

The Roaring Twenties**Biography***Alain LeRoy Locke*

1885–1954



WHY HE MADE HISTORY Alain LeRoy Locke was an educator, philosopher, and writer. He was also a major figure of the Harlem Renaissance.



As you read the biography below, think about how Alain LeRoy Locke's education helped him accomplish so much.

Alain LeRoy Locke was born in Philadelphia in 1885. He attended primary and secondary school in Philadelphia where both of his parents were teachers. In 1904 he entered Harvard University where he majored in philosophy. He was elected to **Phi Beta Kappa** and in 1907, became the first African American **Rhodes Scholar**.

After completing three years at Oxford University in England, Locke furthered his studies at the University of Berlin. Upon returning to the United States, Locke began his 40-year career as an educator at Howard University. In 1917 he received his Ph.D. from Harvard.

From his college days, Locke had been interested in social and cultural issues. These interests inspired his many contributions to **anthologies** and literary publications. He became a well-known figure of the Harlem Renaissance.

In 1925 Locke organized and edited an issue of the magazine *Survey*. Titled "Harlem, Mecca of the New Negro," the issue focused on African American culture. Locke believed these writings showed a renewed interest in the artistic and cultural life that was very important to the African American community.



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VOCABULARY

Phi Beta Kappa a national academic honor society

Rhodes Scholar a person who receives a scholarship to study at Oxford University in England

anthology a collection of literary works

Locke then edited the book *The New Negro*, a collection of African American literature. In the forward to the book, he stated that African American society was “not only establishing new contacts and founding new centers, it is finding a new soul.” The “New Negro” movement became a second name for the Harlem Renaissance.

Alain LeRoy Locke’s studies in literature, philosophy, and issues of race and culture helped establish him as a chief figure in the Harlem Renaissance. Locke died on June 9, 1954, a month before the *Brown vs. the Board of Education* Supreme Court decision. At the time of his death, Locke was one of the best known African American scholars in the United States.

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

1. Recall What subjects interested Alain LeRoy Locke?

2. Sequence List the events of Alain LeRoy Locke’s life in chronological order.

ACTIVITY

3. Use an encyclopedia or online resource to conduct research on another figure of the Harlem Renaissance. On a separate sheet of paper, write a dialogue between Alain LeRoy Locke and the figure that you selected.