Tragic Figures of Race. The Dilemma of Minority Races in Richard Wright's and Nella Larsen's Fiction

The period between 1920 and 1940 in America was a time of raised awareness for people of color. They began to voice their eagerness to be accepted in their community. At this time black people had broken free from slavery. They were, however, not considered equal to white Americans and still had the ghost of slavery hanging over them. During this time in New York a group of people, black and white, formed an alliance to further their mutual interest to establish an identity for people of color and their acceptance amongst other Americans with the aim of social equality for all citizens of the United States of America. This movement was called the New Negro Movement but later referred to as the Harlem Literary Renaissance movement. The main focus of this essay is on this literary movement and in particular the writers Richard Wright and Nella Larsen. Wright's novel Native Son (1940) and Larsen's short stories “Passing” (1929) and “Quicksand” (1928) form the essay's narrow focus. Wright centralizes on the poor lower class black American in Chicago between the 1920s and the 1930s, where his main character is an African American of a poor working class and the trouble he runs into. Larsen chooses a completely different perspective as she focuses on the dilemma mixed race individuals face belonging to neither the black nor the white race. This essay shows how these two writers address the problem people of color face regarding their identity in their work and places their fiction in the context of the Harlem Renaissance to show how it influenced them.
Laura Doyle reveals the central, formative role of race in the development of a transnational, English-language literature over three centuries. Identifying a recurring freedom plot organized around an Atlantic Ocean crossing, Doyle shows how this plot structures the texts of both African-Atlantic and Anglo-Atlantic writers and how it takes shape by way of submerged intertextual exchanges between the two traditions. Examining Europe's encounters with Jews, Muslims, Africans, Native Americans, Mongols, and the Romani ('Gypsies'), from the 12th through 15th centuries, she shows how racial thinking, racial law, racial practices, and racial phenomena existed in medieval Europe before a recognizable vocabulary of race emerged in the West. While The Invention of Race may not seek to provide all the answers, it is a clarion call to continue to theorize and retheorize race in the premodern world. 

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Source: Studies in the Age of Chaucer. 

'Straddling the complicated line between medieval studies and critical race theory, The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages is a comprehensive volume that will change the ways in which medieval history is understood.'