New Exhibit "Harlem Renaissance: As Gay As It was Black"

In the 1920s and 1930s, New York City's Harlem was the focal point of the so-called New Negro Movement, which sparked the Jazz Age and an incredible revolution in art, fashion, literature and music. According to the preeminent African-American historian Henry Louis Gates, the Harlem Renaissance, as it was later known, was "tremendously aspirational." No race was as blacker. The movement was an outgrowth of the time, but the exhibits were not.

Many artists of the Renaissance were solitary, but others such as writer Langston Hughes (below) and singer Bessie Smith referred to same-sex attractions in their work. Their art, as well as other artists, are featured in a new exhibit, "The Harlem Renaissance: As Gay as It Was Black." at Florida Atlantic University.

Rod Haygood at the Sun Sentinel

The photo soports: highlight writers such as Langston Hughes and Zora Neale Hurston, singers Ella Fitzgerald, the Rayeens and Bessie Smith, dancer Josephine Baker, comedian James "Vera" Vane, and many others who populated the north Manhattan neighborhood during an era "when the flag was on fire," Hughes once said. But gay, regardless of race—merely not as fashionable, even as they somberly expressed the futility and rage with it, doing influential articles in Vanity Fair magazine and The New York Times by VanVicker, who announced the New Negro Movement to headlines with "...Now is the psychological moment when everything is Negro."

It is only the 15th years that scholarship has investigated how much gay, lesbian and bisexual many of the participants in same-sex affairs were married, some several times; contributed to the movement. Polc culture hasn't caught up yet, although in 2004 the museum "Brother to Brother" to the ride festival circuit, winning six major awards, including best feature film, at the Slamdance and Lesbian Film Festival. The film documents Brother to Brother, "Lena Vernon, Langston Hughes and many "Harmony.""

And:

"Although Harlem at the time was a black gay counterculture to Greenwich Village and its population of gay whites, intellectuals and artists, the violent racial segregation of that area gave pace to color as an additional hate to blacks. Imagine if you had that hate breed black, a woman and a lesbian," said Jack Rutherford, executive director of the Stonewall Library, Methodist Academic Archive in Fort Lauderdale. "You are a criminal. It is not like Harlem and you could be there with your own kind. So they did to this in the spirit of the new generation of the art that came from there." We analyzed Brother to brother's influence for the MTV's MTV-owned mchem. Read that HERE. The image at top right is from the other important gay film on that era, which surprisingly not mentioned here. Isaac Julien's "genuine film" looking for Langston.

Shane Voge, author of 'The Dinner of Harlem's Cabarets.' Race, Sexuality, Performance says the Renaissance offered freedom: "The goal was to further explore the politics of black life by black artists, which included defining themselves sexually through art, writing, and dance." Many artists explored those themes in their work very openly."

"The Harlem Renaissance: As Gay as It Was Black" was organized by the Stonewall Institute Museum in Fort Lauderdale. The exhibitions will May 15-June 30 at Florida Atlantic University's Weinberg Library Alumni in Boca Raton.

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