THE REMAKING OF THE RADICAL IN THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE: CLAUDE MCKAY'S *HOME TO HARLEM*

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Abstract

Home to Harlem, one of the first successful African American novels, inspired from the urban lower classes' life, produced both revulsion and fascination. W.E.B. Du Bois stated that Claude McKay had proved African Americans were "buffoons, thugs, and rotters anyway" (245). However, the novel was successful, pointing to a 1920s fascination with the lower classes. This article analyzes the intersection of race and class in *Home to Harlem* and shows that the novel proposes a composite model for a radical subject.

Keywords: 1920s, class, Claude McKay, *Home to Harlem*, Harlem Renaissance, radical subject.

LA RECREACIÓN DEL RADICAL EN EL RENACIMIENTO DE HARLEM: *HOME TO HARLEM* DE CLAUDE MCKAY

Resumen

Home to Harlem, una de las primeras novelas afroamericanas de éxito, se inspiró en la vida de las clases más bajas urbanas, provocando tanto repulsión como fascinación. W.E.B. Du Bois manifestó que Claude McKay había demostrado que los afroamericanos eran bufones, brutos y sinvergüenzas en cualquier caso (245). Sin embargo, la novela fue un éxito al aproximarse a la fascinación por las clases bajas de los años veinte. Este artículo analiza la intersección entre raza y clase en Home to Harlem y muestra que la novela propone un modelo compuesto para un sujeto radical.

Palabras clave: años veinte, Claude McKay, *Home to Harlem*, renacimiento de Harlem, sujeto radical.

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INTRODUCTION

The Harlem Renaissance, also known as the New Negro Movement, was considered an aesthetic movement for a long time. This perspective on the famous intellectual and cultural black revival produced by the Great Migration that followed the First World War dates back to 1925. That year, Alain Locke's anthology *The New Negro* defined the aims of the movement that had, until then, been heterogeneous. Locke set a "culturalist" (Hutchinson 2007, 3) tone to the movement and tried to allay the panic sparked by the Bolshevik Revolution. He stated that the New Negro had surpassed "the arid fields of controversy and debate" and moved on to "the productive fields of creative expression" (Locke 1925, 631). Locke calls this "a spiritual Coming of Age," in which the New Negro was "lay[ing] aside the status of a beneficiary and ward for that of a collaborator and participant in American civilization." (634). Locke allows that "the thinking Negro has shifted a little toward the left with the world-trend, and there is an increasing group who affiliate with radical and liberal movements" (633), but argues that it is a forced radicalism that is only present in matters of race. In his later essay, "Art or Propaganda?" (1928), Locke asks whether the Harlem Renaissance should be "a generation of the prophet or that of the poet" (2007, 260), claiming that socially engaged fiction does nothing but supplicate and thus place its authors in a position of inferiority to the mainstream.

A conservative for most part, Locke represented only one side of the debate on the political meaning of the Harlem Renaissance which was raging in the second half of the 1920s (see Mallocci 2018). This aesthetic view of African American literature was opposed to "propaganda," a derogatory term meant to criticize more socially engaged literature. Rather than making excuses for socially engaged fiction, W.E.B. Du Bois sees "all art [as] propaganda," and states that the term "propaganda is confined to one side while the other is stripped and silent" (2004, 782-783). He is against African American art conforming to mainstream standards that are prejudiced against blacks. According to him, "until the art of black folk compels recognition, they will not be recognized as human" (784). In spite of this, Du Bois does advise a radical reworking of mainstream culture, but states that African Americans "want to be full-fledged Americans" (778). Langston Hughes also criticizes "the urge to pour racial individuality into the mold of American standardization" (2004, 1311) in his essay "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain" (1926). He contends that mainstream white culture only accepts art that confirms previously held views, thus creating a 'double bind' for African American writers. Hughes wants African American writers to have the freedom "to express our individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame" (1314). Claude McKay goes even further stating that "propaganda ha[d] now come into its respectable rights and [he was] proud of being a propagandist" (1923b, 61).

W.E.B. Du Bois, Langston Hughes as well as Claude McKay, Countee Cullen, Wallace Thurman, Jean Toomer, and Eric Walrond were considered the "literary Left" (Smethurst 1999, 20). However, Claude McKay, whose work I will discuss here, was perhaps the most dedicated to Communism from the group, up until the release of his anti-Communist autobiography, *A Long Way from Home*

(1937). Du Bois, on the other hand, supported the idea of the Talented Tenth, exceptional African American men who would "guide the Mass away from the contamination and death of the Worst, in their own and other races" (1903, n.p.).

The ultimate aim of this group was to help African Americans achieve respectability and integration. As a consequence of the Red Summer of 1919,[1] the Talented Tenth, i.e. some of the members of the Harlem Renaissance, endorsed "incremental black progress pursued through cultural means" (Maxwell 2007, 173) rather than a more radical approach.

Taking this into consideration, it comes as no surprise that W.E.B. Du Bois, in his famous scathing critique of *Home to Harlem*, claims to be repulsed by it. He says that "white people think we are buffoons, thugs, and rotters anyway" (1928, 202) and that Claude McKay had done nothing but prove them right. Du Bois' negative opinion reflects his Talented-Tenth approach in that he does not approve of the representation of Harlem as low class. He also sees the novel's depiction of Harlem as pandering to white audiences through its recourse to primitivism –a trope that appears in the works of other Modernist writers of the time like Ernest Hemingway or D.H. Lawrence. Since Du Bois' initial review, some have sided with the reviewer while others, especially in more recent analyses, have recuperated the novel "through the lens of oppositional politics" (Wang 2019, 785).

This study aims to analyze how race and class intersect in Claude McKay's *Home to Harlem* taking into account the author's black internationalist radicalism. I contend that through Jake and Ray, *Home to Harlem* depicts a composite model for a radical subject. In the first part of the article, I will examine Claude McKay's views on class, especially through the lens of his writings about Soviet Russia. I will then analyze the novel, focusing especially on the two main characters. Ultimately, I seek to find out if the representation of class in *Home to Harlem* might have allowed McKay to continue to be considered a Harlem Renaissance writer in spite of the aesthetization of the movement after 1925.

CLAUDE MCKAY'S POLITICAL VIEWS

Born in Jamaica in 1989, Claude McKay was one of the "many Caribbean migrants in New York [who] also helped to radicalize Renaissance politics" (Chaney 2007, 47). By 1930, a quarter of the inhabitants of Harlem were from the Caribbean (Pedersen 2007, 187). He was born in a wealthy famer family, but migrated to the United States, along with many others from the Caribbean islands, because his country was undergoing social, economic as well as cultural changes, the consequence of the direct rule imposed by the British government in 1866. McKay was introduced

[1] The Red Summer of 1919 refers to the anti-black riots and the repression by the U.S. government of activities suspected of association with communism. This was a reaction to the Russian revolution of 1917 (See Foley 2003).

to Fabian socialism, British literature, German philosophy, and free thinking by his brother, as well as by his British mentor, Walter Jekyll (Pedersen 2007, 185). The latter, an upper-class clergyman who had become a planter in Jamaica in order to pursue his passion for Jamaican folksongs and stories, encouraged McKay to write in Jamaican dialect (185). Jekyll also helped McKay publish his first volume of poetry, *Songs of Jamaica* (1912), before leaving for the United States. According to Carl Pedersen, "McKay's early dialect verse was part of the development of a national literature free from the constraints of the British literary tradition" (2007, 186).

In the United States, McKay enrolled in Tuskegee Institute with a view to becoming an agronomist in Jamaica (Pedersen 2007, 187). But McKay did not acclimatize to that institution. Through his famous philosophy –"cast down your bucket where you are" (1895)– Booker T. Washington, the leader of the institution, epitomized "Old Negro accommodationism" (Foley 2003, 17).

After arriving in New York, the writer "fell in with two groups at either end of Manhattan: radical Greenwich Village intellectuals and Caribbean and African American writers and intellectuals in Harlem" (Pedersen 2007, 187). As a reaction to the East St. Louis race riot of 1917, McKay wrote one of his most famous poems, "If We Must Die." The poem urges those who face mindless violence to strive for a noble death: "Pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back!" Such sentiments express cultural affirmation and pride in the interactions with mainstream white society. Some of Claude McKay's poems were published in Locke's 1925 anthology along with other works that would come to define this movement. "The White House," the title of his perhaps most radical poem from this anthology was changed by Locke into "White Houses," "in an attempt to excise the protest element out of the New Negro and to 'aestheticize' the 'movement'" (Stewart 2007, 16). "The White House," like "If We Must Die," speaks of showing pride and grace when confronting hate, and contains several references to "anger" and "discontent" lodged in the "wrathful bosom" of the African Americans. The poem presents a situation that seemed to have reached its boiling point, while suggesting that those about to unleash their anger are pressed against the metaphorical doors and windows of the White House. In the aftermath of the First Red Scare, such a radical poem would have created paranoia in the eyes of the government.

That paranoia materialized after Claude McKay's stay in the Soviet Union in 1922-1923, when "the FBI issued orders to stop and search McKay to officials in every major American port" (Maxwell 2007, 174). In spite of the U.S. government's fears, in his speech at the Fourth Congress of the Comintern, McKay expressed "doubts about recruiting southern blacks to the communist cause" (Pedersen 2007, 189). In this speech, called "Report on the Negro Question," McKay describes the Third International as honest in its stand for the "emancipation of all the workers of the world, regardless of race or color" (1923a, 16) while stating that the Constitution of the United States supported emancipation "merely on paper" through the 15th Amendment. The reason why McKay did not believe that the blacks in United States could be easily recruited to the Communist cause was the practice of the American government of pitting whites and blacks against each other, and "setting out to mobilize the entire black race of America for the purpose of fighting organized

labor" (17). According to McKay, this happened especially in Southern states, where mixed-race organizations were illegal, and 'propaganda' could not be delivered easily. McKay also links the subjugation of the African Americans to the "highly organized exploitation of the subject peoples" by the European colonial empires (16), making thus a connection between anti-racism, anti-colonialism, and class struggle.

McKay, like other Harlem Renaissance intellectuals who travelled to Soviet Russia at the beginning of the twentieth century, such as Langston Hughes, was pleasantly impressed by the way he was received. He published his next books *The Negroes in America* (1923), an analysis of the situation of African Americans, and *Trial by Lynching: Stories about Negro Life in North America* (1925), McKay's first collection of short stories, as a consequence of this visit. Claude McKay and Harry Haywood[2] would influence the Soviet policy on race. Significant in this regard is the "Black Belt Nation thesis on the crucial role of African American workers in securing communist footholds in the USA" (Chaney 2007, 49).

Shortly after his return from the Soviet Union to the United States, Claude McKay published "Soviet Russia and the Negro." The article appeared in *The Crisis,* the NAACP[3] magazine, in December 1923. This text sums up McKay's views not just on the Soviet Union, but also his internationalist ideals. McKay describes Europe and America as extremely prejudiced against the blacks, seeing them only as "the Negro minstrel and vaudevillian, the boxer, the black mammy and butler of the cinematograph, the caricatures of the romances and the lynched savage who has violated a beautiful white girl" (1923b, 61). Because of ignorance and apathy, he says, the First World War brought about 'serious clashes' in countries like Britain, France, and Germany, where black men fought in the war as soldiers of the armies of the colonial empires. He also mentioned the contribution of the African Americans as soldiers in the U.S. army during the First World War. On the other hand, the Soviet Union is described as a classless and anti-racist utopia where gender equality and sexual freedom thrived.

There are two causes that McKay identifies for the state of things in the Soviet Union. On the one hand, McKay believed that the tsarist government could be compared to the United States government because the status "of the submerged lower classes and the suppressed national minorities of the old Russia" was similar to "the grievous position of the millions of Negroes in the United States" (1923b, 64). The situation of the blacks in the United States at that time is compared to the Jewish pogroms that the United States had condemned. The Bolshevik Revolution had solved these issues, condemning the United States for its treatment of the blacks. McKay saw Soviet Russia as a model for the way in which the United States could promote racial equality. On the other hand, he described Russia as fundamentally

[2] Harry Haywood (1898-1985), a child of former slaves, American Communist and leader of the international Communist movement in the 1930's.

[3] The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) is a civil rights organization formed in 1909. Its founders included W.E.B Du Bois. The organization played a pivotal role in the Civil Rights Movement.

different from the United States, claiming that even before the Bolshevik Revolution "a Jewish pilgrim in old Russia could find rest and sustenance in the home of an orthodox peasant" (63). He claimed that fierce racial hatred had never existed in Russia as "[t]he Hindu, the Mongolian, the Persian, the Arab, the West European" were mixed in the population of Moscow (63). McKay uses his own experience to support this claim: he felt more respected amongst the anti-bolshevists of Moscow and Petrograd, whom he describes as more inclined towards the arts, than amongst the proletarians whom he describes as being "diligent, elementary school children" (62). The essay ends with the remark that, from some points of view, Russians are not white. McKay's interpretation of Russia speaks more about his own preconceptions and ideals than about the realities of Soviet Russia at the beginning of the twentieth century. To him, the ideal society was a hybrid one in which different social groups cohabitated; in it there was gender equality, and sexual freedom.

Having raised the suspicions of the FBI, but also of the British authorities and the French police because of his anti-colonial connections and attitudes, Claude McKay did not, in fact, make it home to Harlem until 1934. He wrote the trilogy consisting of *Home to Harlem*, *Banjo* (1929) and *Banana Bottom* (1933), in France and in Morocco. According to James Smethurst, at that time Tangier was a "complex network of local and regional ties, polyglot communities, and relatively diffuse sacred and secular authorities [which] provided a space for unusually free artistic, political, sexual, and cultural congress and exchange" (2009, 364), which fed McKay's internationalist views. He considered North Africa black, just like Russia. In his memoir, *A Long Way from Home* (1937), McKay says that North Africa is: "divided into jealous cutthroat groups, the Europeans have used their science to make such fine distinctions among people ... I found more than three-quarters of Marrakesh Negroid" (2007, 304).

McKay's view of Soviet Russia as very tolerant is debatable. He himself moved away from Communism and Soviet Russia as Stalin's grip of power increased. For my analysis here, it is important to emphasize McKay's conception of an ideal society that is anti-racist, anti-colonial, anti-capitalist, a society in which there is gender equality and sexual freedom. William J. Maxwell makes a sagacious observation, "black radical internationalists cultivated vagabond souls at the cost of criminalizing many chosen movements" (2007, 175). Claude McKay's travels and views seem to anticipate Paul Gilroy's notion that "the curse of homelessness or the curse of enforced exile" during the transatlantic slave trade "gets repossessed" (1993, 111), which offers a privileged perspective on the modern world. Indeed, others have found intersections between McKay's works and canonical white Modernist writers (Rosenberg 2004, Holcomb 2007, Xavier 2008, Wang 2019), but in what follows I will look particularly at race and class in *Home to Harlem* in order to analyze the Modernist conceptions of internationalism and primitivism present in the text.

HOME TO HARLEM: A QUEST FOR AN APPROPRIATE POLITICAL VIEW

Home to Harlem examines the 'vagabond souls' who populated the interwar period, giving a different perspective on 'masculine impotence' (Holcomb 2007, 71). It tells the story of Jake Brown, an African American longshoreman from Harlem who enlists and is stationed in Brest, France, during the First World War. Having enlisted to fight Germans, he is disappointed by the racism of his company. African Americans are used for menial jobs and never see combat. Pretending to go on leave, Jake deserts and returns to his beloved Harlem via the Havre and London, on a mixed-race freighter. Once in Harlem, Jake picks up a prostitute named Felice, for whom he meanders through Prohibition-Era Harlem. In the second part of the novel, another protagonist appears: Ray, a university student from Haiti who works as a waiter on the same train as Jake. Ray is obviously a stand-in for the author, and while he is very different from Jake, both in terms of class and of worldview, the two become close friends. Eventually, both characters leave Harlem: Jake runs away to Chicago with Felice, while Ray leaves the country, taking a job on a freighter. Like McKay's next novel, *Banjo,* which is subtitled "A story without a plot," *Home to Harlem* is a rambling picaresque tale, whose sole purpose is to put the two characters together so they can learn something from each other. In what follows, I will show how the two characters changed after their encounter and became non-conforming subjects.

In spite of being a deserter, Jake is a working-class hero. As Wayne F. Cooper states in the "Foreword" to the novel, Jake is a "symbol of primitive Afro-American decency and vitality" (1993, XXIII). Jake is the more instinctual of the two characters:

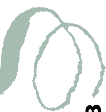
> Each human body has its own peculiar rhythm, shallow or deep or profound. Transient rhythms that touch and pass you, unrememberable, and rhythms unforgettable. Imperial rhythms whose vivid splendor blinds your sight and destroys your taste for lesser ones. Jake possessed a sure instinct for the right rhythm. He was connoisseur enough. But although he had tasted such a varied many, he was not raw animal enough to be undiscriminating, nor civilized enough to be cynical. (McKay 1993, 15)

It is evident from the paragraph above that *Home to Harlem* depicts the so-called civilization, which we are to understand as middle-class white values, as corrupting. However, it does not advocate for 'animal' traits as those are said to make one 'undiscriminating,' i.e. incapable of understanding one's position in the world and how to fight for its improvement.

It is important to note that Jake did not desert out of cowardice or fear, but because of racial discrimination, "[t]hey didn't seem to want us niggers foh no soldiers" (McKay 1993, 331). Upon his return to Harlem, he regrets having enlisted and believes that black soldiers were only used as servants and manual laborers in the war. They were not, in fact, participating as citizens. This belief of Jake's is reflected in the rhetorical questions from the beginning of the novel: "Why did I ever enlist and come over here?... Why did I want to mix mahself up in a white folks' war?" (8). Jake decides that African Americans should not participate in "white folks' business" (8).

This idea opens and closes the novel. Felice repeats the same notion in the last pages: "What right have niggers got to shoot down a whole lot a Germans for? Is they worse than Americans or any other nation a white people?" (331-332). While Jake has changed some of his views by the end of the novel, this aspect remains constant and it is relevant that Felice reiterates this. As her name suggests, Felice represents happiness. Jake only finds her again at the end of the novel, once he is transformed, which suggests that he could not have achieved happiness without the changes he made to himself. Still, his interpretation of the relationship between those in power and those who are powerless remains constant. The fact that Felice confirms his views gives off a sense of alliance between the two and stresses that it is important to stand together against oppressors.

Jake is portrayed positively, as a sort of "natural man" (Smethurst 1999, 368), with powerful working class values. For instance, he refuses to be a strikebreaker: "I ain't nevah yet scabbed it on any man" (McKay 1993, 45). However, he also refuses to join a union for the same reason he deserted the army. While he mentions getting along with his Irish co-workers, when talking to a white fellow worker, Jake mentions that he had been a union member when he had "longshored in Philly" (45). Then, in New York he discovered that the union had given "worser piers and holds the bes'n a them foh the Irishmen" (45). This scene foregrounds both the divisions between white and black workers at that time (reminiscent of what McKay mentioned in his Comintern speech) and Jake's lack of class solidarity.



Another positive attribute of Jake is that he accepts all kinds of outsiders who would be excluded from mainstream American society. Like many a Modernist protagonist, Jake exudes traditional masculinity in his sexual pursuits, but he also has non-conformist friends. For example, his friend Zeddy become a "sweetman," that is the kept lover of a relatively well-to-do woman, in this case he was the lover of Gin-head Susy. Zeddy does not conform to a traditional male gender role and for a while manages to "hold out under the ridicule of his pals" (59). Another friend of Jake's, Billy Biase, is gay and constitutes one of the first positive queer characters in American literature. Finally, Ray, who becomes Jake's best friend, is a foreigner whom Jake accepts and respects wholeheartedly in spite of their many differences. Some critics have even read Ray as a queer character (see Holcomb 2007).

Much of the novel describes the daily lives and nights of the working class: "[l]ongshoremen, kitchen-workers, laundresses, and W.C. tenders ... bellboys, butlers, some railroad workers and waiters, waitresses and maids of all sorts" (1993, 294). Jake, the prototype of these working people, spends his time pursuing women and fulfilling his sexual desires in speakeasies around Harlem. This milieu is described as an essentially black one that does not conform to the norms of white middle-class American society. Catherine Rottenberg notes that Harlem is sexualized and feminized in Jake's descriptions (Rottenberg 2010, 122). Its streets are filled with "tantalizing brown legs" (McKay 1993, 8). Rottenberg claims that this is a "way of presenting working-class black protagonists who are unfettered by middle class white moral norms" (2010, 121). Rather than being a "white cult of the primitive" (Worth 1995, 470) it is a celebration of an essentialized blackness.

One of Jake's flaws to be corrected by the end of the novel is his Americanness. The novel implies that, like all Americans, Jake sees the rest of the world through the lens of imperialism: "Jake was very American in spirit and shared a little of that comfortable Yankee contempt for poor foreigners. And as an American Negro he looked askew at foreign niggers. Africa was jungle, and Africans bush niggers, cannibals. And West Indians were monkey chasers. But now he felt like a boy who stands with the map of the world in colors before him, and feels the wonder of the world" (McKay 1993, 135). It appears that, in spite of his travels to Europe, Jake has the same misconceptions about his own race as McKay claimed white Americans and Europeans did (see McKay 1923b). It is Ray who teaches Jake about the history of slavery, Haiti and Africa. Ray's explanations raise Jake's self-consciousness.

Ray is, in many ways, Jake's opposite. While Jake intuitively believes that white norms do not apply to him, nor are they to his advantage, Ray holds some of those values through the education he has received. In this sense, Ray is more similar to Du Bois' Talented Tenth, whom McKay dismissed as too middle class. This is evident in the scene where Ray has a conversation with Grant:

> "Can't a Negro have fine feelings about life?"
> "Yes, but not the old false-fine feelings that used to be monopolized by educated and cultivated people. You should educate yourself away from that sort of thing."
> "But education is something to make you finer."
> "No, modern education is planned to make you a sharp, snouty, rooting hog. A Negro getting it is an anachronism. We ought to get something new, we Negroes. But we get our education like –like our houses. When the whites move out, we move in and take possession of the old dead stuff. Dead stuff that this age has no use for." (McKay 1993, 242-243)

Grant's reference to hogs is reminiscent of the same reference in "If We Must Die." In the poem, hogs represent sacrificial animals who put up no resistance to their own slaughter. Here, it is implied that education incorporates a bias against people of color, while also not being aligned with interwar notions of culture any longer.

Jake is the namesake of Hemingway's protagonist from *The Sun Also Rises* and Ray is said to be "impotent" like Jake Barnes: "Ray felt that as he was conscious of being black and impotent" (154). Ray is deprived of power in two ways. On the one hand, he is powerless as a person of color. Thinking of his home in Haiti, he feels powerless because he could not defeat the Americans, he could not prevent them from invading his country, arresting his father, and killing his brother. Ray imagines how he might feel if he were white and powerful. The text also implies that Jake is impotent. He is humiliated as a soldier and is never given the opportunity to overpower even the white enemies of his own country. Paradoxically, in the aftermath of the war, Jake Barnes feels impotent because he does not have access to more vital energies which he would associate with the space from where Ray comes, while Ray feels impotent precisely because he comes from those spaces.

Ray also feels impotent because of his education and middle class upbringing. This causes him to feel a lack of connection with the working class and his race,

except for Jake. During a sleepless night, which also implies anxiety and losing touch with one's own body, Ray observes his sleeping fellow workers:

> Intermittently the cooks broke their snoring with masticating noises of their fat lips, like animals eating. Ray fixed his eyes on the offensive bug-bitten bulk of the chef. These men claimed kinship with him. They were black like him. Man and nature had put them in the same race. He ought to love them and feel them (if they felt anything). He ought to if he had a shred of social morality in him. They were all chain-ganged together and he was counted as one link. Yet he loathed every soul in that great barrack-room, except Jake. (153)

It is only when Jake initiates him into the lifestyle of Harlem and other black spaces that Ray gets in touch with his instincts. In a drug-induced dream –he takes Jake's cocaine in an attempt to sleep– Ray travels back to Haiti to see it anew. The country is described as a tropical paradise in which phallic symbols suggest desire and fertility: "Giddy-high erect thatch palms, slender, tall, fur-fronded ferns, majestic cotton trees, stately bamboos creating a green grandeur in the heart of space..." (153).

Ray also conforms to middle-class rules about relationships. When Jake meets him, he is engaged to be married. Agatha, his fiancée, is described like a submissive animal: "He saw destiny working in her large, dream-sad eyes, filling them with the passive softness of resignation to life, and seeking to encompass and yoke him down as just one of the thousand niggers of Harlem" (265). By the end of the novel, he realizes that adhering to hetero-normative white gender roles would make him feel trapped and decides to leave the country. Jake, on the other hand, seems to have found a more conventional partner in Felice, but the last time he meets Ray, he expresses a desire that destabilizes that symbol of hetero-normativity. "If I was edjucated, I could understand things better and be proper-speaking like you is. [...] Then we could all settle down and make money like edjucated people do" (273). This suggests that it is Ray and not Felice with whom Jake really wants to stay together.

CONCLUSION

Home to Harlem imagines the type of radical that McKay also describes in his political essays and in his autobiography, where he envisioned a world unfettered by prejudices against certain races, classes, or genders. In describing the Soviet Union and Tangier, he imagined a society at the intersection of several races, ethnicities, languages, classes and genders. Ray, the character who resembles McKay in *Home to Harlem,* does not become the radical subject that McKay supported until he renounces his stifling middle-class education and norms, and learned from the working classes represented by Jake. On the other hand, Jake does not achieve his full potential until he is taught by Ray about the history of his race. While we might interpret Ray's transformation into someone more instinctual as pandering to the Modernist white obsession with primitivism, the exchange between Jake and

Ray surpasses their individual traits that might be associated with the glorifying instinct. By the end of the novel, Jake has internalized some of Ray's traits and Ray had learnt from Jake as well. This exchange creates a composite identity that includes a connection to the physical as well as social awareness and solidarity. The novel's perspective does not fit neatly into any of the radical traditions of the era, which is presumably why it was not excluded from the Harlem Renaissance.

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