



Smithsonian Institution

National Museum of African American History and Culture

Delegate Magazine 1982

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1920-1941

Encouraged by the publication in 1925 of Alain Locke's anthology, *The New Negro*--a collection of poems, stories, essays and pictures--a vogue for things Negro in the arts developed among white New Yorkers and spread across the country. The twenties were, in a way, a Negro Renaissance. Dr. Alain Locke had been a Phi Beta Kappa at Harvard, a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford and had studied at the University of Berlin before becoming a professor of philosophy at Howard University in Washington. An influential lecturer, essayist and critic, he imbued many Negroes with the idea that art might provide a new approach to the race problem. "The fiction is that the life of the races is separate, and increasingly so," he wrote. "The fact is that they touch too closely at the unfavorable and too lightly at the favorable levels."

The work of colored painters and sculptors also began to attract wide attention. Alain Locke brought from Europe a priceless collection of ancient African art for exhibition in America. The Hall Johnson Choir became popular for its powerful spirituals. Fletcher Henderson and Louis Armstrong brought jazz to Broadway. A Negro-originated dance called the Charleston swept the nation, followed in popularity in 1927 by a dance that had begun at the Savoy Ballroom in Harlem, the Lindy Hop. During the Prohibition era Negro entertainers and performers were popular—the tap dancer "Bojangles" Bill Robinson, the Mills Brothers and Ethel Waters. George Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue" had deep roots in Negro blues and Paul Green's dramas of race conflict, with excellent colored actors in the casts, came to Broadway. Critics called Rose McClendon the "Negro Duse." In 1927 "Porgy" opened. In 1928 the sparkling hit revue "Blackbirds" came to Broadway. And in 1930 "The Green Pastures," with De Lawd surrounded by colored angels, opened its lengthy run.

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participant in American civilization," during the twenties had finally reached his "spiritual coming of age."

[[image]]
[[caption]] PAUL ROBESON, 1930/SCHOMBURG COLLECTION, NYPL
[[/caption]]

[[image]]
[[caption]] Romere Beardon, 1980 [[/caption]]

[[image]]
[[caption]] ALAIN LOCKE (1886-1954) [[/caption]]

[[image]]
[[caption]] MAYOR LAGUARDIA AND BILL ROBINSON REPLANTING
TREE OF HOPE [[/caption]]

[[image]]
[[caption]] Rex Ingraham in "Haiti," Lafayette Theatre, c. 1936
Schomburg Collection, NYPL [[/caption]]

[[image]]
[[caption]] OPENING NIGHT OF MACBETH, LAFAYETTE THEATRE,
1936 [[/caption]]

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