Nella Larsen

Selected Resources

Nella Larsen (1891-1964) was the mixed-race child of immigrant parents. Reared in a visibly "white" family, she was a lonely child whose racial identity separated her from both parents and sibling. She became part of the African-American world when she entered the Fisk University Normal High School. She left after a year without receiving either a diploma or a teaching degree. She moved to New York where, in 1915, she completed nurse's training at the Lincoln Hospital School of Nursing. Disillusioned with the opportunities for African-American females in nursing, she capitalized on her love of books by working for the New York Public Library, a job that enabled her to enter the New York Public Library School in 1922 and introduced her to the emerging coterie of writers in Harlem.

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Born to an indifferent white mother and an absent black father, and scorned for her dark skin, Helga Crane has long had to fend for herself. As a young woman, Helga teaches at an all-black school in the South, but even here she feels different. Moving to Harlem and eventually to Denmark, she attempts to carve out a comfortable life and place for herself, but ends up back where she started, choosing emotional freedom that quickly translates into a narrow existence.

A light-skinned beauty that spends years passing for white finds herself dangerously drawn to an old friend's Harlem neighborhood. A restless young mulatto tries desperately to find a comfortable place in a world in which she sees herself as a perpetual outsider. A mother's confrontation with tragedy tests her loyalty to her race.

This is a biography of the author of two "novels about women of mixed racial heritage and the politics of gender and color, Quicksand and Passing .

Jessie Fauset and Nella Larsen played prominent roles in the black literary heyday known as the Harlem Renaissance. Revived by feminists in the late 1970s and early 1980s, their novels raise important questions about gender and race. In this book Jacquelyn McLendon the author looks at Jessie Fauset's Plum Bun and Comedy: American Style and Nella Larsen's Quicksand and Passing and finds them revisionary and subversive. She goes beyond previous feminist criticism to focus on the authors' works rather than their lives and moves toward developing new theoretical ways of looking at black women's writing.

This is a critical biography of two authors of the Harlem Renaissance. The work is arranged in four 'sections, each split between Larsen and Toomer's subjects. It begins 'In the Middle' with each author's place in and response to the publishing practices of the Harlem Renaissance.