

118TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. RES. 94

Honoring the legacy of the Harlem Renaissance, a cultural, social, and political movement in American history.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

FEBRUARY 2, 2023

Mr. ESPAILLAT (for himself, Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN, Ms. TLAIB, Ms. VELÁZQUEZ, Mr. DAVIS of Illinois, Mr. IVEY, and Mr. BOWMAN) submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on Oversight and Accountability

RESOLUTION

Honoring the legacy of the Harlem Renaissance, a cultural, social, and political movement in American history.

Whereas the Harlem Renaissance radically redefined the Black experience and continues to influence future generations of artists, writers, and intellectuals, creating indelible impacts on culture in the United States and the world;

Whereas approximately 6,000,000 Black people moved from the American South to Northern, Midwestern, and Western States between the 1910s until the 1970s, a population shift which we know today as “The Great Migration”, one of the largest movements of people in United States history seeking to escape the radically racist system of Jim Crow segregation policies;

Whereas “the Great Migration” of Blacks from the Southern States and the arrival of African diasporans notably from the Caribbean and Latin America seeking economic opportunities, better housing and education, and social justice and civil rights also served the World War I efforts as patriotic Americans despite segregation and systemic racial discrimination in the Army;

Whereas the most celebrated African-American regiment in World War I, the 369th Infantry Regiment, the Harlem Hellfighters (Black Rattlers), mostly New Yorkers (Blacks and Latinos) and residents of Harlem, entered the battlefields on October 15, 1918, fought bravely in the Meuse-Argonne Offensive alongside the French troops, and were awarded the highest honor by the French Government, the Croix de Guerre;

Whereas the 369th Infantry Regiment, the Harlem Hellfighters, fought with bravery in battle, under the leadership of Lieutenant James Reese Europe, the 369th Regiment military band also became known for its rag-time music and is credited for introducing American jazz to Europe;

Whereas its triumphant return to the United States and parade which drew thousands on February 17, 1919, is considered the start of the Harlem Renaissance era;

Whereas Harlem in New York City was one of the most popular destinations for these families, a formerly all-White neighborhood that by the 1920s became home to some 200,000–500,000 African Americans;

Whereas this considerable population shift fostered the birth of an African-American cultural movement;

Whereas leading organizations such as the National Urban League and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) headed by well-known figures such as W.E.B. Du Bois, James Weldon Johnson, Walter White, and Jessie Fauset who provided aesthetic guidance and financial support both for this cultural awakening that spanned from the 1910s to the mid-1930s, and to withstand and overcome segregated churches, schools, housing, stores, theaters, hotels, and restaurants which persisted even in Harlem in one form or another as late as the 1960s;

Whereas in 1914, Marcus Garvey, of Jamaican descent, founded the United Negro Improvement Association and advocated for stronger connections between African Americans and the worldwide African diaspora, was also a leading intellectual during the Harlem Renaissance;

Whereas educator, writer, and philosopher Alain Locke compiled an anthology reflecting the works of African Americans seeking social, political, and artistic change called the “New Negro” whose name came to define a movement which today we know as the Harlem Renaissance;

Whereas statesman Asa Philip Randolph helped establish our Nation’s first federally recognized labor union to protect Black workers, the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, in 1925, in Harlem;

Whereas bold and exciting forms of Black music evolved, along with venues to listen and to dance to the music such as Harlem’s Minton’s Playhouse, the Cotton Club, Small’s Paradise, Baby Grand, Lenox Lounge, Savoy Ballroom, Renaissance Ballroom, and Alhambra Ballroom;

Whereas blues, ragtime, and jazz became the key form of form of cultural expression in Harlem, where legendary artists such as Scott Joplin, Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, Cab Calloway, Lena Horne, Bessie Smith, Count Basie, Ethel Waters, Ella Fitzgerald, Billie Holiday, Ivie Anderson, Mamie Smith, Noble Sissle, Eubie Blake, Jelly Roll Morton, and many performers composers and arrangers rose to prominence;

Whereas Edward Kennedy “Duke” Ellington, with Billy Strayhorn, a gay great affectionately known as, “Sweet Pea”, was a composer, pianist, and jazz orchestra leader for five decades writing over 1,000 songs, and Louis Armstrong, the “Jazz Ambassador”, became three of the most influential musicians in the history of jazz with a distinctive voice and a unique style;

Whereas the era also saw the burgeoning of literary work by and about African Americans by writers like Sterling A. Brown, Alice Dunbar Nelson, Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, Nella Larson, Wallace Thurman, and Countee Cullen, to name just a few;

Whereas two of the first works that had a significant impact on the culture of the Harlem Renaissance were the poetry anthologies known as “Harlem Shadows” by Claude McKay and “Cane” by Jean Toomer;

Whereas artist Aaron Douglas, a figure of the Harlem Renaissance, “defined a modern visual language that represented Black Americans in a new light” and later became known as the “father of African-American art”, along with noted sculptor Richard Barthe and several leading women artists, including Augusta Savage and Elizabeth Catlett;

Whereas acclaimed Black architects including Vertner Woodson Tandy, George Washington Foster, John Lewis Wilson, and Norma Merrick Sklarek all helped to transform the Harlem landscape;

Whereas acclaimed photographers James Van Der Zee, Morgan and Marvin Smith, Austen Hansen, and Gordon Parks were known as the “unofficial chroniclers of African-American life in Harlem” and their vast portfolios of formal and informal photographs help to provide a resounding visual legacy of this moment in history;

Whereas the Harlem Renaissance is remembered for the literature that came from the movement, including “Home to Harlem” by Claude McKay, “Not Without Laughter” by Langston Hughes, “The Infants of the Spring” by Wallace Thurman, “Smoke Lillies and Jade” by Richard Bruce Nugent, “Black No More” by George Schuyler, and “Their Eyes Were Watching God” by Zora Neale Hurston, and publisher and writer Dorothy West’s “The Living is Easy”;

Whereas the development of Harlem as a Black cultural mecca in the early 20th century and the subsequent social and artistic movements that produced a golden era in African-American culture manifested in dance, design, architecture, poetry, literature, politics, fashion, scholarship, music and stage performance, and art;

Whereas Harlem attracted a remarkable concentration of intellect and talent and served as the symbolic capital of this cultural awakening, while other New York City neighborhoods, as well as communities in Chicago, Cleveland, and Los Angeles, also nurtured social and creative movements;

Whereas the Harlem Renaissance embraced literary, musical, theatrical, and visual arts, its participants also sought to foster a new image of “the Negro” that challenged the racist and derogatory stereotypes with which Whites had characterized Black people and instead sought to engender pride in Black culture and heritage;

Whereas crucial to the movement were magazines such as *The Crisis*, published by the NAACP, *Opportunity*, published by the National Urban League, and *The Messenger*, a socialist journal eventually connected with the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters; and

Whereas the Harlem Renaissance was not dominated by a particular school of thought but rather characterized by intense debate, the movement laid a foundation for later African-American literature and consciousness worldwide: Now, therefore, be it

1 *Resolved*, That the House of Representatives—

2 (1) recognizes that the Harlem Renaissance
3 represented a pivotal moment in America history for
4 African Americans and the African diaspora commu-
5 nity of intellectuals, artists, performers, writers,
6 poets, and musicians whose works of political dis-
7 course and creative expression set a path for self-de-
8 termination and self-empowerment which is still evi-
9 dent today;

10 (2) recognizes that the Harlem Renaissance
11 gave Black people pride in and control over how the
12 Black experience was represented in American cul-

1 ture and set the stage for the civil rights movement
2 and continues to inform the activities of today for
3 social justice and equal rights;

4 (3) supports efforts to recognize, promote, pre-
5 serve, and celebrate the rich history of the Harlem
6 Renaissance and its continuum through contem-
7 porary interpretive programs;

8 (4) protects Harlem’s historic assets, its cul-
9 tural legacy, the rich history of its people against en-
10 croachments resulting in the displacement and up-
11 rooting of low- and moderate-income residents, and
12 undermine its world-renowned cultural identity and
13 unique neighborhood character, which are economic
14 tools not only for Harlem, but New York City, in
15 general; and

16 (5) celebrates the lasting impact of the Harlem
17 Renaissance on the art, literature, music, discourse,
18 and culture of the United States.

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