Renaissance in Florence and Harlem

Realizing Our Potential in the Age of Consciousness Soul

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During the 2021-22 school year, I was asked to teach two 7th grade Renaissance blocks. It was suggested that I read Charles Kovacs' *The Age of Discovery* to prepare for the classes. For several weeks I was designing two very traditional Renaissance blocks that explore the European Renaissance with a heavy focus on the artists and ideas coming from Florence, Italy. Then, in a moment of synchronicity, I was handed a copy of the Spring/Summer 2021 *Research Bulletin*, featuring an article by middle school teacher Ryan Cameron, from the Rudolf Steiner School in New York City. In the article, Cameron discusses her idea of including the Harlem Renaissance in her 7th grade Renaissance block. With this inspiration, I headed down the rabbit hole.

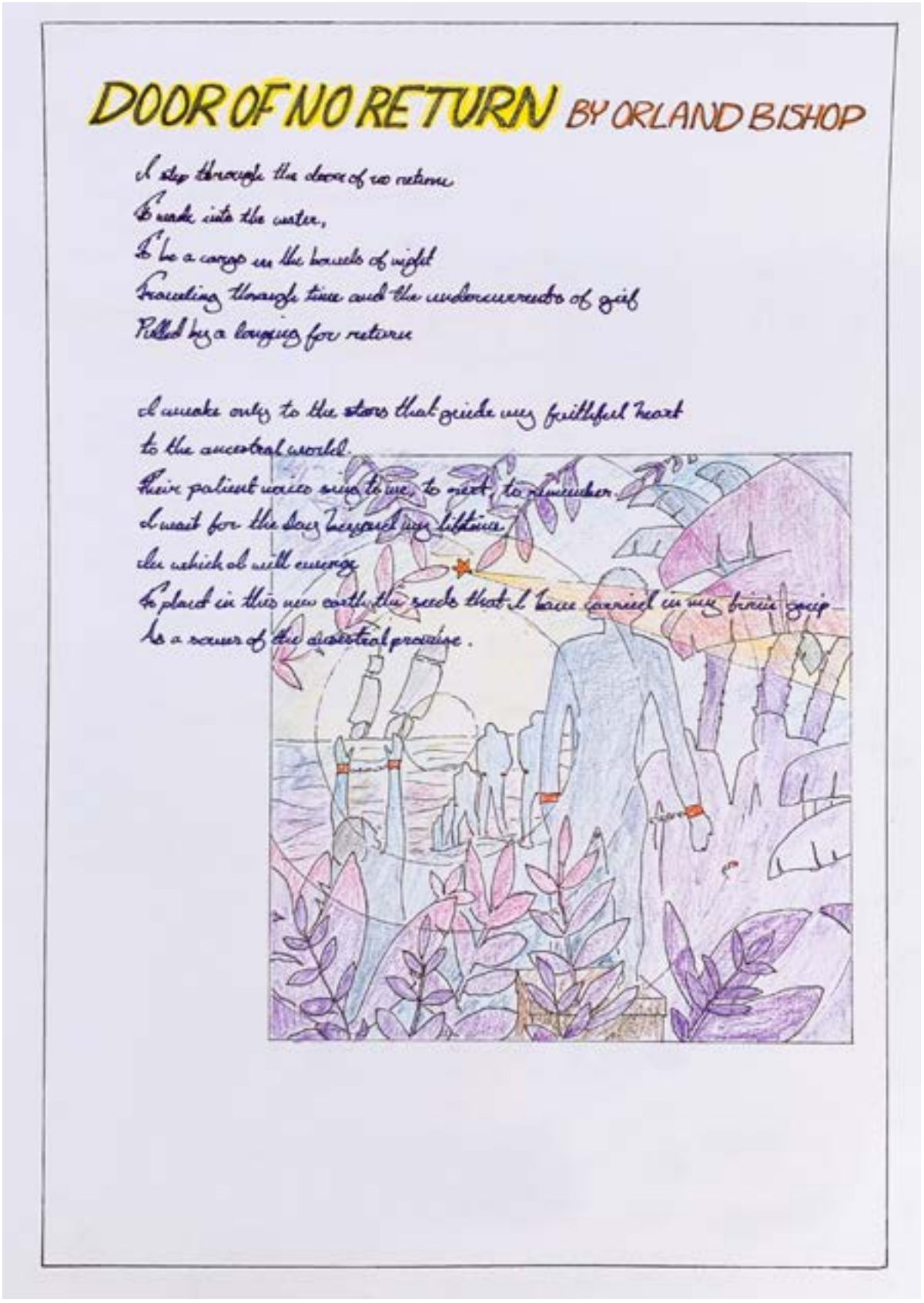
In full disclosure, at the time I knew very little about the Harlem Renaissance, but I felt, as many others do these days, that the curriculum I was being asked to teach could include voices outside of Europe, as well as the voices of women, people of color, etc. In the typical Waldorf curricular scope and sequence, students explore the Medieval and Renaissance periods of Europe twice: once in the 6th and 7th grades, and then again in the 11th grade. Truly, I didn't know whether introducing the Harlem piece made sense, but my teaching instinct said it was worth exploring if for no other reason than deepening the material by including more diverse perspectives. What I discovered as I conducted my research was that there were remarkable parallels between these two very distinct yet related periods of rebirth. Though I understood that teaching the European Renaissance was important because it ushered in a major shift in consciousness, what I came to understand was that far from being an immediate change, the artists and thinkers of Florence introduced a spark that was taken up and refined by movements like the one in early 20th century Harlem. This article will explore what I've learned and make a case for the importance of trying out similar projects within the Waldorf curriculum.

The Significance of Rebirth

It makes sense to start with the word "Renaissance" itself – French for *rebirth*. The archetype of rebirth might be one of the most important concepts we introduce students to in the course of their education. In similarity to the transition of historical epochs, we are all subjected to this process of death and rebirth throughout our lives. In the words of Goethe: "Until you have experienced this—die and become—you are but a ghost-like visitor on the earth." By using history to teach this important concept to students, we are in effect preparing them for this inner spiritual transformation, which they begin experiencing intimations of in middle and high school. Like all archetypes, rebirth follows a pattern, and with some digging, I was able to identify points of connection shared by both the Harlem and the Italian (and later European) Renaissance.

As a way to organize the blocks, I focused on the archetypal patterns associated with rebirth as opposed to limiting myself to a specific time in history. Setting it up this way allowed me to move back and forth fairly seamlessly between Florence and Harlem, as the two epicenters of my focus. Each city was given equal time in the main lesson, and I typically went back and forth between the two. Though this might make it sound like a comparative history class, the need to compare never became a focus of the class. Instead, the pairing of Florence and Harlem created an atmosphere of anticipation, as, with each person or idea we explored in one period, students eagerly awaited learning of its counterpart in the other period. Teaching the blocks this way, as opposed to tacking on a few days of Harlem Renaissance at the end, emphasized the significance of the Harlem movement in a way that I would come to feel it deserved. Some of my colleagues did opine that this sets up a false equivalency, a point I will address later. In the beginning stages of research, my thought was simply, "What if students could come away from these blocks with the same reverence for artists and thinkers from Harlem as they would for those associated with Italy?" Even on this basic level, it made the curricular experiment seem worth trying. As Steiner noted, "Reverence is something that we plant in the soul as a seed; and the seed will bear fruit."

The first stage of rebirth involves a disruption of the status quo by a series of dark events. In the case of the Italian Renaissance, the Black Death swept through Europe, killing as much as ninety percent of the population of Florence. In addition, Europe began experiencing the Little Ice Age (roughly, 1300-1850) that devastated crops and led to mass starvation and a series of peasant uprisings. The darkness that preceded the Harlem Renaissance was 246 years of enslavement, followed by decades of racial discrimination. From



DOOR OF NO RETURN BY ORLAND BISHOP

I step through the door of no return
I wade into the water,
I be a cargo in the bowels of night
Traveling through time and the undercurrents of grief
Pulled by a longing for return

I awake only to the stars that guide my faithful heart
to the ancestral world.
Their patient voices sing to me, to next, to remember.
I wait for the days beyond my lifetime,
the which I will emerge
to plant in this new earth the seeds that I have carried in my brine grip
to be a sower of the ancestral promise.

Student main lesson book page, featuring the poem "Door of No Return," by Orland Bishop, and the painting "Into Bondage," by Aaron Douglas.

a spiritual perspective, darkness pushes us inward, and as Holocaust survivor Viktor Frankl so eloquently pointed out in *Man's Search for Meaning*, "When we are no longer able to change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves." It is a difficult question to entertain whether suffering is in fact necessary for spiritual growth, nonetheless, the pattern holds.

In their main lesson books, students documented this stage of rebirth by writing a letter to a friend or relative from the perspective of a Florentine who was living through the Black Death. For Harlem, I had students read a chapter from the book *Barracoon* by Zora Neale Hurston, where she interviews one of the last living formerly enslaved people about his experience during the Middle Passage. Students also created a main lesson page using the following poem from Orland Bishop's book *The Seventh Shrine*:

> *I step through the door of no return*
> *to wade into the water,*
> *to be a cargo in the bowels of night*
> *traveling through time and the undercurrents of grief*
> *pulled by a longing for return.*
> *I awake only to the stars that guide my faithful heart*
> *to the ancestral world.*
> *Their patient voices sing to me, to rest, to remember.*
> *I wait for the day beyond my lifetime,*
> *beyond my children's lifetime*
> *in which I will emerge*
> *to plant in this new earth the seeds that I have carried in my firm grip*
> *as a sower of the ancestral promise.*

This poem introduces the idea of rebirth in the image of a future descendant emerging and planting seeds for the future. It is a beautiful picture of resilience and perseverance against all odds.

The second stage of rebirth involves a backwards look, to discover what has been lost. This seems to be a crucial question in the forming of identity in the age of the consciousness soul.

Some Shared Features

In both Harlem and Florence, rebirth was arguably instigated by a specific individual, though certainly a myriad of factors and people participated in advancing rebirth. I identified these two key figures as W.E.B. Du Bois, precipitating the Harlem Renaissance, and Petrarch ushering in the Italian one. Interestingly, both figures are missing from the more traditional or canonical Waldorf pedagogy. Though this isn't the place for an in-depth exploration of their biographies, I will mention that both men were committed to raising the consciousness of the individual. This becomes clear in key anecdotes from their lives.

Petrarch (1304-1374) found himself in a crisis, early in his life, as he tried in vain to discover his life's purpose. He embarked on a physical challenge to, no doubt, get his mind off things. He decided to hike to the top of Mount Ventoux, the highest mountain in southern France. The only thing he took with him was his favorite book, *Confessions*, by Saint Augustine. After much physical exertion he finally summitted the mountain, and as he did, the book fell from his pocket and opened to the following passage:

> "And men go about to wonder at the height of the mountains, and the mighty waves of the sea, and the wide sweep of rivers, and the circuit of the ocean, and the revolution of the stars, but themselves they consider not."

With this, his destiny—and the destiny of Florence—was revealed to him. Petrarch's whole life became a quest to explore his unique inner being, and in doing so, establishing a model for others. His search for identity is captured poignantly in his book *Secretum (The Secret)*, which began circulating after his death. It is often referred to as the first work of modern psychology.

The story of W.E.B. Du Bois' call is similarly miraculous. By all accounts, Du Bois (1868-1963) was brilliant. He carries the distinction of being the first African American to receive a PhD from Harvard. After graduating, he moved to Atlanta and took a job as a professor at Atlanta University. There, he became a leading intellectual, and he made the pursuit of truth his focus. Following the lynching of a man named Sam Hose, in 1899, Du Bois was interviewed by a journalist about lynching in America. The interview took place while the two men walked through the city of Atlanta. As Du Bois was answering one of the reporter's questions, he glanced over at a storefront window and realized in horror that they were selling Sam Hose's burnt knuckles. In that moment Du Bois knew he could no longer be merely an academic but needed to take the additional step of acting on the truth. A few years later, in 1903,

Student main lesson book page: "Call to Adventure," Petrarch and W. E. B. Du Bois.

he published his seminal work, *The Souls of Black Folk*, where he makes a claim similar to Petrarch's revelation:

> "In those sombre forests of his striving [the African American's] own soul rose before him, and he saw himself –darkly as through a veil; and yet he saw in himself some faint revelation of his power, of his mission. He began to have a dim feeling that, to attain his place in the world, he must be himself, and not another."

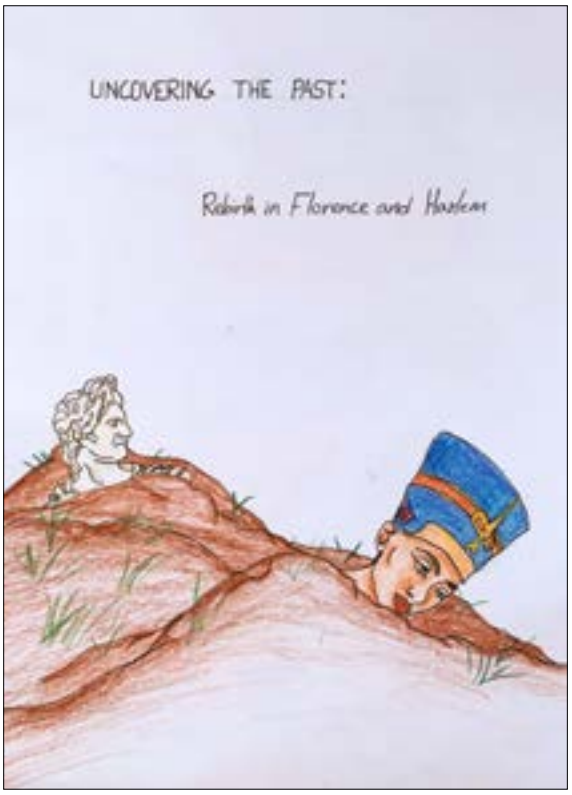
Both Du Bois' and Petrarch's lives revolve around bringing this individualizing impulse to the communities in which they live.

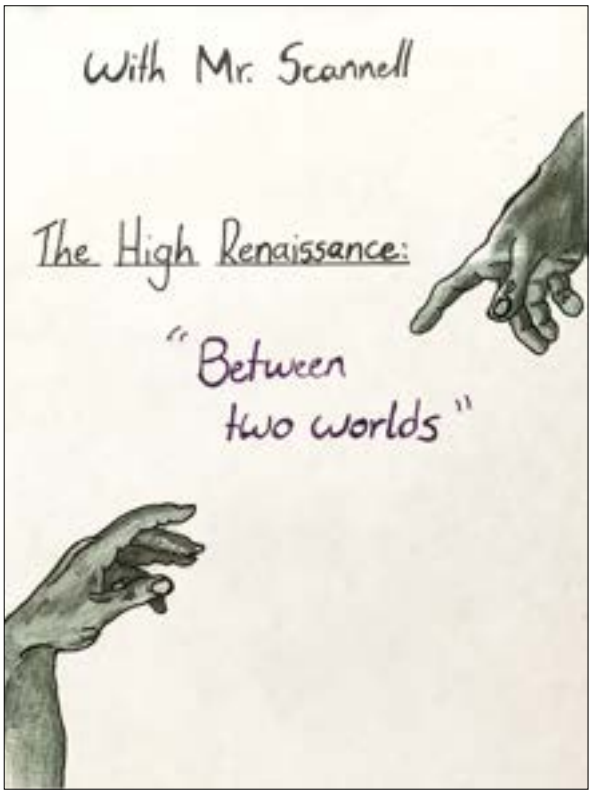
The second stage of rebirth involves a looking to the past to discover what has been lost. This seems to be a crucial question in the age of the consciousness soul. In the case of Florence, this looking backwards focused on the ancient civilizations of Greece and Rome. Works by Plato, Homer, Aristotle, and Cicero were brought to Europe in 1453, after the fall of Constantinople, and were translated for the first time (Petrarch was the first to translate *The Odyssey* from Greek to Latin). Cosimo de' Medici set up a Platonic school in Florence where gifted students received their education, which was steeped in the ideas of ancient Greek philosophers.

In Harlem, this looking backwards mainly focused on the ancient cultures of Egypt/Nubia and Ethiopia. The focus was on people like the Queen of Sheba, the Egyptian queen Nefertiti, the Nubian King Piye, and others. In *The Soul of Black Folk*, Du Bois articulates this important lineage: "The shadow of a mighty Negro past flits through the tale of Ethiopia the shadowy and of Egypt the Sphinx. Throughout history, the powers of single black men flash here and there like falling stars, and die sometimes before the world has rightly gauged their brightness." This link to the past was further emphasized by Alaine Locke who served as an editor of two of the most influential texts published at the height of the Harlem Renaissance: *Survey Graphic: Harlem, Mecca of the New Negro* and later the anthology *The New Negro*. Poet Langston Hughes is featured prominently in both publications, and his poem, *The Negro Speaks of Rivers* (1920), is a perfect summation of the importance of looking backward in order to understand your spiritual legacy:

> *I've known rivers:*
> *I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than the*
> *flow of human blood in human veins.*
> *My soul has grown deep like the rivers.*
> *I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.*
> *I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.*
> *I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.*
> *I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln*
> *went down to New Orleans, and I've seen its muddy*
> *bosom turn all golden in the sunset.*
> *I've known rivers:*
> *Ancient, dusky rivers.*
> *My soul has grown deep like the rivers.*

Both Harlem and Florence harkened back to the rich spiritual and artistic legacies that had in some sense been forgotten, or, in the case of Harlem, that had





Renaissance in two blocks. Student main lesson book cover pages.

been violently separated from the people to whom it belonged. Fascinatingly, in both cases, major archeological discoveries were unearthed around the beginning of both Renaissance periods. The Belvedere Torso and Apollo were discovered in Rome, in the mid 15th century, while busts of the Egyptian queens Nefertiti and Tiye were discovered in Amarna, Egypt, in 1912. I named the first Renaissance block I taught, *Uncovering the Past: Rebirth in Florence and Harlem* (see main lesson book covers for both sections below*)*. On the first day of class, we went outside and "dug up" busts of Nefertiti and of Apollo, statues that later graced the cover of students' main lesson books. Unfortunately, I couldn't quite remember where I buried them, and it ended up taking nearly the whole period to find the buried busts!

There are also key pieces of art from the early stages of both Renaissance periods that epitomize what each movement was trying to accomplish. In Florence, that piece was Donatello's *David,* finished in 1440 and commissioned by Cosimo de' Medici. In Harlem, it was Meta Fuller's *Ethiopia Awakening*, commissioned by W.E.B. Du Bois in 1921. Placed side by side, the two sculptures have much in common, though I don't believe Fuller's sculpture is derivative of Donatello's. Both communicate much through the gesture of the figures. *David* was the first freestanding nude male sculpture since antiquity, and *Ethiopia Awakening* was considered the first Pan-African artwork. In the context of the *looking backwards* stage of rebirth, both emphasize the time towards which each movement turned its gaze. In addition, each statue carries autobiographical elements of its creator that celebrate the artist's unique individual identity. Family legend had it that Fuller's grandmother had been a princess in Ethiopia. Though the artwork's title references Ethiopia, the image of a woman emerging from a sarcophagus is clearly an allusion to Egypt and its spiritual legacy. The emerging figure seems to suggest that that which has lain dormant is now ready to re-emerge, an idea that echoes Orland Bishop's poem quoted above. Many art historians have noted the effeminate posture of Donatello's David, some claiming the statue is a veiled celebration of the artist's homosexuality. David was a key symbol for Florentines who related to his underdog status and his ability to triumph against great odds. Both statues foreshadow the challenges faced by individuals as they attempt to free themselves from all the forces that would keep them from self-actualization.

I ended this first block on a bit of a cliffhanger as the Ottoman army surrounded the walls of Constantinople, in 1453. Back in Harlem, art commissions came to a

David by Donatello (1440s)

Ethiopia Awakening by Meta Vaux Warrick Fuller (1921)

screeching halt as Black Tuesday ushered in the Great Depression, in 1929. In my thinking, these events marked an important point of transition into the next or higher phase of the Renaissance. Many historians mark the end of the Harlem Renaissance with the Great Depression. In my reading of history, the two decades after Black Tuesday are filled with important artistic experimentation that culminate in the Civil Rights Movement. The following passage from the website of the National Museum of African American History & Culture makes explicit this link between what began in Harlem and the Civil Rights Movement:

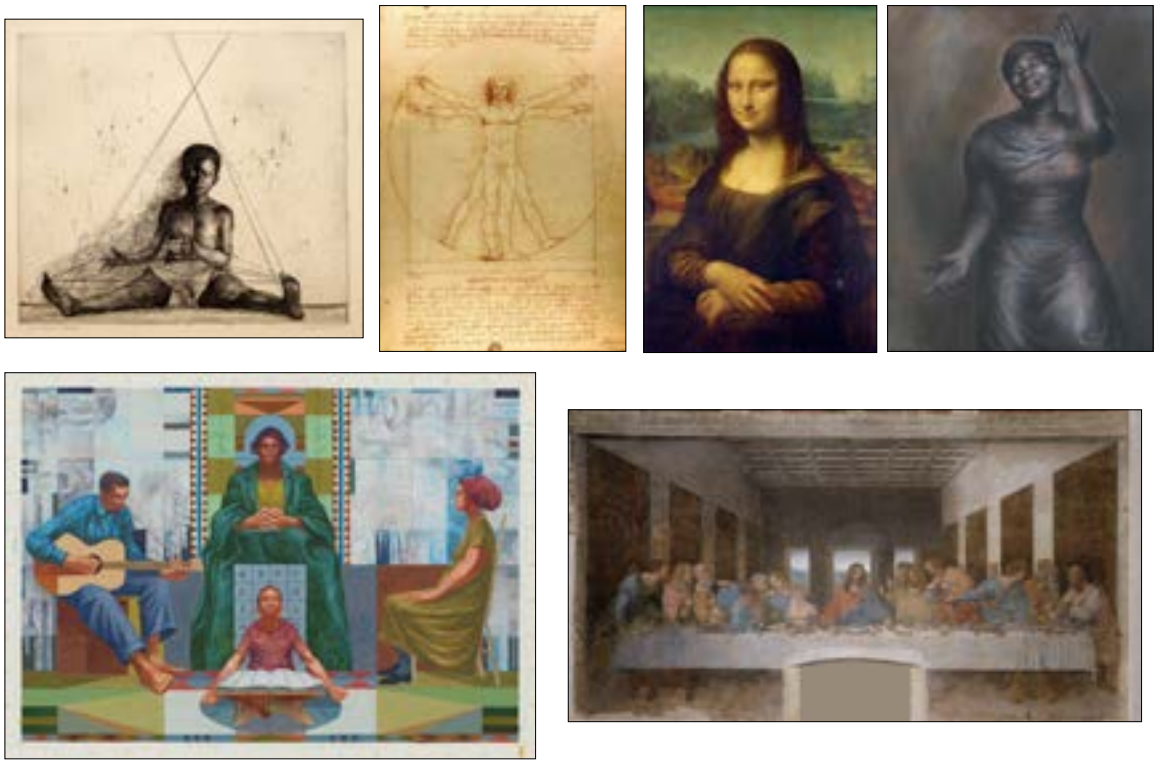
> *[T]he Harlem Renaissance instilled in African Americans across the country a new spirit of self-determination and pride, a new social consciousness, and a new commitment to political activism, all of which would provide a foundation for the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s. In doing so, it validated the beliefs of its founders and leaders like Alain Locke and Langston Hughes that art could be a vehicle to improve the lives of the African Americans*.[1]

1 https://nmaahc.si.edu/explore/stories/new-african-american-identity-harlem-renaissance

Artists and Other Reformers

I titled my second block, *Between Two Worlds: The High Renaissance* (see sample of main lesson book above). This block emphasized the role of artists as harbingers of change. Artists often lead the way as they are more sensitive to the spirit of the times in which they live and can creatively communicate their ideas to others through their art. What I discovered was that there were wonderful parallels in the lives of the artists I highlighted. These artists included Charles White, Richmond Barthé, Elizabeth Catlett, and Jacob Lawrence, from America, and Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, and Raphael, from Italy. I could say a lot here, but will limit my comments to a few links between artists Charles White and Leonardo da Vinci.

I think it speaks to the heart of the issue that most Americans would not recognize many of the important American artists listed above. Until embarking on this journey, I, too, was not familiar with most of them. In doing my research for these blocks, I was surprised to find that few books existed about these American artists, and among the few that did, most were out of print. I did manage to get my hands on a great book about Charles White, entitled *Charles White: A Retrospective*.



Top: Charles White, "Cat's Cradle" (1972); Leonardo da Vinci, "Vitruvian Man" (1490); "Mona Lisa" (1517); Charles White, "Mahalia" (1955). Bottom: Charles White, "Mary McLeod Bethune" mural (1978); Leonardo da Vinci, "The Last Supper" mural (1498).

Like da Vinci, White grew up in a broken home and showed an early aptitude for art. He got a job painting signs during the Great Depression, when he was only 14. White was deeply moved as a teenager by reading Alain Locke's *The New Negro*, which caused him to question his teachers about why African American history was not being taught at his high school. This frustration ultimately led to his not finishing school, another biographical fact he shares with da Vinci. Despite not graduating, White received a scholarship to take art classes at arguably the best art school in the country at the time, The Art Institute of Chicago, which again parallels da Vinci apprenticing at Verrocchio's workshop. Da Vinci once wrote in his journal that, "the good painter has to paint two principal things, man and the intention of his mind." White and da Vinci are both masters of using outward gestures to communicate something of the inner soul lives of their subjects. In fact, it is this quality that makes both artists into champions of the consciousness soul age. Their art is a signpost to our own inner depths. In discussing his art, White noted, "I deal with love, hope, courage, freedom, and dignity—the full gamut of human spirit." All these qualities are at the heart of the spirit of our times.

It is helpful to see some of White and da Vinci's most important work side by side to appreciate the remarkable similarities in their approach.

The final stage of rebirth—in which something new is actually born—requires a holding of tension of opposites. This is in line with the anthroposophical view that consciousness arises between polarities. The most productive times in human history happen when individuals and societies can hold opposing notions, and in doing so, allow something new to emerge. A classic example of this is given by the Golden Age of Greece, when the true seat of power, the Oracle of Delphi, was dedicated to both Apollo and Dionysus—demonstrating a dual respect of order as well as chaos. The Italian Renaissance was a time when people rediscovered the ideas of Greek and Roman philosophers and held them along with their Christian faith. In this way they were between two worlds. Renaissance artists also balanced scientific and artistic ways of knowing in their art. A perfect example of this is *Vitruvian Man*, by Leonardo da Vinci.

Harlem artists turned their gaze to the ancient cultures of Egypt and Ethiopia and found themselves between the worlds of their African past and their American future. They also held the tension of being black in a white dominated world, epitomized in the nonviolent approach of Martin Luther King, Jr. King once noted, "We who engage in nonviolent direct action are not the creators of tension. We merely bring to the surface the hidden tension that is already alive. We bring it

out in the open, where it can be seen and dealt with." A great example of this tension reflected in art is *The Great Migration Panel 49*, by Jacob Lawrence. It bears repeating that it is only through holding the tension of opposites that a new higher consciousness can be born. Historical periods of rebirth demonstrate the impact such a period has on society when individuals join together and collectively hold the tensions that define their age. When this happens, we, in essence, become midwives to the spiritual development of our fellow man.

The final main lesson page I asked students to complete was entitled *A Tale of Two Martins*. In another fascinating similarity between these Renaissances, both movements culminate (if you accept my thesis that the Harlem Renaissance ends in the Civil Rights Movement) in the work of men named Martin Luther (Martin Luther King Jr. was named after the 16th century German Reformation priest). Both men led movements to combat the evils of their time, one taking on the corruption of the all-powerful Church, the other in combating pervasive racism and inequality. Luther's ideas that sparked the reformation were a clarion call to the individual to become master of one's own spiritual development. King took this a step further, insisting that individuals put their spiritual gifts in service of others in the form of nonviolent activism. In an interesting difference, Luther's ideas fractured the Church, a fracturing one could argue that the Church never recovered from. King's work, by contrast, aimed at bringing people back together.

Where the fruit of Florence was the birth of the individual, the Harlem experiment could be understood as offering an important correction to counteract the growing egotism that is a direct result of humanities' shift into the consciousness soul age.

Some Differences

Though I discovered many interesting similarities between Harlem and Florence, there were also some key differences. One notable example was how each movement was funded. In Florence, the Medici bankrolled the artists and intellectuals who stimulated so much new thinking. It is estimated they spent approximately 500 million dollars in today's money supporting artists. A part of this generosity may stem from guilt, as usury—or interest charged on loans—was still considered a sin at the time, and the Medici's banking empire committed this sin on a massive scale. By stark contrast, the Harlem Renaissance had no major funding apart from a small group of mostly white benefactors, perhaps also operating from some sense of guilt. Artists like the sculptor Augusta Savage had to work as a teacher to make ends meet. Though her talent was recognized, she couldn't afford to cast her work in metal and instead painted her plaster to look like bronze. Arguably her most famous piece, entitled *Gamin*, is a wonderful example of this practice of painting plaster. Another important piece of hers, *Lift Every Voice and Sing*, commissioned for the 1939 World's Fair in New York, was later destroyed as the World's Fair did not have the funds available to create a permanent cast, even though Savage's sculpture was considered a highlight of the fair. Contrast these stories with the knowledge we have of artists such as Donatello and Michelangelo, who were never want for the best materials to work with. At risk of stating the obvious, another benefit of teaching the Harlem Renaissance is that women had central roles in that movement, unlike in its male dominated Florentine counterpart.

A stark difference emerging from setting the two movements side by side is that while the Florentine artists were somewhat free to celebrate—albeit through Christian iconography—their emerging sense of individuality, Harlem artists had the extra step of first having to restore their people's dignity. As Alain Locke, one of the architects of the Harlem Renaissance, noted, "art must discover and reveal the beauty which prejudice and caricature have overlaid." This was not something people like da Vinci and Michelangelo had to overcome, though one could make a case that da Vinci was aiming to challenge prejudice against women with a painting like the *Mona Lisa*. This restoration of dignity is particularly clear in the work of an artist like Winold Reiss, whose images of African Americans are a major part of the highly influential *Survey Graphic* magazine mentioned earlier. I aimed to demonstrate the ways dignity was restored through artistic representation in a lesson, where I showed racist caricatures of African Americans juxtaposed with important art that presented a different image of its African American subjects. This lesson was inspired by a book by David Pilgrim called *Understanding Jim Crow*: *Using Racist Memorabilia to Teach Tolerance and Promote Social Justice.*

Conclusions

Both the Harlem and Florentine movements had the same goal—to raise the consciousness of the individual

"Aunt Jemima" advertisement, The Saturday Evening Post (1919).

"Elise Johnson McDougald" by Winold Reiss (1925).

through art and ideas. In my experience teaching this material it was clear that some students found it easier to relate to the more pragmatic and gritty Harlem artists while others were drawn more to the idealism of the Florentine artists. What was interesting was how they seemed to lift each other up. In *The Soul of Black Folk*, Du Bois expresses the hope that "some day on American soil two world races may give each to each those characteristics both so sadly lack." I assume that, in the past, the idealism of the Italian Renaissance met most students at a time when their dreamy idealism was very much alive in them. Unfortunately, that is not how I would characterize the current consciousness of the seven-grader. They are more awake, more conscious, and more pessimistic than perhaps they have been in the past. The Harlem piece seemed to really speak to those more awakened students.

According to Steiner, the world entered the consciousness soul age in 1413. This very specific date is an approximation that references a radical shift in the spiritual path of humanity. It seems clear from a historical perspective that the epicenter of this shifting consciousness was located in Europe. Though this impulse starts in Europe, the consciousness soul age is a long process that will refine itself over many centuries. As Waldorf educators, it serves us well to note the various ways people and societies in our global community meet the consciousness soul. Our curriculum has traditionally done a great job following the thread of this emerging consciousness as it flows out of Italy and is later refined by movements like the English Romantics and American Transcendentalists. What is sadly missing from our curricular arch is the important legacy of the African spiritual journey, one that offers many keys to unlocking the potential of our age. Every individual or collective anecdote in how we meet the challenges of the consciousness soul age provide clues on how we as educators can recapitulate this process in our classrooms.

One piece of critical feedback I received that has stuck with me is the idea that offering these two Renaissance periods side by side essentially sets up a false equivalency. The argument is that while the Italian and broader European Renaissance usher in the consciousness soul age—and with it the Age of Exploration, the Scientific Revolution, the Enlightenment, etc.—the Harlem movement simply raised the awareness of a relatively small group of people over a much shorter time span. At first this felt like a fair criticism, as the Harlem Renaissance was shorter and more localized. However, upon deeper reflection, it occurred to me that the Harlem Renaissance did not really end in 1929, as most historians suggest; its seeds reached their fullest flowering in the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s

and only truly ended with the assassination of King in 1968. Where the fruit of Florence was the birth of the individual, the Harlem experiment could be understood as offering an important correction to counteract the growing egotism that is a direct result of humanities' shift into the consciousness soul age. In *An Outline of Esoteric Science*, Steiner says, "Everything that the 'I' can develop within itself must turn into love… The greater the power of the love that comes into being, the more we will be able to accomplish creatively on behalf of the future." To put our spiritual development in the service of others as the civil rights movement demanded is a beautiful example of how our highly individualized consciousness can in fact—in the words of Steiner—"turn into love." Nonviolent civil rights activists combated hate and ignorance with patience, understanding, and love, and by doing so they planted important seeds for our future spiritual development. They teach us a critical lesson about realizing our potential in the consciousness soul age, a lesson with no equivalent in the Italian Renaissance.

In his book *The Archetype of Initiation,* psychologist Robert Moore articulates the spiritual significance of MLK's nonviolent approach: "Through the power of his personality and ritual genius, King was able to turn the streets of racist cities into sacred geography, containing powerful emotions, allowing the social shadow to become manifest, and facilitating deep structural changes in the psyches of both his supporters and his opponents." The history of nonviolent activism goes all the way back to Jesus and was taken up by heretics like the Manicheans and the Cathars, among others. The idea of nonviolence went mostly underground after the last Cathars were eradicated in the 13th century. Its reintroduction in the consciousness soul age by people like Tolstoy, Gandhi, and Martin Luther King, Jr., is critical, if the consciousness soul age is to reach its fullest potential. What non-violent activism demands is self-knowledge and deep inner strength put in service to others. Without this service component, the one-sided egotism of the conscious soul age becomes the epidemic of selfishness and isolation so prevalent in our world today. Nonviolent activism is the great spiritual gift the Harlem Renaissance offered to the world.

As Waldorf educators, it seems imperative that we look for places in our curriculum where marginalized voices can be showcased. Not only do I feel the impulse to teach the Harlem Renaissance is spiritually sound, I also believe it helps balance what at times can be a myopically Eurocentric curriculum. My decision wasn't a reactionary impulse to throw out the old in favor of the new. In my estimation, this is not how we meet the moment. I acknowledge that the educators who came before me and created this curriculum were thoughtful, visionary and well-intentioned. My choice to experiment with the curriculum is also not meant to imply that all diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives being implemented in Waldorf schools are healthy, spiritually sound, and developmentally appropriate. In my three years in the movement, I can attest that holding the tension of opposites between tradition and progress is a delicate balance that many schools are still trying to get right. If we are to truly have courage for the truth, we need to be honest with ourselves when we find ourselves losing this critical tension and straying too far into either the traditionalist or the progressive camps.

In his book *The Occult Significance of Forgiveness,* the anthroposophic author Sergei Prokofieff writes, "The process of 'moral breathing' begins through the powers of understanding and tolerance towards the thoughts and views of other people being gradually brought to a focus in the capacity to 'inhale' the materialistic thoughts of modern civilization and 'exhale' spiritual thoughts. This is one of the most important tasks of anthroposophists in our time." Prokofieff goes on to say that Rudolf Steiner in his own life presented an archetypal example of this process, having 'inhaled' Haeckel's theory of evolution and then 'exhaled' it in the form of Anthroposophy. It feels critical to the future success of Waldorf education that in the true spirit of Renaissance, we hold the tension of our values and traditions alongside more progressive ideas and impulses and become practitioners of this moral breathing.

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History teaches us that the moment we lose our points of tension, our society returns to a spiritual wasteland. This happened in Europe when Descartes famously proclaimed, "I think, therefore I am" and abandoned faith for reason. When Martin Luther King was assassinated, the world lost an initiate who attempted to bridge the Black and White worlds through nonviolence. In my mind, the Renaissance curriculum I have highlighted here is my attempt to marry our traditions with what this moment is calling for in a way that offers students a more diverse curriculum without sacrificing

the spiritual core of why the curriculum was taught in the first place. It is an outbreath, full of life, vitality, and hope for the future.

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