Abstract: The American Dream Redefined –How the Harlem Renaissance Changed and Questioned the Idea of the American Dream

Although the Harlem Renaissance raises many questions regarding boundaries and labels for both the place and the time that African American artists were “reborn,” it effectively could question the idea of the American Dream. Described on Wikipedia as, “the faith held by many in the United States of America that through hard work, courage, and determination, one can achieve a better life for oneself, usually through financial prosperity,” the idea of what defines the American Dream has become a “question under constant discussion, and some believe that it has led to an emphasis on material wealth as a measure of success and/or happiness” (Wikipedia). The writers of the Harlem Renaissance challenge this notion by problematizing exactly what hard work, courage, and determination can actually obtain. While the Harlem Renaissance produced writers of strong work ethic as well as those willing to challenge the strictures of society, their “renaissance” was the reshaping of what it means to be a black American.

It is important for students to participate in an active dialogue in the classroom because the idea of the American Dream is still prevalent in their own lives and its attainability or applicability is still questioned today.