

## VASAD

Vankulu Sosyal Arařtırmalar Dergisi  
Sayı/Issue: 3  
Sayfa / Page: 35-53  
Yaz / Summer, 2019

Geliř/Received: 11.05.2019 | Kabul/  
Accepted: 09.06.2019  
Makale Bilgisi / Article Info :  
Arařtırma Makalesi / Research Article



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**HARLEM RENAISSANCE** \* | *HARLEM RÖNESANS***Öz**

Harlem Rönesansı Afrikan-Amerikan ulusunun tarihlerinde en gurur duyduğu bir dönemdir. 1920’lerde başlayıp 1930’larda son bulan bu hareket, o dönemde ‘Yeni Zenci Hareketi’ olarak biliniyordu. Hayal kırıklığına uğramış ve Jim Crow ayrımcılığı altında bir tecride mahkûm edilen Harlem entelektüelleri Harlem’de toplanmıştır. Ortaya koydukları eserler, daha önceki dönemde ortaya çıkan siyahî sanatın ürünlerinden farklıydı. Eserleri siyahî bir aklın ürünleriydi ve bir ırk bilinci ile oluşturulmuşlardı. Harlem’in sanatçıları, beyaz ırk tarafından hoş karşılanma beklentisi içinde değillerdi, aksine kendi ırklarıyla gurur duyup eserlerinde hem siyah hem de Amerikan olmaya özel önem atfediyorlardı. Pasif bir direniş anlayışıyla Amerikan ulusuna entegre edilmeyi bekleyen eski siyah zihniyetinden farklı olarak, Harlem’in siyahî sanatçıları daha radikal bir tutum takınmışlardır. Bu makalede takındıkları bu radikal tutum çerçevesinde hem siyah hem de Amerikan olarak ulaşmaya çalıştıkları orijinal seviye ele alınmıştır. Makalede ayrıca; siyahların Sivil Hakları kazanımı ve eşitlik mücadelesinde, bu hareketin kattıkları ve engel olduğu noktalar sorgulanıp ortaya konmuştur.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Harlem Rönesansı, Afrikan Amerikan Tarihi, Siyah Edebiyatı,

**Abstract**

Harlem Renaissance is an era of which the black American race is proud at most. Beginning in the 1920s and ending towards 1930s, the movement was

\* Bu makale Mehmet Bilem tarafından yazılan “The Enlightenment of Afro-American Society” adlı yüksek lisans tezinden üretilmiştir.

known as the New Negro Movement at the time. Having been frustrated and forced to isolation under Jim Crow segregation the New Negro intellectuals gathered in Harlem. The works they produced had a distinguished aspect different from the previous black art and culture. They were products of black minds and highlighted the black culture with a racial awareness. The black artists of the Renaissance did not feel an obligation to be welcome by their white counterparts, yet in contrary they were boasted of their black side and attached a special importance to being both black and American. They were relatively more radical compared to the old Negro mentality who sought for a passive integration of the black race into the American nation. The main point discussed in this article is the extent of success reached in their quest of being original and black. The article puts forth both the aspects to be proud of and the negative sides that halted the progress of the black race towards the civil rights acquisition and equality.

**Keywords:** Harlem Renaissance, African-American History, Black Literature.

### **What is Harlem Renaissance?**

Harlem Renaissance is the social and cultural of a radical rise in the black world. As Cary D. Wintz simply defines "The Harlem Renaissance was basically a psychology -- a state of mind or an attitude -- shared by a number of black writers and intellectuals who centered their activities around Harlem, in the late 1920s and early 1930s" (1988:2). In any country and in any city, there have always been communities of black populations living isolated from the rest of the white population, however that of Harlem was distinguished. So; what made Harlem special? What made it the 'black metropolises for some? Wintz states; "for the New Negro, Harlem was the Mecca of the black world" (1988:3). First of all; there are historical and sociological phenomena lying behind the rise of Black world. There is a historical background behind the change that happened in Harlem. Various reasons lie behind the revolutionary artistic, cultural and to some extent political rise in Harlem. The ironical point is that, although there were opposite views about uplifting the black race in any fields of human civilization, in Harlem Renaissance all of the views, movements and wars contributed to what really culminated and later on gained the name Renaissance. As an exterior determinant for the Renaissance, Huggins attributes the political awareness of Harlem's intellectuals to the outbreak of World War I. Accordingly he states:

Like others of that generation whose collective experience was World War I, Harlemites were caught up in its wake. Surely the ethnocentrism that generated self-determination as an Allied aim in that war informed a new racial awareness among blacks throughout the world. The war also forced a re-evaluation of Western civ-

ilization and encouraged non-Europeans to esteem their own cultures as being as valid and civilized as Europe's. War-disillusioned white men (American and European), on the other hand, helped enhance a black selfconcept through their own search for valid, authentic experience (Huggins, 2007: 7).

According to Huggins, the national and ethnocentric awareness that changed the geography of the continents had an effect on the psychology of the New Negro by no means. On the other hand as for the internal motivations of the renaissance, Huggins speaks of the black race's original qualities and the genetics of the Negro, stating:

(...) Freud and the new psychology caused sophisticated people to deny the artifices of civility and manner and to seek the true self through spontaneity and the indulgence of impulse. In so far as Afro-Americans could see their own lives as being more natural and immediate than their countrymen's, they could be convinced that the mere accentuation of their characteristic spontaneity would work toward the creation of a new Negro, a new man. Indeed, if anyone doubted that the black man's time had come, he needed only look at the awakening of Mother Africa as evidenced in the recent European discoveries and appreciation of African culture and civilization. Such elements of the spirit of the age contributed to the Harlemites' view of themselves and their historic role (2007:7).

The history had recorded several improvements in favor of black men and women up to Harlem Renaissance, yet an artistic and cultural reform has never been recorded to such a great extent as the one in Harlem. Huggins attributes the specialty of the Renaissance to the Negro's character, expressing: "(...) what distinguished Harlem from the several other burgeoning black metropolises were changes, seemingly centered in Harlem, in the character of Negro protest and thought (2007:18). There was obviously a change in the Negro's state of mind. Though Harlem Renaissance reminds people of an unstopped and ongoing positive impression, upon deeper inspection one gets to know that an equivalent amount of violence, corruption, woman trafficking and many more crimes had found itself a large place in Harlem. This two-dimension of Harlem diversifies the understanding of it as well. One side of Harlem is defined as a place where the Negro's coming of age occurred, while the other side speaks off poverty crime and corruption. Therefore, Harlem was not a land of paradise contrary to what was believed at the time of Migrations to North. As stated above more than one single reason led the history to record that

artistic rise in Harlem. Being mostly historical events, such as the period starting with emancipation of the slaves, Reconstruction of the states in a united America, Jim Crow Laws, The boll weevil and many other factors have dragged the minds and bodies that formulated the renaissance in Harlem. Huggins enlightens the facts about the migrations' help to create the Harlem Renaissance asserting: "The circumstances that made Harlem and New York appear a viable center of Negro cultural, intellectual, and political life were in part the result of the large migration of talented blacks to the city in the years before the war" (2007: 18).

The intellectuals that gathered in Harlem later on were called 'the giants' as they have performed revolutionary works in Harlem. A race, insulted, degraded and despised and most important of all enslaved for centuries, proved the human capacity of producing art and civilization for the first time in a society dominated by whites who from the beginning of the first encounter with the black men, treated him like a creature a bit more capable of performing tasks than an animal. The black people felt a compulsion to prove themselves and the works and activities produced at the time of renaissance in fact can be viewed as struggles to prove the capacity of black race. This tendency as Huggins previously referred was a result of the ethnocentric awakening of new Negro. However the ethnocentrism of the black race did not urge a political independence in the Negro mind, but rather an anti-racist attitude was strengthened. The main struggle of the race was to be integrated to the American nation without being discriminated. They wanted unity but a unity that would not be ignored by the black race. Although later on challenged by Nathan Irvin Huggins in his criticism of W.E.B. Du Bois claiming that it is impossible to unite two separate races with culture which had been separated by history, the main struggle was to strive to survive in a white dominated society. (Huggins, 2007). Booker T. Washington had the same views but his main concern was to elevate the black sphere of American nation in handcraft and jobs that black people might have in order be integrated into a harmonized black and white society with no clashes.

Harlem Renaissance has been the subject of many academic articles, books and dissertations up to now, yet similar to any production of African-American experience it was not granted the attention required, until a long time passed, just like Huggins thinks; "The traditional neglect of black America as a subject had much to do with this positioning of the era on the periphery of our sense of history" (2007: xvi). African American history has always been neglected from the beginning with the Danning School's doctrine till modern times. Huggins, while putting forth the extent of neglect, states that "many educated blacks impatient with the progress

of the race— impatient with the race itself—dismissed the era” blaming some of the black intellectuals as well (2007: xvii).

Similar to Huggins’ ideas on the lack of interest in Harlem Renaissance Helbling presents his ideas as follows:

Harold Cruse was one of the first to call attention to the Harlem Renaissance (“something ... which has not been adequately dealt with in the history books”) and to link this outburst of creative energy with what he argued to be the problematic cultural identity of present-day black Americans, a people “left in the limbo of social marginality, alienated and directionless on the landscape of America (1999:1).

In any phase of the studies of black American history, researchers encounter Harlem Renaissance as a major area that needs deep exploration. It is an undisputed fact that we owe this opportunity to the Harlem’s intellectual minds. The giants of Harlem Renaissance in fact filled the vacancy of academic research fields and historiography of black American people. By working hard to enact the skills and deeds of the black men’s inner power, Harlem’s giants contributed to a nation’s reawakening process via performing art and culture. The giants of Harlem magnified and praised the skills and capacity of their black fellows. This aspect of the Renaissance makes it precious as the black race progressed in the mental slavery imposed by the white masters for centuries. For centuries they were made to believe that a black person can only conduct slavery, and even after the emancipation the blacks were in fact conducting ‘volunteer slavery’ in the white-owned plantations. The emancipation and Reconstruction acquisitions were meaningless for a mind untrained about the human’s inborn talents. That, in fact justifies the first wave of migration to the north and the immigrants’ mostly being the educated people. So what is Harlem Renaissance? Maurice Wallace answers as;

While white America was celebrating the jazz age and the Roaring Twenties, black America was celebrating its own jazz and blues age. The flowering of black literature and poetry, of black music and dance, visual arts and pan-African politics in this era soon came to be identified as the Harlem Renaissance (2007: 67).

In the previous chapters the immigrations to North was mentioned in advance. Though not directly to Harlem district, a great amount of immigrants ultimately stopped at Harlem being their final destination. Although Harlem was initially a town of white middle class Americans, after the arrival of the black immigrants, it started to change demographically, in the end reaching the status ‘capital of the black world’ as Huggins name it.

Geographically having an isolated shape, Harlem gradually became a town of black residents. Under the severe segregation, black people were forced to ‘voluntarily’ live in isolated cities away from white people. Although W.E.B. Du Bois severely criticizes Booker T. Washington’s leadership of the black world, judging from the original artistic works that the blacks set forth, it would be wrong not to attribute any credit to Washington and his understanding of reconciliatory policy between the two races. It is ethically, morally and legally, no doubt, indecent to segregate the two races; however the reality that on the way to survive and prove the black men’s adequacy in all fields, Harlem’s isolated and black population, for the first time in American history, under the leaderships of the giants, found an opportunity to prove that the black race is no different from any other race in producing civilization, culture and art. On the other hand avoiding concrete clashes and a nation-wide battle, Washington paved the way of the black race for culminating in all fields including education, craftsmanship and culture, which, taking into consideration the lack of readiness of white race, was the most rational route to follow. It may sound contradictory to link the Harlem Renaissance to the accommodationist and reconciliatory policy of Washington, but when thinking on an individual-scale, any success of a person needs first a quiet and aloof isolation from racial clashes which had the chance to grow into a wider turmoil. The objectivity principle of scientific history enables the researchers to identify the historical events and figures, even when these figures such as W.E.B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington are two opposing figures, upon studying the advancement of the race and the mentioned figures’ contributions with their unique styles and philosophies, to the accomplished common purpose. Regardless of the philosophies and styles they adopted, every black American leader has contributed to the advancement of the colored people in America, which is more or less the same for the comparison of W.E.B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington. It is actually a richness to have more than one single method of achieving the common purpose like that of democracy which shelters various and opposite views working for the ultimate but same goal, to lead the country to welfare. However adherence to the objectivity of scientific history, makes it is also essential to reveal the events, movements and the leaders of these movements who halted the progress towards the common goal which is the welfare of the black race in African American history. When the method adopted is wrong, the goal of leading the nation to welfare, does not needless to say, vindicate the failure of any person or group of people.

### **Art and Culture in Harlem: ‘Beautiful but Black’**

The black race’s motivation to prove the adequacy of their race as

a civilized nation could not succeed to wipe the color line out; on the contrary it generated or contributed to the formation of customers and pleasure seekers exploiting the artistic but black productions. "This was an attitude of cultural elitism" says Huggins while defining the struggle for unity at the top (2007: 5). However Huggins does not blame the Harlem intellectuals for the quest of progressing through 'cultural elitism' concluding his criticism as:

But it is wrong to assume that these black intellectuals, because of it, were not related to the black common man in Harlem, I think that in the early decades of this century most Negroes were apt to agree that it was a good thing to have Negroes writing "good" novels, poems, plays, and symphonies. Not always because they could read, listen, and understand them, but because the fact that these works were written was a remarkable achievement (2007: 5-6).

What Huggins defines as the real problem is the lack of perception that the two races were completely different as he reports:

Our problem here, as in any history, is to see men and women of another era in their own terms and not our own. And that will require of us a humanism that will modulate our own egos and self-consciousness enough to perceive theirs. Their world was different from ours. We must start there (2007: 6)

Huggins believes that the two races, due to their background and structural distinction were two extremely different, and the black race should have started the quest of 'coming of age' first of all with accepting the difference. Any success story cannot be applied to every person in the society; and if the persons are of two distinct background such as having two different skin colors which was the furthest distance between two different people and races, the story of success turns out to be nothing more than a romanticized journey. The journey that the Harlem intellectuals demanded that the normal black men should start, for the aim of rising the race up, would end up both in the welfare of the race and it would also prove the competence of the Negro in America. Romanticizing the class mobility thus taking their protagonists from the trash of the society upwards to the top, Harlem's leading minds encouraged their people to believe in this tragic end. But one thing they might have skipped is that even if this story had ever come true, it would still be eternally a product of western civilization as the dream itself is originally a product of the white Americans. The black intellectuals of Harlem fell for that dream of whites and trailed the Harlemites as well. Racial prejudice was deep in the Western civilization it was hard to overcome it such a short time as Helbling



implies; “(...) the prejudices he confronted were deeply rooted in the social and intellectual soil of Western culture” (1999: 19).

The delusion of the Harlem Renaissance’s dream as an American dream’s prototype in Harlem is not a complete failure though. Huggins analyzes the fallacies of the dream yet puts forth the positive sides of the movement too. He, in fact does not adopt a manner of complete disregard for the artistic progress recorded. What he does mainly, is to take into consideration the norms and the unquestionable art and culture forms as the achievements of Western civilization and thus that of the black race as well. He concentrates on and questions the scale of success for the black art due to the norms being products of white civilization. He explains this as:

As long as the white norms remained unchallenged, no matter what the Negro’s reaction to them, he always needed to return to the white judge to measure his achievement. It would have required a much more profound rejection of white values than was likely in the 1920s for Negroes to have freed themselves for creating the desired self-generating and self-confident Negro art. I am not suggesting that blacks needed to acquire a race hatred; there was evidence of that already. I mean merely that Negroes had to see whites—without the awe of love or the awe of hate—and themselves truly, without myth or fantasy, in order that they could be themselves in life and in art (Huggins, 2007: 323).

The western civilization had norms which were established according to their own perception of life. In their perception of life there was no racial equality. Accordingly, their norms of art and culture are culminations of their racist perceptions of life. Without recognizing their racist genetics of the western civilization, one would always end up in frustration while trying to reach equality through art and culture. Every product of black art would be labelled ‘beautiful but black’. The perception of life white civilization had, was the very thing to be challenged in the first place. Huggins urges the black race not only to create art and culture but an authority which has the adequacy that can seal the Negro art’s fate as success or failure. Without having this type of substructure, the Negro art would have to confront the white dominant and most probably patronizing authority for the fate of black art. Huggins, criticizing W.E.B. Du Bois and his contemporary leading figures of the Renaissance due to his concentration of the emphasis on high art, states:

It was commonly thought, in those decades around World War I, that culture (literature, art, music, etc.) was the true measure of civilization. Harlem intellectuals, sharing in that belief and seeing



themselves as living out the moment of their race's rebirth, naturally marked off their achievement by such artistic production. Thus they promoted poetry, prose, painting, and music as if their lives depended on it (2007: 9).

Not all of the critics of the movement are as pessimistic as Huggins though. Being one of those, who highlights the good sides of the Renaissance Wintz concentrates on the progress recorded at the time of Harlem's rise. Wintz analyzes the depiction of the local colors in the literary works concluding that these works were beneficial for the promotion of black culture as he reports:

Besides serving as the spiritual home of the movement, it also provided the material and the setting for many literary creations of the Renaissance. The poetry, short stories, and novels of the period abound with scenes and characters lifted from Harlem's streets and cabarets. Most of the Renaissance writers produced at least some work of Harlem local color. Rudolph Fisher, Claude McKay, and Langston Hughes were especially adept at portraying New York's ghetto life (1988: 3).

Wintz, despite the good sides of the promotion of the black urban life in Harlem, also mentions the unchanging misery of Harlem's people asserting:

It was a teeming, overcrowded ghetto, and much of its laughter and gaiety only thinly veiled the misery and poverty that was becoming the standard of life for the new black urban masses. This, too, was reflected by the Harlem Renaissance (1988: 3).

After the process of emancipation and the Great Migration the black people had a process of Urbanization. In America, Harlem was attributed another but crucial importance taking into consideration the urbanization of the black race for the first time, after getting rid of the chains of slavery. Wintz highlights this fact claiming:

Harlem played an important role in the Renaissance because Harlem itself symbolized the central experience of American blacks in the early twentieth century -- the urbanization of black America. Harlem housed the first major concentration of blacks who settled outside the South, and it reflected on a larger and more concentrated scale the patterns of change that were occurring in Philadelphia, Chicago, Detroit, and dozens of other northern industrial cities in the first half of the twentieth century (1988: 3).

Even though they were still under segregation, the people of Har-

lem started to experience an urban life in a black populated city where they were no more slaves. This radical shift from slavery to urbanized black civilization did pave the way for the Renaissance. The fact that they were having troubles and living in poverty in Harlem did not stop them from formulating the Renaissance. The artists and intellectuals of the city promoted and depicted this miserable life under segregation, and this way they contributed to the development of the movement as much as the historical factors behind the Renaissance. Wintz touches upon the aims the white men of letters and their objectives in their works. Comparing the writers of the two races he reports:

(...) it is necessary to say something about the relationship between black literary creativity of the twenties and the similarly intense creativity among white writers of the same period. Like their black counterparts, the white writers of the 1920s engaged in experimentation in form, revolted against what they considered the restrictions imposed by an obsolete morality, and sought to identify truth and meaning in a world of violence, oppression, and absurdity (1988: 4).

The black sphere and Harlem was an ideal setting for the white writers; however their contextual aim was never to raise awareness about the racial conflicts. While the Harlem writers were focused on race issues in their works; “(...) during the twenties white writers ignored the race question more than at any other time in American literary history” (Wintz, 1988: 4). The negligence of the black world was systematically maintained in the literary world as well. “The Harlem Renaissance was the product of a history and a way of life about which most white writers knew very little. This, of course, was a natural outcome of life in racially segregated America” (Wintz, 1988: 5).

The immigrants to Harlem were not seeing themselves as guests or seasonal workers in the demographically white dominant North. Apart from few exceptional examples the immigrants did not have the idea of returning back to South. This mental shift of adopting North instead of South as a new habitat to live and progress in their future life, was also felt in their leading intellectuals of Harlem as Wintz declares:

By the 1920s few black intellectuals still believed that the future of their race lay in the South. As they turned their attention northward and focused their hope on the emerging black communities in northern cities, however, they also were turning their backs on their southern heritage (1988: 6).

It is possible to tolerate this kind of change though. The compari-

son between south and north, presented to both workers and intellectuals of Harlem, a clear picture of preference in favors of north. So the immigrants very rarely thought of going back to South at the time of the Renaissance. However the will to stay did not stem from a heavenly life in Harlem or other Northern states. Truth is that; the black people were living under better conditions in their new places, and some even got proper education and owned properties, but the majority of the population remained uneducated with no decent jobs and living an extreme poverty (Wintz, 1988: 6). The condition had already started to deteriorate not only due to poverty or unemployment but due to the growing white hostility which was heavily felt by black people. The white people thought that the black changed the structure of the society and that they shouldn't have been let to migrate in large numbers to North. This accordingly evolved to a racial hostility among white Americans. A growing tension between the two races was triggered. Related to the underlying reason of the unrest Wintz states:

Even those who had achieved some material success saw these accomplishments threatened by the growth of segregation and racial violence. Supreme Court reinterpretations of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments left blacks defenseless against the segregationist enactments of southern legislatures (1988: 6).

As mentioned above; the segregation was brought to Northern states with the arrival of immigrants as well. This absolutely does not mean that the segregation was due to the black population, and they are not the side to be blamed for the segregation. This in fact means that before the great migration, the north was not populated by blacks as much as the period after the arrivals of the black waves, and it also means the northern economic agents who had previously boasted as the north was not segregated and the blacks would have been fully free if they were to migrate to north, proved to be an untested and a jactitation in order to attract blacks to the Northern states. The reason the northern agents wanted the southern former slaves to be transferred to the north, was to benefit from their man-power for the industrial workforce. However the white population of North was untested and had not proved to be friendly against a concrete black population; that is why the southern segregation was transferred and applied in the north as well. And that is again why the black people chose or better to recognize as 'were forced to choose' to learn to live with the segregation and discrimination. They ultimately escaped of segregation but again welcome by another hostile racism. The solution for the black people according to era's conditions, which was what they had done in Harlem, was to live in isolated districts with the least contact with white Americans. Having failed to reach the humanely life and work conditions,

the black immigrants to north, faced with America's biggest problem of the era, for many times in a row since the emancipation: racism. This continuous racist attitude of white supremacists in both southern and northern states contributed to the political and cultural awareness of black intellectuals for their own roots.

### **World War I and the New Negro**

The racial debates of the Harlem intellectuals were sparked with another exterior reason though; World War I. The consequences of World War I as publicly known reshaped an ethnocentric mind among the minorities in multinational countries which led to the foundation of many new nation states. Although not aiming a nation state country the black Americans also were under the effect of the ethnocentric awakening that occurred in the world. The black Americans supported their white fellows World War I hoping to be granted equality in the postwar period. Wintz explains the support of blacks to the whites during war with the expectation of reaching racial equality expressing:

The outbreak of World War I only intensified racial conflict in America. Traditionally blacks have supported America's war efforts in hopes that a display of loyalty and battlefield gallantry would win them popular support in their quest for equality. And, in their efforts to participate fully in their country's battles, blacks have traditionally confronted a government reluctant to accept their services. During World War I the already existing racial strife intensified these problems (1988:11).

The black Americans did not take part in war in order to gain independence. Harlem intellectuals led by W. E. B. Du Bois demanded the black Americans to support the white nation for a common purpose. This demonstrates their integration policy rather than independence. Wintz points; although the idea was not accepted by few, the support of the black race was promoted by the leading figures of the Renaissance as well:

Most black leaders responded to the onset of the war by urging blacks to support their country wholeheartedly. Even W. E. B. Du Bois set aside his struggle for integration and asked his people to "close ranks" with white America and to "forget our present grievances" for the duration of the war, even though this meant accommodation with the segregationist policies of America's military forces (1988: 11).

Despite the military assistance of the black race, the white race did not sidled up to their black fellows at all. Even in the army the black

soldiers were not assigned with important duties as Wintz puts forth:

Most blacks, however, made every effort to comply with Du Bois's request in spite of the openly discriminatory policies of their government. At the outset of the war, for example, Colonel Charles Young, the ranking black regular Army officer, was forced to resign. The Navy allowed blacks to serve only as mess boys, while the Marines would not accept blacks in any capacity. The Army eventually accepted blacks in all branches except for the pilot section of the Air Corps, and, after considerable agitation by the NAACP, established a segregated officer training camp for blacks. Of course the entire military was segregated (1988: 11).

The contribution of World War I was not due to the segregation in the army though (Wintz, 1988, p. 11). As stated above the black soldiers who have joined the war with their white alliances were in pursuit of proving their loyalty to the country and in exchange for receiving the support of white people to overcome the racial barriers and obtain equality in real terms. However the result was again frustration. Failing to obtain their ideals to live equally under humanely conditions, the black people and their leading minds shifted to much more radical change in their struggles against racism in postwar period.

Blacks hoped that the uniform they wore and the sacrifices they were willing to make for their country would win them some measure of respect and equal treatment. They were proud of their military accomplishments and more reluctant than ever to accept a second-class position in society. From the beginning of the war, however, whites responded to black soldiers with hostility and fear. They did not view the black soldier as a friendly ally; instead, they saw him as a potentially dangerous element which in the future would have to be even more carefully kept under control (Wintz, 1988: 11-12).

The reality that Wintz mentions above and the worldwide consequences of the war shaped the next policy of W.E.B. Du Bois and his people for the coming years. The black race was to turn to its own racial roots even in the political arena. Up to that time, W.E.B. Du Bois and some other intellectuals of Harlem were known for their strict policy against accommodationist strategy, yet as Wintz highlights; at the time of the Great War, even W.E.B. Du Bois temporarily quitted his original idea, and he encouraged the manner of putting the internal conflicts of America related to racial unrest aside. However; due to the assumption that, whether he was deceived or made a mistake himself, his ideological shift was even stricter

than his initial approach to the racial discrimination. As related to this ideology change of Harlem intellectuals, Huggins states:

By the end of the war, in 1919, Afro-Americans who called themselves radicals were already serving notice that the Negro of post-war America was going to be much more militant than his prewar brother. The Messenger had insisted that the “new style” Negro would not accept accommodation or ignore grievances even in the interest of the war. The Negro would no longer “turn the other cheek,” be modest and unassuming. He would answer violence with violence rather than with meek though moral protests and requests for justice (2007: 53).

### **Post-War Negro**

The Post-war Negro was to be different and more cautious in order not to be deceived again. Huggins, quoting W. A. Domingo clarifies the definition of the ‘New Negro’ as follows: “His willingness to fight showed that the New Negro was as anxious to make “America safe for himself” as he had been to make the world safe for democracy (...)” (2007: 53). The New Negro through the lessons of history had been exposed to discrimination, not being granted the previously promised words about equality; he was to be politically more active. Huggins goes ahead with the demands and desired prescriptions for the new Negro as follows:

His labor was not to be exploited as the Old Negro’s had been in the past. But, above all, he would insist on “absolute and unequivocal social equality,” which would be achieved by identifying his interests with those of the working classes (2007: 53).

Another striking definition of the New Negro has been done by Mathew H. Ahmann who concentrates on the activity aspect of the New Negro:

Now what we call the “New Negro” has changed all this. [The previous racial image and bias formulated and maintained about the Negro.] It is increasingly evident that Negroes will not accept anyone else’s definition of themselves. And for the first time, faced with direct and forceful pressure, whites have come face to face with Negroes as they really are. Though this change has been, and is bound to be, unsettling -- for it forces us to act -- it will produce more and more rapid progress to the free and open society that is the dream of all of us (Ahmann, 1969: x).

Counting on the white men and expecting the required racial tolerance did not work until the Negro decided to change himself. This decision

of facing the white men, Ahmann asserts as the most important, since Lincoln's time, was the brand new starting point of the Negro struggle from that on. While introducing the factors which contributed to the birth and growth of the New Negro Ahmann highlights the underlying principle as follows:

The New Negro in the North cannot be understood in isolation. He must be understood in terms of the early and, particularly, the recent history of the Negro in the United States and the complexity and interrelatedness of the pattern of civil rights, political, economic, and international developments characteristic of our times (1969: 25).

The historical and sociological defeats that the black men experienced formulated the New Negro. The process has taught them to participate in actively and as stated before; to shape their own authority in defining their own image not only in art and culture but also in a political sense as well. After the increase in the Northern black population following the migrations, Ahmann remarks that the New Negro reached a political power especially in the presidential elections as well. This political power where the black were not disfranchised meant and urged a compulsion of alliance for the white politicians. In order to receive the electoral support of the black voters, the politicians had to treat much more than a manner of handling a minority group. Because the black population simply meant a great amount of votes, the white now that had to ask for their assistance for ruling the country. This awareness of the black leaders helped the formulation of the New Negro, which can also be concluded from Huggins' revelations where he refers to Domingo saying; "the New Negro "cannot be lulled into a false sense of security with political spoils and patronage. The job is not the price of his vote" (2007: 53). Ahmann in order to explain the political power of Negroes points out:

Negroes who are free to vote in these communities -- with the exception of Washington, D. C., where everyone is disenfranchised -- have the balance of political power in these states which have a large concentration of electoral votes. If and when Negroes are required to vote in terms of critical racial issues, they could and do exert tremendous political power, particularly in presidential elections (1969: 26).

As a result of the political power accumulated in the Northern states, Ahmann implies that the welfare of the black race could be provided as he sets forth: "As the Negro increases his political power in northern communities he will influence the status of Negroes in the southern



states and facilitate the general progress toward full social, political, and economic equality” (1969: 26). According to Ahmann the demographical and geographical change altered the economic horizon of the race as well. When the density of the population was concentrated on the Southern states the main jobs that blacks could do were agricultural jobs, yet with the migration and correspondingly the urbanization process the black employment shifted to a broader range of professions which he exemplifies with the figures below:

The use of Negro labor in the factories in the North has resulted in significant increases in the economic status of the Negro. The average income of Negro families in the North is approximately \$4,000 annually while the average income of Negro families in the South is a little more than \$3,000 annually (1969: 26).

The intellectuals of Harlem, from the emancipation and enfranchisement onwards shifted through various political preferences and sometimes these particular choices were harshly criticized after the failure of obtaining the desired solution of racial conflicts. In some cases especially in the Reconstruction period, the candidates of the political parties did not provide what they promised to the Negroes and the deterioration of the situation via Black Codes and Jim Crow laws disheartened the black former slaves. Not to experience the same crucial deceptions again Huggins states what the New Negro would have to do as follows:

The Negro was mainly a worker, so his new leaders would reject association with capitalism and the bourgeoisie and support a labor party. He would focus on objectives that were to his immediate economic interest, working-men’s goals: shorter working hours, higher wages, and more jobs. He would join white labor unions where he could; he would form his own when white unions discriminated. He would educate himself and others in order to facilitate just race relations, but he would use “physical action in self-defense.” (2007: 53).

So the New Negro would fight against the discrimination and if needed would physically act and get its own due. This type of policy adopted by the leaders of the black world stems from the era’s requirements which history and exterior reasons such WWI urged or better to say enabled them. Their own artistic and cultural awareness did not contribute as much as the historical events natural and to some extent accidental gains such as the increase of the population and the political power accumulated via the demographical changes. There are several reasons behind the production of high culture and art forms yet still debated as being failure

for the Renaissance. One thing to clarify; is the aimed and over concentrated art and original culture of the black art, was not as successful as history when compared according to the acquisitions recorded. As Huggins well analyzed when the division is based on history then the unity had no chance to be provided by culture. This was in fact what exactly happened when talking about the Renaissance's success or failure. The abundance of aspects of any historical or artistic movement to analyze makes the reality also multiple. So one can say that Harlem Renaissance did what it needed for the promotion of black adequacy to conduct and produce high art and culture, but on the other hand one can also see that their production of cultural and high artistic products did not equalize them with white people. Being one of the pioneer interpreters of Harlem Renaissance, Huggins also recognizes this tragic failure of the concentration on art and culture:

For in questioning the quality of the works—the artistic achievement—I necessarily challenge the success of the “renaissance” in delivering what it claimed for itself. Some will argue that in our day of crisis of black identity it is harmful to question any Afro-American achievement; positive self-concept needs pure black poets as well as pure black heroes (2007: 9).

What Harlem Renaissance claimed for itself was to equalize the two historically divided races. And the success, if there was ever in the time of the Renaissance, must mainly be attributed to the low-standard majority instead of high standard intellectuals. Analyzing the productions of the leaders and intellectuals against the majority living in poverty it is possible to declare that the artistic and cultural forms created, could not be as effective as the only thing the poor black people had in their hands: voting. Art in fact, which in some cases served only to much more demean the black race, could not surpass politics and history, which, hence proves Huggins to be right. In addition, Huggins criticizes the black artists and critics of art of the era from another point of view. He thinks that originality which was aimed by the artists could not be attained by the already existing western literary or artistic forms (Huggins, 2007). Huggins blames the Harlem promoters for being so concentrated on the vision of high culture that they missed to look thoroughly at jazz. (2007: 10) For Huggins jazz was the only authentic creation of black race which needed to be promoted and studied carefully. According to him the artists of Renaissance missed the only concrete opportunity of existing in the American artistic arena as jazz had its roots in the African culture. Due to neglecting to well-treat jazz, Huggins complains that the non-musicians that is to say the majority of Harlem Giants could not well-perform to survive in the already western art forms (2007: 10).

It is an undeniable truth that while having a branch of art completely of African origin, the negligence of the era's artists, though they had claimed to turn back to their own capacities of their culture, showed an inexplicable discrepancy ignoring jazz. Huggins explains that jazz music was viewed an unrefined folk art by the high culture devotees (2007: 10). In order to draw attention to the discrepancy of the Harlem Intellectuals he criticizes them and says:

It is very ironic that a generation that was searching for a new Negro and his distinctive cultural expression would have passed up the only really creative thing that was going on. But then, it is not too surprising. The jazzmen were too busy creating a cultural renaissance to think about the implications of what they were doing (2007: 11).

In Huggins' criticism Langston Hughes is the one favored and excluded from the responsibility of neglecting jazz music. Huggins saw the effort to prove the artistry of the black race in vain. He states:

Harlem intellectuals promoted Negro art, but one thing is very curious, except for Langston Hughes, none of them took jazz—the new music—seriously. Of course, they all mentioned it as background, as descriptive of Harlem life. All said it was important in the definition of the New Negro. But none thought enough about it to try and figure out what was happening (2007: 9-10).

Among the black intellectuals one name is very popular since his first debut into the history African Americans: W.E.B. Du Bois.

### **Conclusion**

The historical progress of the black race till the era of the Renaissance proved that the amendments and regulations did not reach the target of equalizing the two races. Black Americans were deceived and manipulated in many cases. Although they allied with the white soldiers during the civil war they were not given credit and their success during the war were forgotten. Their contribution to the reunion of America was ignored and the history records did not match with their acts of devotion to America. Following the recurrent frustrations, the black race and intelligentsia decided over a radical attitude for defending the black race. The Harlem Renaissance is the culmination of the black intelligentsia's efforts to prove the black race's competence of art and culture. Truth is that a great amount of artistic works were produced and most of them were very successful yet the Renaissance's overall view proves a failure more than a rebirth. The tone they employed in defending the black Americans' rights was very

fierce. The giants of Harlem tried to show the adequacy of black mind and soul in art and culture. However the authority to evaluate the success rate was still under the white hegemony. It is a truth that the products and performances of black Americans were liked by the white sphere as well; yet as for terminating the discrimination and inequality we cannot utter the same success. Another aspect that names the Renaissance failure is that the intelligentsia of Harlem did not demonstrate the misery in the underground of Harlem. Poverty, unemployment and high crime rate did not find place in the works of the new Negro mind. Trying hard to show off the black race's positive side, the giants of Harlem excluded the concrete problems of black Harlemites out of their new Negro paradigm.

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