

FIRE!! Writers, Musicians, and Visual Artists of the Harlem Renaissance I: 1918-1929 Syllabus

Instructor

Annie Randall

Quarter: Summer 2024

Start – end date: June 12 – Aug 7

Session day/time: Wednesdays, 6:00 – 8:30 pm CT

Course Code and Section: HUAS78084 24U1

Email

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Modality

Remote learning

Course Overview

Exploding in the 1920s and 1930s the creative energy of Harlem’s poets, painters, novelists, jazz and blues musicians, sculptors, photographers, graphic designers, and filmmakers changed the face of New York City and established the northern Manhattan neighborhood as the intellectual and artistic Black capital of the world. The urgent new ideas, images, and sounds generated in this period of radical self-reinvention had a profound ripple effect that is still felt today in all corners of U.S. culture. This course explores the lives and works of figures such as W.E.B. DuBois, Jessie Fauset, Langston Hughes, Nella Larsen, Alain Locke, Bessie Smith, Duke Ellington, Augusta Savage, Aaron Douglas, and Zora Neale Hurston, paying special attention to the networks that sustained them through the era’s turmoil and triumphs.

*The course title is taken from one of the period’s most influential journals, *FIRE!! A Quarterly Devoted to the Younger Negro Artists* (1926).

Note to students

Each week we will discuss the work of Harlem Renaissance writers, essayists, musicians, and visual artists. On Canvas, before class, students are invited to post a brief response to one or more of the week’s assigned materials. In addition, they may post responses to classmates’ posts. These will provide points of departure for class dialogue. Students who want to give a solo or group presentation are welcome to do so after working with the instructor on direction and format. We will also, on occasion, read poems aloud in class, following a popular practice of the period. All participation is voluntary.

Required text:

The Portable Harlem Renaissance Reader, edited by David Levering Lewis, Penguin Classics, 1995. ISBN: 978-0140170368

Optional Texts:

The Harlem Renaissance: A Very Short Introduction, by Cheryl Wall, Oxford University Press, 2016. 978-0199335558

Harlem Renaissance Lives, edited by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Evelyn Brooks Higgenbotham, Oxford University Press, 2009. ISBN: 978-0195387957

Playlist on Canvas

Students will have access to a custom online playlist that includes all assigned music selections.

Books can be purchased online through the [University of Chicago Bookstore](#).

Course readings (subject to change)

Week	Topic	Assignment
Week 1	Introduction The legacy of spirituals	Poetry / Fiction: James Weldon Johnson, “O Black and Unknown Bards” Essay: Zora Neale Hurston, “Spirituals and Neo-Spirituals” Music: Roland Hayes, “Go Down Moses” and Paul Robeson, “Motherless Child” Visual Art: Aaron Douglas, illustrations for <i>FIRE!!</i> , <i>The Crisis</i> , and <i>Opportunity</i>
Week 2	Art for art’s sake?	Poetry / Fiction: Langston Hughes, “The Negro Speaks of Rivers,” “I, Too” Essay: Alain Locke, “Art or Propaganda” and W.E.B DuBois, “Criteria of Negro Art” Music: Duke Ellington, <i>Symphony in Black</i> Visual art: Winold Reiss, illustrations for <i>The New Negro</i>
Week 3	“By us, for us, about us”: Who is the audience?	Poetry / Fiction: Nella Larsen, <i>Passing</i> (excerpt) Essay: W.E.B. DuBois, “A Little Negro Theatre” (Krigwa manifesto) Music: Bessie Smith, “Sing Sing Prison Blues” and “Workhouse Blues” Visual art: James van der Zee, photographic portraits
Week 4	Writing Black histories	Poetry / Fiction: Gwen Bennett, “To Usward,” “Song,” “Hatred,” and Claude McKay, “If We Must Die,” “The White House” Essay: Arturo Schomburg, “The Negro Digs Up His Past” Music: Billie Holiday, “Strange Fruit” Visual art: Augusta Savage, <i>The Harp</i> and <i>Realization</i>
Week 5	Double consciousness	Poetry / Fiction: Jean Toomer, <i>Cane</i> (excerpt)

Week	Topic	Assignment
		Essay: W.E.B. DuBois, <i>Souls of Black Folk</i> (excerpt) Music: Fisk Jubilee Singers, “Wade in the Water” Visual art: Sargent Johnson, <i>Negro woman, Forever Free, White and Black</i>
Week 6	Self-representation(s)	Poetry / Fiction: Countee Cullen, “Incident,” “Yet do I Marvel,” “From the Dark Tower” Essay: George Schuyler, The “Negro-Art Hokum” Music: Gladys Bentley, “Worried Blues,” “Moanful Wailin’ Blues” Visual art: Laura Wheeler Waring, <i>Girl in a Green Cap, Mother and Daughter</i>
Week 7	The “respectability” debate	Poetry / Fiction: Richard Bruce Nugent, “Smoke, Lilies, and Jade” Essay: Rudolph Fisher, “The Caucasian Storms Harlem” Music: William Grant Still, <i>Afro-American Symphony</i> Visual art: Hale Woodruff, <i>Mutiny on the Amistad</i>
Week 8	Networks of support and influence	Poetry / Fiction: Eulalie Spence, <i>Her</i> Essay: Langston Hughes, “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain” Music: James Weldon Johnson, “Lift Every Voice and Sing” Visual art: Meta Warrick Fuller, <i>Mary Turner</i>

Accessing remote courses

Remote courses are taught through our Canvas platform. Approximately two weeks before your class begins, we will add you to your canvas site using the email address you provided at the time of registration. An invitation will then be sent to that email. Click the “Get Started” button in the email to begin the Canvas login process. For step-by-step instructions, please visit <https://grahamschool.uchicago.edu/academic-programs/online/learning-resources/liberal-arts>. Once you’ve created your Canvas account, you can access any Graham School canvas course for which you are registered at: <https://canvas.uchicago.edu>.

Accessibility information

Student Disability Services (SDS) works to provide resources, support and accommodations for all students with disabilities and works to remove physical and attitudinal barriers, which may prevent their full

participation in the University community. Students that would like to request accommodations should contact SDS in advance of the first class session at 773.702.6000 or disabilities@uchicago.edu.

UChicago CARES Statement:

The University and its faculty are committed to creating a safer and more inclusive learning environment for all students. At the University, all faculty, staff, graduate student instructors, and teaching assistants are considered “Individuals with Reporting Responsibilities” and are required to let the University’s Title IX Coordinator know about any disclosures they receive from students about experiences of sexual misconduct (including sexual assault, dating violence, domestic violence, stalking, and sexual harassment). This includes disclosures of experiences that happened before their time at the University. This is to ensure that all students who have experienced sexual misconduct receive support, options, and information about their rights and resources. Students are not obligated to respond to this outreach, and this will not generate a report to law enforcement.

For more information, please see [this handout for students](#) as well as the [University’s Policy on Harassment, Discrimination and Sexual Misconduct](#) and [Policy on Title IX Sexual Harassment](#). You can also reach out directly for services and support from the [Office for Sexual Misconduct Prevention and Support](#) by emailing titleix@uchicago.edu.

If you, or another student you know, wishes to speak to a confidential resource who does not have this reporting responsibility, please contact the Sexual Assault Dean on Call through the UChicago Safe App or at 773.834-HELP.

Questions? Contact Zoë Eisenman at zmel@uchicago.edu.