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Introduction to 2022 Anthós Dossier

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Introduction to 2022 *Anthós* Dossier

The articles in this dossier about Nella Larsen's 1929 novel *Passing* emerged from projects the students did in my Honors 399: Honors Writing for Junior Transfer course (now numbered HON 360 in the catalog). The purpose of this course is to give new junior transfer students to Honors practices with the kinds of reading and writing we do in the Honors curriculum – practices foundational to proposing and carrying out a thesis in senior year. My fall 2021 version of the course was centered around an inquiry into identity and community in Larsen's novel about the relationship between a middle class Black woman focused on responsibilities to family and community and her childhood friend who is eager to engage with the Black community in Harlem after passing as a white woman in her marriage to a racist white man. Our class approached the novel as a cultural artifact: we began the course by reading and discussing current scholarship about the historical and cultural context for the novel, particularly the New Negro movement and the complex constructions of identity(ies) available to middle class Black women in the northeast in the 1920s. Later in the course, students read a range of scholarship about the novel itself before writing a multi-draft final project in which they offered their analysis of the novel and put their analysis in conversation with other scholars.

The three pieces in this dossier demonstrate a variety of approaches to engaging in analyzing the novel. Both Sky McLeod's "Passing Down: Nella Larsen's Questioning of Eugenic Ideology" and Lindsey Abercrombie's "Dignity, Respect, and Freedom" approach the novel through the cultural and historical context. McLeod puts the novel in the context of eugenics ideologies in the early twentieth century, particularly W.E.B. Dubois' idea of "racial uplift." Abercrombie analyzes the novel within the context of the New Negro movement. Both authors focus on the character of Irene, who embodies the pressures on middle class Black women in the 1920s to take on "race motherhood" and "racial uplift." These authors investigate the fissures in Irene's embodiment of these cultural ideals in relation to the character of Clare who refuses them. These two articles ask us what costs individuals pay when they either attempt to conform—or to resist—dominant ideologies.

Finally, John Kohlepp's project will be familiar to students in Honors who have done the summary of argument assignment. In "Data Visualization: Analyzing an Evidentiary Archive," Kohlepp examines in great depth the use of sources in Lisa Mendleman's article "Character Defects: The Racialized Addict and Nella Larsen's *Passing*." Kohlepp's article grew out of group project in which he and his collaborators did a class presentation using the summary of argument method

and Kohlepp was responsible for categorizing and analyzing the evidentiary archive (sources) in the target article by Mendleman. Kohlepp performs an extended analysis of Mendleman's use of sources, and his data visualization reveals fascinating details about how a scholar constructs a complex manuscript. Kohlepp's model for handling the data here can be a helpful model for students reading scholarship and writing their own.

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