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The Centrality of the City: Transience of Identity and Transformative City Life in
Quicksand and *Plum Bun: A Novel Without a Moral*

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In the early to mid-1900s, the Harlem Renaissance sought both creative and intellectual revival for the African-American community. This movement, however, is primarily known for its male-authored texts and its advancement of the New Negro—a decidedly male figure whose search for legitimization and socio-cultural mobility was arguably at the forefront of the movement's creative drive. Despite its predominant focus on the lives of black men in the city, the Harlem Renaissance was not an exclusive male club. From Zora Neale Hurston to Nella Larsen to the equally underacknowledged Jessie Redmon Fauset, African-American women writers strived to depict the experiences of the black woman at large, thus offering a more expansive view of the 1900s' cultural climate and the larger African-American condition.

In her novel *Quicksand*, for instance, Nella Larsen follows the character of Helga Crane as her sense of identity consistently metamorphoses across geographical space—a representation of the transience or indeterminacy of identity commonplace in the black community. Similarly, in *Plum Bun: A Novel Without a Moral*, Jessie Redmon Fauset explores the journey of Angela Murray, her life “in passing” directly tied to the city, able to lose herself among the growing throngs of people both black and white alike. These two works together play an integral role in representing the black woman in the city, particularly the black woman artist, however temporary her life in the city may be. This proposed paper will examine the black female protagonists in these vital works as 1) they search for a room of their own in the city and 2) consistently struggle to avoid sinking in the concrete quicksand, hoping to avoid becoming just another lost figure among the growing masses of “Fourteenth Street types.”