ENG257 African American Lit
Weekly Reading and Writing #5

Reading
TUESDAY
- Harlem Renaissance, 1919 – 1940, pages 953 – 962
- Alain Locke and The New Negro, pages 983 – 993

Questions for our discussion
1. What were the causes of the Migration North (page 954)?
2. In attacking Negro dialect verse, which had dominated black American poetry until the early 20th century, James Weldon Johnson called for a form “freer and larger than dialect” (page 956)? What was his thinking?
3. Appreciate the dates of the work of DuBois, Johnson, Locke, Hughes, Hurston.
4. Who was the Old Negro (page 984 – 5)?
5. Why do we call this the Harlem Renaissance? What does the term renaissance imply?

THURSDAY

Writing Choices: Choose two from the following (each ½ page single-spaced); choose two different topics (one from Tuesday’s reading and one from Thursday’s reading):

- Join the controversy on Negro dialect. Write an open letter to Johnson in which you defend its use in poetry and prose. Ground your argument by using examples from the poetry of the time.
- Explain Locke’s description of The New Negro and place this discussion in the context of the Renaissance. Who was the Old Negro? Characterize him/her. Is this the “soul” that DuBois wrote about? In what ways has Locke signified?
- Listen (link on our class website) to Hughes read “The Negro Speaks of Rivers.” What in particular moves you about this poem? What details would you choose if you were writing this poem about your own culture, your own heritage? (Would you like to write that poem? Compose a poem of your own using his poem’s framework.) Then write about the importance of heritage (in what ways is Hughes signifying on the African American tradition?) in his life and yours.
- Listen to Hughes read “The Weary Blues” (page 1294). Consider the following quotes and write about the ways in which jazz and the blues influence his poetry, or rather simply make his poetry possible.
  - “Like the waves of the sea coming one after another, always one after another, like the earth moving around the sun – night, day, night, day, night, day – forever, so is the soul of black music with its rhythm that never betrays you, its strength like the beat of the human heart, its humor and its rooted power.”
  - “Jazz – the eternal tom-tom beating in the Negro soul.”
  - “They don’t care whether they are like white folks. Their joy runs, Bang! Into ecstasy.”
- Among the tropes that we have recognized, which do you find in Hughes’ works? In Locke’s works? Are there any new tropes we should recognize?