**THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE**

* A cultural, social and artistic movement in Harlem, New York
* Spanned the 1920s (generally accepted as 1918-mid 1930s)
* At the time, known as the “New Negro Movement”
* Historical Context: post WWI – fighters accomplishments and sacrifices not recognized, race riots during “Red Summer of 1919”, increase in popularity of black culture,

**PAUL LAURENCE DUNBAR, 1872-1906**

***Precursor to The Harlem Renaissance***

**We Wear the Mask (1896)**

We wear the mask that grins and lies,

It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes,—

This debt we pay to human guile;

With torn and bleeding hearts we smile,

And mouth with myriad subtleties.

Why should the world be over-wise,

In counting all our tears and sighs?

Nay, let them only see us, while

We wear the mask.

We smile, but, O great Christ, our cries

To thee from tortured souls arise.

We sing, but oh the clay is vile

Beneath our feet, and long the mile;

But let the world dream otherwise,

We wear the mask!

**CLAUDE MCKAY, 1889-1948**

**If We Must Die (1919)**

If we must die—let it not be like hogs

Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot,

While round us bark the mad and hungry dogs,

Making their mock at our accursed lot.

If we must die—oh, let us nobly die,

So that our precious blood may not be shed

In vain; then even the monsters we defy

Shall be constrained to honor us though dead!

Oh, Kinsmen! We must meet the common foe;

Though far outnumbered, let us show us brave,

And for their thousand blows deal one deathblow!

What though before us lies the open grave?

Like men we’ll face the murderous, cowardly pack,

Pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back!

**Harlem Dancer (1917)**

Applauding youths laughed with young prostitutes

And watched her perfect, half-clothed body sway;

Her voice was like the sound of blended flutes

Blown by black players upon a picnic day.

She sang and danced on gracefully and calm,

The light gauze hanging loose about her form;

To me she seemed a proudly-swaying palm

Grown lovelier for passing through a storm.

Upon her swarthy neck black shiny curls

Luxuriant fell; and tossing coins in praise,

The wine-flushed, bold-eyed boys, and even the girls,

Devoured her shape with eager, passionate gaze;

But looking at her falsely-smiling face,

I knew her self was not in that strange place.

**Countee Cullen, 1903-1946**

**Any Human to Another (1935)**

The ills I sorrow at

Not me alone

Like an arrow,

Pierce to the marrow,

Through the fat

And past the bone.

Your grief and mine

Must intertwine

Like sea and river,

Be fused and mingle,

Diverse yet single,

Forever and forever.

Let no man be so proud

And confident,

To think he is allowed

A little tent

Pitched in a meadow

Of sun and shadow

All his little own.

Joy may be shy, unique,

Friendly to a few,

Sorrow may be scorned to speak

To any who

Were false or true.

Your every grief

Like a blade

Shining and unsheathed

Must strike me down.

Of bitter aloes wreathed,

My sorrow must be laid

On your head like a crown.

**LANGSTON HUGHES, 1902 - 1967**

**The Negro Speaks of Rivers (1921)**

I’ve known rivers:

I’ve known rivers ancient as the world and older than the

flow of human blood in human veins.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.

I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.

I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.

I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln

went down to New Orleans, and I’ve seen its muddy

bosom turn all golden in the sunset.

I’ve known rivers:

Ancient, dusky rivers.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

**I, Too (1932)**

I, too, sing America.

I am the darker brother.

They send me to eat in the kitchen

When company comes,

But I laugh,

And eat well,

And grow strong.

Tomorrow,

I’ll be at the table

When company comes.

Nobody’ll dare

Say to me,

“Eat in the kitchen,”

Then.

Besides,

They’ll see how beautiful I am

And be ashamed—

I, too, am America.

**Let America Be America Again (1938)**

Let America be America again.

Let it be the dream it used to be.

Let it be the pioneer on the plain

Seeking a home where he himself is free.

(America never was America to me.)

Let America be the dream the dreamers dreamed—

Let it be that great strong land of love

Where never kings connive nor tyrants scheme

That any man be crushed by one above.

(It never was America to me.)

O, let my land be a land where Liberty

Is crowned with no false patriotic wreath,

But opportunity is real, and life is free,

Equality is in the air we breathe.

(There’s never been equality for me,

Nor freedom in this “homeland of the free.”)

Say, who are you that mumbles in the dark?

And who are you that draws your veil across the stars?

I am the poor white, fooled and pushed apart,

I am the Negro bearing slavery’s scars.

I am the red man driven from the land,

I am the immigrant clutching the hope I seek—

And finding only the same old stupid plan

Of dog eat dog, of mighty crush the weak.

I am the young man, full of strength and hope,

Tangled in that ancient endless chain

Of profit, power, gain, of grab the land!

Of grab the gold! Of grab the ways of satisfying need!

Of work the men! Of take the pay!

Of owning everything for one’s own greed!

I am the farmer, bondsman to the soil.

I am the worker sold to the machine.

I am the Negro, servant to you all.

I am the people, humble, hungry, mean—

Hungry yet today despite the dream.

Beaten yet today—O, Pioneers!

I am the man who never got ahead,

The poorest worker bartered through the years.

Yet I’m the one who dreamt our basic dream

In the Old World while still a serf of kings,

Who dreamt a dream so strong, so brave, so true,

That even yet its mighty daring sings

In every brick and stone, in every furrow turned

That’s made America the land it has become.

O, I’m the man who sailed those early seas

In search of what I meant to be my home—

For I’m the one who left dark Ireland’s shore,

And Poland’s plain, and England’s grassy lea,

And torn from Black Africa’s strand I came

To build a “homeland of the free.”

The free?

Who said the free? Not me?

Surely not me? The millions on relief today?

The millions shot down when we strike?

The millions who have nothing for our pay?

For all the dreams we’ve dreamed

And all the songs we’ve sung

And all the hopes we’ve held

And all the flags we’ve hung,

The millions who have nothing for our pay—

Except the dream that’s almost dead today.

O, let America be America again—

The land that never has been yet—

And yet must be—the land where every man is free.

The land that’s mine—the poor man’s, Indian’s, Negro’s, ME—

Who made America,

Whose sweat and blood, whose faith and pain,

Whose hand at the foundry, whose plow in the rain,

Must bring back our mighty dream again.

Sure, call me any ugly name you choose—

The steel of freedom does not stain.

From those who live like leeches on the people’s lives,

We must take back our land again,

America!

O, yes,

I say it plain,

America never was America to me,

And yet I swear this oath—

America will be!

Out of the rack and ruin of our gangster death,

The rape and rot of graft, and stealth, and lies,

We, the people, must redeem

The land, the mines, the plants, the rivers.

The mountains and the endless plain—

All, all the stretch of these great green states—

And make America again!

**Theme for English B (1951)**

The instructor said,

Go home and write

a page tonight.

And let that page come out of you—

Then, it will be true.

I wonder if it’s that simple?

I am twenty-two, colored, born in Winston-Salem.

I went to school there, then Durham, then here

to this college on the hill above Harlem.

I am the only colored student in my class.

The steps from the hill lead down into Harlem,

through a park, then I cross St. Nicholas,

Eighth Avenue, Seventh, and I come to the Y,

the Harlem Branch Y, where I take the elevator

up to my room, sit down, and write this page:

It’s not easy to know what is true for you or me

at twenty-two, my age. But I guess I’m what

I feel and see and hear, Harlem, I hear you:

hear you, hear me—we two—you, me, talk on this page.

(I hear New York, too.) Me—who?

Well, I like to eat, sleep, drink, and be in love.

I like to work, read, learn, and understand life.

I like a pipe for a Christmas present,

or records—Bessie, bop, or Bach.

I guess being colored doesn’t make me not like

the same things other folks like who are other races.

So will my page be colored that I write?

Being me, it will not be white.

But it will be

a part of you, instructor.

You are white—

yet a part of me, as I am a part of you.

That’s American.

Sometimes perhaps you don’t want to be a part of me.

Nor do I often want to be a part of you.

But we are, that’s true!

As I learn from you,

I guess you learn from me—

although you’re older—and white—

and somewhat more free.

This is my page for English B.

**Gwendolyn Brooks, 1917 - 2000**

***Post Harlem Renaissance***

**We Real Cool (1959)**

THE POOL PLAYERS.

SEVEN AT THE GOLDEN SHOVEL.

We real cool. We

Left school. We

Lurk late. We

Strike straight. We

Sing sin. We

Thin gin. We

Jazz June. We

Die soon.

**my dreams, my works, must wait till after hell**

I hold my honey and I store my bread

In little jars and cabinets of my will.

I label clearly, and each latch and lid

I bid, Be firm till I return from hell.

I am very hungry. I am incomplete.

And none can tell when I may dine again.

No man can give me any word but Wait,

The puny light. I keep eyes pointed in;

Hoping that, when the devil days of my hurt

Drag out to their last dregs and I resume

On such legs as are left me, in such heart

As I can manage, remember to go home,

My taste will not have turned insensitive

To honey and bread old purity could love.