

*The Muse in Bronzeville: African American Creative Expression in Chicago, 1932-1950*

By Robert Bone and Richard Courage

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In his 1986 essay, "Richard Wright and the Chicago Renaissance," Robert Bone redrew the geographical and conceptual boundaries around the black cultural renaissance in the interwar period. Only a few years after most scholars had fully included Harlem Renaissance works within the literary and cultural canon, Bone made it clear that there was more work to do: renaissance did not stop at New York City's Hudson River; renaissance did not die at the dawn of the Great Depression; and elite notions of art and artistry did not account for the more dynamic relationships between culture workers, community institutions, social movements, and popular cultures that constituted the actual black creative flowering that was the renaissance. With this one essay, whole worlds of cultural production and consumption were now able to be recovered from the archives as part of a black expressive outpouring that went far beyond Harlem, the literary salon, or even the written word and canvas. So since the publication of this essay, scholars across the world eagerly awaited the long-anticipated book version of Bone's work.

In many ways, Bone became a victim of his own wide-ranging influence. He labored away on the book version of "Chicago Renaissance" at the slower pace of a community

college professor, while a whole sub-field sprouted up around him largely inspired by his 1986 essay. An army of scholars pushed a fully reconstructed vision of renaissance, in which some filled out the Chicago story, others redrew the map as far abroad as Paris and Moscow, and still others incorporated a range of political campaigns and popular cultures challenging the very terms of a "comprehensive" black renaissance study. Finally, facing severe health challenges, Bone entrusted the final manuscript to his former student Richard Courage before Bone died in 2007. But even in the face of these significant obstacles, the final project does not disappoint.

*The Muse in Bronzeville* forcefully demonstrates that "Chicago's South Side experienced a period of creative ferment during the 1930s and 1940s comparable in achievement and scope to the Harlem Renaissance" (p. xv). Bone and Courage substantiate this claim by widening the scope from the former's expertise in literature to incorporate a range of cultural mediums from the social sciences and visual culture to music, dance, and institutional politics.

The work largely circles around what the authors call a "generational analysis," whereby a collective biography of artists that come of age at about the same time leads the reader

through Chicago's black cultural outpouring. Such an approach is compelling when the complex contours of Chicago's cultural production are refracted and routed through the dynamic life worlds of individual figures from Louis Armstrong and Mahalia Jackson to Katherine Dunham and Archibald Motley. Still, this explicitly generational approach also hangs on to a traditional intellectual history focus on great men, women, and their schools of thought. But Bone and Courage admirably push forward with a concerted effort to situate individual figures and institutions within what they term a "material base."

Of special note is the authors' attention to the intellectual and cultural tendons that link together Booker T. Washington, "Chicago School" sociologist, scholar, and organizer Charles Johnson, and the Urban League in providing a significant institutional base for Chicago's black cultural renaissance. But such intellectual profiles also indicate some of the work's limits. By suggesting that Chicago School sociologist Robert Park brought a fully formed interracial scholarly vision to Chicago from Tuskegee, the authors miss the opportunity to explore how Park was, in fact, profoundly shaped by black cultural production on the South Side

before the 1930s. The authors admirably reach beyond Bone's strengths as a literary scholar, but ultimately the chapters on music and visual and performance culture are encyclopedic in nature and do not match up to the close readings of poetry and prose in the text.

Thanks largely to Robert Bone, any claim of offering the most "fully contextualized" or "first comprehensive account" (pp. 1, xii) is a hard standard to meet, even for his own work. Still, this is an essential study, not only for continuing to push the black renaissance beyond Harlem, but most importantly, for redrawing the map of the cultural "terrain between the Harlem Renaissance and the Black Arts Movement" (p. 1).

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