

Topic: Shades of Black: Words & Images of the Harlem Renaissance  
Facilitator: Sidra Smith Wahaltere  
Sessions: Mondays, February 9, 16, 2009  
Time: 7-9 p.m.  
Cost: \$55 per person for both sessions

Langston Hughes and Zora Neale Hurston are probably the best known figures of the Harlem Renaissance, an intellectual and creative movement of black cultural expression that took place in the 1920s and 1930s. Some novelists and poets drew their inspiration from “the folk,” working-class people in search of a better life, while artists like Jessie Fauset and James Van Der Zee depicted the black upper classes. Some incorporated African themes in an effort to bring attention to the cultural and historical connections with an ancestral home, while others intentionally modeled their work after more Western forms and eagerly acknowledged America as home. This Salon will explore varying, sometimes oppositional, depictions of African Americans in the literary and visual arts of the Harlem Renaissance with attention to the question, how should African Americans be portrayed in art? We will read the results of a 1926 survey posing this question and answer the question for ourselves while examining the fiction, poetry, photography and painting of this fascinating, highly creative period of American expression.

Sidra Smith Wahaltere, PhD, is a Lecturer in the Department of English where she offers courses on American realism and naturalism, multi-ethnic U.S. literature, and the African American literary tradition. Her current research project examines representations of the black middle class in African American fiction published between the 1890s and the Harlem Renaissance.