

Chronology

1919

February 17: Returning veterans of the Fifteenth Regiment of New York's National Guard march triumphally through Harlem. February 19–21: While the Paris Peace Conference is taking place, W.E.B. Du Bois organizes Pan-African Conference in Paris, attended by fifty-seven delegates from the United States, the West Indies, Europe, and Africa; conference calls for acknowledgment and protection of the rights of Africans under colonial rule. March: Release of *The Homesteader*, directed and produced by self-published novelist and entrepreneur Oscar Micheaux, first feature-length film by an African American. May: Hair-care entrepreneur Madam C. J. Walker dies at her estate in Irvington, New York; her daughter A'Lelia Walker assumes control of the Madam C.J. Walker Manufacturing Company. May–October: In what becomes known as “the Red Summer,” racial conflicts boil over in the wake of the return of African American veterans; incidents of racial violence erupt across the United States, including outbreaks in Charleston, South Carolina; Longview, Texas; Omaha; Washington, D.C.; Chicago; Knoxville; and Elaine, Arkansas. June: Marcus Garvey establishes his Black Star Line (the shipping concern will operate until 1922). July: Claude McKay's poem “If We Must Die,” written in response to the summer of violence, appears in Max Eastman's magazine *The Liberator*. September: Jessie Redmon Fauset joins staff of *The Crisis*, the literary magazine of the NAACP founded in 1910, as literary editor.

1920

January: *The Brownie's Book*, a magazine for African American children, founded by W.E.B. Du Bois with Jessie Redmon Fauset and Augustus Dill, begins its run of twenty-four issues. Oscar Micheaux releases the anti-lynching film, *Within Our Gates*, an answer both to D. W. Griffith's inflammatory *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) and the Red Summer of 1919. April: In an article in *The Crisis*, W.E.B. Du Bois writes: “A renaissance of American Negro literature is due.” August: The Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), founded by Jamaican immigrant and Pan-Africanist Marcus Garvey, holds its first convention at Madison Square Garden

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in New York City, attended by some 25,000 delegates. November: James Weldon Johnson becomes executive secretary (and first black officer) of the NAACP. Mamie Smith's "Crazy Blues" is released by Okeh Records. Eugene O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones*, starring Charles Gilpin, opens at the Provincetown Playhouse in Greenwich Village.

Books

W.E.B. Du Bois: *Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil* (Harcourt, Brace & Howe)
 Claude McKay: *Spring in New Hampshire and Other Poems* (Grant Richards)

1921

February: Max Eastman invites Claude McKay, just returned from England, to become associate editor of *The Liberator*. March: Harry Pace forms Black Swan Phonograph Company, one of the first black-owned record companies in Harlem; its most successful recording artist is Ethel Waters. May: *Shuffle Along*, a pioneering all-African American production, with book by Flournoy Miller and Aubrey Lyles and music and lyrics by Eubie Blake and Noble Sissle, opens on Broadway and becomes a hit. It showcases such stars as Florence Mills and Josephine Baker. June: Langston Hughes publishes his poem "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" in *The Crisis*. August–September: Exhibit of African American art at the 13th Street branch of the New York Public Library, including work by Henry Ossawa Tanner, Meta Fuller, and Laura Wheeler Waring. December: René Maran, a native of Martinique, becomes the first black recipient of the Prix Goncourt, for his novel *Batouala*; soon translated into English, it will be widely discussed in the African American press.

1922

January: The Dyer Anti-Lynching Bill is passed by the House of Representatives; it is subsequently blocked in the Senate. Spring: *Birchright*, novel of African American life by the white novelist T. S. Stribling, is published by Century Publications. (Oscar Micheaux will make two films based on the book, in 1924 and 1938.) White real estate magnate William E. Harmon establishes the Harmon Foundation to advance African American achievements.

Books

Georgia Douglas Johnson: *Bronze* (B. J. Brimmer)
 James Weldon Johnson, editor: *The Book of American Negro Poetry* (Harcourt, Brace)

Claude McKay: *Harlem Shadows* (Harcourt, Brace; expanded version of *Spring in New Hampshire*)
 T. S. Stribling: *Birchright* (Century)

1923

January: *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life*, published by the National Urban League and edited by sociologist Charles S. Johnson, is founded. Claude McKay addresses the Fourth Congress of the Third International in Moscow. February: Bessie Smith's "Downhearted Blues" (written and originally recorded by Alberta Hunter) is released by Columbia Records and sells nearly a million copies within six months. May: Willis Richardson's *The Chip Woman*, produced by the National Ethiopian Art Players, becomes the first serious play by an African American playwright to open on Broadway. June: Marcus Garvey receives a five-year sentence for mail fraud. December: Tenor Roland Hayes, having won acclaim in London as a singer of classical music, gives a concert of lieder and spirituals at Tow Hall in New York. *The Messenger*, founded in 1917 by Asa Philip Randolph and Chandler Owen as a black trade unionist magazine with socialist sympathies, begins publishing more literary material under editorial guidance of George S. Schuyler and Theophilus Lewis.

Books

Marcus Garvey: *Philosophy and Opinion of Marcus Garvey* (Universal Publishing House)
 Jean Toomer: *Cane* (Boni & Liveright)

1924

March: The Civic Club dinner, held in honor of Jessie Redmon Fauset on publishing her first novel *There Is Confusion*, is sponsored by *Opportunity* and Charles S. Johnson. Those in attendance include Alain Locke, W.E.B. Du Bois, Countee Cullen, Eric Walrond, Gwendolyn Bennett, and such representatives of the New York publishing world as Alfred A. Knopf and Horace Liveright. (In retrospect the occasion is often taken to mark the beginning of the Harlem Renaissance.) May: W.E.B. Du Bois attacks Marcus Garvey in *The Crisis* article "A Lunatic or a Traitor." Eugene O'Neill's play *All God's Chillun Got Wings*, starring Paul Robeson and controversial for its theme of miscegenation, opens. Autumn: Countee Cullen is the first recipient of Witter Bynner Poetry Competition. September: René Maran publishes poems by Countee Cullen, Langston Hughes, Claude McKay, and Jean Toomer in his Paris

newspaper, *Les Continents*. Louis Armstrong comes to New York from Chicago to join Fletcher Henderson's band at the Roseland Ballroom.

Books

W.E.B. Du Bois: *The Gift of Black Folk: The Negroes in the Making of America* (Stratford)

Jessie Redmon Fauset: *There Is Confusion* (Boni & Live-right)

Walter White: *The Fire in the Flint* (Knopf)

1925

February: After his appeals are denied, Marcus Garvey begins serving his sentence for mail fraud at Atlanta Federal Penitentiary. March: Howard Philosophy Professor Alain Locke edits a special issue of *The Survey Graphic* titled "Harlem: Mecca of the New Negro"; in November *The New Negro*, an expanded book version, is published by Albert and Charles Boni. The volume features six pages of painter Aaron Douglas's African-inspired illustrations, and includes writing by Jean Toomer, Rudolph Fisher, Zora Neale Hurston, Eric Walrond, Countee Cullen, James Weldon Johnson, Langston Hughes, Georgia Douglas Johnson, Richard Bruce Nugent, Anne Spencer, Claude McKay, Jessie Redmon Fauset, Arthur Schomburg, Charles S. Johnson, W.E.B. Du Bois, and E. Franklin Frazier. May: *Opportunity* holds its first awards dinner, recognizing, among others, Langston Hughes ("The Weary Blues," first prize), Countee Cullen, Zora Neale Hurston, Eric Walrond, and Sterling Brown. Paul Robeson appears at Greenwich Village Theatre in a concert entirely devoted to spirituals, accompanied by Lawrence Brown. August: A. Phillip Randolph organizes the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. October: The American Negro Labor Congress is founded in Chicago. November: First prize of *The Crisis* awards goes to poet Countee Cullen. Paul Robeson stars in Oscar Micheaux's film *Body and Soul*. December: Marita Bonner publishes essay "On Being Young—A Woman—And Colored" in *The Crisis*, about the predicament and possibilities of the educated black woman.

Books

Countee Cullen: *Color* (Harper)

James Weldon Johnson and J. Rosamond Johnson, editors: *The Book of American Negro Spirituals* (Viking Press)

Alain Locke, editor: *The New Negro: An Interpretation* (Albert and Charles Boni)

1926

January: The Harmon Foundation announces its first awards for artistic achievement by African Americans. Palmer Hayden, a World War I veteran and menial laborer, wins the gold medal for painting. February: Jessie Redmon Fauset steps down as editor of *The Crisis*. The play *Lulu Belle*, starring Lenore Ulric in blackface as well as the African American actress Edna Thomas, opens to great success on Broadway; it helps create a vogue of whites frequenting Harlem nightspots. March: The Savoy Ballroom opens on Lenox Avenue between 140th and 141st Streets. June: Successive issues of *The Nation* feature Langston Hughes's "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain" and George S. Schuyler's "The Negro-Art Hokum." July: W.E.B. Du Bois founds Krigwa Players, Harlem theater group devoted to plays depicting African American life. August: Carl Van Vechten, white novelist and close friend to many Negro Renaissance figures, publishes his roman à clef, *Nigger Heaven*, with Knopf. Although many of his friends—including James Weldon Johnson, Nella Larsen, and Langston Hughes—are supportive, the book is widely disliked by African American readers, and notably condemned by W.E.B. Du Bois. October: Arthur Schomburg's collection of thousands of books, manuscripts, and artworks is purchased for the New York Public Library by the Carnegie Corporation; it will form the basis of what will become the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. November: *Fire!!*, a journal edited by Wallace Thurman, makes its sole appearance. Contributors include Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, and Gwendolyn Bennett, among others. "Smoke, Lilies and Jade," a short story by Richard Bruce Nugent published in *Fire!!*, shocks many by its delineation of a homosexual liaison as well as by Nugent's suggestive line drawings. Most copies are accidentally destroyed in a fire. December: Countee Cullen begins contributing a column, "The Dark Tower," to *Opportunity*. (It will run until September 1928.)

Books

W. C. Handy, editor: *Blues: An Anthology* (Boni & Boni)

Langston Hughes: *The Weary Blues* (Knopf)

Alain Locke, editor: *Four Negro Poets* (Simon & Schuster)

Carl Van Vechten: *Nigger Heaven* (Knopf)
 Eric Walrond: *Tropic Death* (Boni & Liveright; story collection)
 Walter White: *Flight* (Knopf)

1927

July: Ethel Waters stars on Broadway in the revue *Africana*.
 August: Rudolph Fisher's essay "The Caucasian Storms Harlem" is published in *The American Mercury*. September: James Weldon Johnson's *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*, first published anonymously in 1912, is republished by Knopf. October: A'Lelia Walker, cosmetics heiress and Harlem socialite, opens The Dark Tower, a tearoom intended as a cultural gathering place, at her home on West 130th Street. "We dedicate this tower to the aesthetes. That cultural group of young Negro writers, sculptors, painters, music artists, composers, and their friends." The Theatre Guild production of DuBoise Heyward's play *Porgy*, with an African American cast, opens to great success. December: Marcus Garvey, pardoned by Calvin Coolidge after serving more than half of five-year sentence for mail fraud, is deported. Duke Ellington and his orchestra begin what will prove a years-long engagement at the Cotton Club of Harlem.

Books

Countee Cullen: *Copper Sun* (Harper)
 Countee Cullen, editor: *Caroling Dusk: An Anthology of Verse by Negro Poets* (Harper)
 Langston Hughes: *Fine Clothes to the Jew* (Knopf)
 Charles S. Johnson, editor: *Ebony and Topaz* (Journal of Negro Life/National Urban League)
 James Weldon Johnson: *God's Trombones: Seven Negro Sermons in Verse* (Knopf)
 Alain Locke and Montgomery Gregory, editors: *Plays of Negro Life* (Harper)

January: The first Harmon Foundation art exhibition opens at New York's International House. April 9: Countee Cullen marries Nina Yolande, daughter of W.E.B. Du Bois; the wedding is a major social event, attended by thousands of people. (The marriage breaks up several months later.) May: Bill "Bojangles" Robinson appears on Broadway in the revue *Blackbirds of 1928*. June: *The Messenger* ceases publication when the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters can no longer financially support the journal. November:

1928

Wallace Thurman publishes the first and only issue of the magazine *Harlem: A Forum of Negro Life*.

Books

W.E.B. Du Bois: *Dark Princess: A Romance* (Harcourt, Brace)
 Jessie Redmon Fauset: *Plum Bun* (Frederick Stokes)
 Rudolph Fisher: *The Walls of Jericho* (Knopf)
 Georgia Douglas Johnson: *An Autumn Love Cycle* (Harold Vinal)
 Nella Larsen: *Quicksand* (Knopf)
 Claude McKay: *Home to Harlem* (Harper)

1929

February: *Harlem*, co-authored by Wallace Thurman and William Rapp, opens on Broadway to mixed reviews. Archibald Motley, Jr. wins gold medal for painting from the Harmon Foundation. October 29: The New York stock market plunges, eliminating much of the funding powering "New Negro" literature and arts.

Books

Countee Cullen: *The Black Christ and Other Poems* (Harper)
 Nella Larsen: *Passing* (Knopf)
 Claude McKay: *Banjo: A Story Without a Plot* (Harper)
 Wallace Thurman: *The Blacker the Berry* (Macaulay)
 Walter White: *Rope and Faggot: A Biography of Judge Lynch* (Knopf)

1930

February: *The Green Pastures*, a play by Marc Connelly, based on Roark Bradford's *Of Man Adam an' His Chillin* (1928), opens on Broadway with an all-black cast; it will be one of the most successful plays of its era. July: The Nation of Islam, colloquially known as the Black Muslims, founded by W. D. Fard in Detroit at the Islam Temple. Dancer and anthropology student Katharine Dunham founds Ballet Nègre in Chicago. James Weldon Johnson publishes a limited edition of "Saint Peter Relates an Incident of the Resurrection Day," a poem protesting the insulting treatment accorded to African American Gold Star Mothers visiting American cemeteries in Europe.

Books

Langston Hughes: *Not Without Laughter* (Macmillan)
 Charles S. Johnson: *The Negro in American Civilization: A Study of Negro Life and Race Relations* (Henry Holt)
 James Weldon Johnson: *Black Manhattan* (Knopf)

James Weldon Johnson: *Saint Peter Relates an Incident of the Resurrection Day* (Viking Press)

1931

April-July: The "Scottsboro Boys," a group of young African American men accused of raping two white women, are tried and convicted; a massive, lengthy, and only partly successful campaign to free them begins. Sculptor Augusta Savage, whose real-life rebuff by the white art establishment becomes part of the back story for *Plum Bun*, establishes the Savage Studio of Arts and Crafts in Harlem.

Books

Arna Bontemps: *God Sends Sunday* (Harcourt, Brace)
 Sterling Brown: *Outline for the Study of Poetry of American Negroes* (Harcourt, Brace)
 Countee Cullen: *One Way to Heaven* (Harper)
 Jessie Redmon Fauset: *The Chinaberry Tree* (Frederick Stokes)
 Langston Hughes: *Dear Lonely Death* (Troutbeck Press)
 George S. Schuyler: *Black No More* (Macaulay)
 Jean Toomer: *Essentials: Definitions and Aphorisms* (Lakeside Press)

1932

June: Langston Hughes, Dorothy West, Louise Thompson, and more than a dozen other African Americans travel to the Soviet Union to film *Black and White*, a movie about American racism. (Due to shifting Soviet policies, the movie will never be made.)

Books

Sterling Brown: *Southern Road* (Harcourt, Brace)
 Rudolph Fisher: *The Conjure-Man Dies* (Covici-Friede)
 Langston Hughes: *The Dream Keeper* (Knopf)
 Claude McKay: *Gingertown* (Harper; story collection)
 George S. Schuyler: *Slaves Today* (Brewer, Warren, and Putnam)
 Wallace Thurman: *Infants of the Spring* (Macaulay)
 Wallace Thurman and Abraham Furman: *Interne* (Macaulay)

1933

Books

Jessie Redmon Fauset: *Comedy: American Style* (Frederick A. Stokes)
 James Weldon Johnson: *Along This Way* (Knopf)

Alain Locke: *The Negro in America* (American Library Association)

Claude McKay: *Banana Bottom* (Harper)

1934

January: The Apollo Theater opens. February: *Negro*, an anthology of work by and about African Americans, edited by Nancy Cunard, is published by Wishart in London. March: Dorothy West founds the magazine *Challenge*. May: W.E.B. Du Bois resigns from the NAACP; he is replaced as editor of *The Crisis* by Roy Wilkins. November: Aaron Douglas completes *Aspects of Negro Life*, four murals commissioned by the New York Public Library. December: Wallace Thurman and Rudolph Fisher die within days of one another. Richard Wright writes the initial draft of his first novel, *Lawd Today*, published posthumously in 1963. M. B. Tolson completes sequence of poems *A Gallery of Harlem Portraits*, published posthumously in 1979.

Books

Langston Hughes: *The Ways of White Folks* (Knopf; story collection)
 Zora Neale Hurston: *Jonah's Gourd Vine* (Lippincott)
 James Weldon Johnson: *Negro Americans, What Now?* (Viking Press)

1935

March 19: A riot sparked by rumors of white violence against a Puerto Rican youth results in three African American deaths and millions of dollars in damage to white-owned properties. April: In "Harlem Runs Wild," published in *The Nation*, Claude McKay asserts that the riot is "the gesture of despair of a bewildered, baffled, and disillusioned people." The Works Progress Administration (WPA) established by U.S. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt; writers and artists who will eventually find employment under its aegis include Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, Dorothy West, Margaret Walker, Augusta Savage, Romare Bearden, and Jacob Lawrence. October: Langston Hughes's play *Mulatto* and George Gershwin's opera *Porgy and Bess* open on Broadway.

Books

Countee Cullen: *The Medea and Some Poems* (Harper)
 Frank Marshall Davis: *Black Man's Verse* (Black Cat Press)
 W.E.B. Du Bois: *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880* (Harcourt, Brace)

Zora Neale Hurston: *Mules and Men* (Lippincott)
 James Weldon Johnson: *Saint Peter Relates an Incident: Selected Poems* (Viking Press)

1936

February: The National Negro Congress, representing some 600 organizations, holds its first meeting in Chicago.
 June: Mary McLeod Bethune is appointed Director of the Division of Negro Affairs of the National Youth Administration, becoming the highest-ranking African American official of the Roosevelt administration.

Books

Arna Bontemps: *Black Thunder* (Macmillan)
 Alain Locke: *Negro Art—Past and Present* (Associates in Negro Folk Education)
 Alain Locke: *The Negro and His Music* (Associates in Negro Folk Education)

Biographical Notes

Jean Toomer Born Nathan Pinchback Toomer on December 18, 1899, in Washington, D.C., the only son of Nathan Eugene Toomer, a Georgia planter who had been born into slavery, and Nina Pinchback, the daughter of P.B.S. Pinchback, a Louisiana politician during Reconstruction served as the state's lieutenant governor briefly as acting governor) and was elected to the U.S. Senate in 1904 but did not serve owing to the contestation of his election. Toomer's parents were of mixed race and, like Toomer, very light-skinned. Toomer's parents separated when he was very young; he grew up in the household of his maternal grandfather. Most, if not all, of his early years were spent in Washington, D.C.; he later commented that he did not really live in an African American neighborhood until he was a teenager. Following a short residence in upstate New York with his mother and her second husband, Toomer returned to Washington following her death in 1909 and graduated in 1914 from the elite all-black Street School (renamed Paul Laurence Dunbar High School in 1931). Toomer enrolled in classes at a variety of schools, including the University of Wisconsin, the Massachusetts College of Agriculture, the American College of Physical Training (Chicago), the University of Chicago, the City College of New York, and New York University, but did not earn an undergraduate degree. He changed his name to Jean Toomer and in his early twenties lived in Greenwich Village where he met writers including Van Wyck Brooks and Witter Bynner, and formed a close friendship with Waldo Frank. In the fall of 1921 he took a temporary teaching job at an agricultural school in Sparta, Georgia, an experience that became the basis for much of *Cane*, a fusion of fiction, poetry, and drama that was published by Boni and Liveright in 1923. His poetry and prose appeared in magazines such as *Broom*, *Liberator*, *Nomad*, and *The Little Review*, and *Cane* upon publication received wide critical acclaim. Toomer became interested in the mystical ideas of George Ivanovich Gurdjieff; in January 1924 in New York he met A. R. Orage, an English disciple of Gurdjieff, and spent that summer at Gurdjieff's Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man at Fontainebleau, France. Returning to America, he conducted Gurdjieff workshops in New York, Chicago, and Portland, Oregon, and Wisconsin. He married the writer Margery Latimer in 1931, and their marriage led to a national anti-miscegenation scandal when reported on by *Time*. (At the time of the marriage Toomer issued a statement