A Cultural Awakening: The Harlem Renaissance revisited

Due to the lack of diversity at the University of Vermont (UV) and its community, I wanted to broaden experiences by bringing a sampling of the African American experience via the Harlem Renaissance to these communities.

I wrote, received, and administered a grant in the spring of 1998 to develop a three-credit course, "The Harlem Renaissance Revisited." The course, offered through the Division of Continuing Education, was augmented by a number of university-wide events:


February offered a compelling lecture and slide presentation, "The Face and Heart of the Black Renaissance," by Edmund Barry Gaither, director of the Museum of the National Center of Afro-American Artists in Boston, and "Aspects of the Harlem Renaissance," a faculty panel and open discussion led by UV's Professor Donald Grinde with professors from Dartmouth, Middlebury, and Bennington colleges. UV alumnus William O. Boyd, who as a boy worked for Langston Hughes, was our special guest. Bailey/Howe's February Film Festival included "From These Roots," "Two Dollars and a Dream," "Black Artist of the USA," and "Harlem Renaissance and Beyond."

In March, "Two Creative Women in the Harlem Renaissance Ethos: The 1920s Anne Spencer and the 1990s Dolores Sandoval," was introduced with a brief biography on Spencer. The 1920s iconoclast was a writer and librarian whose Lynchburg, Virginia, home became a haven for many of the 1920s black intelligentsia. Sadly, two legendary librarians, Augusta Baker and Jean Blackwell Hutson, died in February as their contributions to the Schomburg hung in the Bailey/Howard Library.


The reawakening was deemed a success and best summed up by a staff member who said, "I was unaware of the Harlem Renaissance, except for the music of Duke Ellington. During this cultural awakening I became aware of Black American history, art, and literature." My objective exactly—Marilyn Nelson, library assistant professor, Bailey/Howe Library, University of Vermont, e-mail: mxnelson@zoo.uvm.edu.