

## Claude McKay 1890-1948

Claude McKay grew up in Jamaica, where he was educated by an older brother who had an extensive library. He journeyed to America in 1912, when, having recently published two volumes of poetry, he was awarded a study grant by the Jamaican Institute of Arts and Sciences ("Claude McKay" 710). He studied briefly at Tuskegee Institute and Kansas State College, but continued his journey to New York City where he "became affiliated with a group of radical writers" ("Claude McKay" 710). His poem "If We Must Die," is a "stirring exhortation to black Americans to 'fight back' against those who would victimize them" and established him as a prominent poet ("Claude McKay" 710).

As one of the most influential Harlem Renaissance writers, McKay wrote about issues concerning African American migrants, such as their experiences with racism, segregation, and urbanization. Arthur D. Drayton wrote in his essay, "Claude McKay's Human Pity," "McKay does not seek to hide his bitterness. But having preserved his vision as poet and his status as a human being, he can transcend bitterness." Through his poetry and novels, McKay became a powerful voice for African American migrants, and a true "poet of the people" ("Claude McKay" 710).

"Claude McKay." In Donald T. Hollenbeck and Julie West Johnson eds., *Literature*. Evanston, IL: McDougal, 1984.

Drayton, Arthur D. "Claude McKay's Human Pity." In Ulli Beier, ed., *Introduction to African Literature*. Chicago, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1967.