

Excerpt of “Harlem” by Alain Locke (March 1925)

... Harlem is neither slum, ghetto, resort or colony, though it is in part all of them. It is-- or promises at least to be--a race capital.... Negro life is not only founding new centers, but finding a new soul. The tide of Negro migration, northward and city-ward, is not to be fully explained as a blind flood started by the demands of war industry coupled with the shutting off of foreign migration, or by the pressure of poor crops coupled with increased social terrorism in certain sections of the South and Southwest. Neither labor demand, the boll-weevil nor the Ku Klux Klan is a basic factor, however contributory any or all of them may have been. The wash and rush of this human tide on the beach line of the northern city centers is to be explained primarily in terms of a new vision of opportunity, of social and economic freedom of a spirit to seize, even in the face of an extortionate and heavy toll, a chance for the improvement of conditions. With each successive wave of it, the movement of the Negro migrant becomes more and more like that of the European waves at their crests, a mass movement toward the larger and the more democratic chance--in the Negro's case a deliberate flight not only from countryside to city, but from medieaval America to modern.

SOURCE: Alain Locke, “Harlem,” Survey Graphic, Vol. 6, No. 6 (March 1925): 628-630.