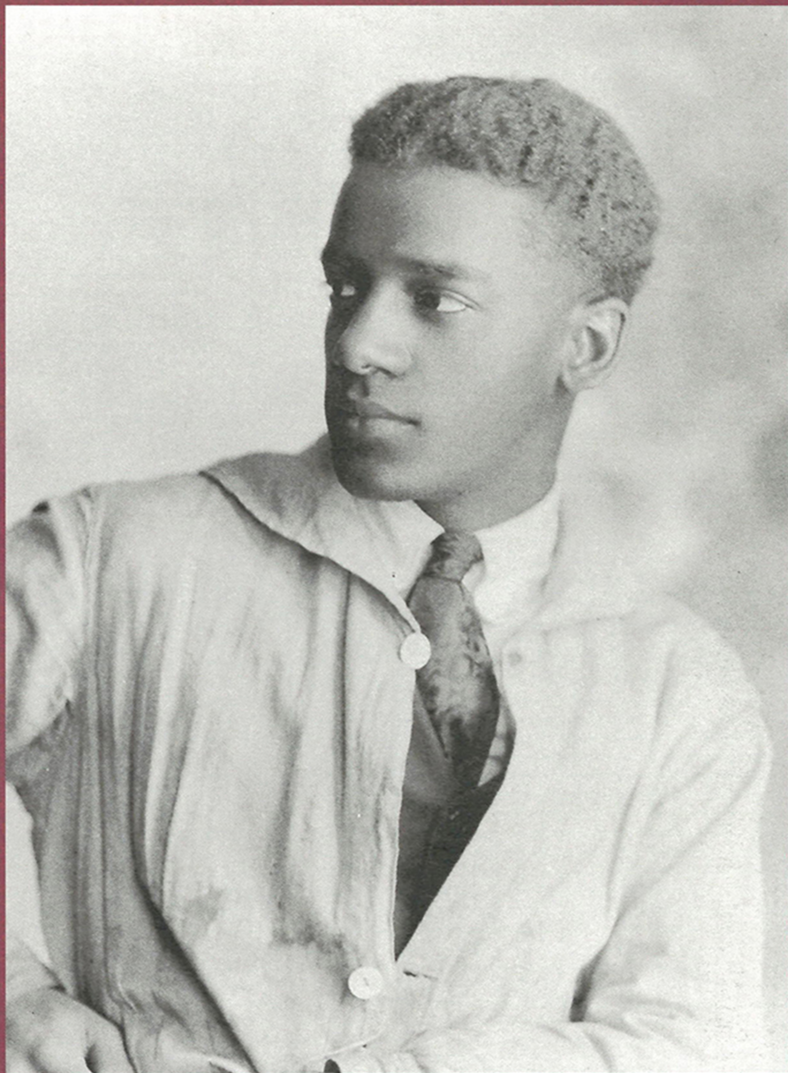
Portraiture & the Harlem Renaissance

THE PHOTOGRAPHS OF JAMES L. ALLEN



One of the most privileged roles of the university art museum is the exploration of the little-known, neglected, minor byways of visual culture. With this exhibition of portraits by James Latimer Allen, the Yale Art Gallery focuses on a virtually unknown photographer, to whom not a single article or exhibition has been dedicated since 1930. Yet, as Camara Dia Holloway and the photographs themselves so amply demonstrate, Allen was not merely in the business of making likenesses, but of constructing a visual identity for an entire generation. In his portrayals of the intellectual and social elite of Harlem's black community from the late 1920s through the early 1940s, Allen managed two separate but intricately entwined tasks. On the one hand, he reinforced a daring claim for black equality in the context of the dominant white culture. Black artists, writers, performers, and society were literally pictured through the same lens and mind as their white counterparts. But within the black community itself, Allen's photographs underscored a growing sense of self-identity. Finely conceived and crafted—and often enhanced with simple and touching dedications—they were passed from hand to hand with obvious pride. These portraits, devoid of drama and props, served as the "cartes-de-visite" of the members of the Harlem Renaissance. It is entirely fitting that this exhibition opens just as we remember Martin Luther King and celebrate Black History Month.

The spark for our exhibition was provided in its entirety by Ms. Holloway, who is a doctoral candidate in the history of art at Yale and spent considerable time during the past year as the first Florence B. Selden Fellow in the Gallery's department of prints, drawings, and photographs. The fulfillment of her project, of course, was dependent upon the good offices and generous collaboration of many others. First among these was the late Florence B. Selden, whose support

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COVER
Self-Portrait, Wearing an Artist's Smock, 1926 (cat. 2)

FRONTISPIECE
Self-Portrait with Camera, 1934 (cat. 1)

James Latimer Allen, Artist-Photographer of the New Negro

Born in New York City on February 7, 1907, James Latimer Allen took part in the settling of Harlem and witnessed its emergence as the principal locus for the black cultural renaissance of the early twentieth century. His work as a photographer between the two World Wars—virtually unknown today—constitutes a visual record of the leading figures from this important moment in black history. Allen produced portraits of Harlem's black elite, who were the first to articulate a vision of *modern* black identity and experience. The men and women he photographed had such a tremendous impact on black culture that their work remains a touchstone for the history of the Harlem Renaissance and black identity today. They not only shaped the way blacks thought about themselves, they shaped the way blacks were viewed by others. And Allen's photographs, as tangible metaphors for the reality of black experience, contributed significantly to the image of the "New Negro" that resulted.

Allen became interested in photography and developed his artistic aspirations as an adolescent just as the seeds of the Harlem Renaissance were taking root. He attended DeWitt Clinton School, where the poet prodigy Countee Cullen first made his mark in the school magazine, *The Magpie.* Richard Bruce Nugent, who would later become a writer and graphic artist, was also educated there. The school had its own camera club, the Amateur Cinema League, which Allen joined. And in 1923, at the age of sixteen, he began a four-year photographic apprenticeship at Stone, Van Dresser and Company, a white-owned illustration firm. Louis Collins Stone, the owner and a portrait painter, as well as his wife seem to have taken an interest in Allen and in nurturing black talent, for they also employed Nugent.

Celebrating a wealth of black cultural activity in the 1920s, black leaders proclaimed the establishment of a tradition of black arts and letters. Black writers were publishing novels and poems, and black performers were making a splash on Broadway. In 1925, in a special issue titled "Harlem: Mecca of the New Negro," *The Survey Graphic* magazine declared the birth of the black Renaissance and addressed the social conditions which made this cultural flowering possible in the nation's largest and most important black community.[1] As one of the key historians of the Harlem Renaissance, David Levering Lewis, has observed, "Almost everything seemed possible above 125th Street in the early 1920s."[2] It was in this milieu that James Allen, a young black man, was able to imagine a career for himself as an artist-photographer.

Of course, Allen was not the first black photographer of repute. The history of black photographers in America goes back to 1839 when Jacques-Louis Mandé Daguerre made his invention available to all. Americans were quick to embrace the new technology, and blacks were no exception. Jules Lion, a free man of mixed racial heritage who learned the daguerreotype process while studying in France, established the first daguerreotype studio in New Orleans in 1840.[3] As fascination with the new medium escalated, many other black practitioners chose a career in photography, and several achieved considerable prominence. James Presley Ball, for example, established one of the nation's best-known western photography studios in Cincinnati.[4] And as blacks gained wealth and social position following Emancipation, they began to commission photographic portraits that located them within a family history and documented a narrative of progress. Some, including Sojourner Truth and Frederick Douglass, became part of the pantheon of celebrity portraits that were collected with much fervor.

After World War I, a significant number of black photographers set up studios in black communities across the nation, with larger urban centers like Harlem supporting several studios.[5] By this time, the Pictorialist movement had secured photography's status as an artistic medium, one that was capable of interpretation and personal expression rather than mere factual rendering. The time was ripe for a photographer like James Allen to emerge and contribute, through his art, to the legitimization of other black artists.

Allen's artistic aspirations are evident from his earliest known images. His first self-portraits, taken in 1926, display the hallmarks of his style and the scope of

his ambition (cover; fig. 1). Allen adopted the austere modern portrait format, which presented the subject in a shallow space against a neutral background. This portrait mode eschewed the use of props to convey information about the sitter, relying instead on the belief that the body was legible and could reveal the character of the subject. In addition, Allen very self-consciously employed Western iconographic conventions of self-portraiture to deliberate effect. Wearing the accoutrements of the artist—the smock and bohemian languor of a nineteenth-

fig. 1
Self-Portrait, Wearing an Artist's Smock, 1926 (cat. 2)

century romantic genius—he defied then-current notions of what black people could be. Significantly, there are no earlier known examples of a black artist portraying himself in that role. Allen's precursors wear appropriate public attire in their self-portraits. Such images express their authors' desire to achieve an equal place in society through the valorization of black humanity. Allen made even greater claims for blacks. In this quiet, small, softly focused self-portrait, Allen's smock stands out boldly against the unadorned neutral background as the sign of his chosen profession. At a time when looking a white person directly in the eye could result in a lynching, blacks were thought to be incapable of expressing themselves as fine artists. By representing himself in that very role, Allen daringly aligned himself with the Western canon of the artist-genius.

Allen's persona, career, and work were consonant with those of the black intelligentsia of the Harlem Renaissance. In the early 1920s, black leaders like Charles S. Johnson, a sociologist and the national director of research and investigations for the National Urban League, James Weldon Johnson, the executive secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and Alain Locke, a professor of philosophy at Howard University, recognized that the vogue for black literature, music, and dance could serve as a platform for social ends:

> The twin notions that art was ultimately the measure of civilization and the final object and expression of self-cultivation were articles of common faith then in most precincts of American life. And for African-Americans, the evident failure of the post-Civil War national Reconstruction to elevate their place in the body politic led quite naturally to the conviction that the Progress of the Race depended upon a racial reconstruction of self and society, in art as in life, that they themselves would have to effect.[6]

Most crucially, they felt that evidence of their cultural parity with whites would prompt the latter to regard blacks as equals and treat them accordingly. Since the turn of the century, the emergent black elite had embraced the symbol of the "New Negro" to articulate their sense of self and assert their cultural ideals. This ideology was diametrically opposed to the stereotype of the "Old Negro," which was at the heart of Reconstruction-era narratives of an imagined antebellum past.[7] In these narratives, black slaves and servants were devoted to the service of their white masters. Their blackness marked them as innately inferior to whites and ordained their subjugated social position. Believing that white hatred and

discrimination were engendered by such negative perceptions, a growing number of black leaders felt that a celebration of the New Negro was necessary to challenge hegemonic representations of blackness.

With deliberate intention, then, black intellectuals cultivated the creative talents of the generation that came of age in the 1920s. In the 1925 Harlem issue of *The Survey Graphic,* Alain Locke articulated how this younger generation would effect the strategy for social change:

> He now becomes a conscious contributor and lays aside the status of a beneficiary and ward for that of a collaborator and participant in American civilization. The greatest social gain in this is the releasing of our talented group from the arid fields of controversy and debate to the productive fields of creative expression. The especially cultural recognition they win should in turn prove the key to that revaluation of the Negro which must precede or accompany any considerable betterment of race relationships.[8]

James Allen was an identifiable member of this group of young black artists and writers. His sense of self, his artistic goals, and his talent fit in well with the cultural agenda of the black leadership. Blacks of Allen's generation had never known slavery. Self-consciously raised as New Negroes, they came to maturity with a militant outlook and the expectation of an expanded range of possibilities. Their artistic abilities were a prized commodity in the struggle to demonstrate that blacks had attained cultural parity with other races. In this context, photography provided an important means to disseminate the image of the New Negro to both black and white audiences:

> Photography was another medium through which artists sought to visualize this new racial entity in modern society. A cursory look through the pages of *The Crisis* (the monthly magazine published by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) shows an editorial interest in depicting the "New Negro." From the painterly soft-focus studio portrait to the crisp identification picture (or "mug shot") culled from assorted educational institutions nationwide, *The Crisis* visually linked the enterprising black man, woman and child to the larger, contemporaneous, race-based movement then in progress. Sociologist Charles S. Johnson's 1925 observation that a "new type of Negro is evolving—a city Negro" was subliminally affirmed in countless photographs of black folk, dressed up and placed in front of studio backdrops or standing before elevated train stations and urban brownstone stoops.[9]

The entire black community championed black visual artists who created the images that most reflected how they saw themselves. As early as 1905, the

black YMCAs and YWCAs and black libraries were serving as venues for art exhibitions and other cultural activities. *The Crisis,* which began publication in 1910, used black art for covers and illustrations and was copied by other black periodicals like *Opportunity, The Messenger,* and *Half-Century Magazine.* The first black film was produced in 1912, and race films featuring all-black casts and narratives of the black experience quickly became a thriving industry. By the time the younger generation began showing their work in the 1920s, images of blacks produced by black artists were a regular feature of black cultural life.

The major venue for black artists at the time was the exhibition program mounted in conjunction with the William E. Harmon Foundation Awards for Distinguished Achievement Among Negroes.[10] Two years after the awards program was established in 1926, this series of annual exhibitions began to provide media exposure and recognition to participating artists. When Allen first applied for the Harmon award in 1927, the Foundation had not anticipated submissions of photographs in the fine arts category,[11] yet his work was well received and garnered him an Honorable Mention. Allen continued to submit applications for the duration of the program, and in 1930 he was awarded the Commission on Race Relations Prize for Photographic Work, established that year to recognize black photography as a legitimate form of artistic expression. Allen would win this prize again in 1931 and 1933, the award program's final year.

Allen's association with the Harmon Foundation earned him considerable recognition and esteem. The Foundation principally supported black painters and sculptors, and only four other photographers were included in its exhibitions: King Daniel Ganaway of Chicago, Edgar Eugene Phipps of New York, and the twins Morgan and Marvin Smith, who were also based in New York. Allen was not only the most decorated of the group, he was the only photographer featured in the Foundation's 1934 film, *A Study of Negro Artists.*[12] As Deborah Willis, the pioneering historian of black photography, has observed, "The Harmon Foundation yielded [Allen] opportunities to exhibit and express his art in a way that no other black photographer had in the first hundred years after the invention of photography."[13] Allen also enjoyed other exhibition opportunities that had not been available to earlier black photographers.[14] His work was included in such fine arts exhibitions as *An Exhibition of Negro Art* at the YWCA in 1935 and the *Exhibition*

of Fine Arts Production by American Negroes held at the Texas Centennial Exposition in Dallas in 1936.[15]

Allen supported his artistic photography and his family—his mother and two sisters—with other photographic activities. The commercial portrait studio he opened at 213 West 121st Street in 1927 flourished as New Negro journals like *Opportunity, The Messenger,* and *The Crisis* published his portraits. Allen also did commercial work for advertisement agencies, and his photographs were included in Claude McKay's 1940 book, *Harlem: Negro Metropolis.*[16] During the Depression, he found other opportunities to supplement his income within the artistic community of Harlem. He photographed exhibition installations and individual works of art for the Harmon Foundation and its publications.[17] Artists also purchased photographs of their work from Allen to advance their own careers. When the Harlem Community Art Center was founded in 1937 by the sculptor Augusta Savage, Allen was employed as an instructor. He also produced a series of portraits of artists at work in their Art Center studios and shot publicity photographs documenting the Center's activities. The body of work that resulted constitutes an important record of the artists and artistic life of Harlem between the wars.

Allen enlisted in the army during World War II and was assigned to the Office of Strategic Services in Washington, DC, where he processed the film shot for intelligence purposes. Remaining in Washington after the war, he worked for the government until his death in 1977, and although he participated in Camera Club activities there, he never resumed his career as a photographer.[18] In part because his wife later threw out the boxes in which he had stored the remnants of his New York studio, fewer then two hundred identified photographs by James Allen survive today. This corpus is preserved in archives that document the Harlem Renaissance, including the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center at Howard University, the J. W. Johnson Memorial Collection at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University, the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, and the Harmon Foundation Archives at the National Archives and the Library of Congress. Many of these arrived with the papers of several key figures of the Harlem Renaissance, among them Carl Van Vechten and Langston Hughes, avid collectors who saved the many portraits they had received from friends and acquaintances. A wide range of eminent cultural figures, from

well-known celebrities and historians to pioneering painters, novelists, sculptors, poets, musicians, and intellectuals, were immortalized by Allen. The 1930 checklist for *An Exhibition of Portraits by James L. Allen (A Group of New Portraits)* reads like a who's who of the Harlem elite.[19] The show featured portraits of the National Urban League's Charles Johnson and Ira De Augustine Reid; actress Rose McClendon; socialite Casca Bonds; physicist Elmer Imes and his wife, the author Nella Larsen; singer Taylor Gordon; bibliophile Arthur A. Schomburg, founder of the Schomburg Collection; and W.E.B. DuBois, editor of *The Crisis.*

A survey of these works reveals how Allen's constituency set him apart as a photographer. To commission a portrait from Allen was a deliberate decision to acquire an image most consistent with the Harlem elite's sense of self. Allen's patrons desired images by an artist who shared their world view. Through his lens, they became what they were—serious, creative, and talented human beings, equal *and* black. Although all would sit for a variety of photographers, both white and black, no other black photographer consistently recorded as many members of this intellectual elite.[20] Other black photographers developed distinct clienteles. As the official photographer of Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association, James Van Der Zee photographed the Association's rallies and meetings, and many of its members sought him out for individual and family portraits.[21] Well-known for these group portraits, he was frequently employed to photograph local businesses and civic clubs like the Elks. Other black photographers specialized in funerary portraits or images of popular religious leaders like Father Divine. Although these social circles overlapped, it should be noted that Countee Cullen is the only eminent New Negro who is known to have sat for both Van Der Zee and Allen. It was to the latter that Harlem's cultural elite turned.

INVENTING THE NEW NEGRO

The New Negro elite likely employed photographic portraiture in the same fashion that Dutch burghers in the seventeenth century and medical practitioners in eighteenth-century England used painted portraiture, "to make conventional claims to recognition, respectability, reliability, and trustworthiness. In short, they used portraiture to lay claim to a position alongside, and yet distinguishable

from, accepted categories of the great and good."[22] Portraiture had begun as the province of a limited number of people with power and became a central means of defining subjecthood and articulating social ideals for an entire bourgeoisie. Formal conventions developed in the portrait genre ensured that images imparted the correct meaning and conveyed the sitter's proper status. Denied the prerogatives conferred upon those who sat for their portraits, blacks had been virtually excluded from the genre. Representations of blacks in photography followed a distinctly different tradition, one that arose to record the socially unfit, including criminals, orphans, and the mentally or physically ill. The rhetoric of this imagery clearly marked these social types as deviants. The daguerreotypes of slaves commissioned by the natural scientist Louis Agassiz in 1850 to prove his theory of polygenesis (that humans descended along multiple lines), are examples of this sort of photographic non-portraiture.[23] Such photographs were used to gird a "visible economy of race":

> [This is] an economy of parts that enables the viewer to ascertain the subject's rightful place in a racial chain of being. While not the only means for the articulation of racial essence, the visible has a long, contested, and highly contradictory role as the primary vehicle for making race "real" in the United States. Its function, to cite the body as the inevitable locus of "being," depends on a series of bodily fictions assumed to unproblematically reflect the natural meaning of flesh.[24]

This system of visual signs rendered blackness an innate feature of the entire body and generated its connotations of negative value.

As black America urbanized and joined a modern consumer society, a wider range of blacks were able to commission portraits. The task for James Allen and other interwar photographers was to create an honorific portraiture that would situate their clients within this expanded social sphere. Allen's iconography was carefully chosen to counter in every respect the gross caricatures of blackness that had circulated in American popular culture since the early nineteenth century. Designed to denigrate blacks and promote oppression, such images defined blackness according to a racially coded index of physical features that included not only dark skin but kinky hair, broad noses, and thick lips. On account of an evolving but widespread belief in the pseudo-scientific discourses of physiognomy, phrenology, and craniology, these external physical characteristics were thought to be a reflection of inner mores, attitudes, and feelings. Dark skin was deemed

the outward manifestation of a corrupt soul, and every negative human quality was attributed to the true nature of blacks.[25] By the 1920s, this white fantasy of blackness was a well-established norm of American culture:

> These images took the form of outrageous characterizations of blacks, their communities, and their alleged cultural practices. These grotesque, garishly dressed beings, with black skins, protruding red lips and bulging eyeballs, were usually shown in impoverished settings with yard fowl, watermelons, and so on. Alternately backward, shiftless, ridiculous, childish, criminal, these characterizations faithfully appeared in turn-of-the-century European and American theatrical productions, popular literature, advertisements, children's toys, and other cultural documenta. Countless graphic artists and illustrators established themselves in this field of commercial art. Edward W. Kemble literally created his own one-man Negro-stereotype industry, with dozens of racist illustrations for books and journals, including his 1896 "classic," *Kemble's Coons*.[26]

The visual iconography of the New Negro was determined in the first decade of the twentieth century by the illustrator John Henry Adams, who worked for the Atlanta newspaper, *The Voice of the Negro*. "To counter and confute the dominant, visual metaphor of Other-as-beast in the popular culture, Adams employed a politics of reversals, a form of imitation through which the black subject identifies with the valorized (white) side...by appropriating [its] signs."[27] The resulting portrayals of the New Negro man and woman deviated from images of white Victorians only in that their physiognomy was carefully rendered to register as racially black. Through grooming and attire, Adams's subjects insisted equally on their Americanness and their embrace of normative bourgeois values. Blackness was thereby accorded a positive value. This image of the New Negro echoed the position taken by W. E. B. DuBois in his seminal 1903 study on black culture, *The Souls of Black Folk*.[28] DuBois emphatically asserted the centrality of blacks to American experience but equally maintained that blacks were racially and culturally distinct from whites due to their African ancestry and the experience of slavery. Three decades later, Allen's updated image of the New Negro perpetuated both the progressivist rhetoric of turn-of-the-century works and this sense of being of and yet distinct from America.

Blacks in America consistently challenged the racial assumptions assigned to their physiognomy. Attempting to maintain a measure of control over their bodies, they asserted themselves through the ways they "clothed themselves, styled their hair, and communicated meaning through gesture, dance, and other forms

of bodily display."[29] Allen's photographs celebrate such self-definition. Ascribing a new set of cultural meanings to the black body, he created an "art...[that revealed] the beauty which prejudice and caricature have overlaid."[30] Allen recognized that the appearance and attitude of his sitters as well as the setting in which they were placed were crucial to conveying the impression of civility, urbanity, and modernity that was the hallmark of the New Negro. In virtually all of his photographs, the subjects are formally attired. Rejecting the rigid frontality of scientific and criminal photography, he photographed them along a diagonal axis to generate a dynamism that was associated with the bourgeois, i.e. respectable, subject.[31] Because posture and gesture were key indices of the racialized body, Allen's sitters were invariably posed and self-contained. Broad gestures risked conjuring up memories of blackface minstrel performances like that of Al Jolson singing "Mammy" in the 1927 film *The Jazz Singer.* Jolson adopted the typical repertoire of minstrel performers who claimed that their posturing, on bent knee with outstretched arms and splayed hands, and other similarly extravagant gestures and dances duplicated authentic black movements that they had witnessed.[32] Allen's sitters customarily assumed serious facial expressions as another means of distancing themselves from minstrelsy. The grin that was a perennial feature of caricatures of blacks fed the belief in their putative infantile nature and was largely proscribed in images of the New Negro. Such notable exceptions as Allen's smiling *Self-Portrait with Camera* of 1934 (frontispiece) and *Laughing Black* of 1930 (cat. 12) reflect a desire to embrace the freedom of self-expression. Perhaps, too, Allen had grown confident that the cultivated and groomed body alone was sufficient to allude to the New Negro.

As the leaps of imagination involved in creating the image of the New Negro reveal, the concept of combating racism through culture proved inherently paradoxical. The very strategy of reversal employed by Allen and other black artists was one of negotiation that at each step had to confront the limits imposed by the white supremacy. Yet it seemed to fulfill the needs of blacks during the interwar years. Many of the photographs by James Allen are autographed, often with personalized inscriptions. A portrait of Rose McClendon in a collection of photographs from Carl Van Vechten's estate reads, "To the dearest Carl that ever Van Vechted, Rose McClendon." On a portrait of Countee Cullen from the 1930s, one finds the inscription, "To James Weldon Johnson, with admiration, Countee

Cullen." One of Allen's self-portraits bears the inscription, "To Langston, from Jimmie." Through such inscriptions, one can trace the nuances of relationships and developing intimacies. A portrait gifted to someone during a period of initial acquaintance can be identified by the inscription's formal manner of address, whereas images presented later on in an established relationship employ nicknames and more personalized references. The reinforcement of social connections was a crucial aspect of the photograph's *use* value because this group of men and women were attempting a novel and tenuous strategy to effect social change. Wallace Thurman's 1932 novel, *Infants of the Spring*, chronicled the activities of black bohemian artists and their efforts to create a viable, productive community.[33] Its tragic denouement points to the frailty of the project in which black artists were engaged. In this light, Allen's portraits appear to have bolstered his clients' sense of self, while the exchange of photographs cemented bonds of affiliation and served as affirmations of common identity and membership within this social circle.

ALLEN, THE NEW NEGRO, AND THE BLACK VANGUARD

In December 1924, the Mexican caricaturist Miguel Covarrubias produced a set of drawings of New Negro types for *Vanity Fair* magazine.[34] The caption read, "Enter, the New Negro, a Distinctive Type Recently Created by the Coloured Cabaret Belt in New York. Exit, the Coloured Crooner of Lullabys, the Cotton-Picker, the Mammy-Singer and the Darky Banjo-Player, for so Long Over-Exploited Figures on the American Stage." At face value, this layout heralding the arrival of the New Negro in a major mainstream magazine seems like a good thing. The Civic Club Diner had likewise just announced the birth of Negro letters, and the planning for the Harlem issue of *The Survey Graphic* was underway. But Corarrubias's drawings were perhaps a shade too reminiscent of stereotypical darky images. The lips and noses were a little too broad, the display of teeth too exaggerated. And the accompanying text focused exclusively on Harlem night life—complete with "quoted dialect"—and the recent success of black entertainment on Broadway. The notion that black intellectuals, writers, and artists were equally coming into their own was nowhere to be found. For even though the Negro had come into vogue in America after World War I, white appreciation of

blacks during these years had its limits. White audiences were often far more interested in their own atavistic and primitivist fantasies of black life than in the efforts of Harlem's black intelligentsia to develop an artistic tradition and to change society. Indeed, the attempt to elicit a new attitude towards blacks from white viewers was not simply a matter of valorizing blackness. For even those whites who were the most sympathetic to black culture tended to perpetuate a view of black life that glossed over its more mundane aspects and all but ignored the strivings of the black elite. Carl Van Vechten for example, a sophisticate and an intellectual who had intimate friends who were black, became truly involved with the Harlem Renaissance and lent support to artists like Allen. Yet such works as his 1926 novel *Nigger Heaven* dwelled on the prurient features of Harlem night life and perpetuated stereotypical views of blacks that understandably upset some black critics.

> For Van Vechten...the distinctive element in the black character was a primitiveness, a close tie to jungle rhythms, a sensuality. According to Van Vechten, these were the traits that the advent of civilization and the dependence on technology had refined out of Western civilization, traits that the West now was seeking to reacquire. These were the gifts that the black race could restore to the West.[35]

The notion that blacks were closer to nature and retained the values of premodern and pre-industrial civilization had been a source of attraction for whites since the turn of the century, when the European avant-garde discovered African sculpture and Negro spirituals. It was this "exotic spirit of the New Negro," symbolized by Harlem's dandies, sheiks, swells, "teasin' browns" and "yalla gals," that Covarrubias found most compelling when Van Vechten introduced him to the pleasures to be had uptown.[36]

Of even greater concern to black leaders was the fact that members of the younger generation often held views similar to those of their white counterparts, or were content to cater to the demand for licentious images of blacks in order to pay the bills. In 1926, in the pages of *The Crisis*, W.E.B. DuBois orchestrated a yearlong debate on the representation of the Negro and the responsibilities of the artist toward black subject matter. Over 40 artists and writers contributed to this symposium on "The Negro in Art? How Shall He be Portrayed?" The list of questions to be considered began, "When the artist, black or white, portrays Negro characters is he under any obligations or limitations as to the sort of character he will portray?"[37] The answer, implied in the rhetorical editorial tone, was

fig. 2
Portrait of Alain Locke, 1928
(cat. 17)

emphatically clear when it came to the work of black artists. The onus was on them to use their art to promote an altered perception of blackness that would benefit their communities. Wedded to the notion of uplift as a means of improving the material conditions and status of blacks, the black elite felt that Negro art should feature the noblest qualities of the race and produce models that the larger black population would emulate. Specifically, black artists were to embrace the emblematic image of the New Negro. Those who had their portraits taken by James Allen felt that he fulfilled this expectation.

Allen's *Portrait of Alain Locke* of 1928 exemplified how the black leadership wished to be represented (fig. 2). The image presents a bust-length view of

Locke against a medium gray backdrop. He was impeccably dressed, his sartorial sensibility subtly asserted by the dapper bow tie. Locke's head and body are turned slightly away from the camera to avoid a rigid, full frontal pose, and the camera itself was not centered but positioned to the left. The light falls prominently on Locke's forehead, emphasizing his tremendous intellect. Locke, who was a Renaissance man in the classic sense of the word, embodied the essence of the New Negro.[38] He graduated from Harvard, became the first black Rhodes Scholar, and later returned to Harvard as a graduate student, earning a doctorate in philosophy. He went on to teach and head the philosophy department at Howard University, where he cultivated and encouraged black artists through personal support and, most importantly, created the foundation of a critical discourse about Negro art. It was Locke whom Paul Kellogg invited to guest edit the Harlem issue of *The Survey Graphic.* And it was Locke who later published *The New Negro* anthology, the major work documenting the black cultural renaissance.[39] Consistent with his role as champion of Negro artists, Locke commissioned numerous portraits from James Allen.

fig. 3
Portrait of Aaron Douglas,
ca. 1927 (cat. 26)

The artists of the younger generation did not always agree with their elders on the subject matter of black art. They wanted to explore the full range of black life in their art—both the good and the bad—and saw their obligations and responsibilities differently. Being true to human experience was more important to them than observing the proprieties of their class. Many artists were especially attracted to the lives of working-class blacks and to the blues, jazz, and other popular entertainments, which they felt represented an authentic essence of blackness. Nevertheless, the bohemian vanguard readily embraced Allen and his vision of the New Negro. Allen's *Portrait of Aaron Douglas,* taken around 1927 (fig. 3), displays the same sort of self-cultivation that we saw in the portrait of Locke. It does not flaunt Douglas's status as the most prominent black visual artist of the New Negro

movement, nor does it allude to his regular participation in avant-garde endeavors. His somber, conservative attire—dark jacket, white shirt and tie, and white pocket square—betrays no hint that the photograph was taken when Douglas was illustrating the journal, *Fire!! A Quarterly Devoted to the Younger Negro Artists*. Organized by the writer Wallace Thurman, this publishing venture was the most ambitiously radical undertaking of the younger generation.[40] Douglas's stately image reflects instead an older conception of the artist as a gentleman and acad-

fig. 4
Portrait of Langston Hughes, 1927 (cat. 29)

emician and demonstrates that the younger generation was equally concerned with challenging white stereotypes of blacks.

The quintessential image of a member of the younger generation in James Allen's oeuvre is his *Portrait of Langston Hughes,* taken in 1927 (fig. 4). The photograph characterizes Hughes as a romantic, Byronic hero—an image perfectly suited to his career as a writer and his stature among his peers as one of the most prominent figures of the Harlem Renaissance. Seated at a table before a gray backdrop, Hughes leans slightly forward, resting his right elbow on the table and his head in his hand. It is not by chance that the pose recalls Rodin's *The Thinker* and the long line of images of the pensive scholar that preceded it. *The Thinker* was a resonant image for Negroes of that era. A drawing of the sculpture bearing Negroid features celebrated the New Negro on the January 1927 cover of *The Messenger.*[41] And Allen used a similar pose in his *Portrait of James Weldon Johnson,* also of 1927 (fig. 5). In Allen's photograph of Hughes, the allusion to his sitter's erudition is furthered by the light that falls from the upper left, emphasizing his forehead. A moody romanticism is evoked by his melancholic expression and distant gaze into a space off-camera to the left, and enhanced by the shadow cast to his right. Visually linking Hughes to the lineage of Western philosophers and poets through the use of such established iconographic signs was significant because blacks had rarely been portrayed in such an exalted manner. Yet even as the image alluded to his creative vocation, Hughes took care to be portrayed as a proper young man. He is dressed in a jacket and tie. His white shirt is pristine, his hair impeccably coiffed. Only the tie, slightly disheveled by the lean of his torso, disrupts the plenitude of the illusion,

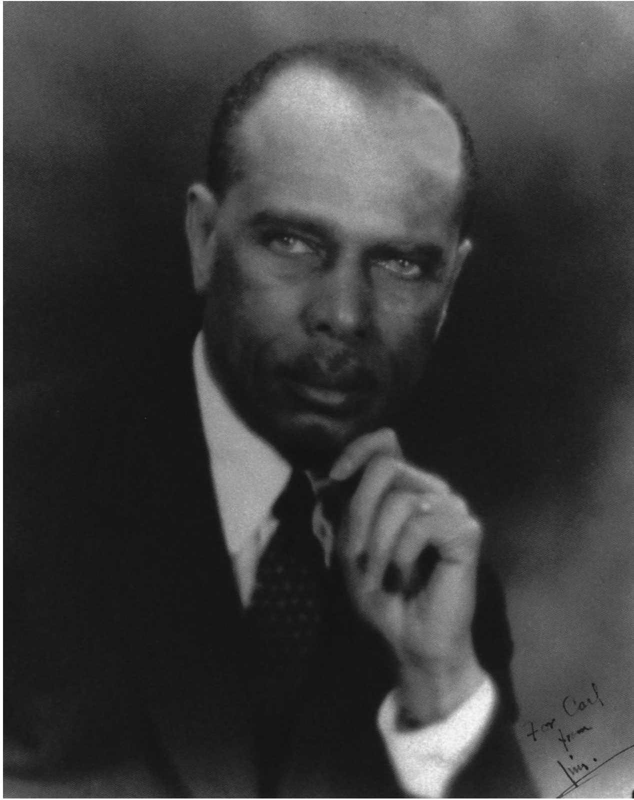

fig. 5
Portrait of James Weldon Johnson, 1927 (cat. 19)

reinforcing the impression that Hughes possessed an artistic temperament characteristic of the bohemian.

Wallace Thurman and the writer Zora Neale Hurston dubbed this younger generation "the Niggerati," and in the Harlem issue of *Survey Graphic,* Alain Locke identified its artists as being "vibrant with a new psychology."[42] They were bound by their enthusiasm for a newly ascendant black culture, by "a sense of community, a feeling that they were all part of the same endeavor."[43] The Niggerati turned to James Allen for images because he was self-consciously an artist, like them, and shared the same values and goals. It was Thurman who in early April 1927 gave Allen his first opportunity to exhibit, including his photographs in the *Exhibition of Young Negro Artists* at "Niggerati Manor," the name given to an apartment building at 267 West 136th Street where many black artists and writers, like Thurman, lived.[44] The exhibition featured the work of several artists who would be important for the New Negro movement, including Aaron Douglas, Richard Bruce Nugent, O. Richard Reid, and Malvin Gray Johnson.[45] Allen would be affiliated with this vanguard circle of artists and intellectuals for the duration of his photographic career.

Recommending Allen's work for a Harmon Foundation Award in 1928, Langston Hughes wrote:

> To him his work is an art. Through the medium of the camera, and with Negro subjects, he is seeking to achieve beauty. So few photographers know how to capture with the lense [sic] the shades and tone of the Negro skin colors, and none make of it an art....This young man's work will stand comparison with that of any of the best photographers in the country and with racial subjects, I know of none to surpass him.
>
> So few of the younger Negro artists in any line care about bringing to light the beauties that are peculiarly racial. Most of them want to sing songs written by white people, write poetry as white people write it, paint as the most mediocre white artists paint in old and out-moded traditions. All of our photographers I know copy the cheapest white commercial styles. None of them care for, or are concerned with the capture of racial beauties on their films,—no kind of beauty for that matter. Mr. Allen does desire to do this, to capture beauty and to glorify the Negro.[46]

Such praise is a testament to the power of the photographic image between the wars and especially to the universal desire among blacks for images devoted to the portrayal of their lives and experiences. Allen's portraiture was apparently elastic enough to accommodate the various needs of his patrons, regardless of their ideo-

logical position. The conception of blackness during the interwar years was not a monolithic one, and members of the black elite held divergent views, which varied according to age, class, gender, and sexual orientation. Even so, those who commissioned portraits from Allen were overwhelmingly united regarding the identity that they wished to present to the world. Support for Allen's career spanned the full breadth of the black elite. When he submitted his first application for a Harmon Foundation Award in 1927, Wallace Thurman sponsored him, and Van Vechten and Locke as well as Hughes wrote recommendations.[47] Others sponsors and recommenders included Bessye Bearden, the journalist and mother of the artist Romare Bearden; Louis Stone, Allen's previous employer; and Walter White, Assistant Secretary of the NAACP. Many patrons, among them Alain Locke, Countee Cullen, and Langston Hughes, returned to Allen again and again for new portraits.

THE NEW NEGRO IN PUBLIC

For blacks from all walks of life, the primary concern was to improve their social condition and the most effective means to accomplish this goal seemed to be the production of group-generated images of blackness. So while portraits of blacks retained their private commemorative functions within the home, they also acquired a public role in establishing the New Negro social type within America's cultural and social landscape. A telling comment appeared in *The Messenger* in 1927 when it declared its intention to publish more photographs: "The best way to show Negro progress is to show it in pictures."[48] Indeed, the pages of Negro publications are filled with formal portraits of Negroes, from the local high school student who won a spelling bee to the most eminent businessman or political leader. Blacks of all backgrounds were eager to invest in the New Negro type. The groomed, coiffed, attractively attired black body was the black cultural ideal, regardless of one's class background or regional location. Throughout the country, blacks presented themselves to black photographers to be represented as the modern people that they had become. As photographs like Allen's circulated through the public sphere, they offered a model of the New Negro that was central to the formation of both personal and group identity. In that same column in

The Messenger, the work of James Allen was introduced to readers with the following observation:

> Very few photographers understand the photographing of Negro types. As a result nearly all pictures of Negroes look almost alike. There is none of the finer distinction of light and shade. The late C. M. Battey knew how to do the job, but he was almost alone in the wilderness. However, there is a young man in New York, working for a large photographic concern, who is an artist of the first flight. Very shortly we shall show some of his work. This will be a real treat. You have never seen such photographs of Negroes such as he produces.[49]

fig. 6
Portrait of Charles S. Johnson, ca. 1928 (cat. 20)

Like many of his peers, Allen provided a public face for the New Negro to be used in the rapidly expanding media industry. The admiration that the elite held for his work resulted in black publications giving it special prominence.

The most extensive relationship that Allen had with a periodical was the one he enjoyed with *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life.* The magazine made its first mention of Allen when it reported on the "Niggerati Manor" exhibition in its May 1927 issue. Making note of such events was consistent with Charles Johnson's agenda as editor to make *Opportunity* a vehicle for the promotion of black arts and letters. Like other black leaders, Johnson "argued that a flourishing black cultural movement was an effective means of combating racism and advancing the political objectives of the black race,"[50] and he was willing to commit the Urban League's resources to help establish the Negro renaissance.[51] Johnson was also personally invested in the type of imagery of the New Negro that Allen created. In a portrait that he commissioned from Allen, the dapper Johnson displays the interest in self-cultivation that was characteristic of the photographer's clients (fig. 6).[52]

Allen's vision of the New Negro found a supportive environment in *Opportunity.* In the December 1928 issue, his *Portrait of Carl Van Vechten* (fig. 7)

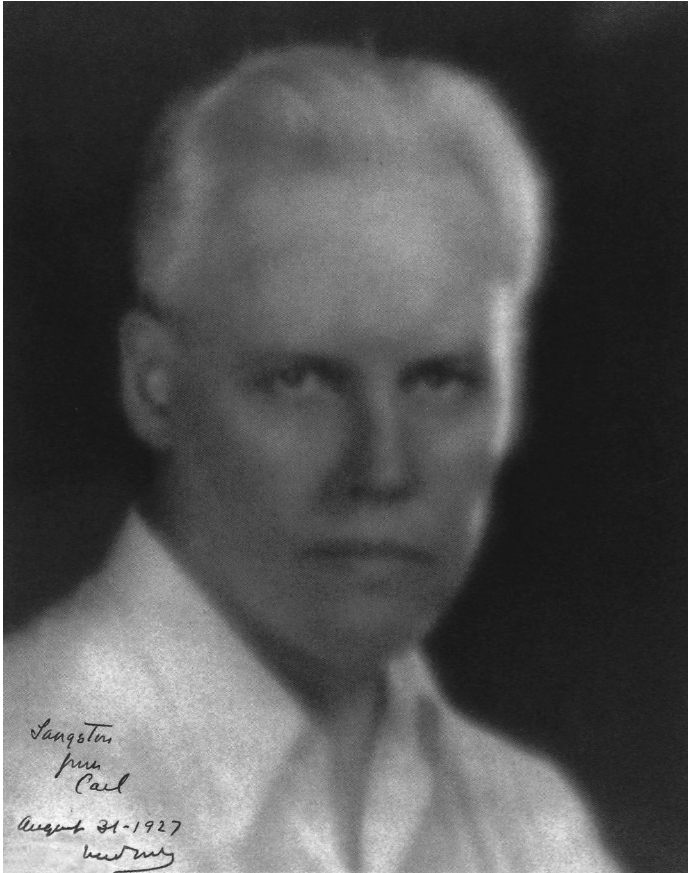

fig. 7
Portrait of Carl Van Vechten, 1927 (cat. 24)

appeared with a short article that tellingly noted the power of Allen's photographs to inform:

> Infinite variations of light and shade give to the portraits of James L. Allen a unique place of promise in the photographic arts. Though his work is not confined to the American Negro he sees in them an ideal of picturesque racial beauty heretofore undiscovered and unloved. Yet, Mr. Allen seeks to portray that beauty by isolating and perfecting this and that bit of his id[e]al, directing our attention to it and teaching us to love it.[53]

Even after Johnson resigned to assume a professorship in sociology at Fisk University and the arts' prominence in *Opportunity* lessened slightly, Allen's work continued to appear there. He also regularly ran an advertisement for his studio in the

magazine. Between 1934 and 1942, sixteen of *Opportunity*'s covers featured photographs by Allen. The majority of these images were portraits and figure studies celebrating the New Negro, and especially the New Negro woman.

The large number of images of women in Allen's oeuvre reflects their significant role in shaping the New Negro movement. In July 1923, *The Messenger* had devoted an issue to the New Negro woman. Two years later, the feminist Elise Johnson McDougald was invited to contribute an article to *Survey Graphic*'s Harlem issue. "The Double Task: The Struggle of Negro Women for Sex and Race Emancipation" paid attention to the particular concerns that black women faced as the targets of both racial and gender oppression.[54] For in spite of this consideration of black women within the discourse of the black cultural renaissance, they were often relegated to the position of helpmate. Among the larger black population, the symbolic function of black women as emblems of racial pride took center stage:

> As if in direct response to the devaluation of African-American appearance, the assertion that black women were beautiful became an important declaration of cultural legitimacy. The African-American press had long reported on women's work in clubs, churches, and other organizations documenting their wide influence in community affairs. In the 1910s and 1920s, women represented the race in an added way, through a well-groomed and attractive appearance. Racial pride often took the guise of a beautiful woman on display.[55]

Just as images of white women were used to allegorize American cultural ideals and to establish whiteness as the accepted standard of the beautiful and the good, Allen's images of black women performed the same function for blackness and black culture.[56] As black culture emerged in the early twentieth century, wearing cosmetics, carefully grooming hair with special chemical preparations, and sporting the latest fashions signified that black women had adopted modern social behaviors, casting off the shadow of slavery and the past, and exercising their rights and freedoms as American citizens. Attractive young black women became a common feature in the pages of black periodicals, and in race films, beauty contests, and fashion shows. The impact of this new beauty culture on the lives of blacks was not merely symbolic. Images of black women had acquired considerable cultural currency:

African-American beauty had become a commodity to trade not only in the marketplace of goods but in the exchange of political ideas. For black women themselves, however, beautifying was much more. Although opposed by some as a sign of emulation and falsity, cosmetics offered others a way of negotiating new experiences and expressing a new sense of self. For those who embraced it, the culture of beauty asserted desires for dignity, respect, and social participation in a world in which these basic human imperatives were too often denied.[57]

Allen created two types of images of black women. In the first type, an anonymous black female is displayed solely for her beauty (fig. 8). The view is close-up, and the woman's shoulders are bare. It is the sophisticated coiffure, discrete earrings, and skillfully applied makeup that identify her as a devotee of beauty culture. This type of image was often created solely for publication in periodicals. Beauty culture had the potential to significantly alter black women's lives and their ability to negotiate the public sphere. How a black woman appeared to others affected all aspects of her life and experience, from acquiring gainful employment and being accepted within prominent social circles, to finding a romantic partner. In addition to promoting black beauty, images of New Negro women challenged the myths of black female sexuality that had traditionally justified the sexual exploitation of black women by both black and white men.[58] The modern vision of black womanhood insisted upon the respectability of black women and attempted to produce a climate where black women would be treated civilly in public. The beauty industry, in providing work for a large segment of the black female population, was also, literally, an avenue to the American dream and economic freedom. Broadcasting an image of the black woman that challenged stereotypes was an important component in generating improved social conditions for blacks. Women were closely scrutinized to ensure that their appearance conformed to prevailing standards, and achieving the right look became something of a racial obligation.

The other image of black womanhood that Allen produced was the New Negro type delineated in black feminist texts. Several women had been crucial to the success of the black cultural renaissance, either as writers and artists or as agents working behind the scenes. Ethel Ray Nance and the librarian Regina Anderson shared an apartment at the posh address, 580 St. Nicholas Avenue. They organized cultural events that provided key opportunities to network, and

their hospitality to newly arrived artists was indispensable to the movement. A'Lelia Walker was important as a patron and as a socialite who brought black and white society circles together (fig. 9). Louise Thompson, an educator and social activist, is mainly remembered because Wallace Thurman was her first husband, but she was also an important resource for artists. Thompson served as a typist and stenographer for Thurman and, on occasion, for her friend Langston Hughes. In Allen's portrait, she wears a demure, high-collared dress (fig. 10).

fig. 8
Dark Beauty (II),
1930s (cat. 8)

fig. 9
Portrait of A'Lelia Walker,
1927 (cat. 28)

fig. 10
Portrait of Louise Thompson,
1930s (cat. 27)

As with his portraits of men, Allen's photographs of these female members of the black elite placed their character and accomplishments at the forefront. They were under the same constraints to assume a correct demeanor and were expected to be attractively but conservatively attired. Indeed, the significance attached to projecting the right image could potentially become tyrannical. Beauty culture reinforced color hierarchies within the black community and exerted social pressure to maintain expensive regimes that most blacks could ill afford. Acquiring the right look could even be dangerous since it led to the use of harmful cosmetics like skin bleaching creams to achieve the desired hue. And yet blacks scrimped and saved and risked their health for the sake of appearance even at the height of the Depression. The New Negro concept embodied a powerful and seductive narrative of black progress and liberation that transcended ideology, class, and region:

> What was most important here was the public declaration that the black body was capable of being regarded as a thing of beauty. Against an unvarying background of

> demeaning visual portrayals of African American bodies in cartoons, magazine illustrations, advertisements, and film, black beauty contests and fashion shows were not merely vivid repudiations of black physical and aesthetic inferiority but salutary expressions of African American pride. That those who organized or took part in these displays may have been acceding, in part, to prevailing white standards of beauty was less significant than the fact that for the first time blacks were being presented, through the contests and fashion shows themselves and the widespread publicity given to these events by the African American press, in what was, by contemporary standards, an unambiguously positive way.[59]

The published photographs of James Allen furnished his audience with images that affirmed a modern black identity, reflected the cultural values of black America, and generated a sense of a national black community. The imagery demanded of Allen and other black photographers refuted theories of Negro inferiority and displayed the bonds of affection and community among blacks that were rarely acknowledged by the white media. Photographs of mother and children were commonly created as family portraits and for public use: Allen's *Brown Madonna* appeared on the cover of the December 1941 issue of *Opportunity* (fig. 11). Photographs of babies and children were also extremely popular (fig. 12). Such celebrations of family reveal the sense of pride, community, and optimism that prevailed during this era. The contrast between these photographs and the corpus produced in the 1930s by the Farm Security Administration or the Photo League's Harlem Document is telling. White photographers depicted Harlem and other black communities as poverty-stricken ghettoes, while blacks favored images like James Van Der Zee's famous 1932 photograph, *A Couple Wearing Raccoon Coats with a Cadillac, Taken on West 127th Street.* At the height of the Depression, blacks in Harlem commissioned images that self-consciously proclaimed their sense of worth and accomplishment.[60] Images of black celebrities like Josephine Baker, Paul Robeson, Roland Hayes, and Herbert Julian were featured in black periodicals as emblems of black excellence. The black community was justifiably proud that members of their race had attained such a degree of success in such a wide array of disciplines. This was the first time in American history that blacks had such a public forum to celebrate their heroes and themselves.

Scholars and critics of this chapter in black cultural history have often declared that the cultural strategy of the era was ineffective. They claim that the

Renaissance had no lasting impact and was a poor substitute for political action. The cultural historian Ann Douglas counters that the participants in the Harlem Renaissance "played a shrewd game and, equally important, it was perhaps the only one open to them":[61]

> The most pressing reason for the New Negro's decision to work through culture, not politics, was that this was the closest Harlem could come to so-called real politics. When whites in the 1920s abandoned traditional politics for the realm of culture and

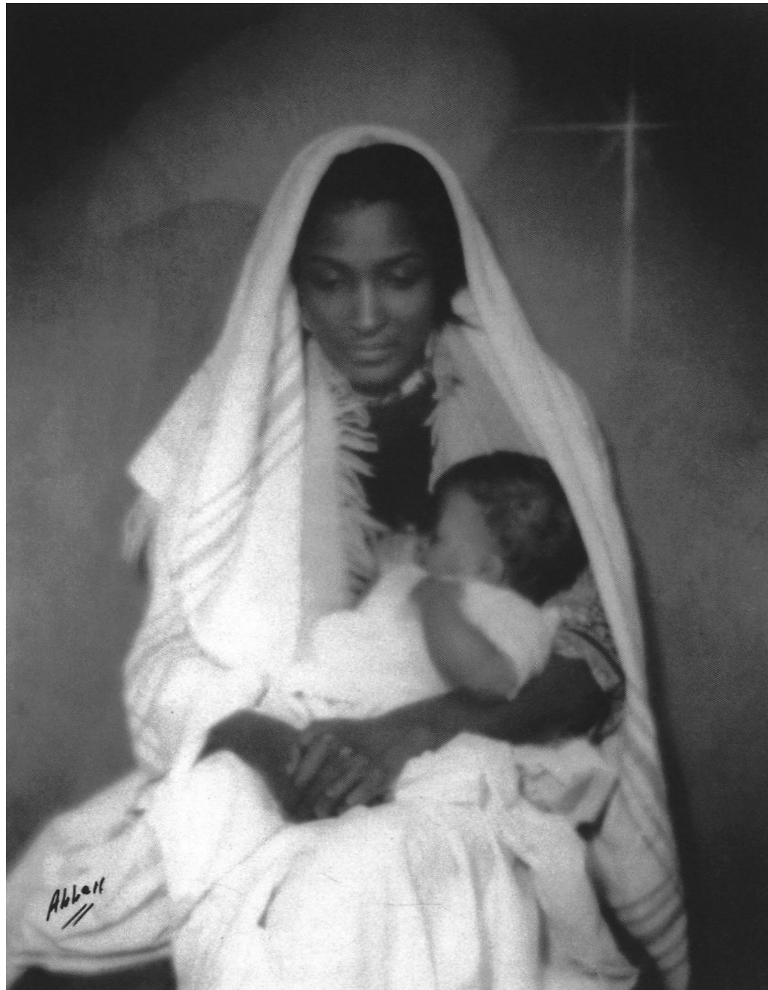

fig. 11
Brown Madonna, ca. 1941
(cat. 3)

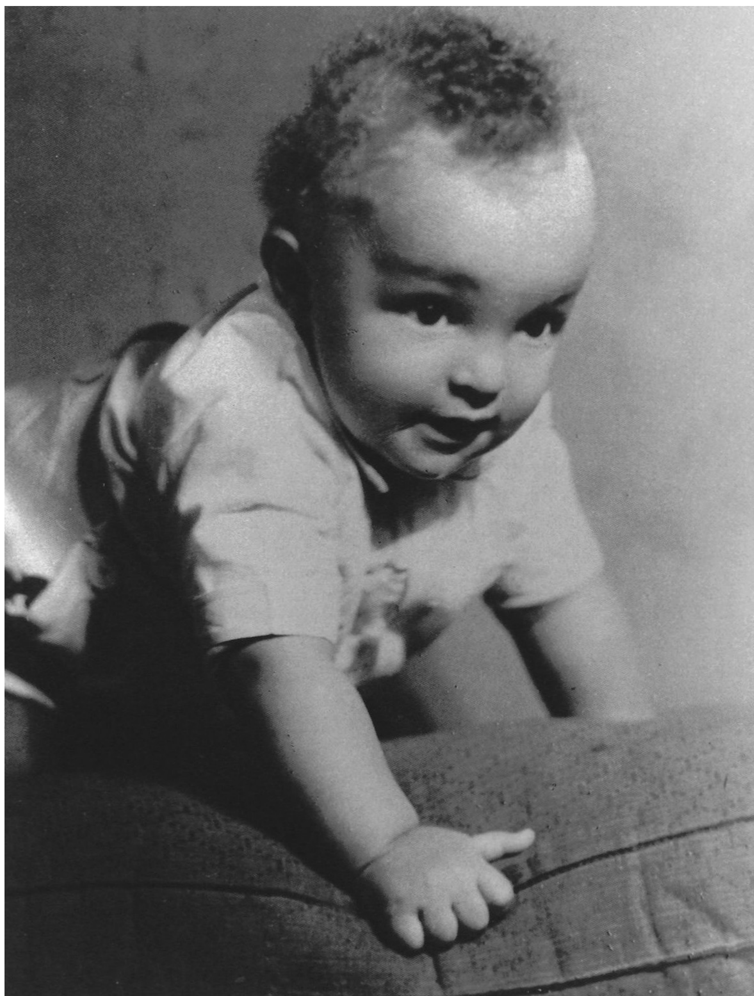

fig. 12
Portrait of Monroe Davis Dowling, Jr., ca. 1935
(cat. 5)

> artistic expression, they were turning their backs, as some of them discovered in the 1930s, on an arena wide open to them had they chosen to enter it. In contrast, blacks, barred from most meaningful direct political activity, were not abandoning politics so much as translating politics into cultural terms.[62]

Blacks were not assured of success when they undertook this endeavor. It was not until much later in the century that, through collective, political activity, blacks were able to make substantive changes in their social status. It should be evident,

though, that the later gains of the Civil Rights era would not have been possible without this earlier historical episode when blacks took control over their identities and their public image. Celebrities in the 1920s and 30s were staunch forces in this effort, consciously adopting public personas that reflected their community and racial heritage. Paul Robeson, one of the most accomplished and celebrated figures of the 1920s, was photographed by James Allen, in a suit and tie, looking very much like other members of the black elite who embraced the image of the New Negro (fig. 13). As Hazel Carby argued in *Race Men,* Robeson preferred this public image to the plethora of alternative images created during that era, such as the one presented in Nikolas Muray's nude studies.[63] While Muray located the

fig. 13
Portrait of Paul Robeson,
1927 (cat. 33)

fig. 14
Portrait of Joel A. Rogers,
1931 (cat. 25)

essence of blackness in the body, Allen's photographs imagined blackness as not limited to skin color. Allen's portrait of Robeson is visually akin to his other photographs of leading black figures. Robeson shared the same concerns and approach to his public persona as Joel A. Rogers, who has fallen below our radar but was a prominent journalist in Harlem in 1931 when Allen made his portrait (fig. 14). The black elite led the way in creating a collective image of blackness that launched blacks and their voices into the realm of American public life. Allen's career as a photographer, which spanned more than fifteen years between 1927 and 1944, reflects the investment of blacks in the production of material culture that reflected their experiences and ideals as an alternative to the hegemonic vision of blackness.

For blacks during the interwar era, wearing elegant, formal clothing in public spaces and availing oneself of the option to go to a photographer to have a portrait made were exercises of newfound status and freedom. The significance of these public acts of self-cultivation and representation was readily understood by both blacks and whites. Since slavery times, whites had reacted with hostility to black displays of self-possession. In their book, *Stylin': African American Expressive Culture from Its Beginnings to the Zoot Suit,* authors Shane White and Graham White recount an incident in 1911 where a young black man was hit by a white man for being in the man's way and "trying to look too good anyway."[64] This story reveals the pitfalls of dressing counter to the expectation of whites,

> [alerting] us to the myriad ways in which Jim Crow impacted on the presentation of the African American body. Just as slaves, in the antebellum world, had been expected to look the part, shunning any sign of assertiveness and even demonstrating their con-

> tentment, so, under the racial system that had crystallized by the turn of the century, African Americans were required to dress, walk, comport themselves, and direct their gaze in a manner that registered uncomplaining subservience. Blacks understood, for example, that it could be dangerous to wear expensive clothes or, particularly in rural areas, to don Sunday attire during the week.[65]

Contrary to the hopes of black leaders, the Great War, which blacks viewed as a demonstration of their humanity and commitment to American democracy, did little to alter this attitude.[66] The authors also noted that the sight of Negro soldiers, "whose crisp uniforms and dignified bearing denoted pride and self-assurance, proved especially affronting to whites."[67]

Producing photographs that glorified the black body and hailed black achievement was a transgressive act in Allen's day. His image of the New Negro destroyed the illusions required to justify segregation. Although the creation of the New Negro iconography did not immediately yield the desired transformation of American society, the activity around this symbol was an important first step in the black struggle for civil rights. Blacks needed a means to affirm themselves, and the portrait as symbol provided a critical psychical armature upon which to build a valorized identity. Photography and other means of publicly displaying this identity formed a wellspring for blacks to draw upon that remains central to how they envision themselves today.

NOTES

1. Alain Leroy Locke, guest ed., "Harlem: Mecca of the New Negro," *The Survey Graphic* (March 1925): 621–724.

2. David Levering Lewis, "Harlem My Home," in *Harlem Renaissance: Art of Black America* (New York: The Studio Museum in Harlem and Harry N. Abrams, 1987), 57.

3. Samuel B. Morse is credited as the person who introduced photography to America. The painter was in France at the time of Daguerre's announcement and wrote about the new technology for American audiences. Robert Cornelius was another early photographer. He is thought to have made the first photographic portrait, a self-portrait, in late 1839.

4. Deborah Willis, ed., *J. P. Ball, Daguerrean and Studio Photographer* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1993).

5. For the history of black photography, see Valencia Hollins Coar, ed., *A Century of Black Photographers, 1840–1960* (Providence, RI: Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, 1983); Deborah Willis-Thomas, *Black Photographers, 1840–1940: A Bio-Bibliography* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1985); and Jeanne Moutoussamy-Ashe, *Viewfinders: Black Women Photographers* (New York and London: Writers and Readers Publishing Inc., 1993).

6. John Wright, "A Scintillating Send-Off for Falling Stars: The Black Renaissance Reconsidered," in *A Stronger Soul within a Finer Frame: Portraying African-Americans in the Black Renaissance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1990), 15.

7. Elizabeth Grace Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890–1940* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1998).

8. Alain Locke, "Enter the New Negro," *The Survey Graphic* (March 1925): 634.

9. Richard J. Powell, "Re/Birth of a Nation," in *Rhapsodies in Black: Art of the Harlem Renaissance* (London: Hayward Gallery, 1997), 19.

10. Beryl Wright and Gary Reynolds, *Against the Odds: African-American Artists and the Harmon Foundation* (Newark: The Newark Museum, 1989). The Foundation funded the awards, while the Commission on Race Relations of the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America—supervised by the Council's executive secretary George E. Haynes—provided the administrative services.

11. Deborah Willis, "Photography and the Harmon Foundation," in *Against the Odds*, 99–105.

12. *A Study of Negro Artists* (New York: Harmon Foundation, 1934), Motion Picture and Recorded Sound Division, National Archives.

13. Willis, "Photography and the Harmon Foundation," 105.

14. Cornelius M. Battey and Lucy Calloway were probably the first black photographers to exhibit their works in a fine art exhibition. Six of their photographs were included in the *Negro Arts Exhibit* held in 1921 at the 135th Street Branch of the New York Public Library. See ibid., 99.

15. *An Exhibition of Negro Art, March 17 through 30, 1935* (New York: YWCA, 1935); *Exhibition of*

Fine Arts Productions by American Negroes, Hall of Negro Life, Texas Centennial, June 19–November 29, 1936 (Dallas: Texas Centennial, 1936). See The Harmon Foundation Collection, The Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

16. Claude McKay, *Harlem: Negro Metropolis* (New York: Dutton, 1940).

17. White photographers, including Charles Sheeler and Walker Evans, likewise did installation shoots to supplement their incomes. See Maria Morris Hambourg and Christopher Phillips, *The New Vision: Photography Between the World Wars* (1989; New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1994).

18. This information about Allen's activities after he closed his studio was provided by Robert McNeil, a black photographer from Washington, DC who began his career with the Farm Security Administration in the 1940s. McNeil first met Allen in New York in 1938. Robert McNeil, telephone conversation, June 8, 1998.

19. *An Exhibition of Portraits by James L. Allen (A Group of New Portraits)* was shown at the Hobby Horse from April 20 to May 4, 1930. The Hobby Horse was a Harlem bookstore located at 113 West 136th Street. Douglas Howe, the owner, created a cafe-cum-salon, reminiscent of Sylvia Beach's Shakespeare and Company bookstore in Paris. The brochure is held in the L.S. Alexander Gumby Collection of Negroiana, The Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University.

20. Only Carl Van Vechten, who took up photography in 1932, photographed a comparable range of Harlem's cultural figures. See Keith F. Davis, *The Passionate Observer: Photographs by Carl Van Vechten* (Kansas City, MO: Hallmark Cards, Inc., 1993).

21. Deborah Willis-Braithwaite, *Van Der Zee, Photographer, 1886–1983* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1993).

22. Joanna Woodall, ed., introduction, *Portraiture: Facing the Subject* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1997), 19.

23. Brian Wallis, "Black Bodies, White Science: Louis Agassiz's Slave Daguerreotypes," *American Art* 9.2 (Summer 1995): 39–61.

24. Robyn Wiegman, *American Anatomies: Theorizing Race and Gender* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1995), 21.

25. Jan Nederveen Pieterse, *White On Black: Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992); Albert Boime, *The Art of Exclusion: Representing Blacks in the Nineteenth Century* (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1990).

26. Richard J. Powell, *Black Art and Culture in the 20th Century* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1997), 24–25.

27. Wayne Martin Mellinger, "John Henry Adams and the Image of the 'New Negro,'" *The International Review of African American Art* 14.1 (1997): 29–33.

28. William Edward Burghardt DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903; New York: New American Library, 1982).

29. Shane White and Graham White, *Stylin': African American Expressive Culture from its Beginnings to the Zoot Suit* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1998), 2.

30. Alain Locke, "The Legacy of the Ancestral Arts," in *The New Negro: An Anthology* (New York: Albert and Charles Boni, 1925), 264.

31. Suren Lalvani, *Photography, Vision, and the Production of Modern Bodies* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 66.

32. Thomas D. Rice's account about the source for his immensely popular song and dance, "Jump Jim Crow," and other origin myths of minstrelsy were legitimizing narratives where white performers claimed to have witnessed blacks performing such movements and dances. For a history of the early development of the minstrel show prior to the Civil War, see Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1993).

33. Wallace Thurman, *The Infants of the Spring* (New York: Macaulay, 1932).

34. Wendy Rick Reaves, "Miguel Covarrubias: Caricature and Modernism in *Vanity Fair*," in *Celebrity Caricature in America* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998), 158–180.

35. Cary D. Wintz, *Black Culture and the Harlem Renaissance* (1988; College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 1996), 98.

36. See also Covarrubias's book of caricatures, *Negro Drawings* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1927).

37. "A Questionnaire," *The Crisis* (February 1926): 165.

38. Locke was a quintessential "Philadelphia Negro" as described by DuBois in his sociological study of the same name and was a prime example of DuBois's concept of the "talented tenth" individual who could uplift the race. DuBois, *The Philadelphia Negro* (1899; Millwood, NY: Kraus-Thomson Organization Limited, 1992).

39. See n. 30 above.

40. *Fire!! A Quarterly Devoted to the Younger Negro Artists* (November 1926): 1–48.

41. "The New Negro," *The Messenger* (January 1927): cover.

42. Locke, "Enter the New Negro," *The Survey Graphic* (March 1925): 631.

43. Wintz, 2.

44. There are no indications as to how Allen and Wallace Thurman met. A notice for the exhibition appeared in *Opportunity* magazine and some of the newspapers; see *Opportunity* (May 1927): 154.

45. Ibid.

46. Langston Hughes, letter of recommendation for James L. Allen, 1928, Harmon Foundation Collection, The Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

47. James L. Allen, application for the William E. Harmon Foundation Awards for Distinguished Achievement Among Negroes, 1927, Harmon Foundation Collection, The Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

48. "Messenger Gossip," *The Messenger* (1927): 176.

49. Ibid.

50. Wintz, 123.

51. "As Johnson became convinced of the importance of art and literature in assisting blacks to come to terms with their difficult situation in urban America, he shifted the magazine's focus to the analysis and promotion of the cultural life of black America. Under his guidance the periodical played a key role in the Harlem Renaissance. He opened its pages to unknown black writers, and he took the leadership in organizing many of the contests and literary dinners that effectively publicized and rewarded the more successful black writers" (Ibid., 122).

52. The historian David Levering Lewis has noted Johnson's penchant for British tailored suits; see his *When Harlem Was in Vogue* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1981), 90.

53. "James L. Allen—Portraitist," *Opportunity* (December 1928): 369. Allen's *Portrait of Ira de Augustine Reid* was published in this same issue (p. 382).

54. Elise Johnson McDougald, "The Double Task: The Struggle of Negro Women for Sex and Race Emancipation," *The Survey Graphic* (March 1925): 689–91. This essay was also included in *The New Negro,* despite Locke's reputation as a notorious misogynist.

55. Kathy Peiss, "Shades of Difference," in *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America's Beauty Culture* (New York: Metropolitan Books/Henry Holt and Company, 1998), 213.

56. Mary Banta, *Imaging American Women: Idea and Ideals in Cultural History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987).

57. Peiss, 235.

58. Pieterse, "Libido in Colour," in *White On Black,* 172–187.

59. White and White, 218.

60. Willis-Braithwaite, 12.

61. Ann Douglas, *Terrible Honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s* (New York: Noonday Press, 1995), 323.

62. Ibid., 323–24.

63. Hazel Carby, *Race Men* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 64–65.

64. White and White, 153.

65. Ibid., 154.

66. Lewis, "We Return Fighting," in *When Harlem Was in Vogue,* 3–24.

67. White and White, 155.

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Checklist of the Exhibition

All photographs are gelatin silver prints; many are sepia toned. Dimensions are in inches, height before width, and measure the entire sheet or mount, except where they were taken of a framed work ("sight"). Inscriptions are those on the rectos of the photographs. Some are also inscribed in various hands on their versos; these have not been noted.

ALLEN AND HIS CAREER

1.
Self-Portrait with Camera, 1934 [frontispiece]
4 1/4 x 3 1/4 (sight)
National Archives Gift Collection

2.
Self-Portrait, Wearing an Artist's Smock, 1926 [cover; p. 7]
11 x 7
Inscribed in blue ink, lower left:
To Dr. Locke / From / James L. Allen
Alain Locke Papers, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University

3.
Brown Madonna, ca. 1941 [p. 31]
9 5/8 x 7 3/8
Signed in ink, lower left: Allen
Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library

4.
Portrait of Unidentified Woman and Child
6 3/4 x 4 3/4
Blind stamp, lower right: Allen / NY
Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library

5.
Portrait of Monroe Davis Dowling, Jr., ca. 1935 [p. 32]
10 1/4 x 8
Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library

6.
A Little Nut Brown Girl, ca. 1936
9 7/8 x 8
Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library

7.
Dark Beauty (I), 1930s
10 1/8 x 9 1/8
Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library

8.
Dark Beauty (II), 1930s [p. 28]
10 x 8 1/8
Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library

9.
The Dancer, 1932
8 3/4 x 6 7/8 (sight)
National Archives Gift Collection

10.
Mara-Mara, 1930
8 3/4 x 5 3/4 (sight)
National Archives Gift Collection

11.
The Dancer Wenfield (The Shouting Bushman), 1934
8 1/2 x 6 3/4 (sight)
National Archives Gift Collection

12.
Laughing Black (Study of Maurice Hunter), 1930
8 3/4 x 6 3/4 (sight)
National Archives Gift Collection

13.
Charles Alston in his Studio, 1937–39
7 3/8 x 7 1/4 (sight)
National Archives Gift Collection

14.
Robert Blackburn Working Lithographer's Stone at Harlem Art Center, 1937–39
8 1/2 x 7 1/4 (sight)
National Archives Gift Collection

15.
Jacob Lawrence at Work, 1937–39
7 3/8 x 8 3/8 (sight)
National Archives Gift Collection

16.
Norman Lewis at Etcher's Press, Harlem Art Center, 1937–39
7 1/4 x 7 3/8 (sight)
National Archives Gift Collection

17.
Portrait of Alain Locke, 1928 [p. 18]
7 3/8 x 5
Blind stamp, lower right: Allen / NY
Alain Locke Papers, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University

18.
Portrait of Alain Locke, 1937
11 7/8 x 8
Signed in graphite, lower right: ALLEN / N.Y.
Alain Locke Papers, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University

19.
Portrait of James Weldon Johnson, 1927 [p. 21]
9 3/8 x 7 1/4 (sight)
Inscribed in blue ink, lower right: For Carl / from / Jim.
James Weldon Johnson Memorial Collection, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library

20.
Portrait of Charles S. Johnson, ca. 1928 [p. 24]
6 1/4 x 3 7/8 (sight)
Blind stamp, lower right: Allen / NY
Inscribed in graphite, below: Charles S. Johnson
James Weldon Johnson Memorial Collection, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library

21.
Portrait of Countee Cullen, ca. 1927
9 x 7 3/8 (sight)
Signed in graphite, lower right: ALLEN / N.Y.
Inscribed in ink, lower right: To James Weldon Johnson, / With admiration, / Countee Cullen
James Weldon Johnson Memorial Collection, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library

cat. 36

22.
Portrait of Claude McKay, 1937
9 1/8 x 6 1/2 (sight)
Inscribed in ink, lower right: For / My good friend / & / esteemed fellow craftsman / James Weldon Johnson / from / Claude McKay —April 1937
James Weldon Johnson Memorial Collection, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library

23.
Portrait of Nella Larsen, ca. 1928
9 x 7 3/8 (sight)
Inscribed in ink, lower right: For dear Carl / and / lovely Fania
James Weldon Johnson Memorial Collection, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library

24.
Portrait of Carl Van Vechten, 1927 [p. 25]
8 3/4 x 7 (sight)
Signed in purple ink, lower left: Langston / from / Carl / August 31, 1927 / New York
James Weldon Johnson Memorial Collection, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library

25.
Portrait of Joel A. Rogers, 1931 [p. 36]
6 1/2 x 4 3/4
Inscribed in blue ink, lower center: J. A. Rogers / 1931
Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library

26.
Portrait of Aaron Douglas, ca. 1927 [p. 19]
6 5/8 x 4 1/4
Blind stamp, lower left: Allen / NY
Inscribed in graphite, bottom center: Aaron Douglas
Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library

27.
Portrait of Louise Thompson, 1930s [p. 29]
8 1/2 x 6 1/2 (sight)
Blind stamp, lower right: Allen / NY
Signed in blue ink, lower right: To Lang / My best Pal / Lou
James Weldon Johnson Memorial Collection, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library

28.
Portrait of A'Lelia Walker, 1927 [p. 29]
9 1/8 x 7 1/8 (sight)
James Weldon Johnson Memorial Collection, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library

29.
Portrait of Langston Hughes, 1927 [p. 20]
10 x 8
Blind stamp, lower right: PORTRAIT / JAMES L. ALLEN / NEW YORK
Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library

30.
Portrait of Langston Hughes, ca. 1930
15 1/8 x 11
Signed in graphite, lower right: ALLEN / N.Y.
Inscribed in graphite, lower right: Langston Hughes / 3/27/86 (in a recent hand)
Alain Locke Papers, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University

cat. 38

31.
Portrait of Langston Hughes, 1927
8 3/8 x 6 3/8 (sight)
Inscribed in blue ink, lower right: For Carl, / Blues truly, / Langston / May 26, / 1927
James Weldon Johnson Memorial Collection, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library

32.
Portrait of Langston Hughes, ca. 1930
8 7/8 x 6 7/8 (sight)
Signed in graphite, below: ALLEN / N.Y.
Inscribed in ink, below: Langston Hughes
James Weldon Johnson Memorial Collection, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library

PORTRAITS OF NEW NEGROES

33.
Portrait of Paul Robeson, 1927 [p. 33]
8 5/8 x 7 1/8 (sight)
Signed in graphite, upper left: ALLEN / N.Y.
James Weldon Johnson Memorial Collection, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library

34.
Portrait of Taylor Gordon, 1927
9 x 7 (sight)
Signed in graphite, lower right: Allen
James Weldon Johnson Memorial Collection, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library

35.
Portrait of Edna Thomas, 1927 [p. 40]
9 1/4 x 7 1/4 (sight)
Inscribed in ink, lower right: For Fania / & Carlo / "I 'too' am America"
James Weldon Johnson Memorial Collection, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library

36.
Portrait of T. Thomas Fortune Fletcher, 1927–28 [p. 43]
5 x 3 7/8 (sight)
Blind stamp, lower right: Allen / NY
Inscribed in blue ink, lower right: To Langston Hughes / In sincere admiration / T. Fortune Fletcher
James Weldon Johnson Memorial Collection, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library

37.
Portrait of Edward Perry, 1927–28
6 3/8 x 4 1/2
Signed in graphite, lower right: Allen
Inscribed in ink, at bottom of mount: To the adorable Gerry / Sincerely / Edward Perry
Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library

38.
Portrait of Rose McClendon (Study in Black and White), 1930 [p. 45]
8 5/8 x 6 1/4
Inscribed in ink, left center: To the Dearest Carl / that ever Van Vechted / Rose McClendon
James Weldon Johnson Memorial Collection, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library

39.
Portrait of Richard B. Harrison, 1933
8 5/8 x 6 7/8 (sight)
National Archives Gift Collection

40.
Portrait of Flora Thomas, ca. 1935
10 1/8 x 8
Blind stamp, lower right: Allen / NY
Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library

41.
Portrait of Nell Occomy Becker, ca. 1936
10 x 8 1/4
Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library

42.
Portrait of Jane M. Bolin, 1939
8 3/8 x 6 1/4
Blind stamp, lower right: Allen / NY
Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library

43.
Portrait of Madge Haynes, ca. 1941
10 x 8 1/8
Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library

44.
Portrait of Josephine Harreld Love, ca. 1941
10 x 8
Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library

45.
Portrait of Evelyn Bullock, ca. 1941
10 x 8 1/8
Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library

46.
Portrait of Frances O. Grant
8 1/4 x 6 (sight)
Inscribed in green ink, lower right: For my good / friends Grayee / and Jack / with love / Frances
James Weldon Johnson Memorial Collection, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library

47.
Portrait of Dr. Ernest E. Just
6 x 3 7/8 (sight)
Blind stamp, lower left: Allen / NY
James Weldon Johnson Memorial Collection, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library

48.
Portrait of Leviticus Lyon
8 3/8 x 6 1/2 (sight)
Blind stamp, lower right: Allen / NY
James Weldon Johnson Memorial Collection, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library

49.
Portrait of William Edouard Scott
6 3/8 x 4 1/4 (sight)
National Archives Gift Collection

50.
Portrait of James Lesesne Wells
12 7/8 x 9 1/2
Signed in graphite, lower right: ALLEN / N.Y.
Alain Locke Papers, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University

of younger scholars and their training made possible Ms. Holloway's fellowship as well as significant funding for this exhibition. Richard S. Field and Lisa Hodermarsky provided much of the methodological and mechanical underpinnings, while Daniell Cornell, the present Selden Fellow, and Lesley K. Baier offered trenchant editorial guidance. Jennifer Bossman, Assistant Registrar, masterfully oversaw all logistics. Diana Brownell and Gisela B. Noack contributed their skills to matting and framing; and Burrus Harlow, Nancy Valley, Clark Crolius, and Peter Cohen were our inspired installers. Finally, we are immensely grateful to Julie Fry for producing so classic a design for this catalogue at the very last instant.

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Jock Reynolds
The Henry J. Heinz II Director

Yale University Art Gallery