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**Harlem as a Political Center in the 20th Century African-  
American Uprisings**

**Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for  
Master's Degree in Literature and Civilization**

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## **Dedication**

*We dedicate this humble work to:*

*Our families, whose love and unwavering support have been our compass. Your sacrifices, compassion, and support have helped to mould us into the person we are today.*

*Thank you for everything.*

*Study's member, whose willingness to provide their time and knowledge made this research feasible, thank you.*

*Also, we dedicate this dissertation to everyone who has inspired, encouraged, and mentored us along the way. This achievement would not have been achieved without their continual encouragement.*

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## **Abstract**

This dissertation investigates the role of Harlem as a political center for African Americans in the 20<sup>th</sup>-century uprisings. Specifically, it explores the role of African American activism's role in both arts and politics. A qualitative approach is used to conduct this study, where it adopts historical, descriptive, and analytical methods. The first chapter provides a historical overview of Harlem as a space in the United States of America, the culture of the Harlem Renaissance, and its impact in shaping the political consciousness of the African American community. The second chapter examines the emergence of political parties such as Black Power, The Black Panther, and organizations like the Congress of Racial Equality, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and so on. Moreover, it highlights the role of the influential figures and their experiences which are analyzed to give an insight into the dynamics of African American activism in Harlem. The chapter ends with the evolution of the new African American political ideologies and their impact on uprisings in the African American socio-political landscape. The findings of this study highlight Harlem's significance as a center for African American political resistance and its contribution to gaining racial equality. In conclusion, this study contributes to understanding that Harlem's history as a political center serves as a powerful reminder of the strength of African American community. The findings of this study have important implications for contemporary debates about racial equality, and social justice and also provide a clear vision of African American politics in the United States of America.

***Keywords:*** African American, Harlem, Politics, Racism, Resistance.

## **List of Abbreviations and Acronyms**

<b>CORE</b>	Congress of Racial Equality
<b>NAACP</b>	National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
<b>SCLC</b>	Southern Christian Leadership Conference
<b>UK</b>	United Kingdom
<b>US</b>	United States
<b>USA</b>	United States of America

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# **General Introduction**

## **1. Background of the Study**

Over the years, African Americans in the U.S. refer to Harlem as a notable artistic and political landscape. Early in the 20th century, when it emerged as a scene for arts, literature, and music, the area began to have a rich history. It acted as a place where African Americans could openly express themselves and share their works which facilitated the formation of their identity. Despite being an artistic landscape, Harlem has been identified as a political destination in earlier studies. This means that while Harlem is acknowledged for its contributions to literature and the arts, it is sometimes underappreciated as a hub for political activism and social transformation.

This dissertation focuses on Harlem as a political center that had a crucial influence in defining the city's new identity as a setting for political activity and engagement. Many African-American politicians and activists settled in Harlem and engaged in political activities to attack oppression, racism, and violence against their community. Furthermore, the work provides an overview of the impact of political organizations and parties on Harlem's political scene, also it examines how these parties and organizations work to establish new political ideologies in Harlem.

## **2. Statement of the Problem**

The Harlem Renaissance Movement flourished in the 1920's celebrating the heritage of the African American community by presenting their identity, traditions, and culture in different forms such as literature, paintings, music, and arts in general. However, the role that Harlem took as a political epicenter and its political contributions in providing background to African Americans in the US was rarely mentioned in the previous works. Therefore, the problem that is addressed in this research is how Harlem formed a background and became a center of political

engagement and activism. In addition, it examines the shift from arts to politics in defending the rights of African American as citizens in the USA.

### **3. Research Questions**

Specifically, this paper aims to answer the following research questions:

- Was Harlem only a place for artistic, literary, and aesthetic creativity?
- How did Harlem become the African-American center of activism?
- What impact did political parties and activists have on the African-American population?

### **4. Research Arguments**

The study suggests the following hypotheses to the earlier proposed questions:

- The Harlem Renaissance Movement provided a background for the African-American culture which made it a strategic location to start their political activism.
- The political participation and activities in Harlem assisted in challenging and dismantling systematic barriers and social segregation.
- Harlem formed a solid background to the African American political parties and contributors.

### **5. Aims of the Study**

This dissertation aims to provide a clear explanation of the role of the Harlem Renaissance Movement in forming an artistic and cultural background for the African-American population. Also, it sheds light on the contribution of the most influential figures of African Americans in raising the political consciousness of their communities. In addition, it aims at addressing the importance of Harlem as a political space to fight against racism, violence, and segregation, and its remarkable role as a center of political activism in US history.

### **6. Significance of the Study**

This research provides a new perspective to the previous studies conducted about the cultural side of the Harlem Renaissance and its importance by adding the political aspect of Harlem. Harlem and its contribution to finding the new path that the African-American community took in their journey to fight racism and impose their voices as US citizens. Thus, their achievements, challenges, and strategies. Moreover, it helps in understanding the development of African American history and how it takes a part in the whole USA's history. This study also aims to examine the influence of African American politics in gaining their rights and enhancing the African American individual's life standard.

## **7. Research Methodology**

This qualitative study employs secondary sources research for its methodology. It examines works and articles pertinent to the topic of study. This study also investigates academic and professorial research on Harlem as a cultural and political movement. In the first chapter, a historical method is utilized in which a variety of sources are used to provide the theoretical background and basis of the Harlem foundations. Later in the second chapter, the current study employs an analytical-descriptive method to analyze and describe Harlem as a political center, the role of political parties, and African American contributors' impact; also, it examines the new African American ideologies.

## **8. Literature Review**

While The Harlem Renaissance was primarily driven by a focus on literature as a means to reflect upon Black history (Richman, 2022), it cannot be separated from the socio-political setting of the time. The topic that will be discussed in the present project is the presence of Harlem as a political center for the African American community in the 1900s, and how they did express themselves in several ways including arts and literature, more specifically it will emphasize their presence as part of American politics and the world's politics as a whole. Most of the notable works in the field stressed the importance of Harlem as a place for arts and literature excluding the other aspects that can be also studied. In 1995, Brenda Smith Huggins

wrote *Voices from the Harlem Renaissance*, in which it analyzed how Harlem was the stage to change the African Americans' fortune. Moreover, the role that those leaders played in shaping ideas, thoughts, and minds of those communities to resist against racism and political changes in that period of time. The author also pointed out that the Harlem Renaissance or in other words the New Negro Movement was not only a movement, it was more than that, it was a new ideology for all Africans around the world to show their identity. Another work by Eloise E. Johnson (1997), also a work in the African American context deals with the Harlem Renaissance as an artistic and intellectual movement, explaining the exclusion of African American writers and artists from being part of the American culture, civilization, and history. The work also discussed the creation of the Harlem Renaissance in parallel with the modernism period, also how Harlem arts were defined and evaluated (Johnson, 1997). *The New Jim Crow* (2010) is likely closer to the topic presented in this study, Michelle Alexander in her book introduces the issue of racial discrimination and segregation by bringing a series of true stories of his own experiences and others that have been told by people living the same experience. Themes were different including the right to vote and many other issues. One limitation of the past studies is a focus on Harlem as an artistic and cultural movement and its influence on African American culture, this means that researchers currently know relatively little about Harlem as a political scope and its impact on the construction of political consciousness. This current study has begun to fill the gaps of the previous studies by providing insights into how political activism played a powerful role and its tactics, or even the end goals of their activism which, was clear through the political movement. African Americans were going forcefully to assert themselves as people who deserved equal civil, social, and political rights.

## **9. Structure of the Study**

This dissertation consists of two chapters. The first chapter revolves around Harlem between Arts, Culture, and Rising Political Consciousness, focuses on the cultural side of the Harlem Renaissance exploring the literary and artistic aspects of the movement and its most famous

works, also providing an in-depth analysis of the contributions of those artistic works in rising a political awareness. Harlem as Political Center is the second chapter title. It emphasizes the shift from arts and literature to the political aspect shedding light on the main political parties like the Black Power, The Black Panther, and the organizations that contributed to delivering African-American voices to the higher authorities in the USA. Also, it focuses on the impact of the political contributors in shaping the landscape of Harlem, then on the new political ideologies adopted by the African Americans as part of understanding and solving the problems that their community faced. The two chapters together provide a clear illustration of the role of Harlem in both an artistic and political movement. Furthermore; it provides an exploration of the connection between arts and politics at the same time. Both chapters play a part in understanding how Harlem became a central point for all African American to celebrate their culture and defend their rights in the USA.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

# **Harlem Between Art, Culture, and Rising Political Consciousness**

# Chapter One: Harlem between Art, Culture, and Rising Political

## Consciousness

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## **Introduction**

This chapter delves into the foundations of the Harlem Renaissance, exploring its cultural and political significance in the United States. Aiming to spotlight the reader's attention on how these cultural and political movements contributed to building the Harlem Renaissance and bringing it to national recognition. The chapter also examines the impact of the Great Migration on American history, and why Harlem emerged as the preferred destination for Black Americans seeking a new life. Moreover, the chapter illustrates how Harlem became the epicenter of the outflow of African American culture, and the place where they expressed themselves through their writings, art, and music. Also, this chapter points out the key figures who led this cultural movement. In addition, the following section explores Harlem's political landscape, examining the political activism and movements that contributed to the emergence of a new sense of identity and political awakening among African Americans. It further identifies the influential activists during the Harlem Renaissance and their significant contributions to the political and social progress of the African American community.

### **1.1. Harlem Overview**

#### **1.1.1. Historical Background**

The 19th century saw the US divided into two main parts, the Union and the Confederates. the northern states form what is called the Union and the southern states formed the Confederates (Livingston, 2002). The Union was formed by free states where slavery was abolished, while the confederates allowed slavery as seen in the figure (Figure.1.1).

**Figure 1.1** Boundaries between the North and the South in the USA during the Civil War



The civil war ended with the victory of the North (1861–1865). However, the victory did not mean the end of slavery; this latter remained even after the war due to political decisions, codes, and laws (Milewski, 2010). The Jim Crow Law was a law that gave priority to white Americans, leaving African Americans as second-class citizens with no official rights (Smithsonian American Art Museum, n.d.). Jim Crow was not the only code that segregates Black people in the USA, also other “black laws” prohibited them from living freely (SAAM, n.d.). Due to all of these circumstances, escaping to the free states, thus the northern states, was the right solution, or at least to reduce the pressure on them; such an act was widely known as the Great Migration. The Great Migration is defined as: “In the years preceding World War I, a slow but steady migration of African Americans from the rural South to the urban North began. This was the beginning of a phenomenon called the Great Migration” (SAAM, n.d.). In other words, it is an act of moving African Americans from the South to the North escaping racism, segregation, and violence caused by white supremacy in the South (Figure 1.2). It has many other names like the Great Black Migration, The African American Migration, and so on (Black et al., 2011). As shown on the map below that most of the Black moved to the Eastern Northern cities seeking better conditions of life that allow them to live freely as citizens, and find jobs, and houses.

**Figure 1.2** Destination of People during the Great Migration



### 1.2.1. The Effect of the Great Migration

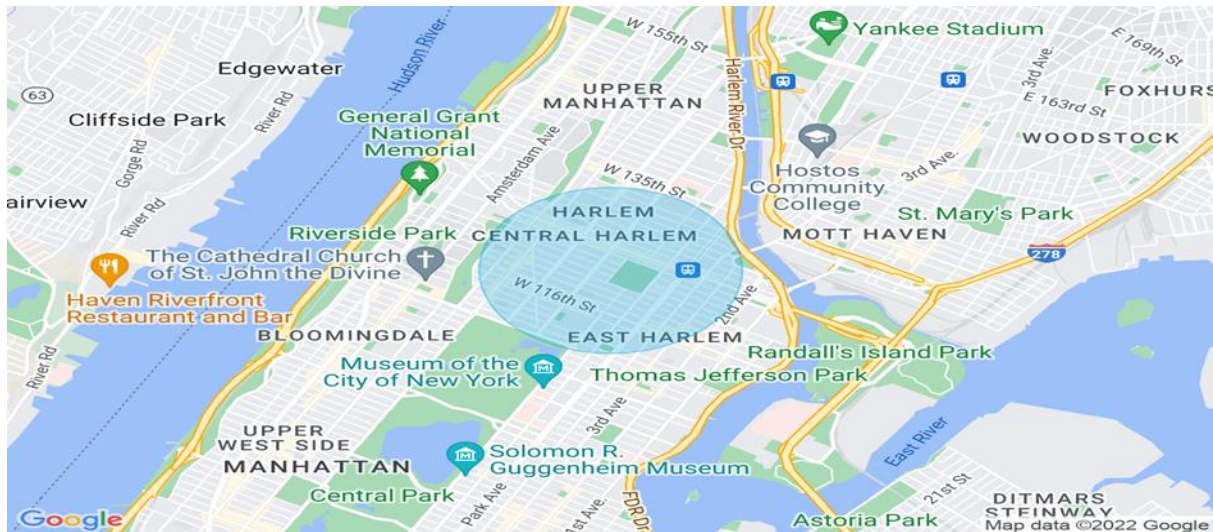
The Great Migration was a significant demographical change in the USA at that time. *The Effects of the Great Migration on Urban Renewal* illustrates the process of this act. The Great Migration was divided into two main phases, “In the first phase of the Great Migration, between 1910 and 1940, approximately 1.5 million Black individuals left the South. The second phase, between 1940-1970, was substantially larger as it resulted in four million additional migrants” (Shi et al., 2021, p. 4). Also, it confirms that the Great Migration has a long-term effect on American history, especially on the northern side of the country causing a sudden change in the population, education, economics, and politics as well in the states. New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, Detroit, and Los Angeles were the most polarized cities among the Black community. Among those states, New York was the most famous destination for the African American population, where they took many towns and neighborhoods as their places to live (Black et al., 2011). One of these places was Harlem, which was the destination of African Americans during the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### 1.2.3. Harlem

African Americans were motivated to migrate to the northern cities in search of freedom and rights. Harlem was the right place to start their new life with better conditions. It is located in upper Manhattan and has no fixed boundaries, lying between 155th Street on the north, Harlem

Rivers on the east, 96th Street (east of Central Park), 110th Street and Cathedral Parkway on the south, and Amsterdam Avenue on the west (Figure 1.3).

**Figure 1.3** Harlem Town Location in Maps



Harlem became a Black space in the 20th Century, known as New York's Black community or the Black Town. It was initially occupied by the Dutch, then white Americans rented houses to African Americans. Due to the increasing number of African -American people, Harlem became the center for Black people who started to present their own culture, traditions, and identity in society (SAAM, n.d.). In the 1920s, a new cultural trend was established known as The Harlem Renaissance, which is a movement for the rebirth of the African American identity (SAAM, n.d.). The movement includes artistic works such as paintings, dance, music, and written works including novels, poems, and so on. The most notable figures of the Harlem Renaissance era are Zora Neale Hurston, Langston Hurston, Jacob Lawrence, Claude McKay, Aaron Douglas, and many others.

## **1.2. The Culture of Harlem: Literature, Music, Art, and Politics**

African Americans migrated from southern states to urban centers in the early 20th century (McMillian, 2006), during the period of The Great Migration, millions of rural Black southerners relocated to US cities, especially Harlem (Stephoe, 2018). Harlem, a little neighborhood in Manhattan, became a popular destination for them, and the population flourished dramatically as

a result. With this flood of individuals, Harlem became the world's biggest concentration of Black people at the time. Harlem quickly became a hub for African Americans from various backgrounds, including those from the Caribbean and Africa (Hutchinson, 2023). Despite their varied experiences of slavery, emancipation, colonization, and other forms of racial oppression, they shared a common goal and shared the same experiences of forging new identities as free people. The Great Migration brought some of the most accomplished and brilliant African American artists, writers, musicians, and politicians to Harlem, as well as other cities such as Cleveland and Los Angeles, between the end of World War I and the mid-1930s. This led to the Harlem Renaissance, one of the most significant periods of cultural expression in the history of the country. It is important to remember that the Great Migration had a significant influence on other cities, such as Chicago, where this cultural explosion took place. Alain Locke is remembered in history as becoming the first African American Rhodes Scholar. As the "Dean" of the Harlem Renaissance (Buck, 2005), he used the term "spiritual coming of age" to describe the cultural birth of African Americans during the Harlem Renaissance (Lock, 2018).

### **1.2.1. African American Literature during The Harlem Renaissance**

In the context of literature, many Black authors and poets flourished during the movement. Harlem became a hub of creativity and innovation, and its writers produced some of the most important and influential works of African-American literature as a means to reflect upon Black history (Richman, 2022). These works explored themes such as racial identity, the Black experiences in America, and the struggle for civil rights. Harlem's writers were significantly influenced by key social, cultural, and political events of their time, and they raised much-needed attention to the harsh legacy of slavery and racism (Pruitt, 2022). These authors contributed significantly to shaping America's cultural landscape and giving voice to the struggles and experiences of African Americans through their literary works. Their artistic talent was vital to the larger social and political movements of their era, and their efforts helped give the African-American community a voice. Writers such as Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, Countee

Cullen, and James Baldwin used their writing to challenge racial stereotypes and advocate for civil rights. Alain Locke was a key figure in the Harlem Renaissance who was instrumental in bringing the movement to the attention of the general public. He was a renowned professor and Rhodes scholar and is even considered the father of the Harlem Renaissance (Conde, 2021), he was a spearhead for the African-American community, breaking down barriers and promoting their culture. In one of Locke's most influential works *The New Negro* (1925) He contends that the concept of the Black man in America required modification. Many African-American writers were inspired by Locke's support and encouragement to produce notable literary works they were proud of. One such influential writer of the Harlem Renaissance was Zora Neale Hurston, a novelist, anthropologist, and folklorist who made significant contributions to African-American literature, documenting and preserving their folklore and culture (Norwood, 2017). Her most famous novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, is now considered a classic of African-American literature. Her work helped pave the way for future generations of African-American writers and artists. Langston Hughes was an important literary figure during the Harlem Renaissance, breaking boundaries with his poetry and its legacy (Kettler, 2020), in which he depicts the experiences of Black individuals, highlighting their concerns and the challenges they faced in America during that time. In Hughes essay *The Negro Artist and The Racial Mountain* (1926), he argues that Black artists should embrace their racial identity and create works that reflect their unique experiences and perspectives, he writes: "We younger Negro artists who create now intend to express our dark-skinned selves without fear or shame. If white people are pleased, we are glad. If they are not, it doesn't matter" (Als, 2015). In his essay, Hughes urged African artists to produce pieces that pay homage to their cultural heritage.

### **1.2.2. African-American Music During Harlem Renaissance**

During the Harlem Renaissance, music played a significant role in African - American culture. The Jazz Age was a term used by many to describe this era, as African-American music, particularly blues, and jazz, was seen as a defining feature of the Renaissance (Wintz, 2015).

Although jazz and blues were brought to Harlem, they originated from the African-American experience in southern towns and cities like New Orleans and Memphis. These musical forms spread throughout the country from their origins . Music has historically represented a medium through which African Americans have maintained their humanity in the face of constant dehumanization and demonization. It has also provided a means for them to express and perform their history. In this sense, music has served the dual role of being both an experiential reservoir and an archive of Black struggle in a racist world.

Jazz emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in the Mississippi Delta region and spread across the country it was a unique cultural setting in Harlem in the 1920s, where musicians like Duke Ellington, WC Handy, Joe King Oliver, and Billie Holiday became stars. It was a symbol of African American culture and identity, providing a soundtrack for a community that was struggling to assert its identity and place in American society. Jazz clubs were heard in bars and rent parties as part of popular nightlife (Collins, 2012)

Louis Armstrong is one of jazz's most well-known performers. He was one of the first Black jazz musicians to gain popularity (Kerlinger, 2022), who began his career in local jazz bands. His distinctive trumpet playing and singing style helped to popularize jazz music, and he made numerous recordings and was known for his distinct voice and improvisational skills. He was also well-known for his contributions to the Civil Rights Movement, including his participation in the 1963 March on Washington. Armstrong's recordings *What a Wonderful World* and *Hello Dolly* (Waring, 2023), remain popular to this day. Concerning blues music, grew up in the Mississippi Delta just upriver from New Orleans, the birthplace of jazz. The blues has deep roots in American history, particularly African American history. The origins of blues music, along with all other forms of African American music, can be traced back to the era of the slave trade (Weiler, 2017), which began in 1619 and ended in 1809. During this time, many West Africans were forcibly transported across the Atlantic Ocean in what was known as the middle passage and sold into slavery. According to historical accounts, slave ship captains would

encourage slaves to sing and dance during the voyage in the hopes that it would keep them alive until they reached their destination. As a result, many African musical elements were brought to the Americas on slave ships and eventually served as the foundations for a variety of popular African American musical genres, including the blues (Weiler, 2017). Harlem's nightlife scene was a hub for blues performers, which often addressed themes of discrimination and social injustice. Jazz and blues music also had a significant influence on politics in Harlem.

### **1.2.3. African-American Visual Art during the Harlem Renaissance**

While music and literature were already well-established in Harlem when the movement began, the visual arts took a little longer to catch on, but by the mid-1920s, the scene was beginning to take shape. One of the most notable visual artists of the era was Aaron Douglas, who is known as “The Father of African-American Art” (Conrads, 2007), he played a pivotal role in defining a modern visual language that represented black Americans in a new and empowering light. Douglas initially began his artistic career as a landscape painter but was soon drawn toward modern art movements. Douglas intended to develop a new visual language that highlighted the beauty and strength of Black Americans and showed them as dignified and proud persons through his art. He wanted to question the traditional portrayals of Black Americans that were prominent at the time. As a result, the artists of the Harlem Renaissance used their art to assist social and political change, addressing African-American experiences through Douglas's bold shapes, vibrant colors, and compelling images.

One of Douglas's famous artworks is *The Negro in an African Setting*. The mural depicts a scene of pre-slavery African life. Aaron Douglas has incorporated his interpretation of African spirituality by portraying the two central figures leaning back at a steep angle. The abundance of foliage surrounding the group is an indication of the fertility of the African wilderness. Concentric circles of varying opacity convey movement and energy while drawing the viewer's attention to a small fetish figure.

*An Idyll of the Deep Southern* as another of Douglas's works. The artwork depicts a group of African American musicians surrounded by concentric circles, with the violence and struggle of slave life depicted on either side. Figures kneel around a rope hanging from a tree on the far left, while numerous slaves are hidden in darkness as they hold hoes and labor the land on the far right. A little, white, five-pointed star shoots a ray of light diagonally over the artwork in the upper-right corner, suggesting hope or a guiding light for those seeking freedom and emancipation from the terrible conditions of slavery.

A further Douglas's well-known murals were *The Creation*. This artwork features an African-inspired backdrop, with God's hand reaching down from the top of the composition. Aaron Douglas' artistic style is characterized by flat, abstract forms that draw on influences including Art Deco, African art, and Cubism. He frequently employed a range of shades of a single color in his works. The painting is derived from an illustration found in *God's Trombones: Seven Negro Sermons in Verse* and is part of a series created for the book.

#### **1.2.4. African -American Politics during the Harlem Renaissance**

##### **1.2.4.1. How Politics Influenced by Writing, Music, and Art**

The Harlem Renaissance was an explosion of creativity and culture within New York City's African-American community in the 1920s (Ritchie, 2013). It was a period in American history when African-American artists, writers, musicians, and thinkers produced a large amount of creative work that examined the Black experience. The political climate at the time was significantly impacted by the Harlem Renaissance cultural movement, as many of the writers, musicians, and visual artists who participated in it used their art to advocate for their civil and political rights and to express their frustration with the challenges they faced. Harlem Renaissance artists and writers challenged the racist stereotypes and social norms that had been imposed on them (Hutchinson, 2023), many writers and artists associated with the Harlem Renaissance such as Langston Hughes, Zora Neal Hurston, and Countee Cullen, used their work to confront issues like racial discrimination, economic inequality, and political

disenfranchisement, they called for greater recognition and respect for African- American culture and advocated for political and social change and helping to lay the foundation for the civil rights movement (Pruitt, 2022). Langston Hughes is one of the most prominent writers of the Harlem Renaissance who used his poetry to critique racism and segregationist policies (Feredj & Chaddadi, 2016) His poem *I, Too*, expressed the idea that despite being discriminated against. In this poem, Hughes reflects on a common experience for many African Americans during his time (Feredj, 2016), where he depicts how racism affects African Americans.

The poem's assertion that *I, Too*, can be interpreted as a claim to full citizenship and participation in the political process, despite the systematic obstacles faced by African Americans, echoes the broader struggle for civil or legal rights and political representation. Additionally, it reflects economic marginalization during the mid-20th century (Mwita, 2018). Furthermore, *I, Too*, can be read as a powerful statement about the ongoing struggle for social and political justice in the US, particularly as it relates to issues of race and inequality.

Besides Harlem writings, music was also another component of the Harlem Renaissance (McBirney, 2017). It was a prominent feature of African-American culture during the Harlem Renaissance. The role of jazz music and jazz musicians in political participation began in the initial phases of jazz development in the early 1920s (Mamadi, 2022). At that time, jazz was primarily played in African-American communities and was seen as a form of cultural expression and resistance against the racist and oppressive systems of the era. Therefore, as a period of cultural evolution in African-American socio-political progression. Jazz music became a symbol of international cooperation, and anti-colonialism in which musicians used their platforms to advocate for civil rights and social justice, for example, songs like *Strange Fruit* by Billie Holiday and *Mississippi Goddam* by Nina Simon, directly addressed issues of racism and injustice (Flynn, 2023).

*Strange Fruit's* lines vividly depict the brutal violence that was being inflicted on Black people, who were often lynched and left hanging from trees as a means of intimidation and terror

(Carrillo, 2021). The fact that this brutality took place in the Jim Crow South with impunity is a reflection of the systemic racism and political exclusion that black people there endured at the time. Additionally, the political groups made use of jazz's appeal and impact to raise money through live performances for their individual political activities (Mamadi, 2022), where many jazz musicians were active in organizations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the Congress for Racial Equality (CORE). In the 1920s, the Harlem Renaissance gave birth to new ideas and forms of artistic expression. It significantly influenced Harlem's social and cultural growth as well as its contribution to American art and literature. It provided African-American artists with an opportunity to communicate their stories and show pride in their identities, and it also helped open doors for them in the larger art community. It also contributed significantly to political empowerment by leveraging its activities to fight issues of racial and socioeconomic injustice.

One of the famous artworks that reflects political injustice in Harlem during the 1920s is *The Banjo Lesson* by Henry Ossawa Tanner. The painting was about giving African Americans back their pride and dignity and was concerned with everyday life as an African American (Smith, 2010). It depicts an elderly African American man teaching a young boy how to play the banjo, surrounded by sparse. The painting can be interpreted as a commentary on the harsh living conditions and limited opportunities for African Americans in the early 20th century.

### **1.3. Cultural and Political Consciousness and the Sense of Identity**

The pursuit of equality for African Americans has been arduous, with significant challenges and hardships along the way. The transition to political engagement was a gradual evolution that initially found expression through an artistic movement (Larry, 2007). The Harlem Renaissance culture shaped the new African-American identity through its arts, creating and reforming community consciousness (Larry). Artists, musicians, writers, thinkers, and philosophers were credited with spreading African-American culture, playing a pivotal role in this transformation, W.E.B. Du Bois, a pioneering African American sociologist, philosopher, researcher, and

historian, played a crucial role in advocating for change in the fortunes of African Americans. Through his writings, Du Bois addressed a wide range of societal issues and contributed to shaping African American life and consciousness (Bruce, 1992). As a sociologist, Du Bois brought many theories and their applications in real life where the main issues he tackled were about race, ethnicity, and differences between people. In light of such studies, Du Bois brought much attention to the state of the Black community in America. *The Souls of Black Folk* is one of his famous books which is considered a notable masterpiece in African American literature that was published in 1903. The book is a collection of essays where he is explaining the state of Blacks after the Civil War in the South and how they suffered from injustice, racism, and inequality. Du Bois even stresses the meaning of freedom, calling all African Americans to start changing their minds by protesting against the segregation of the white man in the United States of America: the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world, a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world (Du Bois, 1903, p. 7).

Du Bois vividly describes the challenges of being Black in America, including the struggle for identity and the complex experience of having dual consciousness (Bruce, 1992). This refers to the difficulty of reconciling one's African American identity with their American identity, resulting in a sense of having two distinct identities simultaneously. Du Bois eloquently captures the concept of double consciousness, where African Americans must navigate between their racial identity and their American identity, often experiencing a sense of duality and conflict in their self-identification. In the same book, Du Bois (1903) narrows down the story of Mr. Washington, a southern African American who succeeds in being a notable figure in society. Du Bois (1903) describes what Mr. Washington had become:

Today he stands as the one recognized spokesman of his ten million fellows and one of the most notable figures in a nation of seventy million. One hesitates,

therefore, to criticize a life that, beginning with so little, has done so much (pp. 47- 48).

Du Bois sought to inspire the African American community by promoting the idea that Black Americans could achieve success, leadership, education, and recognition. His writings encouraged the construction of a unique Black identity and culture, serving as a source of inspiration for prominent figures of the Harlem Renaissance movement. Du Bois' message resonated with the Black community, motivating them to embrace their potential and strive for equality and success in various fields, despite the challenges they faced (Bruce, 1992). His writings had a profound impact on shaping the minds and aspirations of African Americans during the Harlem Renaissance era. Besides that, Du Bois had a significant role in politics in the latter years. He is one of those who formed and founded the NAACP Organization and contributed to the construction of the Pan Africanism Congress in 1919 (Bruce, 1992). According to Contee (1972), Du Bois was not only a thinker or a philosopher, but DuBois was also the most influential figure for the African American community and the entire world. Contee writes: “Hence, Du Bois served as the major middle figure in the history and the continuity of organized Pan-Africanism and African nationalism” (1972, p. 14).

Harlem Renaissance movement symbolizes the awareness of the African American community, thus who they are as a community, their culture, and their identity. However, before reaching a common standpoint among African Americans, different thinkers had different points of view about the issue of freedom, the way to reach equality, and fighting against racism. In other words, they were in a situation where they are still looking for a definition of what it is meant to be African American. In a book titled *The Harlem Renaissance: A Cultural, Social, and Political Movement*, Sarah Ritchie (2013) illustrates the beginning of the movement and the role of contributors and their beliefs. Firstly, Charles Spurgeon Johnson is among the first African American sociologists. Johnson was obliged to move from the South to get educated and he graduated from the University of Chicago( Ritchie, 2013) in explaining the theory of Johnson,

claims: “the theory that suggested that the way to break barriers of segregation and discrimination could only come through contact, interaction, and personal relationships with white people” (p. 50). Johnson, as an influencer, believed that to stop segregation is by making strong contact with the white society, his ideas were considered a peaceful strategy to make the whites understand their needs. Besides that, organizations in New York City played an essential role in defending the rights of African Americans, such as the Committee for the Improvement of Industrial Conditions Among Negroes in New York (1906), the National League for the Protection of Colored Women (1906), and the Committee on Urban Conditions Among Negroes (1910). Later these organizations were brought together to form what is called The National Urban League in 1920. Again Ritchie claims that: “one of its founders was Edmund Haynes, who believed that well planned and realistic agendas were keys to the organization’s success” (2013, p. 50). The purpose of such an organization is to find quick and implemented rules to gain equality. In another work, Shannon King (2011) stresses the importance of the manifestation during the Harlem Renaissance era to help create political change for them. Violence against African Americans led them to begin protesting in the streets, regular protests became the platform to defend their rights and send messages to the government, by doing so the issue becomes a national problem.

In Harlem, Black self-protection at both the individual and collective levels was politically significant not only because it was public and openly challenged authority and white terror. Such acts of overt resistance, while temporarily shifting the relationship of power between the combatants, were surely transient. (King, 2011, p. 759)

King (2011) explains the role of the new self-defense strategy to reach political development and later suggests that such an act is an act of politicizing the mobilizing at the same time. Back to the cultural aspect, the Harlem Renaissance provided a solid background for all African Americans to be aware of their identity thus it increased the sense of cultural and

political consciousness. The Harlem Renaissance instilled in African Americans across the country a new spirit of self-determination and pride, a new social consciousness, and a new commitment to political activism, all of which would provide a foundation for the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s (National Museum of African American History & Culture, n.d.)

The Harlem Renaissance was not just a cultural movement for African Americans but a strategy to challenge the perception of Blackness, which equates to second-class citizenship in America. It empowered African Americans to not only defend their rights but also to recognize their potential to play significant roles in society. The Harlem culture served as a source of empowerment, spreading African American culture, tradition, and beliefs to the world. The movement birthed talented writers, artists, musicians, and influential politicians who made significant contributions to changing perspectives and fortunes, not only in the USA but also in the entire world (National Museum of African American History & Culture).

#### **1.4. African American Activism and Political Engagement**

African Americans have fought for their civil and political rights since they were brought from Africa and enslaved. Consequently, African American activism concentrated on and engaged in activism to combat several significant issues, such as racism, inequality, social justice, and civil rights. Achieving these objectives and privileges was easy. Because the journey to liberation was arduous and the price was high.

When African Americans completed the last stage of their long march, from slavery to freedom, by building a noble and courageous movement that captured the hearts and minds of the people of the United States and the sympathy of many throughout the world. (Bush, 2009, p. 9)

Bush (2009) explained that as a result, African Americans ultimately overcame slavery, and won freedom; their noble and valiant movement inspired the nation and the whole world.

Black Americans engaged in a variety of activities and strategies to attain their civil rights, with protest marches, sit-ins, boycotts, civil disobedience...etc. During the 1920s, African Americans moved North to the nation's cities their migration was an expression of their changing attitude toward themselves. Such attitude is best captured in the phrase 'Black is Beautiful', it was first used between 1910 and 1920 during the movement of the Great Migration (Jha, 2016). African Americans formed the Black Metropolis, Boyd (2013) explains Black Metropolis is: “a term used to refer to the large, urban Black communities of the United States. It has been used most extensively, perhaps, in reference to those urban black communities” (p. 129). This term has indeed been commonly used by academics and journalists to describe large Black communities in American cities. Its most common application has been to those Black neighborhoods in the city. African Americans organized groups and organizations to challenge prejudice in housing, employment, and police brutality (Boyd). The Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s brought about substantial political and social transformation.

Hundreds of thousands left the South and took their talents and skills with them to the North. When combined with the native northern black populations, the black population in the United States was transformed from a largely rural people to one concentrated in cities. (Alton Hornsby, 2005, p. 479)

According to Hornsby (2005), many African Americans migrated to New York City, in which its economic, cultural, and political importance has historically attracted African American writers, artists, philosophers, and politicians.

#### **1.4.1. Voices of Resistance: The Civil Rights Movement**

The Civil Rights Movement began with the Harlem Renaissance, which was driven by diverse intellectuals, authors, and artists (A new African American Identity: The Harlem Renaissance, 2022). The Civil Rights Movement empowered African American people because it is considered as a significant step in African American political engagement and one of the most powerful movements in American and global history (Hall, 2005). This movement is defined as

the mid-1950s southern US protest movement against racial segregation and inequality. Enslaved African Americans and their descendants fought for centuries to end slavery and racial oppression. After the American Civil War, enslaved people were granted basic civil rights by the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments to the U.S. Constitution. However, they still struggled for federal protection of these rights for the next century (Carson, 2023). The Civil Rights movement sought to secure legal and constitutional rights for African Americans and other marginalized groups, who had been denied equal treatment and suffered discrimination in various areas of their lives. This trend has also reached to secure legal and constitutional rights for African Americans and other marginalized groups, who had been denied equal treatment under the law and experienced discrimination in education, work, housing, and voting, among other areas of life. Through nonviolent protest, the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s broke the pattern of public facilities being segregated by “race” in the South and achieved the most important breakthrough in equal-rights legislation for African Americans since the Reconstruction period (1865–1877) (Carson, 2023). Also, it overturned the trend of race-based segregation of public facilities in the South and secured the most significant advance in equal-rights legislation for African Americans. As mentioned previously, the Civil Rights movement adopted tactics that included sit-ins, marches, and boycotts, as well as legal challenges against discriminatory laws and policies (Joseph, 2006). The concept of asserting civil and political rights was embraced by a huge number of organizations and movements, all of which represented Black Americans, as well as Americans who believed in equality and freedom for African Americans. Several groups participated in the American Civil Rights movement, their role in American societies was significant because they advanced the cause of civil rights for African Americans and other minority groups in the United States. They worked assiduously to raise awareness of these issues and advance social justice. The most famous groups are The Black Panthers, Black Power, Chicago Housing Activists, and many others. All of these

movements and groups had an essential role in political activities to demand rights throughout the years in the USA.

Harlem which is known for its artistic works and cultural heritage, also, became a platform for political engagement, serving the foundations of political parties, organizations, and influential figures as well. When the Civil Rights Movement emerged, Harlem continued to be a political epicenter for African American activism. Its notable artistic works and political determination make it a source of power in the African American context in the USA to fight against racism and reach racial equality.

## **Conclusion**

The history of African Americans is full of struggles and adversity, encompassing battles against segregation, violence, and racism. The difficult journey that African Americans have made is briefly summarized in this chapter, from enduring violence in the South and the Civil War to their migration in search of a shared objective. As a community, African Americans as a group started a cultural revival by claiming their ethnicity and cultural practices to be accepted and find a place in American society alongside white people, African Americans. This cultural movement provided a strong platform for African Americans to express themselves through various art forms, such as jazz music and dance, opera, paintings, crafts, novels, and poems. Through these creative aspects, Black Americans eventually turned their attention toward politics, recognizing it as a means to combat racism and achieve equality and fight racial inequality. This shift from the arts to politics was driven by a growing cultural consciousness that aided in fostering political awareness. Activism and political engagement became significant in the pursuit of equality through formal means. This chapter serves as a logical and illustrative explanation, laying the groundwork for subsequent discussions on key themes manifestations, parties, and the contributions of the African Americans.



## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **Harlem as Political Center in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century**

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## **Introduction**

This chapter is an illustration of the main political issues that emerged in the 20<sup>th</sup>-century era. During this period African Americans faced significant political challenges including racism, discrimination, and violence. This section explores the emergence of various political parties and organizations for instance the Black Power, the Black Panther, and NAACP that are calling for justice and equality. Also, it deals with the main prominent African American political contributors who emerged during the Harlem Renaissance and after, including Adam Clayton Powell Jr, Phillip Randolph, and Martin Luther King Jr who fought for the equality of African Americans and worked on the reconstruction of the African-American identity within their societies. Additionally, it delves into the foundations of the African American ideologies that form the basis of solid political thoughts among the communities that provided solutions for contemporary African American issues.

### **2.1. Breaking Barriers, Building Bridges: African American Parties and Organizations**

Throughout history, political parties and organizations have played a significant role in promoting African American empowerment. These groups have been instrumental in advocating for civil rights, advancing social justice, and increasing African Americans' political representation (McCormick, 1985). These parties and movements utilized many different forms of peaceful strategies and tactics to exert pressure on successive American governments to secure the rights of African Americans, such as protests, sit-ins, and marches.

Several African-American political parties made important contributions to American politics throughout the 20th century such as Black Panther, Black Power, Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC).

### **2.1.1. The Black Panther Party**

The origin of the name and the symbol of the Black Panther Party are derived from the Lowndes County Freedom Organization. The organization took the Black Panther as its representation and emblem. The adaptation of such a name symbolizes the representation of the homage and the previous activism of this organization (Jeffries, 2022). The Black Panther Party is among the most-known and most influential parties, it was founded in Oakland in 1966 by Bobby Seale and Huey P. Newton. The Black Panthers gained national attention for their militancy, the adoption of Maoism ideology, unique uniforms, and their armed presence near police. Critics overlooked that the Panthers' carrying of guns was legal under California law. In addition, they failed to recognize their non-controversial activities, including operating medical clinics and free breakfast programs for poor communities (Egerton, 2013). The party supported armed self-defense and community organizing as ways to stop police brutality and other forms of racism that were built into society. The Black Panthers' participation in this, was their most significant role because it allowed them to speak out against the violence the police were committing.

In most states, the Black Panther Party opened more than one office, bringing the total number to 68. These offices were opened in cities where there was a conflict with the local police force in particular. As this party became a revolutionary organization that sought to empower and protect Black communities, fight against systemic oppression, and promote revolutionary change , “In the face of numerous armed conflicts with police and virulent direct repression by the state, young black people embraced the revolutionary vision of the Party. The Black Panther Party had become the center of a revolutionary movement in the United States” (Bloom & Martin, 2013, p.01).

The primary objective of the Party was to empower African Americans and fight discrimination and oppression in the United States. The Black Panthers compared the African American liberation movement to liberation movements in Africa and Southeast Asia, holding that nonviolent protests could not truly liberate Black Americans or give them control over their

own lives (The Black Panther Party: Challenging Police and Promoting Social Change, n.d.). This activity inside the United States has a global dimension so that the influence and pressure on American policy toward African Americans become significant.

The Black Panther Party did not ignore the social aspect. The party members provided important support to the African American community including the low-income communities, such activities are to provide free breakfast programs to children, elderly people, and poor families. They also provided sponsoring to schools, legal aid offices, clothing distributions, transportation services, providing health clinics, and so on. By such doings, the Black Panther Party gained the support of the public (The Black Panther Party: Challenging Police and Promoting Social Change). On the surface, these actions had significant consequences and accomplished far-reaching objectives that the Panthers aimed to achieve. As Fred Hampton, an African American activist, said: “First you have free breakfasts, then you have free medical care, then you have free bus rides, and soon you have FREEDOM!” (Bloom & Martin, 2013).

The Black Panther Athletic Club was established by the Harlem Branch, one of the first to be established outside of California. The branch also organized black-centered health, housing, and education programs for children (*Black Panther Party. Harlem Branch. - Social Networks and Archival Context*, n.d.). The Black Panther Party had a notable presence in Harlem. This party established a chapter in Harlem to raise issues about different issues about African American position in society. There is evidence of BBP activity in Harlem as the early fall of 1966, located at Seventh Avenue and 14<sup>th</sup> Street, one of the Harlem Branch’s first acts was a call for the September 12<sup>th</sup> Shutdown of Harlem schools, and demands Central Harlem a community college, African languages and Arts and science classes in the elementary and junior high schools, and hiring of Black superintendents (*Black Panther Party Harlem Branch Files*, n.d.).

Besides such demands, the Black Panther Party also adopted the free feed programs and many other services. The Harlem Black Panther Party Branch was made up of three essential party organizations, the first is the Party Congress including the total active members, the second

is the Executive Committee including the chairman, executive director, executive treasurer...etc., and the third is Party Directors are responsible for political, organizational, and community issues including transportation, housing, and so on. The offices in Harlem were considered the central offices for the entire State. The presence in Harlem aimed to empower the community since Harlem is considered the center for African Americans. The Black Panther Party was profoundly involved in political activism, advocating for the rights of African Americans and challenging oppression and racial discrimination at the systemic level (Williams, 2008).

### **2.1.2. The Black Power Party**

The Black Power Party was also a prominent participant in Harlem, New York's political scene. "Black Power" was a political slogan and ideology that emerged during the Civil Rights movement and was adopted by several organizations, including the Black Panther Party. Black Power was a political movement that arose in the United States in the late 1960s and 1970s in as a reaction to the ongoing fight for civil rights and racial justice (Joseph, 2009). The party was popularized by the notable civil rights activist and head of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, Stokely Carmichael (SNCC). The Black Power Party concentrated its political efforts on: "creating economic, social and political power of their own, rather than seek integration into white-dominated society. Crucially, Black Power advocates, particularly more militant groups like the Black Panther Party, did not discount the use of violence but embraced Malcolm X's challenge to pursue freedom, equality, and justice *by any means necessary* (Pruitt, 2020). Thus, instead of trying to fit into a society dominated by white people, the Black Power Party tried to gain economic, social, and political power on its own. Notably, Black Power supporters, especially more militant groups like the Black Panther Party, did not rule out the use of violence. The Black Power Movement of the 1960s in the US was seen by most of its advocates as the latest in a series of efforts in order to correct the injustices that existed in almost every dimension of life between Black and white Americans (McCarteny, 1992).

There were a great number of significant people involved in the Black Power movement. These individuals helped form the movement and pushed for social, political, and economic change. The Black Power became a link between the struggle for Black liberation in the United States to be a global movement against American Imperialism. Such doings empowered African American community and also gave strength to Black Power Party members to continue their mission of reaching the demands of the African American people.

The impact of Black Power on the American political landscape manifested itself in various ways. And the Most notable way is self-defense for African Americans; they rejected nonviolence as the sole method for accomplishing social and political change (Joseph, 2009). While some experts believe that the term “nonviolence” refers to a variety of protest or resistance activities that fall between the straightforward use of physical force and the simple expression of dissatisfaction in conventional, legally permitted ways within officially constituted bodies or channels, there seems little doubt that this is the case (Fredrickson, 1995). As a result, experts concur that nonviolent actions do not necessarily signify a nonviolent ideology and that boycotts, strikes, mass marches or demonstrations, and planned civil disobedience are all forms of nonviolent resistance. Most members of the Black Power Party believed that Black people will gain only as much as they can win through their ability to organize independent bases of economic and political power through boycotts, electoral activity, rent strikes, work stoppages, and pressure group bargaining (McCarteny, 1992). Black Power insisted that African Americans should have power and control over their own schools, businesses, community services, and local government; in addition, they believed that by exhibiting self-respect and racial pride and by celebrating the cultural accomplishments of Black people around the world, they concentrated on overcoming centuries of humiliation. Black Power, especially the Black Panther Party, empowered African Americans. The movement pushed Black people to take charge of their lives and communities. Black Power still inspires social justice movements.

Harlem played a significant role in the Black Power Movement. The neighborhood served as the ground for both cultural expression and political activism. Joseph (2006) claims:

Harlem was home to influential activists and long-marchers, including ANPM founder Carlos Cooks and book store owner Lewis Micheaux. Raising the political consciousness of a generation of young intellectuals, activists, artists, and cultural workers, these journals challenged the very idea of American democracy. (p. 257)

The political activists in Harlem embraced the principles of self-determination, fighting racism, and advocating social and political change by organizing protests, rallies, and community programs to raise awareness among the African American community. The Black Power Party was also preparing for a large march and rally in Harlem at the time in support of the international liberation movement and to oppose the Vietnam War (Joseph, 2006). Besides politicians, artists also played a vital role in the Black Power movement, “A mass rally was held in Harlem to protest police repression, and one of the protest groups was led by the Jazz singer Abbey Lincoln” .

The Black Power in Harlem aimed to address issues concerning different struggles of African Americans in society, which led to the formation of other organizations that aimed to empower the community to believe in their self-sufficiency and challenge social inequalities. Therefore, Harlem becomes the ground for Black pride, empowerment, and resistance against all forms of racism.

The Black Power Movement was a diverse and complicated movement whose ideology and tactics were shaped by several famous personalities. The Black Power Party also helped in raising African American political and social demands.

### **2.1.3 Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC)**

For over two hundred years, the African-American church in America has served as a buffer between individuals and the larger society. In doing so, it has served as a source of empowerment and mutual aid and a focal point for significant social change. A review of the church's historical evolution from its early form as an invisible institution during slavery to its current diverse and formal structures exposes the church's significant role in the Black community (Moore, 1991).

The Southern Christian Leadership Conference is one of the most famous African-American political parties. It was founded by three African American leaders, including Martin Luther King Jr., who was the most famous figure in this party. The Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA), a civil rights organization that successfully organized a 381-day boycott of Montgomery, Alabama's segregated bus system, gave rise to the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) in 1957 (Hon, 1997). The SCLC's records offer researchers a wealth of primary source material on the challenges of putting together a successful mass protest movement, as well as how the organization profoundly influenced the modern Civil Rights Movement and the course of American political history in the second half of the twentieth century (Bracey & Meier, 1996). Among the most famous founding leaders of this association are: Martin Luther King, Jr., Bayard Rustin, Ralph Abernathy, Fred Shuttles Worth, and others, who founded the SCLC to have a regional organization that could better coordinate civil rights protest activities across the South. The Southern Christian Leadership Conference Party's methods of political struggle are identical to those of the other parties, except for Martin Luther, who viewed Gandhian nonviolence as the optimal strategy for confrontation.

The SCLC was founded in Atlanta, Georgia, at the Ebenezer Baptist Church and advocated confrontation of segregation through civil dissent. This "direct action" included boycotts, marches, and other forms of nonviolent protest and was considered controversial by many in the Black community, who felt that segregation should be challenged in the courts (Bracey & Meier, 1996). The SCLC's leadership, most of whom were ministers, also believed

that churches should be involved in political activism and held many of their meetings at Black churches, which became important symbols in the battle for civil rights. So, the founders of this party believed that the church played an effective role, thus they incorporated it into all of their activities.

The SCLC had a notable presence in Harlem because Harlem is known for its artistic and political activism. The SCLC established local chapters in Harlem aiming to combat racial injustice and racism because Harlem is considered the largest Black community of over two hundred thousand persons (Capeci, 1979). The leaders of this party worked together to address different issues that affect African American population (Hon, 1997). Like the other parties, the SCLC also organized marches, rallies, and protests to advocate civil rights. This party's essential principles are equal access to education, housing, and employment (Capeci, 1979). Martin Luther King Jr visited Harlem aiming to mobilize the African American community and send his messages about nonviolent resistance and inequality. His presence as the leader of SCLC helped in gathering African Americans and supporting the Civil Rights Movement.

The Southern Christian Leadership Conference Party collaborated with churches, which served as a safe place for African Americans. In Harlem, churches were considered as both community organizing and spiritual guidance. The churches hosted rallies, speeches, and meetings. King Jr delivered his powerful speeches in Harlem churches to advocate social equality and inspire hope among African Americans. These churches became a center for African Americans offering free classes and workshops. The presence of the SCLC in Harlem aided in empowering voices of the African Americans and contributed to gathering people together to support the Civil Rights Movement (Moore, 1991).

In the end, African Americans had to go through a long way to get their freedom from slavery and later their civil and political rights, The Great Migration marked a turning point in the lives of African Americans and in the political landscape of the United States. Black Americans developed new movements, associations, and parties, employing diverse ways,

means, and techniques to extract their civil and political rights from racist American regimes. Prominent, educated, and cultured figures emerged to lead this scene. African American participation in American politics and activities had clear effects. African Americans won rights they never expected.

## **2.2. Political Contributors in Shaping Harlem's Politics**

The 1920s in American history were marked by significant political engagement and the emergence of prominent politicians who contributed to the cultural movement known as the Harlem Renaissance (Amin, 2007). The movement encompassed literature, art, and political activism, this cultural representation took the form of a social movement that aimed to redefine public power structures and demanded the creation of an intellectual forum where Black Americans could discuss and express their political situation, as politicians worked to support African-American artists and writers to address issues of social justice and civil rights. The most influential contributors who worked on shaping the political landscape in Harlem were Powell, Adam Clayton Jr., Martin Luther King Jr., and Phillip Randolph.

A Northern labor activist, Phillip Randolph, is a man who comes into the fullness of his calling, first as a socialist; He is the co-editor of a magazine called *The Messenger*, advocating for taking down capitalism as the only true road to racial equality (Muhammad, 2013), in which he believes that capitalism is inherently racist and that it perpetuates inequalities. As the leader of the first successful black labor union, "The Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters" (Dreier, 2010), he was devoted to the cause of organizing and advocating for the rights of Black workers within and beyond Harlem and sought to secure better conditions for them.

Randolph parlayed his success with the Pullman porters into advocacy work for Black workers at the federal level (Nittle, 2019). He used his accomplishments in organizing Pullman porters to advance his efforts in promoting the rights of Black workers at the national level. Additionally, Randolph played a key role in getting President Harry Truman to sign the Selective

Service Act of 1947, which made it illegal to segregate the military based on race. The legislation was critical to giving Black workers the same opportunities and protection as their white counterparts.

Another political contributor in Harlem was Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., a leader of the modern American Civil Rights movement. He is a symbol of peace, courage, sacrifice, and impeccable leadership (Smith, 2022). King is known for his advocacy of nonviolent civil disobedience in the face of racial injustice for African Americans in Harlem. His advocacy for peace and justice made him a symbol of hope and courage for millions of people. King's activism, leadership, and ministry drew heavily on his Christian principles (Szalay, 2023); he believed that all people were created equal and that they should be treated with dignity and respect regardless of their race or ethnicity. King was instrumental in spreading the civil rights movement throughout the South, as he was chosen as a president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, where he played a crucial role in the dissemination of the Civil Rights movement across the southern U.S., and as a result of his contribution. Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech ranks as one of the most famous American speeches, not because of what he said but because of how America has changed since that day (Blake, 2023), it reverberated throughout the country, including Harlem. In King's speech, he spoke about the need for an end to racism and segregation in the United States. Also, he called for an end to discrimination based on skin color and emphasized the importance of judging people based on the content of their character rather than the color of their skin. The speech's most famous phrases include: "I have a dream that one day this nation will rise and live out the true meaning of its creed: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal" (Miller, 2016). In this speech, Dr. King spoke about the ongoing struggle for civil rights and called for an end to segregation and discrimination. He urged people to come together in the spirit of brotherhood and work towards achieving a society where all people are equal.

Martin Luther King Jr. achieved much in a short span of eleven years (Sherman, 2019). He accomplished remarkable activities in a short period of time, including giving more 2500 speeches, and taking part in eight nonviolent actions to effect social change. In 1983, President Ronald Reagan recognized Martin Luther King Jr. by establishing a national holiday to honor the man who had done so much for the country. It was a day to celebrate King's legacy and his contributions to American society.

As a politician, pastor, and civil rights activist, Adam Clayton Powell Jr. (Jeffers & Sportelli, n.d.). Powell used his position to advocate for the civil rights of African Americans, challenging segregation and discrimination in all areas of American life. Powell was instrumental in pushing for civil rights legislation; he excelled as an activist, leading rent strikes, organizing man protests, and spearheading civil rights campaigns against institutions and companies that practiced anti-Black discrimination (Nittle, 2019). In 1941, Powell became the first African American elected to the New York City Council; later, he won a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives representing Harlem (Jeffer & Sportelli, n.d.), which made him the first representative of that area in Washington, D.C. A weekly publication called *The People's Voice*, which he edited and published the same year, gave Harlem people a voice and gave him the opportunity to speak out against practices such as racial segregation. In 1944, Powell ran for Congress on a civil rights platform, advocating for fair employment practices and the abolition of discriminatory policies in the southern U.S. (Joe, 2016), where he promoted equal employment opportunities and opposed discriminatory practices in the American South. Moreover, in addition to creating legislation to prohibit discrimination in housing, employment, transportation, and the armed services, he suggested regulations that would outlaw lynching and poll taxes . He was a champion of civil rights and worked towards creating a more just and equitable society. So, Powell's leadership enabled the Black population in Harlem to actively participate in determining their destiny. He promoted civic participation and political involvement. Residents of Harlem were inspired by Powell's work, which also promoted a sense of community pride and strength.

Those major political leaders were the strongest activist leaders. Though their legacy carries on undoubtedly (Mihalick, 2019), activist groups and organizations were making their efforts to carry the messages these leaders have worked so hard to disseminate.

### **2.3. Beyond Harlem: African American Ideologies and New Political Thoughts**

Throughout history, Harlem has been considered an important center for African American political ideologies. Its energetic cultural and intellectual scene combined with its dense population made it an ideal location for numerous movements which held great influence over African American politics. Harlem was utilized by thinkers, writers, activists, and artists alike who came together to engage in discussions about race, social justice issues, and identity concerns. Its concentration on African-American arts makes it also a hub for political engagement and activism. Plenty of political activists and influential figures emerged and chose Harlem as their focal point to discuss African American societal issues including Martin Luther King Jr, Malcolm X, Powell Jr, Langston Hughes, and many others. During the Civil Rights movement, Harlem became also the focus of different political parties because Harlem was considered the Negro Mecca of the world and it was the most secure place for the African American community (Capeci, 1979).

The population of African Americans in Harlem created a strong sense of both political and cultural consciousness. As a result, parties and organizations established chapters in Harlem and organized peaceful protests, sit-ins, and boycotts to fight racism and empower the African American voice in society. The impact of Harlem's Culture and politics extends beyond the Civil Rights Movement, it became one of the most influential places in the USA, and it is considered a heritage for the whole African American community and nation (Amin, 2006).

Since the 20<sup>th</sup> century, African Americans from different social classes in society participated in the issue of protesting against racial segregation so that the African American issues about racism became much more concerned as public opinion of the whole United States

of America. Harlem as a center of the African American community played a significant role in shaping the minds of its community. The Harlem Renaissance movement also was a source of expression, empowerment, and revolutionary political thoughts, where they managed protests which brought significant changes in African American society. As it is explained in Zamalin's (2015) work: "Political transformation does depend on collective power, which comes from real-world strategy, strategic coalitions and social movements" (p. 21). This part explains the new ideologies which formed the new political thoughts brought by the African American community by which they can reach politics in the USA and deliver their demands to the higher authorities in the country. Also, this part illustrates the meaning of these ideologies and their contribution in providing welfare for the political systems.

In explaining the position African Americans had in American society, Schiele (2009) illustrates: "African Americans are one group of color whose history has been shaped significantly by racial subjugation" (p. 241), several attempts were made to establish a common standpoint for the African American concerning politics to stop racism. According to Zamalin (2015), Michael Dawson, professor of political sciences at the University of Chicago, introduced a schema of the main African American ideologies that help in finding solutions for racial segregation, violence, and racism. In Dawson's work (2001), he introduced six fundamental ideologies in which each one of them tackles different issues and principles. Schiele (2009) defines them as: "Ideologies are narratives that justify and promote specific recommendation for black political and economic empowerment" (p. 241). Also, Zamalin (2015) states:

The spectrum of what the political scientist Michael Dawson asserts are the six core African American political ideologies—radical egalitarian, disillusioned liberal, black Marxist, black nationalist, black feminist and black conservative—which have, at various moments and with diverging frequency, played a role in African American public opinion and political practice (pp. 15-16)

Those ideologies are important in identifying the political thoughts of the African American community as a whole. First, Radical Egalitarianism theory is a form of black liberation that advances the idea that African American subjugation can be eliminated by persistently challenging racial inequality within the confines of the existing American political and economic order (Dawson, 2001). This theory calls to stop segregation against the African American community; also, to apply political democratic decisions that protect them in the societies. Another fundamental principle of this ideology is that all people within a society desire the same societal outcomes like obtaining power and economic security (Merton, 1968). Such ideology provides an equal status to African Americans as it is supported in the Civil Rights movement (Schiele, 2009). Second, Disillusioned Liberalism, is an ideology of former radical egalitarians who have become disappointed and pessimistic about being equal to white men and there is no way to stop segregation and racial inequality (Dawson, 2001). Moreover, this theory suggests that the white man is not prepared to accept the African American as part of the society and he enjoys such kind of oppression. As a reaction, African Americans will separate themselves from white society (Schiele, 2009). Third, Black Conservatism theory, this theory main concern is that segregation against African American communities is a serious problem that requires political decision more than social structure (Dawson, 2001). Being a victim of segregation and racism also requires a change of social accommodations to reduce the danger of racism to create a productive society. Forth, Black Nationalism, its primary principle is to establish a Black nation for African Americans (Bracey et al., 1970). This ideology was influenced by several movements such as Pan-Africanism and Harlem Renaissance which advocate that African Americans should form their own government and political systems. One of its pillars is Malcolm X who argued that African Americans should create their own political and economic systems in which it is extremely separated from the Whites by establishing their own institutions, organizations, and so on. This ideology influenced organizations and parties like The Black Panther, The Black Power, and others (Bracey et al., 1970). Furthermore, the

themes that this ideology provided are solidarity, self-determination, and self-reliance; thus, achieving socio-economic independence (Schiele, 2009). Fifth, Black Feminism and Womanism, according to Dawson (2001), this theory relies upon two main fundamentals are race-based analysis and gender-based. bell hooks (2000) claims that the oppression of women in society created a duality of racism and sexism place African American women in difficult situation, hooks stated: “As a group, black women are in an unusual position in this society” (p. 16). From the struggles that African American women faced, Black Feminism calls for the independence of the African American woman, its policy is based on structural explanations and remedies which encourage education and employment to help reduce poverty, ignorance, and racial segregation. Lastly, Black Marxism, in Dawson’s explanation (2001), it means that the Black freedom vision depends on two aspects together which are race-based analysis and class-based to reduce racism in societies. Schiele (2009) illustrates: “Black Marxists view racial injustice as a result of an intimate companion of capitalist social and economic structures” (p. 246), this ideology is about explaining the social conflict that aids the idea that wealth is unequally distributed and the same thing for power and relations, which those aspects provide the access for the resources and power in the society, what is known as materialistic relations. Therefore, African Americans should make their relations in the society to have power and stop racial segregation, the strategy suggested by Black Marxist is to solve the issue of poverty to eliminate the materials inequality within the African American society as a first step for political change.

Despite the struggles that African Americans faced, from challenging severe political decisions made by the government to the oppression they faced in the streets; they contributed to changing their fortunes for the better. These six African American political ideologies brought into reality great changes in the African American world and provided both the source of the problems that African Americans had concerning their position in the US as second-class citizens suffering from injustice. These theories also suggest practical solutions to fight the subjugation,

racism, and violence that make a solid background for the new African American political thought.

### **Conclusion**

Over the years, Harlem has played a vital role in the political sphere as a center for political activism and engagement. Harlem formed a background for the basis of both artistic and political issues. Also, it contributed in shaping the landscape of African American society and attempted to create new political thoughts and ideologies. Several African American activists engaged in political activities against racism that also helped in the implementation of the right and fair decisions to improve African American individual status in society. All in all, the political parties, organizations, artists, politicians, and activists played an important role in making Harlem a political epicenter and destination that calls for equal rights and peaceful coexistence for all people.

## **General Conclusion**

Harlem has a rich cultural history that is elaborately linked to political activism. The neighborhood has played an important part in forming the identities of African Americans. It was the place where they used their works to express themselves, transforming it into a creative destination. Harlem has historically been a focal point for the civil rights movement, producing some well-known anti-racist leaders, including Adam Clayton Jr. and Martin Luther King Jr. Harlem's political involvement has helped African Americans establish a new sense of identity. Political parties and organizations have significantly contributed to Harlem's political empowerment. Organizations such as the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) and the Black Panther Party have assisted in gathering and organizing communities around social and political justice issues. These organizations have also aided in the formation of new political beliefs, such as Black nationalism, a social and political movement resisting assimilation of Black Americans and advocating self-reliance, which has influenced political debate within Harlem.

Harlem's cultural and political effects are evidence to the power of collective action and community organizing. As Harlem develops, its heritage of political empowerment impacted the neighborhood's future and inspired future generations. The key purpose of this research was to explore how Harlem evolved to be a hub for African-American expression, as well as to investigate how political activists inspired the Harlem community to reject racism and demand equality. The study suggests the following hypotheses to the earlier proposed questions, which illustrate The Harlem Renaissance movement provided a background for the African-American culture which had made it a strategic location to start their political activism. Also, the political participation and activities in Harlem assisted in challenging and dismantling systematic barriers

and oppressive systems. Additionally, the impact of those political parties and contributors and their roles in making Harlem a notable center for political discourse and action.

This project is based on the qualitative method and employs a historical method to analyze and describe Harlem as a political center and its impact on African-American culture. This strategy appears appropriate as it aims to address concerns raised about the subject. The findings of this study revealed that political participation and activism in Harlem were critical in fostering a sense of community and encouraging Harlem residents to advocate for their rights. Through this work, numerous political movements, organizations, ideologies, and contributors have been identified as significant factors in creating Harlem's political center and helping to bring it into national recognition.

Study's findings may be limited by the accessibility and availability of relevant data. Some historical records or primary sources may be missing or insufficient, which limits the depth and scope of the research.

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## ملخص

يتناول هذا البحث، دور هارلم كمركز سياسي للأمريكيين من اصول إفريقية خلال انتفاضة القرن العشرين، وتحديدًا يستكشف دور نشاط الأفارقة الأمريكيين في كل من الأدب والفنون والسياسة. حيث اعتمدت هذه الدراسة المنهج الكيفي، كما وظفت المنهج التاريخي معتمدة على آليتي الوصف والتحليل. تضمن الفصل الأول من البحث: لمحة تاريخية عن هارلم كفضاء جغرافي في الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية، وكذا ثقافة نهضة هارلم وتأثيرها في تشكيل الوعي السياسي للمجتمع الإفريقي الأمريكي. وبحث الفصل الثاني: ظهور الأحزاب السياسية والتنظيمات مثل القوة السوداء، والفهد الأسود، ومنظمات مثل مؤتمر المساواة العرقية والجمعية الوطنية للنهوض بالأشخاص الملونين وما إلى ذلك. كما يسلط البحث الضوء - أيضًا - على دور الشخصيات المؤثرة مع تحليل تجاربهم كفيليب راندولف، باول و مارتن لوثر كينغ، للتعرف عن قرب على ديناميكيات نشاط الأفارقة الأمريكيين في هارلم، وفي نهاية هذا الفصل يركز البحث على تطور الأيديولوجيات السياسية الجديدة للأمريكيين من أصل أفريقي وتأثير الثورات و الانتفاضات على المشهد الاجتماعي السياسي للأمريكيين من أصل أفريقي. و تسلط نتائج هذه الدراسة الضوء على أهمية هارلم كمركز للمقاومة السياسية للأمريكيين من أصل إفريقي، ومساهمتها في تحقيق المساواة العرقية. وفي الختام تسهم هذه الدراسة في التعريف بأن تاريخ هارلم كمركز سياسي يمثل قوة متبقية من قوة المجتمع الأمريكي من أصل إفريقي. و سيكون لنتائج هذه الدراسة آثار مهمة على النقاشات المعاصرة حول قضية المساواة العرقية والعدالة الاجتماعية، وتقديم رؤية واضحة حول سياسة الامريكيين من أصل إفريقي في الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية

**كلمات مفتاحية:** أمريكي من أصل إفريقي، هارلم، سياسة، عنصرية، مقاومة.