

# **Student Essay on The Harlem Renaissance**

## **The Harlem Renaissance**

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# Contents

<a href="#">Student Essay on The Harlem Renaissance.....</a>	<a href="#">1</a>
<a href="#">Contents.....</a>	<a href="#">2</a>
<a href="#">Essay.....</a>	<a href="#">3</a>

## Essay

Many African American's during the Harlem Renaissance felt the urge to exhibit their African American voice. Discrimination lurked around every corner for an African American living in the first half of the nineteen-hundreds. Some African Americans fought this segregation while others learned to live with it. Overall, life for an African American wasn't pleasant. During the Harlem Renaissance, the African American voice was expressed through artistic works such as paintings, music, and poetry.

In William Johnson's painting "Folk Scene - Man With Banjo," one can see that Johnson is expressing his African American voice. This painting includes three African American's, possibly a family, located beside a shack. This family is located on a farm in the rural South, which was a common occupation for African Americans. The man on the right is playing his banjo, probably mourning his life of poverty. The plain clothing and the fact that the African American's aren't wearing shoes shows that this family is living in poverty.

Music was a way through which African Americans struggled to identify their African American voice during the Harlem Renaissance, as in Bessie Smith's song of 1926, "Lost Your Head Blues." The depressing mood of the song demonstrates the feeling of a woman who's husband leaves her. Once the woman earns some money, the man comes back, and wants to be with her again. The woman rejects his offer. Bessie Smith ends her song with the line, "I'm a good gal, but I just been treated wrong" (line 15).

The African American voice is expressed in literature in Langston Hughes's poem, "The Weary Blues." This literary piece combines poetry and the blues into a truly African American work. Throughout the poem, Hughes conveys the hopelessness and pessimism of an African American way of life. Two lines of the poem read, "In a deep song voice with a melancholy tone/ I heard that Negro sing, that old piano moan --" (lines 17-18). The vivid details of those lines paint a mental picture of the harsh life of an African American having to live with this racial isolation. This discrimination of the African American's exhaust them as they try to discover happiness.

Although the African Americans struggled to identify their African American voice, their point is now understood. The many paintings, literary works, and musical compositions paid off in their struggle for a better life.