HIS 357 The Harlem Renaissance:
The rise of African American artists, writers and professionals
HISTORY 357: fulfills 3 credits for American History and/or Liberal Learning
Winter I Term, 2012
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COURSE DESCRIPTION:

The Harlem Renaissance was a cultural movement that spanned the 1920s and 1930s. During this period, former slaves, black musicians, artists, writers, educators, and businessmen left the harsh conditions in the south and settled in that section of New York City called Harlem. Students will explore how the collusion of black Africans and white Americans resulted in the evolution of the unique African-American culture. Through the study of literature, music, philosophy, religion, and politics, students will learn the impact of these former slaves and freedmen on the society of the United States.

One of the most unprecedented periods in U.S. History is that time called The Harlem Renaissance. Former slaves, black artists, scholars, educators, and businessmen, each seeking a life of dignity and good fortune, left the harsh conditions in the south and ultimately settled that section of New York City called Harlem. This area quickly became the largest residential center for blacks in the U.S. as well as the cultural center for African Americans in an otherwise segregated country. In the years between World Wars I and II, African Americans had a place to celebrate their culture and showcase in their enormous contributions to life in the U.S.

Students will explore how the collision of black Africans and white Americans resulted in the evolution of the unique African-American culture. Through the study of literature, performing and visual arts, philosophy, religion and politics students will learn how post-Civil War former slaves and freedmen became a force within the United States population, despite the enormity of racial prejudice so rampant throughout the U.S.

GOAL:
Students will learn about the emergence of African American artists, educators, businessmen, philosophers and politicians that lead to the establishment of a strong African American middle class in the United States. Major focus will be contained primarily to the years between 1900 & 1938 in Harlem, New York.

OBJECTIVES:
I. Students will become aware of the sociological, religious and political forces that arose as a result of slavery and its aftermath of government-defined segregation in the U.S.

II. Students will study selected poems, essays and fiction written by the leading African American writers of the first half of the 20th century.
III. Students will be introduced to the creative works of African American musicians & composers, writers, visual artists, and dancers who defined their culture and heritage through their art forms.

IV. Students will understand how economic elements and the violence of racism lead to the development of a specific and clearly defined African American culture that has become a major force in the United States in the 21st century.

V. Students will explore the lives of some of the most important black leaders who were the precursors of Dr. Martin Luther King and the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s.

**AREAS OF STUDY**

**Overview of African Diaspora** will include a brief survey of the slave trade (Middle Passage) and U.S. slavery, its aftermath during and after the Civil War and the western and northern migration of former slaves.

**Overview of Harlem Renaissance** will reference the following:
the psychological background, political implications artistic accomplishments, and the educational and professional development of African Americans in the first half of the 20th century.

A brief study of the philosophical forces (both domestic & foreign) will illustrate how the almost spontaneous formation of the Harlem Renaissance came to be.

**Politics and the Development of African American Organizations** will trace the development of the NAACP, UNIA and African-American churches and the wide-spread influences that occurred.

Artists were central to the establishment of the Harlem neighborhood. A review of their artistic accomplishments will show the enormity of their contributions to both the United States and to the international world of Arts & Letters.

The Literary works that emerged from the Harlem Renaissance continue to be published and read into the 21st century. We will study various works by Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, Zora Neale Hurston, Gwendolyn Bennett, etc.

The Harlem Renaissance defined the African American arts & culture and continues to inform the country and the world, despite its demise, which was the result of the Great Depression and of World War II. Those influences that continue into the current century, will be addressed as students develop a timeline of the Harlem Renaissance and its aftermath.
**Student Projects:** (presentations will be made during the last several class meetings) Your presentation will include internet research and YouTube excerpts pertinent to your chosen subject selected from one of the areas listed below. Permission of the instructor is important so that no duplication happens.

Research will be accomplished primarily on the internet and occasional resources from the Instructor and/or the library. We will discuss these the first night class and each student will identify their specific study area during the second class meeting. The general areas below will guide you in selecting and specific African American person and his/her work has contributed to:

- a. formation of a black middle class
- b. contributions to national and international arts and letters
- c. influences that have affected African Americans into the current century.

1. MUSIC & DANCE: How the unique music created by the slaves and their descendants became the international art form identified as uniquely American.

2. LITERATURE: How the African rhythms of speech translated into the American English of poetry, prose, song and fiction;

3. RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY: How African American religion and nationalism fed into the development of the mega-churches and televangelists so widespread today both throughout the country and on television.

4. SEGREGATION & ITS ANTIDOTES: How African American artists before, during and after the Harlem Renaissance portrayed their culture as well as the injustices that arose from legalized racism.

**GRADING:**

**ATTENDANCE & PARTICIPATION**
Each class will include listening to music, watching dance, reading literature, or viewing specific art that is central to the remarkable period called the Harlem Renaissance. Each artistic encounter will be follow by a student-generated discussion of the works under study. Because of the importance of student interaction no class can be successfully replicated. **As a consequence attendance and participation will count for 25% of your grade.**

**JOURNAL:**
You are to keep a detailed and comprehensive journal on each class session and your reactions to the arts and the class discussions. This is to reflect how you, on a personal level, have responded to each area of study and discussion throughout the quarter. **Your journal will count for 25% of your grade.**
CLASS PRESENTATION
You will give a 10 minute presentation to the class that reflects the art and the artist whose work you have chosen to explore. I encourage the use of You Tube for citing examples of any music you choose to study. If you are exploring the works of a particular visual artist please consult with me about how you can acquire a sample of the work under study. The internet is truly a remarkable resource for most of the areas you might choose to explore. I also have a limited number of books you might want to utilize for some of your research. **Your class presentation will count for 25% of your grade.**

RESEARCH PAPER:
You will write a 5 – 8 page paper on the particular African American you choose to study. This should include a reasonable section on the life of the person, the works produced, the particular work(s) you choose to illustrate the great contributions in their discipline, and how they undertook to be activists in the creation of the Harlem Renaissance or in the development of a black middle class. I will discuss guidelines for this essay during the first class meeting. **The paper will count for 25% of your grade.**