

## Abstract

The goal of this work is to prove and map out a split within the newly formed African American drama during the period of the Harlem Renaissance. A split between politicized plays that were used as a tool to raise the spirit and awareness of African Americans, and the “folk plays” that put emphasis on artistic expression without overtly focusing on protest or political agenda. This duality, personified by W.E.B. Du Bois and Alain Locke, defined black drama in the period between 1916 and 1937, and the thesis explains it both from the theoretical standpoint as well as a practical one – meaning from the standpoint of its two philosophical leads as well within the plays themselves. First, the thesis shows the point of view of W.E.B. Du Bois, who stood behind the idea of “propagandistic” plays, and then the view of his opponent Alain Locke, who wanted to let go of outright political agenda and instead sought to legitimize the position of African Americans through artistic merit. Both of these lines of thought garnered following in playwrights, which in turn caused the duality. The thesis goes on to map each ideology separately, along with plays that lean towards it. More specifically it examines *Rachel, For Unborn Children, Don't You Want To Be Free?* from the Protest School and *The Broken Banjo, Plumes* and *Balo* from the ranks of the Art-Theatre School. The thesis analyzes the topics of the plays, their characters, settings and symbolism and shows how they correspond with each given ideology, thus proving the existence of the disunity of early African American drama.