

# Mckay, Claude (1890-1948) Encyclopedia Article

## Mckay, Claude (1890-1948) by Claude McKay

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## Mckay, Claude (1890-1948)

While scholar Alain Locke and novelist James Weldon Johnson attempted to make the Harlem Renaissance palatable to white audiences, Claude McKay rose to prominence as the most militant voice in the African-American literary movement. The Jamaican-born poet and author blended Marxist ideals with his belief in racial solidarity to produce *Home to Harlem* (1928) and *Banjo* (1929), vivid accounts of black urban life in American and Europe. Both volumes championed ordinary people and testified to the health of the African diaspora community. McKay lived in the Soviet Union and North Africa during most of the 1920s and drew criticism from mainstream black intellectuals and white liberals for his avowed Communism. He returned to America in 1934, abandoned left-wing politics for the Catholic church, and penned his popular autobiography, *A Long Way for Home* (1937). While never as famous as contemporaries Countee Cullen and Langston Hughes, McKay was the foremost left-wing black intellectual of his age. His writings foreshadowed and influenced those of Richard Wright and James Baldwin.

### Further Reading:

Bronz, Stephen H. *Roots of Negro Racial Consciousness: The 1920s, Three Harlem Renaissance Authors*. New York, Libra, 1964.

Cooper, Wayne F. *Claude McKay, Rebel Sojourner in the Harlem Renaissance: A Biography*. Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 1987.

Giles, James R. *Claude McKay*. Boston, Twayne Publishers, 1976. McKay, Claude. *A Long Way from Home*. New York, Arno Press, 1969.