



# Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance

By Houston A. Baker Jr.

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"Mr. Baker perceives the harlem Renaissance as a crucial moment in a movement, predating the 1920's, when Afro-Americans embraced the task of self-determination and in so doing gave forth a distinctive form of expression that still echoes in a broad spectrum of 20th-century Afro-American arts. . . .

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## **Editorial Review**

From Publishers Weekly

The writing, music and art of the Harlem Renaissance has been called provincial, even by some black critics. In this powerful and controversial essay, Baker not only refutes this notion, he also argues that black writers have created a distinctively Afro-American modernism equal to the elitist Anglo-American modernism of Eliot, Joyce and their ilk. A professor of English at the University of Pennsylvania, Baker traces black modernism to Tuskegee orator Booker T. Washington and political activist W. E. B. DuBois. In *Up from Slavery*, Washington subversively adopted the voice of the black minstrel show, turning inside-out white stereotypes of blacks. DuBois's literary strategy of irony and "deformation" in *The Souls of Black Folk* exploded plantation traditions, the white Southern myth of cavalier gentility and American journalism's pose of fairness. Black poet Paul Laurence Dunbar sang his "badness," waging guerrilla warfare against a hostile white culture as he drew upon an African ancestral past. A brilliant and important book.

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From Library Journal

Baker believes that the Harlem Renaissance has been judged a failure because it has been adversely, and inappropriately, compared with modernism as exemplified by Joyce, Pound, and Eliot. Focusing on the development of an Afro-American "sound" or "voice," and on rhetorical strategies in the works of Booker T. Washington, Charles Chesnutt, W. E. B. DuBois, and others, Baker proposes a unique Afro-American brand of modernism against which the Harlem Renaissance can be measured a resounding success. Baker's critical terms are clearly defined; his arguments lucid, if not always convincing. A thought-provoking study for research collections. William Gargan, Brooklyn Coll. Lib., CUNY

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From the Back Cover

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**Gary Bloomfield:**

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