Remains of the Name: The Origins of the Harlem Renaissance in the Discovery of Egyptology

Almost every aspect of the Harlem (Negro) Renaissance remains hotly contested, and none more so than the question of its origin. The lecture, based on a new angle of research into the genealogy of the movement and its ideas, locates the genesis of the movement in the astonishing ‘Egyptian Revival’ of the 1920s. With slide illustrations of the actual archaeological evidence, the lecture examines and explains the convergence of the Ethiopianist strand of Garveyism with the Egyptological strain embodied in the self-described ‘midwife’ of the Harlem Renaissance, Alain Leroy Locke, whose role it was not only to synthesize but also to aestheticize the movement. The lecture will also highlight the importance of Aaron Douglas—the creator of the Egyptian-influenced iconography of the Harlem Renaissance, even as Locke himself moved away from the artistic influence of the ‘Egyptian Revival’ in favor of primitivism.