' poet, his blackness and heritage at times moved him to write some beautiful poetry on racial themes. "Heritage", "Yet Do I Marvel" and "Shroud of Color" are prime examples of this.

Far removed from the romance of Cullen's poetry was the work of Claude McKay. Much of McKay's writing was of a militant nature. His famous poem "If We Must Die" published in the 'Liberator' in 1919 called upon African-Americans to meet violence with

violence.<sup>56</sup> McKay left the United States in 1923 and missed the main years of the renaissance, but he had been there at its birth, and his works were major contributions to the renaissance period. One piece in particular that gained special recognition, dealing as it did with lower class life in the ghetto areas, was "Home to Harlem" published in 1928.

The movement was not confined to writers alone though, African-American sculptors, musicians, artists and actors all made important contributions. Harlem in the 1920s was the Mecca of all that was new in African-American talent, and its influence spread to other cities. Southern jazz musicians who had migrated north, brought the life and excitement of jazz music to the clubs. Venues like the "Cotton Club" were always packed full of blacks and whites alike, listening to the latest sounds and performing the latest dance crazes.

This was a period when certain segments of American society were enjoying a reckless and free lifestyle, the era of "The Roaring Twenties". It is significant that African-American artists and musicians were at the forefront of this and receiving a level of attention, and often respect, that had been unheard of a decade before. But this was to prove to be a short-lived, and to a point, superficial reality. Hard times were coming and just over the horizon.

## Conclusion

Just as in the areas of labour relations, politics and economic self-help, the Harlem Renaissance marked a turning point in the lives of African-Americans. It proved that the African-American had a great deal to offer in all areas of American life and society, and added credence to the African-American people's attempt to gain political and economic concessions from the dominant white society, of which they were a part. The great migrations from the South to the North, for whatever reason, had compelled them to view their part in the greater society with an increasing sense of importance and involvement. Yet, for all their best efforts at advancement and self-improvement, the prosperity and equality of status they sought, either from a segregationist or accommodationist standpoint, continued to elude them.

The few gains the African-American forged in the war and post-war years were to a great extent illusionary. They often found themselves the victim of circumstances out of their control, particularly in the labour and housing market. Generally, as the whim of the white dominated and controlled economic establishment they were at the mercy of shifts in another groups' fortunes. It is noteworthy that the one area in which they could best find a voice was in the arts, where the expression and freedom of the individual was harder to suppress.

From all angles the African-American did make some headway in the 1920s, but the stock market crash in 1929 was to mark the beginning of some very hard times for all Americans, with African-Americans facing the greatest hardships and burdens. Just like the post-war years, as businesses collapsed and factories closed, the African-American was the first to be fired. Many African-American neighbourhoods were hit hard, and first. The harsh reality of life in Harlem, the home of the renaissance, gives an insight into the plight

The "New Negro": A Study of the Changing Social, Economic and Political Status of the African-American in the Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century( Ramsden ) of the African-American in the depression years.

'In twenty five years, Harlem's population had increased more than 600 per cent... By 1930, Harlem contained some 200,000 people. Half of them dependent upon unemployment relief.'<sup>57</sup>

## Notes

- 1 Strickland / Reich, *The Black American Experience*, p.97
- 2 Link / Link / Catton, *American Epoch*, p.159
- 3 Link / Link / Catton, *Ibid*, p.158
- 4 Strickland / Reich, *op.cit.*, p.114
- 5 Parsons / Clark, *The Negro American*, p.74
- 6 Parsons / Clark, *Ibid.*, p.75
- 7 Meier / Rudwick, *From Plantation to Ghetto*, p.214
- 8 Strickland / Reich, *op.cit.*, p.113
- 9 Low / Clift, *Encyclopaedia of Black America*, p.410
- 10 Bergman, *The Chronological History of the Negro in America*, p.393
- 11 Pinkney, *Red, Black, and Green*, p.39
- 12 'Crisis' Magazine (Article by W.E.B. Du Bois), May 1919, pp.13-14
- 13 Low / Clift, *op.cit.*, pp.618-620
- 14 Bergman, *op.cit.*, pp.400-401
- 15 Low / Clift, *op.cit.*, p.622
- 16 *Chicago Defender* (Editorial), April 12<sup>th</sup> 1918
- 17 Chicago Defender, March 30<sup>th</sup> 1918, p.5
- 18 Strickland / Reich, *op.cit.*, p.116
- 19 Meier / Rudwick, *op.cit.*, p.217
- 20 Meier / Rudwick, *op.cit.*, p.222
- 21 Bontemps, *100 Years of Negro Freedom*, pp.220-221
- 22 Strickland / Reich, *op.cit.*, pp.150-152
- 23 Meier / Redwick, *op.cit.*, p.232
- 24 Kellner, *The Harlem Renaissance (A Historical Dictionary for the Era)*, p.182
- 25 Reich, *Racial Inequality*, pp.50-51
- 26 Zinn, *A People's History of the United States 1492-Present*, p.321
- 27 Potter/Miles/Rosenblum, *Liberators*, pp.44-45
- 28 Bergman, *op.cit.*, p.414
- 29 Zinn, *Ibid*, p.322
- 30 Bergman, *Ibid.*, p.415
- 31 Zinn, *op. cit.*, pp.339-340
- 32 Low / Clift, *op. cit.*, p.619
- 33 Low / Clift, *op.cit.*, p.415
- 34 Strickland/Reich, *op.cit.*, p.152
- 35 Strickland / Reich, *Ibid.*, p.152
- 36 Low / Clift, *op.cit.*, p.621
- 37 Meier / Rudwick, *op.cit.*, pp.224-225
- 38 Bergman, *op.cit.*, p.396
- 39 John Henrik-Clarke, *Marcus Garvey (and the Vision of Africa)*, p.95
- 40 Strickland / Reich, *op.cit.*, p.56
- 41 Cruse, *Rebellion or Revolution*, p.164

- 42 Cruse, *Ibid.*, p.165
- 43 Strickland / Reich, *op.cit.*, p.157
- 44 A.J. Garvey, *Garvey and Garveyism*, p.86
- 45 Bergman, *op.cit.*, p.402
- 46 Berry / Blassingame, *Long Memory*, p.100
- 47 *The 'Crisis'*, Vol. 89, No. 9, November 1982, pp.6-10
- 48 Meier / Rudwick, *op.cit.*, p.234
- 49 Strickland / Reich, *op.cit.*, p.160
- 50 Huggins, *Harlem Renaissance*, p.3
- 51 Huggins, *Ibid.*, p.128
- 52 Anderson, *Harlem: The Great Black Way*, pp.204-205
- 53 Huggins, *op.cit.*, p.6
- 54 Huggins, *Ibid.*, p.5
- 55 Kellner, *op.cit.*, pp.88-89
- 56 Strickland / Reich, *op.cit.*, p.163
- 57 Anderson, *op.cit.*, pp.242-243

## References

Edited by Bruce Kellner, *The Harlem Renaissance (An Historical Dictionary for the Era)*, Greenwood Press, Connecticut (1984)

W. A. Low/V. A. Clift, *Encyclopaedia of Black America*, McGraw-Hill Book Co., New York (1981)

Edited by M. M. Smythe, *The Black American Reference Book*, Prentice Hall Inc., New Jersey (1976)

Peter M. Bergman, *The Chronological History of the Negro in America*, Harper & Row, New York (1969)

Compiled and edited by Harry A. Ploski/James Williams, *The Negro Almanac (A Reference Work on the Afro-American)*, John Wiley & Sons, New York (1983)

M. F. Berry/John W. Blassingame, *Long Memory (The Black Experience in America)*, Oxford University Press, Oxford (1982)

Arna Bontemps, *100 Years of Negro Freedom*, Dodd, Mead & Co., New York (1961)

Michael Reich, *Racial Inequality (A Political-Economic Analysis)*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey (1981)

A. S. Link/W. A. Link/W. B. Catton, *American Epoch (A Historical Study of the U.S. Since 1900) Volume 1: 1900-1945 - Sixth Edition*, Alfred A. Knopf Inc., New York (1987)

Alphonso Pinkley, *Red, Black, and Green (Black Nationalism in the U.S.)*, Cambridge University Press, London (1976)

Roger Whitlow, *Black American Literature (A Critical History)*, Littlefield, Adams & Co., New Jersey (1974)

The "New Negro": A Study of the Changing Social, Economic and Political Status of the African-American in the Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century( Ramsden )

Nathan Irvin Huggins, *Harlem Renaissance*, Oxford University Press, New York (1971)

Charles E. Silberman, *Crisis in Black and White*, Vintage Books, New York (1964)

August Meier/Elliot M. Rudwick, *From Plantation to Ghetto*, Constable & Co., London (1970)

Arvarh E. Strickland/Jerome R. Reich, *The Black American Experience*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, New York (1974)

Jervis Anderson, *Harlem: The Great Black Way 1900-1950*, Orbis Publishing Ltd., London (1982)

Harold Cruse, *Rebellion or Revolution*, William Morrow & Co. Inc., New York (1968)

Edited by John Henrik Clarke, *Marcus Garvey (and the Vision of Africa)*, Vintage books, New York (1974)

Amy Jaques Garvey, *Garvey & Garveyism*, Collier Books, New York (1970)

Edited by Tallott Parsons/Kenneth B. Clark, *The Negro American*, Beacon Press, Boston (1967)

P. Olisanwuche Esedebe, *Pan Africanism - The Idea & movement (1776-1963)*, Howard University Press, Washington. D.C. (1982)

*The 'Crisis' Magazine (A Record of the Darker Races)(Official Organ of the NAACP)*  
Crisis Publishing Company, 1790 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10019

Lou Potter/William Miles/Nina Rosenblum, *Liberators (Fighting on Two Fronts in World War 2 )*, Harcourt/Brace/Jovanovich, Publishers, New York (1992)

Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States 1492-Present*, Harper Collins, New York (1995)

## ニュー・ニグロ

20世紀初期に激変したアメリカ黒人社会（社会文化的、経済的、政治的観点から）

本論文では、アメリカ20世紀初期の、いわゆる「革新時代」に、都市へ移ってきた黒人たちが直面した劇的な変化について述べる。当時の悪化した経済状況に押し流されて、あるいは、南部の白人至上主義者による非道な抑圧から逃れるために、何千人の南部の黒人たちは、北部へ流出していった。これがいわゆる「Great Migration ( 大移動 )」である。実際、北部でも南部同様に困難な状況はあったが、それは本質的に異なるものであった。

ここで黒人たちは、白人雇用者や労働組合から不当な扱いを受けながらも、NAACP（全米黒人向上協会）やNUL（全米都市同盟）などを組織して団結し、生き抜くための権利を獲得するために闘った。その中には過激なものもあったが、黒人の独立とアフリカへの回帰を謳い、多大の支持を得た、黒人指導者マーカス・ガーヴィが中心になって活躍した。

その他、音楽、文学、芸術の分野で黒人文化運動に貢献した者たちもいた。これは「ハーレムルネサンス」として知られている。

いかなる方法であれ、こうして、20世紀初期のアフリカ系アメリカ人社会は、世界中の関心を大きく集めるようになっていったのである。