



# Measuring the Harlem Renaissance: The U.S. Census, African American Identity, and Literary Form

*Michael Soto*

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## **Measuring the Harlem Renaissance: The U.S. Census, African American Identity, and Literary Form**

Michael Soto

In this provocative study, Michael Soto examines African American cultural forms through the lens of census history to tell the story of how U.S. officialdom—in particular the Census Bureau—placed persons of African descent within a shifting taxonomy of racial difference, and how African American writers and intellectuals described a far more complex situation of interracial social contact and intra-racial diversity. What we now call African American identity and the literature that gives it voice emerged out of social, cultural, and intellectual forces that fused in Harlem roughly one century ago.

*Measuring the Harlem Renaissance* sifts through a wide range of authors and ideas—from W. E. B. Du Bois, Rudolph Fisher, and Nella Larsen to Zora Neale Hurston, Langston Hughes, and Wallace Thurman, and from census history to the Great Migration—to provide a fresh take on late nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature and social thought. Soto reveals how Harlem came to be known as the "cultural capital of black America," and how these ideas left us with unforgettable fiction and poetry.

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