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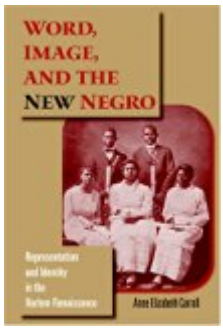

Anne Elizabeth Carroll. *Word, Image, and the New Negro: Representation and Identity in the Harlem Renaissance.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005. xiv + 275 pp. $45.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-253-34583-7.

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In studies of the Harlem Renaissance and the aesthetics/politics of racial representation we do not often hear about actual images. The visual, although sometimes mentioned in passing by literary and social scholars, remains too often in the background of academic thought. Important African-American artists may receive attention in their own right, but too rarely do they make it into "comprehensive" studies of the era. Anne Elizabeth Carroll aims to redress such oversights in her book *Word, Image, and the New Negro: Representation and Identity in the Harlem Renaissance*. As such her work is a very welcome contribution to the contemporary rethinking of the period.

By calling our attention to the images that consistently and significantly appeared alongside some of the well-remembered texts of the Harlem Renaissance, Carroll foregrounds the very modernity that the New Negro Movement sought self-consciously to embrace. Her call for critics "to assess the connections participants forged *between* the arts" (my emphasis, p. 14) speaks further to the very multi-disciplinarity of New Negro cultural production as well as the current need for scholars of African-American culture to venture beyond cozy notions of traditional expertise. Carroll's work explicitly attempts to address the conundrum that Alain Locke set forth in announcing the presence of a "new" Negro on the American scene when he wrote: "The Sociologist, the Philanthropist, the Race-leader are not unaware of the New Negro, but they are at a loss to account for him. He simply cannot be swathed in their formulae."[1] We still may be at a loss to explain the New Negro because we are often called upon to analyze some aspect of a particular text rather than the interplay of its component parts. Thus we look at the complex representations of African-American psychology that Harlem Renaissance texts may give us rather than at the even more complicated interplay between images, text, and audience that might liberate us from such banal questions as whether the Harlem Renaissance was a "failure" or not.

Carroll's analysis helps us gain insight into the New Negro movement as a multi-mediated age; she argues that to reserve such complexity

for our own era is to distort the past. The author carefully works her way through a variety of texts in ways that will prove useful for readers from a variety of disciplinary standpoints. The first two chapters, for instance, take up two leading publications of the time, ***The Crisis*** and ***Opportunity*** , as magazines. Although it may seem obvious to think of these as periodical publications, Carroll examines the issues of editorship, readership, ideological and aesthetic mission and generic convention that make the periodical unique. She takes up the implicit and explicit ways in which journals engage in a multitude of concerns simultaneously, and, as a result, positions herself as a knowing respondent to W.E.B. DuBois's rhetorical question: "How is it that an organization of this kind [the NAACP] can turn aside to talk about Art? After all, what do we who are slaves and black have to do with Art?"[2] African-American periodicals of the era had to recognize the power of both the text and the image to represent blackness in new and fruitful ways; to increase their impact they placed them--using one of Carroll's key terms--in "abrupt juxtapositions" with each other (p. 28).

Throughout her book, Carroll makes a number of important distinctions internal to the Harlem Renaissance. Along with clearly delineating the differences between ***The Crisis*** and ***Opportunity***, Carroll takes two chapters to spell out how the central text of the movement, Locke's ***The New Negro***, evolved from an issue of the journal, ***Survey Graphic*** into the separate anthology with which most students and scholars are today familiar. Carroll largely uses each chapter as a kind of case study for an individual publication, which has the salutary effect of allowing her readers to understand how these texts were put together, in both word and image, in very detailed ways. Carroll's eye for the particular will have both a helpful and inspiring effect on readers who want to continue building on the work she has done here. She consistently places into her analysis the relationship between art and social change that was at the center of the era and that remains at the forefront of African-American Studies today. Thus the book will find a receptive audience in both the social sciences and the humanities.

For all the wonderful research that has gone into this book, however, readers may find themselves less than satisfied when it comes to the depth and strength of Carroll's own arguments about the consequences of the relationship between the images and texts she discusses. When she writes, for instance, that "the arts encourage recognition for African Americans as fully rounded human beings in a way that expository and news texts do not" (p. 102), I find myself wanting a more elaborate discussion of precisely how and why such images achieve this. I also want to learn in what ways the image "rounds" our sense of the Black self. What might have been helpful here are methods of analysis taken from art history and media studies, such as the more iconographic analysis Shawn Michelle Smith provided in her article on W.E.B. Du Bois's photographs for the 1900 Paris Exposition.[3] There are moments when, despite the emphasis on the visual throughout the book, the written text remains the arbiter of African-American representation. Further, although artistic reception is often difficult to ascertain, Carroll's contribution would have been stronger had she given some attention to the kinds of reactions various audiences had to specific images. How were they understood in a variety of historical and social contexts? Carroll could then have led us to some conclusions with even greater theoretical sophistication than we find here. Carroll is absolutely correct in eschewing what she calls the "too-simplistic assessment of ***the*** Harlem Renaissance" (p. 225), yet there is a greater intervention she could make into both historical and contemporary debates: What might identity mean and how--or whether--is it possible to create, destroy and/or represent it? While there may be no single Harlem renaissance out there to

be found, our varied images of it need some astute refereeing.

Notes

[1]. Alain Locke, "The New Negro," in ***Within the Circle***, ed. Angelyn Mitchell (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), p. 21.

[2]. W.E.B. DuBois, "Criteria of Negro Art," ***The Crisis*** 32 (October 1926): p. 290.

[3]. Shawn Michelle Smith, "'Looking at One's Self through the Eyes of Other': W.E.B. Du Bois's Photographs for the 1900 Paris Exposition," ***African American Review*** 34.4 (Winter 2000): pp. 581-599.