

## *Arna Bontemps*

### *Harlem Renaissance Poet and Novelist*



Arna Bontemps was born in Alexandria, Louisiana on October 13, 1902. He attended Pacific Union College and graduated in 1923. The following year he moved to New York to teach at the Harlem Academy.

Bontemps was inspired by what was happening around him in Harlem and became part of the group of writers, artist and scholars who were beginning to be recognized for their talent and the work that they produced. 1926 his poetry began appearing in *Crisis*, the magazine published by the NAACP, and in *Opportunity*, a publication of the National Urban League. He won poetry prizes from both publications.

He left New York in 1931 to take a teaching position in Alabama. His first novel, *God Sends Sunday*, about a St. Louis jockey, was published that same year.

Recognizing the need to provide African American kids with positive role models, Bontemps began writing children's books. His first, *Popo and Fifina, Children of Haiti*, a collaboration with Langston Hughes was published in 1932. He wrote fifteen other books for children and young adults including: *Frederick Douglass: Slave, Fighter, Freeman*; and *Young Booker: Booker T. Washington's Early Days*. *Black Thunder*, his acclaimed historical novel about Gabriel Prosser's slave revolt was published in 1936. Much of Bontemps work gave a realistic description to the struggle for freedom.

In 1943 he became the librarian for historically black Fisk University where he used his position to preserve the papers of other Harlem Renaissance writers.