Lesson 2:
Harlem’s Journey

Lesson Author
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Standards and Benchmarks (see page 2.24)

Lesson Description
This lesson follows the rise and fall of Harlem in New York City, New York, from the promise of the Harlem Renaissance in the 1920s to the neglect after WWII that led to declines in residents’ quality of life. Today, Harlem is experiencing a revitalization, and this lesson traces the evolution of its social, economic, and cultural history.

Grade Level
9-12

Concepts
Discrimination
Gentrification
Net worth/wealth
Wealth inequality

Objectives
Students will be able to
• explain the importance of the Great Migration in transporting some of the brightest minds in America to Harlem in the early twentieth century,
• analyze the contributions that a few individuals made in alerting the world to the Harlem Renaissance,
• distinguish between the shining façade of the Harlem Renaissance and the grinding everyday life for average residents,
explain how the devastation of the Great Depression exacerbated the racial inequities in America and initiated a rapid decline in the quality of life in Harlem, and
demonstrate how a revitalized interest in Harlem is creating economic challenges for long-time residents, including how to preserve the unique culture in the community.

Compelling Question
How did discrimination and wealth inequality contribute to the eventual decline of the Harlem Renaissance?

Time Required
90 minutes

Materials
- PowerPoint slide deck for “Economics and the Great Migration Lesson 2: Harlem’s Journey”
- Reading 1, one copy for each student in 25% of the class
- Reading 2, one copy for each student in 25% of the class
- Reading 3, with following link supplied to each student in 25% of the class: https://www.nytimes.com/1978/03/01/archives/new-jersey-pages-in-last-decade-leaders-say-harlems-dreams-have.html
- Reading 4, with following link supplied to each student in 25% of the class: https://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/29/opinion/sunday/the-end-of-black-harlem.html
- Handouts 2-1 and 2-2, one digital or paper copy of each for each student
- Handout 2-3, one copy for the teacher
- Handout 2-4, one copy for each student

Preparation
For the second half of the lesson (see Procedure step 28), the room’s desks should be arranged so that groups of four students can form discussion circles; assign online students to breakout rooms.

Procedure
1. Display Slide 2 of the PowerPoint slide deck for “Economics and the Great Migration Lesson 2: Harlem’s Journey.”
2. Tell students that the class will explore the journey that Harlem took, beginning with conditions at the turn of the past century to conditions that define the community today. From this narrative, students will discover the role discrimination played in the establishment of wealth inequality between the races. Define **discrimination** as the unjust or prejudicial treatment of different categories of people, especially on the grounds of race, age, or sex. Define a person’s **wealth** or **net worth** as the difference between a person’s assets and liabilities. Explain that **wealth inequality** describes the unequal distribution of wealth among people.

3. Display Slide 3. Explain that modern-day New York City was originally founded by the Dutch and that for 200 years Harlem was a sleepy village on the north end of Manhattan Island until expansion eliminated the urban/rural divide.

4. Display Slide 4. Explain that the expansion of two transportation lines northward created the arteries necessary to connect the island.

5. Display Slide 5. Explain that the first residents of twentieth-century Harlem were Jewish and Italian working-class families seeking a lower cost of living.

6. Display Slide 6. Explain that Black American families encountered policies that kept them from accessing financial capital and housing. Real estate entrepreneur Phillip Payton Jr. was able to raise funds, from a small but wealthy group of Black investors, to begin an investment trust that purchased homes and “block-busted” Black families into White neighborhoods—that is, they deliberately sold homes to Black families in predominantly White neighborhoods. This often began a wave of “White flight” out of the community, which opened for Black families.

7. Display Slide 7. Explain that the demand for housing increased as thousands of Southern Black families arrived weekly during the Great Migration. Payton focused on Harlem, which began filling up with Black families as White families fled the region.

8. Display Slide 8. Explain that the bar graph illustrates the racial transformation in Harlem as WWI began.

9. Display Slide 9. Explain that Harlem Renaissance artist Jacob Lawrence did a series of 60 panels depicting what became known as the Great Migration. The painting on the left illustrates Southern Black families gathering their belongings and beginning their journey. The painting on the right depicts the hope for better educational opportunities for migrant children once they arrived in the North.

10. Display Slide 10. Explain that Harlem quickly became the center of the “New Negro” Movement, a term popularized during the Harlem Renaissance, which implied people’s desire to remove the practices and laws of Jim Crow racial segregation. The National Association for the Advancement of
Colored People (NAACP) and Marcus Garvey’s Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) established their headquarters in Harlem. The NAACP would display that flag anytime a Black man was lynched.

11. Display Slide 11. Explain that Marcus Garvey was a Black nationalist who advocated for Black people in America and stressed it was important for them to understand their heritage. In addition, he explored an avenue for Black Americans to travel to Africa and received praise in the Black community for his work. But Garvey’s methods bordered on demagoguery as he envisioned an African continent in which he would rule. He was eventually deported back to his birth home of Jamaica.

12. Display Slide 12. Explain that at the height of the New Negro movement, Harlem was the epicenter of Black American culture. The neighborhood bustled with publishing houses, music companies, playhouses, nightclubs, and cabarets. This concentration of creativity found in Harlem represented a significant era of cultural expression in the nation’s history.

13. Display Slide 13. Explain that Alain Locke was a very accomplished man before he became known as the Father of the Harlem Renaissance. A literary talent in his own right, Alain became the mentor of some of the greatest authors and visual artists of the century.

14. Display Slide 14. Explain that Charles S. Johnson, a prominent sociologist, envisioned all American citizens embracing the culture of Harlem. All that was needed was some press. The Civic Club dinner on March 21, 1924, was a gathering of more than 100 members of the media and the coming-out party for Harlem’s art community.

15. Display Slide 15. Explain that prominent White magazine editor Paul Kellogg agreed to dedicate an entire edition of his periodical to the works of the Harlem Renaissance. The world took notice. The literature, music, and fashion created in Harlem helped define culture and what many thought was “cool,” in America and around the world.

16. Display Slide 16. Provide a digital or paper copy of Handout 2-1: The Lyrical and Visual Messaging From Harlem to each student. Explain that much of the creative output produced in Harlem centered on the experiences of Black Americans. Tell students that they will read two poems by Langston Hughes, explore a painting by William Johnson, and listen to a song performed by Billie Holiday. Ask the students to interpret what the artists might have been thinking in the process of creating their work. Possible answers to the Handout 2-1 questions include the following:

**Part 1**

1. The South is culturally immature and mistreats its Black residents despite their devotion to it. The South has not changed, because its social structures are still based on demanding more from and providing less to Black residents. It is a place to escape from. Some aspects of the South appear desirable, but at its core it is unhealthy.
2. The solution is to leave the South and migrate North.
3. The expectations are that the North will be a better place to live and that maybe the next generation of Black Americans will not have the experiences of cruelty.

Part 2
1. Johnson may be envisioning a world where Harlem residents can look after each other. Instead of police officers being brutish, they function as community partners.
2. Johnson recognized the devastating effects of racism, but he also paid heed to the additional factors that contributed to a compromised life in Harlem. Violations related to loitering and alcohol, and even physical violence, can be enforced with compassion and empathy. The short officer on the right appears to be gently touching the back of the fallen individual. The man at the top right is being led away, but calmly. The position of the woman in the yellow dress is awkward, even unsettling, but the officers appear to be attentive as they carry her.

Part 3
1. Dixie is a reference to the lands south of the Mason-Dixon line; it’s a reference to the Old South or the Confederacy. Jim Crow laws were the “Black codes” enacted in the South to deny Black residents a life of equal opportunity. Lynching was the public hanging of a Black person by a vigilante group of White persons after accusing them of some affront to their “moral code.”
2. Factors that motivated Southern Black residents to migrate North (push factors) are the threat of violence (including lynching), the repressive Jim Crow laws, and the fear and cruelty that White residents exhibited toward Black residents on a daily basis. The pull factor was the expectation that any place in this country was better than the South. The promise of better jobs, housing, and educational opportunities were pull factors that drew Black residents out of the South by the millions.

Part 4
1. “Strange Fruit” refers to the shocking discovery of two Black people hanging from the branch of a tree like low-hanging fruit.
2. The music is somber and reflects the deep sorrow that accompanies the taking of a life in this way. The lyrics are jarring, and the melody adds an extra layer of emotion.

17. Display Slide 17. Explain that the irony of the Harlem economy was that while Black artists were prolific in their creative output, White citizens were generally the ones reaping the profits. One example was the famous Cotton Club, where some of the greatest Black band leaders entertained exclusively White audiences. White club owners profited, and the Black residents living around the venue were barred from attending.

18. Display Slide 18. Explain that most of the businesses in Harlem were owned by White Americans living outside the community. Though Harlem appeared to be an oasis for Black Americans, its residents encountered the same barriers as Black communities everywhere. The inability of Black
entrepreneurs to access financial capital made it very difficult for them to have a stake in the neighborhood. That was true for both commercial and residential ventures. Law enforcement had predominantly White officers as well, creating cultural clashes.

19. Display Slide 19. Explain that a rare exception to this model was the Dunbar Bank. Financed by the deep pockets of the Rockefeller family, it was a rare institution that both employed and served Black Americans. However, it succumbed to the Great Depression.

20. Display Slide 20. Explain that discrimination and wealth inequality forced Black men and women to travel far from their community to seek employment. When they found work, it was almost always in the service of White Americans.

21. Display Slide 21. Explain that there were few Black-owned businesses in Harlem. The most common type of Black-owned businesses were beauty salons. Minimal financial capital was necessary, and quite often stylists provided services directly in their homes. These parlors would often become hives of community activity and gossip.

22. Display Slide 22. Explain the perception that capitalism had failed to reap rewards for the Black community, which led to interest in the race-neutral and class-free ideology of communism. The American Communist Party actively recruited in Harlem and organized anti-racist and anti-lynching protests. Black Americans felt this alternative provided them an equal partnership in something greater, but it increased the scrutiny under which they lived.

23. Display Slide 23. Explain that the lack of legitimate employment often left some Black Americans little choice but to generate income illicitly. The “Numbers Game” was a huge enterprise in Harlem during and beyond the Renaissance. Like a lottery, players would pick three numbers, and runners representing the “Organization” would collect cash and book bets. At 10 a.m. every day, someone drew the numbers, and the big question every morning was, “What’s the number?”

24. Display Slide 24. Explain that when the Great Depression arrived in the fall of 1929, residents of Harlem had little to do with the stock market or wealth to lose. But when it came to job layoffs, people of color were invariably the first to go. In 1930 in the U.S., 1 in 10 individuals in the employed population were left without work. In the same year, the numbers were 1 in 6 in New York City and 1 in 4 within Harlem’s Black American population.

25. Display Slide 25. Explain that the sustained levels of unemployment and the lack of investment in the community took a heavy toll on Harlem in the decades after the Depression. The unyielding institutional barriers denied Black Americans equality and effectively eroded the community’s spirit.
Display Slide 26. White millennials have been drawn back to New York City for employment opportunities. This has created a demand for housing. Rents in Manhattan have risen sharply as a result. For a while, Brooklyn was an affordable alternative, but rents quickly rose there as well. The wave of urbanites looked to Harlem, which drove rents up in the central and eastern parts of the community. The longtime residents were, and continue to be, driven out as new businesses move in and as apartments are converted to condominiums.

Display Slide 27. Explain that **gentrification** is the process in which the character of a poorer urban area is changed by wealthier people moving in, improving housing, and attracting new businesses, typically displacing current inhabitants in the process. Gentrification affects the vintage nature of a community as landmarks are leveled for new residential and commercial growth.

Explain that students will now use what they’ve learned. They will analyze some of the events that comprise the timeline of the past 100 years of Harlem’s history through a jigsaw activity. Work through the following:

- Divide the class into as many groups of four as you can and have them move their desks into circles, or assign your online groups to breakout rooms for discussion. If there’s a group of three, have one student cover two topics. If there’s a group of five, have two students work together on the same topic.
- Assign each group a number from 1 to 4, repeating the numbers if you have more than four groups, and tell the students that they will keep that number throughout the activity. This will be their “home” group.
- Distribute Reading 1: Early Harlem and Reading 2: Harlem During the Depression, and provide links to Reading 3: Harlem in the 1970s and Reading 4: Harlem Today, so that Reading 1 goes to group 1, Reading 2 goes to group 2, and so forth. In addition, provide a digital or paper copy of Handout 2-2: Harlem History, From Renaissance to Gentrification to each student.
- In their home groups, students are to read and explore the elements of the Harlem period they have been assigned.
- Instruct groups to formulate answers to the four questions in Section 1. The goal is for students to work together in their home groups to develop a common set of answers before moving on to the next phase.
- When students have finished Section 1, create five new groups known as “specialist” groups. Each group should have at least one individual from each of the home groups involved so that all four readings are represented.
- Ask the specialists to share their story with the new group. Tell the students that in sharing their specialist information, they should focus on providing the answers to questions each home group developed in Section 1.
- Once students have revealed all the details of the four time periods, have them work toward completing Section 2 by finding a set of common elements drawn from the collective events.
Once the specialist groups have completed Section 2, have students return to their home groups.

Home group members will now work together in responding to the culminating question of the lesson in Section 3. They should review the current evidence of income, asset, and wealth disparity between Black and White Americans and then recall the stories of history.

Review potential answers in Handout 2-3: Suggested Answers to Reading and Handout 2-2 Questions.

**Closure**

29. Review the main points of the lesson by discussing the following:

- What was the shining façade of the Harlem Renaissance? (*Harlem had such promise as a Black American “oasis.”* Harlem was a concentration of intellect and artistic talent. It was a place where a Black man or woman could walk down a community street and experience relatively less discrimination than they would in other areas.)

- Why was the promise lost? (*Discrimination and wealth inequality overpowered the dream.*)

- Why was the Great Migration important for creating the Harlem Renaissance? (*The Great Migration was a wave of human skill, talent, and entrepreneurial spirit moving out of the repressive South and into areas of the North and West where residents could exercise this energy. Harlem, for a time, was an inviting enclave where a great concentration of this talent could reside.*)

- What restrictions kept Black Americans from fulfilling the dream of Harlem? (*Answers will vary but may include the inability to access financial capital, the fact that White Americans controlled a vast amount of commercial activity, Black Americans’ inability to own real estate, the dominance of White officers on the Harlem police force, or the lack of private investment and support from New York City’s local government.*)

- How did the turmoil of the Great Depression exacerbate the racial inequities in America and initiate the rapid decline in the quality of life in Harlem? (*While Black Americans had little wealth to lose when the Great Depression arrived, they were often the first to lose their jobs. The White-owned businesses and money that poured into entertainment venues in Harlem dried up.*)

- Name some of the individuals who were successful early on in opening up Harlem to the settlement of Great Migrators and alerting the world to the vast array of artistic and cultural talent that grew from the Harlem Renaissance. (*Philip Payton Jr., Alain Locke, Charles Johnson, Paul Kellogg, Langston Hughes, and Jacob Lawrence*)

- What risk does all the current investment in Harlem present to the community’s identity? (*Answers will vary but may include rent inflation that will drive out long-standing Black residents, the replacement of local businesses by large chain stores, and the loss of cultural artifacts of the community.*)
Assessment

30. Provide a copy of Handout 2-4: Assessment to each student. Allow time for students to work and then review the answers as follows:

Multiple Choice

1. What was the Great Migration?
   a. The moving of Duke Ellington’s orchestra from the Savoy to the Cotton Club
   b. The exodus of White people from urban centers to the suburbs
   c. The movement of large commercial stores into Harlem, which moved small local businesses out
   d. *The movement of Black families out of the South to urban centers in the North*

2. What were some of the few business establishments that Black Americans could own and manage?
   a. Car washes
   b. *Beauty salons*
   c. Legal services
   d. Restaurants

3. What is gentrification?
   a. The aging of a community
   b. The decaying of a community from neglect
   c. *Low-income residents being replaced by wealthy investment*
   d. Replacing urban landscapes with parks and greenspaces

Short Answer

4. What policies pertaining to finance made it nearly impossible for Black entrepreneurs to profit and grow from the great economic engine Harlem was during the Renaissance? *Black Americans were routinely denied access to financial capital that would allow them to borrow money, purchase property, and start businesses.*

5. By the 1970s, Harlem was a shell of its former self, with a quality of life closer to that in the developing world. How did Harlem’s Renaissance turn to economic despair? *After the Depression and WWII, Harlem lost its economic viability due to lack of private investment and support from New York City’s local government. With declining property values and no access to capital or financing, Harlem could not recapture its former glory. Residents fell into a cycle of poverty. By the 1970s, NYC itself had also fallen into a state of economic and structural disrepair.*
Reaobg 1: Early Harlem (page 1 of 2)

(From “Then: 125th Street” by Joss Gross; https://eportfolios.macaulay.cuny.edu/brooks12/then-125th-street/)

Northern Manhattan stands in opposition to its humble origins. The area around 125th Street in the first half of the 19th century was mostly country estates and farmland, owned by the wealthy and well-to-do of New York. If one had walked then around what is today the 125th Street subway station, he/she would have seen a rather pastoral setting, a stark contrast to the urban façade found today. Yet, as modernity and urbanization occurred, the community became part of the greater New York City area.

125th Street is located within the cultural heart of Harlem, a historically and sociologically significant New York City neighborhood on the island of Manhattan. Harlem was incorporated into the City of New York after a panic brought the town to near bankruptcy. The traditional boundaries of Harlem are generally considered to be between 155th and 110th street, with the Harlem River and Hudson River bordering the area on the east and west, respectively. Within this larger area are three smaller neighborhoods: East (or Spanish) Harlem, Central Harlem, and West Harlem. East Harlem, home to a large Latino community, is roughly defined as the area of Harlem east of Fifth Avenue and north of 96th Street. Central Harlem, regarded as the epicenter of the neighborhood, is between St. Nicholas Street on the west and Fifth Avenue on the east. West Harlem runs north of 123rd Street and west of St. Nicholas Street.

By the turn of the 20th century, Harlem began to receive an influx of immigrants, many of them Italians and Eastern European Jews. Yet, the demographics of the neighborhood were about to change drastically. Immediately preceding and following World War 1, the “Great Migration” of African Americans from the U.S. South occurred. The migrants sought better wages and greater equality in the north. In 1910, 9% of the population of Central Harlem was African American. By 1920, the percentage had risen to 32%, and it reached 70% in 1930.

The Harlem Renaissance was the development of the Harlem neighborhood in New York City as a black cultural mecca in the early 20th Century and the subsequent social and artistic explosion that resulted. Lasting roughly from the 1910s through the mid-1930s, the period is considered a golden age in African American culture, manifesting in literature, music, stage performance and art.

The Great Migration drew to Harlem some of the greatest minds and brightest talents of the day, an astonishing array of African American artists and scholars. Between the end of World War I and the mid-1930s, they produced one of the most significant eras of cultural expression in the nation’s history—the Harlem Renaissance. Yet this cultural explosion also occurred in Cleveland, Los Angeles and many cities shaped by the great migration. Alain Locke, a Harvard-educated writer, critic, and teacher who became known as the “dean” of the Harlem Renaissance, described it as a “spiritual coming of age” in which African Americans transformed “social disillusionment to race pride.”
Reading 1: Early Harlem (page 2 of 2)

So why did African Americans settle in Harlem, as opposed to spreading throughout many areas of New York? In any great movement of a single people to a new location, there will always be a tendency for that group to seek their own kind for obvious cultural and social reasons. However, for African Americans, larger economic and political forces played a much more important role. But following World War I, provoked by the first wave of the Great Migration, whites panicked: “They erected residential boundaries, through violence and law…thereby penning the migrants into black-only districts that proved to be embryonic ghettos.” Many white families feared the influx of blacks into their communities as an economic scourge and believed black neighbors would instantly depress real estate values.

Below is a restrictive covenant from 1910 on a lot in New York City.

…and no building erected upon said premises, shall ever be used for the sale of liquor, wine or beer or be rented wholly or in part to or occupied by Negroes or colored persons…and further that this covenant against nuisances shall attach and run with the land…

These agreements prevented any single property owner from selling to African Americans. Thus, the emigrating blacks were forced to move to the working-class lower income neighborhood of Harlem, where they settled in an economically depressed community with few financial resources at its disposal.
Reading 2: Harlem During the Depression (page 1 of 2)

(From “Then: 125th Street” by Joss Gross; https://eportfolios.macaulay.cuny.edu/brooks12/then-125th-street/)

There were dreams long ago to make 125th Street a sprawling, developed commercial hub of Harlem. While the street did develop into the commercial heart of Harlem, hopes for prosperity ended in the 1930s. The practice of “redlining”—denying mortgages to neighborhoods that contained certain races, religions, and ethnic groups—eventually extended into all financial and economic services.

As African Americans moved into Harlem, real-estate values plummeted, and so did capital investment in the community. Banks had always discriminated against blacks, but as their movement into urban areas intensified, financial discrimination became more concerted. The term redlining comes from banks’ use of maps marked with red zones to distinguish between areas where loans and financial services would be available and where they would not. Part of the New Deal programming, the National Housing Act of 1935 meant to hinder the sudden growth of mortgage defaults and make housing more affordable, had the reverse effect on minority communities. The Federal Home Loan Bank Board, which came out of the legislation, helped create “residential security maps.” These maps of significant cities in the U.S. were used to indicate the level of risk for real estate investments. Black majority neighbors such as Harlem were declared ineligible for mortgage loans.

From the 1930s through the 1960s, most African Americans could not get mortgages because the government had deemed neighborhoods where they lived ineligible for federal mortgage insurance, the Depression-era innovation that made mortgages widely affordable.

The situation exposed black families to hucksters who peddled homeownership through contracts for deed, in which a home seller gives a buyer a high-interest loan, coupled with a pledge to turn over the deed after 20 to 40 years of monthly installment payments. These contracts enriched the sellers by draining the buyers, who built no equity and were often evicted for minor or alleged infractions, at which point the owner would enter into a contract with another buyer. In the process, families and neighborhoods were ruined.

Stagnant real-estate values and the lack of financial resources led to stunted commercial growth, and little economic development in Harlem. As a result of the economic impediments of the neighborhood a process of “ghettoization” and urban squalor resulted. Overcrowding and segregation led to dilapidated and crowded tenements becoming the norm in Harlem. Economically, the community was dominated by small businesses. Since banks largely refused to provide loans to Harlem businesses, entrepreneurs had to focus their ventures on a smaller scale.
Reading 2: Harlem During the Depression (page 2 of 2)

Surprisingly, most Harlem businesses were not owned by African Americans, who were a majority of area residents. “A survey in 1929 found that whites owned and operated 81.51% of the neighborhood’s 10,319 businesses.” That number only decreased to 60% by 1960. Cosmetic businesses such as barber shops made up the majority of Harlem enterprises. Business owners were largely of Jewish and Italian descent, and many African Americans in the community came to resent both groups as a result.

The Great Depression brought a series of economic challenges and surprises to Harlem. The country was shocked by the economic woes of the Great Depression, which provided a sharp contrast to the prosperity of the 1920s. Harlem suffered more than most places. Ironically, because mortgage lending was a rarity in Harlem prior to the depression, the neighborhood faced less than average exposure to the economic downfall. Yet Harlem saw a dramatic increase in unemployment. Generally, the case in time of economic hardship, it is those who are seen as less desirable or easily replaceable who are first to be laid off. In the 1930s, when racism shaped so much about America, white employers readily replaced African Americans.

In the decades that followed, economic decline and a rise in crime and drug use afflicted the area. Yet 125th Street remained central to the identity of African American New Yorkers, representing their accomplishments and challenges.
Handout 2-1: The Lyrical and Visual Messaging From Harlem

The body of work produced by the artists of Harlem is a window into the Black American experience in the twentieth century. From the Great Migration out of the South to the cultural explosion of the Harlem Renaissance, and from Jim Crow practices and laws to racial street violence, there’s no shortage of eloquence in capturing the times. Explore the words and images below and respond to the questions.

Part 1: Langston Hughes’s “The South” (1926)

The lazy, laughing South  
Passionate, cruel,  
With blood on its mouth.  
Honey-lipped, syphilitic—  
The sunny-faced South,  
That is the South.  
Beast-strong,  
And I, who am black, would love her  
Idiot-brained.  
But she spits in my face.  
The child-minded South  
And I, who am black,  
Scratching in the dead fire’s ashes  
Would give her many rare gifts  
For a Negro’s bones.  
But she turns her back upon me.  
Cotton and the moon,  
So now I seek the North—  
Warmth, earth, warmth,  
The cold-faced North,  
The sky, the sun, the stars,  
For she, they say,  
The magnolia-scented South.  
Is a kinder mistress,  
Beautiful, like a woman,  
And in her house my children  
Seductive as a dark-eyed whore,  
May escape the spell of the South.


1. What does the poem reveal about life in the South?

2. What does the poem suggest is the solution to life in the South?

3. What does the poem reveal about life in the North?
Handout 2-1: The Lyrical and Visual Messaging From Harlem

Part 2: William Johnson’s *Moon Over Harlem* (1943)

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of the Harmon Foundation

**Harlem Race Riot in the Summer of ‘43**

The riots had begun when Robert Bandy, a Black American soldier, tried to intervene when he saw police arresting a Black woman for disorderly conduct. The police, who said Bandy assaulted them, shot him as he tried to flee. When some people falsely reported that Bandy had died in the hospital (he survived), there was an outcry, and two days of rioting ensued. All figures in the painting are Black Americans.

1. Imagine that Johnson is painting a dream scene rather than a factual depiction of the events. Why do you think he painted the police officers as Black Americans?

2. Johnson’s painting depicts a street scene where liquor bottles are strewn everywhere. His illustration implies violence, but a close look at the officers reveals a more compassionate approach than actually occurred. Why do you think this is the way the artist chose to depict the scene?
Handout 2-1: The Lyrical and Visual Messaging From Harlem

Part 3: Langston Hughes’s “One Way Ticket” (1949)

Read the poem “One Way Ticket” by Langston Hughes, online at https://lawrencemigration.phillips-collecion.org/immerse-yourself/poetry-scramble, and then answer the questions below.

1. What is meant by the following terms: Dixie, Jim Crow laws, lynching?

2. Identify two push factors and one pull factor for Black American migration to the North discussed in the poem.
Handout 2-1: The Lyrical and Visual Messaging From Harlem

Part 4: Billie Holiday’s “Strange Fruit” (1939)

One of the greatest talents to come out of the Harlem Renaissance was singer Billie Holiday. One of her most haunting songs is titled “Strange Fruit,” which paints a picture of a rural American South where there is political and psychological persecution of Black American communities. The song’s lyrics portray the everyday violence that many groups and individuals inflicted on Black people. Holiday performed the song in front of Black and White audiences alike. Listen to her 1939 rendition at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wHGAMjwr_j8, and then respond to the questions below.

1. What do the words “Strange Fruit” refer to in the song’s lyrics?

2. What is the general mood created by the song? How does the music contribute to the overall effect?
Section 1

In your "home" groups, read and explore each element of the Harlem period you have been assigned. Working with your group members, formulate answers for each of the four questions below.

1. What period in the past 100 years of Harlem history does your article address?

2. What are some details of Black American life in Harlem during the period you are reading about?

3. Describe the external forces that shape the changes occurring in Harlem during the period you are reading about.

4. What role does the government play in influencing the forces shaping events in Harlem during the period you are reading about?
Handout 2-2: Harlem History, From Renaissance to Gentrification

Section 2

Meet in specialist groups with at least one individual from each of the original (home) groups involved so that all four home groups are represented. Each specialist should share information about the time and people they studied with the new group. Once everyone reveals all details of the four time periods, work together to complete the assessment questions below. All specialists should work together to arrive at some common answers.

1. Cite two examples of race playing a factor in the events that unfolded over the 100 years of Harlem history.

2. Cite two examples of policies influencing the real estate market that affected events over the 100 years of Harlem history.

3. Describe the changes Black American culture endured over the 100 years of Harlem history.

4. Generally, has the government contributed positively or negatively to the events that unfolded over the 100 years of Harlem history? Explain.
Handout 2-2: Harlem History, From Renaissance to Gentrification

Section 3 (page 1 of 2)

Return to your home groups. Working with your partners, review the graphics below and draw on your understanding of Harlem history to respond to the corresponding question.

Racial Wealth Gap in the US

Black households have 153% lower median net worth and 26% lower income than white households. They are also less likely to own a home, business and stock.
Handout 2-2: Harlem History, From Renaissance to Gentrification

Section 3 (page 2 of 2)

Access to credit is still a major obstacle for Black Americans.

Final Question: If you think of Harlem’s history as a microcosm of the national Black American experience, how have the impediments described in the readings you’ve shared contributed to today’s widespread financial inequality exhibited by the data above? To put it simply, what is the connection between the events of the past and the realities of today?
Handout 2-3: Suggested Answers to Reading and Handout 2-2 Questions

Section 1
1. Answers will vary depending on the reading.
2. Answers will vary, but this is an opportunity to speak to the economic, cultural, and societal details of Black American life, from the peaks during the Harlem Renaissance to the depths during the 1970s.
3. Answers will vary but may include the Great Migration, the Great Depression, WWI and WWII, White segregationists, redlining, racism, joblessness, a lack of access to financial resources, indifference, cultural awakening during the Renaissance, drug dealing and despair during the 1970s, or White flight and White return to urban life.
4. Answers will vary but may include the following: Government housing policies in the 1930s set the table for financial inequality; the government’s response to the problem in the 1970s was inadequate; or the NYC mayor has made it easier in modern times for developers in Harlem to build pricey housing.

Section 2
1. Answers will vary but may include how Black Americans were (i) forced into segregated communities, (ii) denied mortgage insurance because of how FHA covenants were written, (iii) denied access to business financing, (iv) faced with drug dealing in the 1970s, or (v) unable to generate wealth, which led to immobility in the 1970s and their inability to afford to remain in Harlem now.
2. Answers will vary but may include the FHA mortgage rules and redlining maps, the community covenants that wouldn’t allow sales to non-White families, or current rules that make it easier for developers in Harlem.
3. Answers will vary but may include the following: The great promise of the Renaissance was gradually dismantled by the decline of the community and by economic forces that denied Black families the ability to thrive.
4. Answers will vary but may include the following: The government’s role has been almost entirely negative. Despite funding the Kerner Report in the 1960s, which detailed the poverty and blight, the government did very little. The FHA denied mortgage insurance, and the city is currently supporting gentrification.

Section 3
Final Question: Students should cite all the details listed in their previous answers as a systematic rejection of any generational wealth creation for Black Americans. Black residents couldn’t buy homes or pursue entrepreneurial dreams throughout the early part of the century, which left households with little savings to pass up the ladder. Recent generations have had little to build on, which has hampered real estate and equity purchases. The problems persist, as it is still more difficult for Black households to attain credit.
Handout 2-4: Assessment

Answer the following questions:

Multiple Choice

1. What was the Great Migration?
   a. The moving of Duke Ellington’s orchestra from the Savoy to the Cotton Club
   b. The exodus of White people from urban centers to the suburbs
   c. The movement of large commercial stores into Harlem, which moved small local businesses out
   d. The movement of Black families out of the South to urban centers in the North

2. What were some of the few business establishments that Black Americans could own and manage?
   a. Car washes
   b. Beauty salons
   c. Legal services
   d. Restaurants

3. What is gentrification?
   a. The aging of a community
   b. The decaying of a community from neglect
   c. Low-income residents being replaced by wealthy investment
   d. Replacing urban landscapes with parks and greenspaces

Short Answer

4. What policies pertaining to finance made it nearly impossible for Black entrepreneurs to profit and grow from the great economic engine Harlem was during the Renaissance?

5. By the 1970s, Harlem was a shell of its former self, with a quality of life closer to that in the developing world. How did Harlem’s Renaissance turn to economic despair?
Standards and Benchmarks


From: https://phi.history.ucla.edu/nchs/united-states-history-content-standards/united-states-era-7/

**Standard 3.** How the United States changed from the end of World War I to the eve of the Great Depression.

**Standard 3C.** The student understands how new cultural movements reflected and changed American society.

- **Grade Level 5-12.** Examine the contributions of artists and writers of the Harlem Renaissance and assess their popularity. [Draw upon visual, literary, and musical sources]

**Arts Connection**

**Standard 5.** Knows a range of arts and communication works from historical and cultural periods.

- **Benchmark 1.** Knows the cultural and historical context of various art forms.

**C3 Framework**

**College, Career, and Civic Readiness—History**

- **D2.His.1.9-12.** Evaluate how historical events and developments were shaped by unique circumstances of time and place as well as broader historical contexts.

- **D2.His.4.9-12.** Analyze complex and interacting factors that influenced the perspectives of people during different historical eras.