

HONORING AND  
REMEMBERING AMERICAN  
ARTISTS

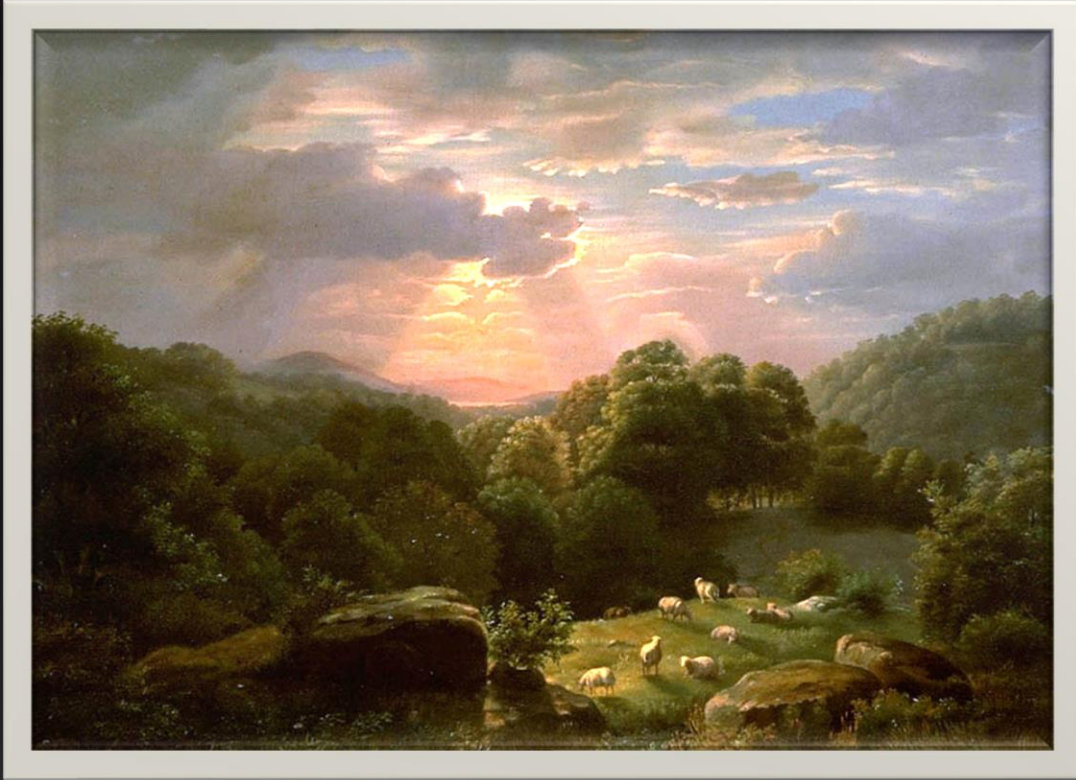
# BLACK HISTORY MONTH

# ROBERT S. DUNCANSON

**Robert Seldon Duncanson** (b. 1821 – d. 1872) was a 19th-century American landscapist of European and African ancestry. Inspired by famous American landscape artists like Thomas Cole, Duncanson created renowned landscape paintings and is considered a second generation Hudson River School artist. Duncanson spent the majority of his career in Cincinnati, Ohio and helped develop the Ohio River Valley landscape tradition. As a free black man in antebellum America, Duncanson engaged the abolitionist community in America and England to support and promote his work. Duncanson is considered the first African-American artist to be internationally known. He operated in the cultural circles of Cincinnati, Detroit, Montreal, and London.



# ROBERT S. DUNCASON



Landscape with Sheep

Smithsonian American Art Museum  
oil on canvas



Blue Hole, Flood Waters, Miami River (1851)

Cincinnati Art Museum  
oil on canvas





# EDMONIA LEWIS

Old Arrow Maker  
1872

Marble Sculpture

Smithsonian American Art Museum,  
Washington DC



Mary Edmonia Lewis, "Wildfire" (c. July 4, 1844 – September 17, 1907), was an African American sculptor, of mixed African-American and Native American (Ojibwe) heritage. Born free in Upstate New York, she worked for most of her career in Rome, Italy. She was the first African-American sculptor to achieve national and then international prominence. She began to gain prominence in the United States during the Civil War; at the end of the 19th century, she remained the only Black woman artist who had participated in and been recognized to any extent by the American artistic mainstream. In 2002, the scholar Molefi Kete Asante named Edmonia Lewis on his list of 100 Greatest African Americans.

Her work is known for incorporating themes relating to Black people and indigenous peoples of the Americas into Neoclassical-style sculpture.

# EDMONIA LEWIS

HAGAR 1875  
MARBLE SCULPTURE

SMITHSONIAN AMERICAN ART MUSEUM, WASHINGTON DC





Poet, Painter and Sculptor

b. 1877- d. 1968

# META VAUX WARRICK FULLER

“Meta Vaux Warrick Fuller was, by all accounts, a woman far ahead of her time. She found renown as an artist at the turn of the 20th century, during a time when the arts were still not entirely hospitable to women and when women artists were often relegated to working only in textiles. Moreover, she chose to explore difficult themes in her work, rejecting the traditional narratives expected of women artists of the time.”

- Katie Rothstein [artnet news](#) Sept 2, 2020





# EMANICIPATION

Meta Vaux Warrick Fuller's sculpture *Emancipation* at Harriet Tubman Square in Boston was originally created in plaster in 1913 to honor the 50th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation, but was not cast in bronze until 1999, well after Fuller's death.

Meta Vaux Warrick Fuller navigated both gender norms and racism of her culture to rise to the top of her profession and became the first African American woman to receive a commission from the U.S. Government.

## IN MEMORY OF MARY TURNER: AS A SILENT PROTEST AGAINST MOB VIOLENCE

**Meta Vaux Warrick Fuller, (1919).**

“According to scholar Caitlin Beach, in 1919, Warrick created one of the first works of art in history to address the subject of lynching with her work *Mary Turner: A Silent Protest Against Mob Violence*.

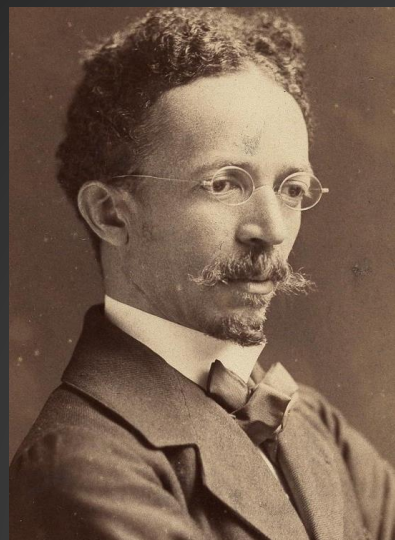
Turner was a young, pregnant black woman who had been the victim of a horrific murder by a white mob after protesting the lynching of her husband, and Fuller’s tribute is a perfect example of her socially conscious work.”

Katie Rothstein [artnet news](#) Sept 2, 2020



Image courtesy of Museum of African American History, Boston and Nantucket.





## HENRY OSSAWA TANNER

Born: June 21, 1859 Pittsburgh, PA

Died: May 25, 1937 Paris, France

Known for: Painting and Drawing

Periods: Modern Art, Realism, American Realism,  
Symbolism, Impressionism, Renaissance



The Banjo Lesson 1893

oil on canvas

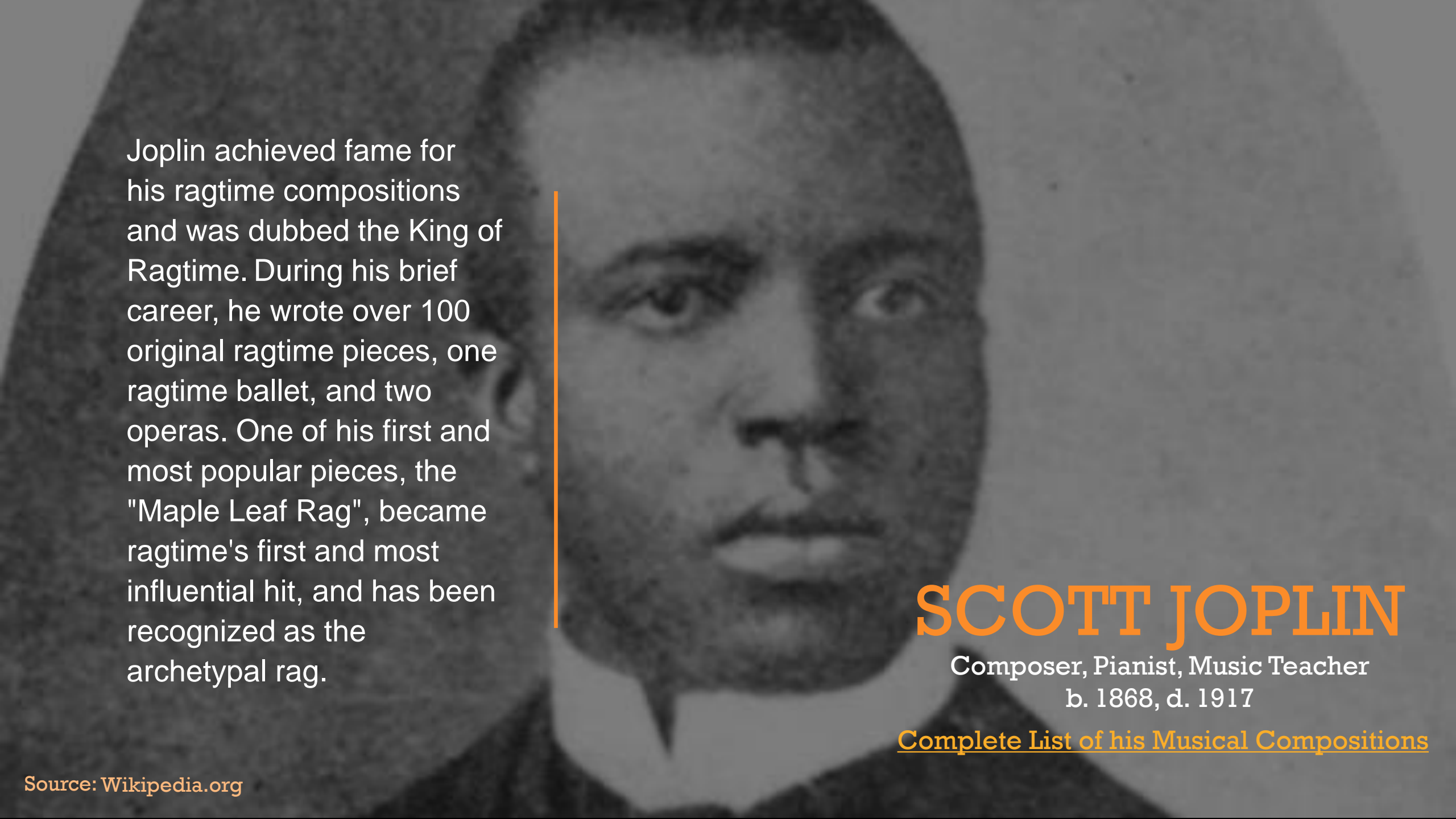


# HENRY OSSAWA TANNER

THE THANKFUL POOR 1894

oil on canvas





Joplin achieved fame for his ragtime compositions and was dubbed the King of Ragtime. During his brief career, he wrote over 100 original ragtime pieces, one ragtime ballet, and two operas. One of his first and most popular pieces, the "Maple Leaf Rag", became ragtime's first and most influential hit, and has been recognized as the archetypal rag.

# SCOTT JOPLIN

Composer, Pianist, Music Teacher  
b. 1868, d. 1917

[Complete List of his Musical Compositions](#)

# MAPLE LEAF RAG

## Listen to the Composition

William J. Leslie, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

## Biographies on the Artist

### Scott Joplin: King of Ragtime

By Edward W. Berlin

### Dancing to a Black Man's Tune: A Life of Scott Joplin

By Susan Curtis





**Gertrude "Ma" Rainey** born **Gertrude Pridgett**, 1882 or 1886 – December 22, 1939 was one of the early African-American professional blues singers and one of the first generation of blues singers to record. She was known for her powerful vocal abilities, energetic disposition, majestic phrasing, and a "moaning" style of singing. Her qualities are present and most evident in her early recordings "Bo-Weevil Blues" and "Moonshine Blues".

[Listen to Ma](#)

Sources: [Wikipedia.org](#)  
[Youtube.com](#)

**MA RAINY**



In 1923, Ma Rainey was discovered by Paramount Records producer J. Mayo Williams. She signed a recording contract with Paramount, and in December she made her first eight recordings in Chicago, including "Bad Luck Blues", "Bo-Weevil Blues" and "Moonshine Blues". She made more than 100 other recordings over the next five years, which brought her fame beyond the South. Paramount marketed her extensively, calling her the "Mother of the Blues", the "Songbird of the South", the "Gold-Neck Woman of the Blues" and the "Paramount Wildcat".





## AARON DOUGLAS

Aaron Douglas was an African-American painter, illustrator and visual arts educator. He was a major figure in the Harlem Renaissance. He developed his art career painting murals and creating illustrations that addressed social issues around race and segregation in the United States by utilizing African-centric imagery. Douglas set the stage for young, African-American artists to enter public arts realm through his involvement with the Harlem Artists Guild. In 1944, he concluded his art career by founding the Art Department at Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee. He taught visual art classes at Fisk until his retirement in 1966. Douglas is known as a prominent leader in modern African-American art whose work influenced artists for years to come. b. 1899 - d. 1979



Charleston 1928

# AARON DOUGLAS

## From Slavery Through Reconstruction

1934

History Painting





# WILLIAM H. JOHNSON

William Henry Johnson was an African-American painter. Born in Florence, South Carolina, he became a student at the National Academy of Design in New York City, working with Charles Webster Hawthorne. He later lived and worked in France, where he was exposed to modernism. After Johnson married Danish textile artist Holcha Krake, the couple lived for some time in Scandinavia. There he was influenced by the strong folk art tradition. The couple moved to the United States in 1938. Johnson eventually found work as a teacher at the Harlem Community Art Center, through the Federal Art Project.

Johnson's style evolved from realism to expressionism to a powerful folk style, for which he is best known. A substantial collection of his paintings, watercolors, and prints including "Little Sweet" and "Nat Turner" are held by the Smithsonian American Art Museum, which has organized and circulated major exhibitions of his works.



William Henry Johnson

1901 – 1970



LITTLE SWEET 1944

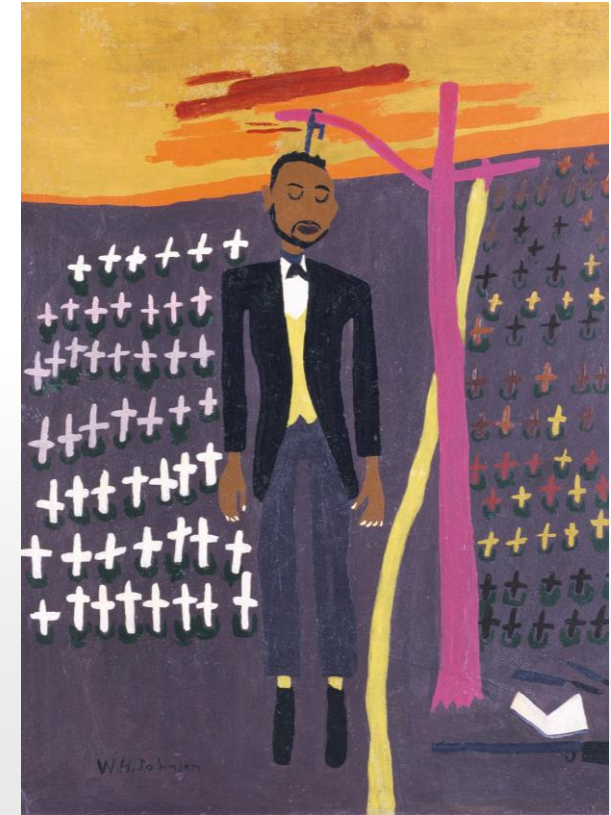
OIL ON PAPERBOARD

## The Story of Nat Turner

“**Nat Turner**, (born October 2, 1800, Southampton county, Virginia, died November 11, 1831, Jerusalem, Virginia, Black American slave who led the only effective, sustained slave rebellion (August 1831) in U.S. history. Spreading terror throughout the white South, his action set off a new wave of oppressive legislation prohibiting the education, movement, and assembly of slaves and stiffened proslavery, anti-abolitionist convictions that persisted in that region until the American Civil War (1861–65). Turner was born the property of a prosperous small-plantation owner in a remote area of Virginia. His mother was an African native who transmitted a passionate hatred of slavery to her son. He learned to read from one of his master’s sons, and he eagerly absorbed intensive religious training. In the early 1820s he was sold to a neighboring farmer of small means. During the following decade his religious ardour tended to approach fanaticism, and he saw himself called upon by God to lead his people out of bondage. He began to exert a powerful influence on many of the nearby slaves, who called him “the Prophet.”

In 1831, shortly after he had been sold again, this time to a craftsman named Joseph Travis, a sign in the form of an eclipse of the Sun caused Turner to believe that the hour to strike was near. His plan was to capture the armory at the county seat, Jerusalem, and, having gathered many recruits, to press on to the Dismal Swamp, 30 miles to the east, where capture would be difficult. On the night of August 21, together with seven fellow slaves in whom he had put his trust, he launched a campaign of total annihilation, murdering Travis and his family in their sleep and then setting forth on a bloody march toward Jerusalem. In two days and nights about 60 white people were ruthlessly slain. Doomed from the start, Turner’s insurrection was handicapped by lack of discipline among his followers and by the fact that only 75 Blacks rallied to his cause. Armed resistance from the local whites and the arrival of the state militia, a total force of 3,000 men, provided the final crushing blow. Only a few miles from the county seat the insurgents were dispersed and either killed or captured, and many innocent slaves were massacred in the hysteria that followed. Turner eluded his pursuers for six weeks but was finally captured, tried, and hanged. Nat Turner’s rebellion put an end to the white Southern myth that slaves were either contented with their lot or too servile to mount an armed revolt. In Southampton county Black people came to measure time from “Nat’s Fray,” or “Old Nat’s War.” For many years in Black churches throughout the country, the name Jerusalem referred not only to the Bible but also covertly to the place where the rebel slave had met his death.”

WILLIAM H. JOHNSON



NAT TURNER 1945  
OIL ON PAPERBOARD



# JAMES LESESNE WELLS

**James Lesesne Wells** (1902–1993) was an African-American graphic artist and painter associated with the Harlem Renaissance. He was an influential art professor at Howard University from 1929 to 1968 and is considered a pioneer in modern art education. He taught block printing, ceramics, clay modeling and sculpture.

Born in Atlanta, Georgia son of a Baptist minister and elementary school teacher, James had his first experience with art assisting his mother with her kindergarten art class.

After 1931, Wells gained recognition as a painter. Many of his paintings were shown at the Phillips Memorial Gallery in Washington D.C., included with the William Harmon Foundation traveling exhibitions and exhibited in many museums and art galleries worldwide. Wells' early work was inspired by the work of German Expressionist woodcut artists. He also was fascinated with abstract cubism and African sculpture.

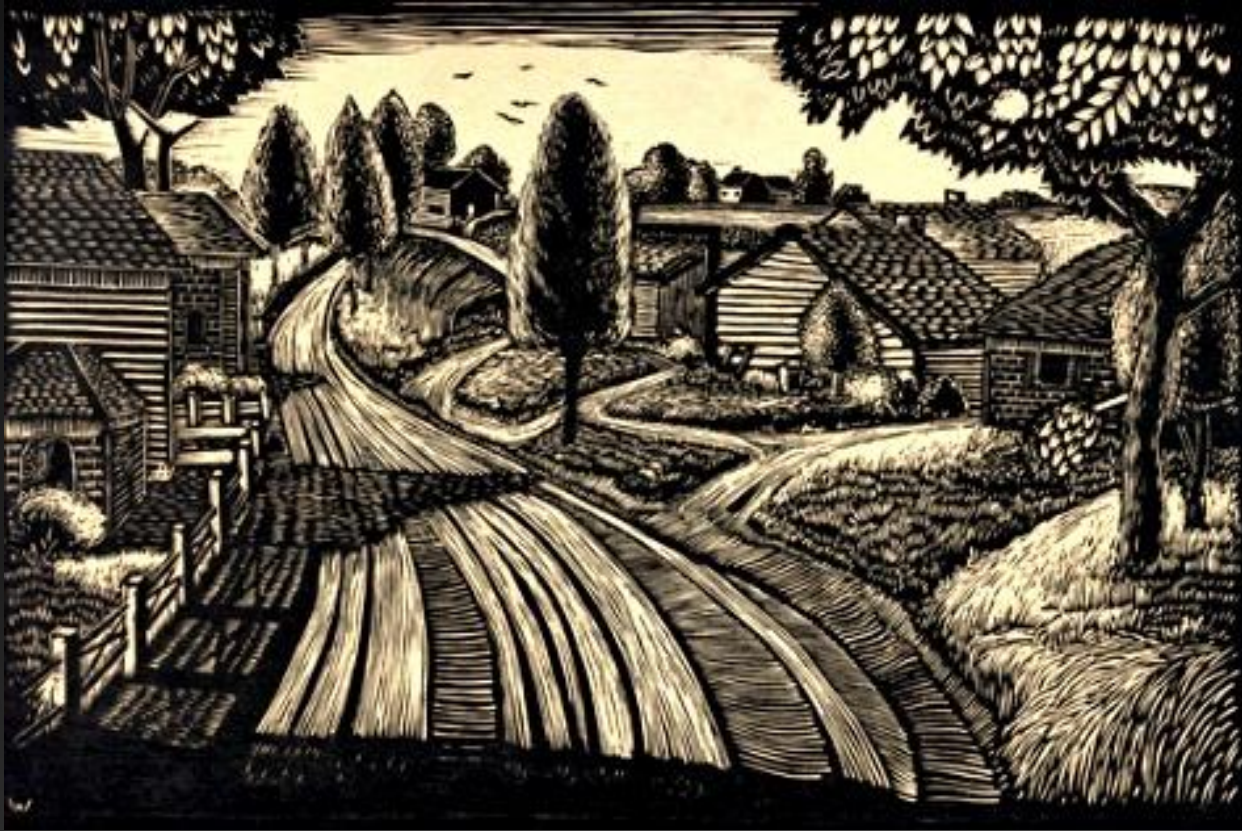
During the Depression, Wells was director of a summer arts program in a Harlem nightclub and In the early 1930s, influenced by the widespread economic hardship from the Great Depression, he made the decision to focus on art that was more affordable. From that point on, he created art that was reproducible: lithographs, woodcuts and etchings. His new work reflected his interest in the African-American experience, and often portrayed workers from all cultures and ethnicity.



**ARTWORK AT THE MET**



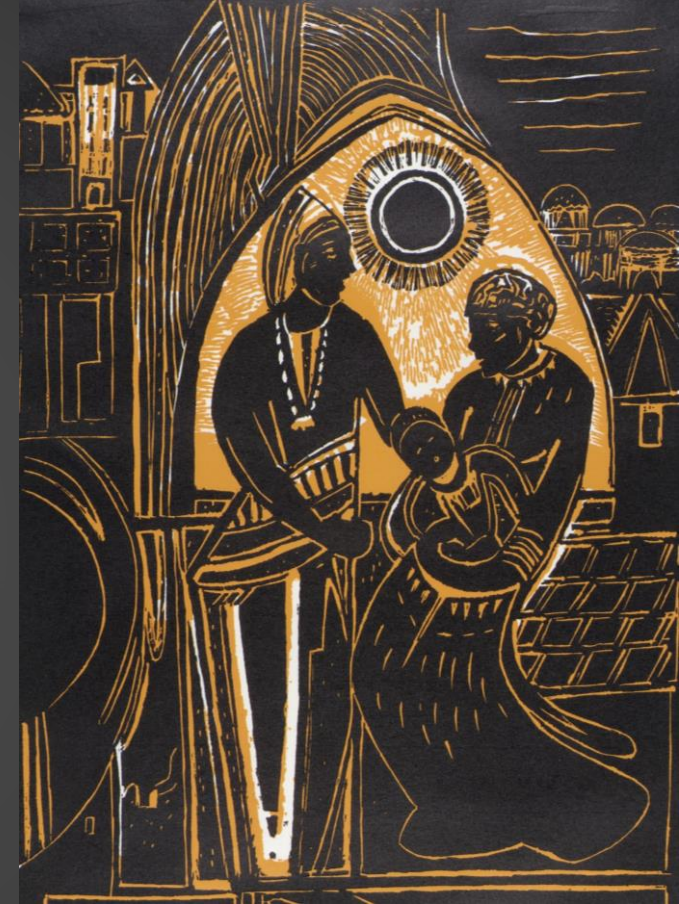
# JAMES LESESNE WELLS



Farmlands 1935-1943

woodcut blockprint

WPA art commissioned by U.S. government



Watusi Family 1988

color linocut on paper

Smithsonian American Art Museum,  
Gift of Jacob and Ruth Kainen



# ROMARE BEARDEN



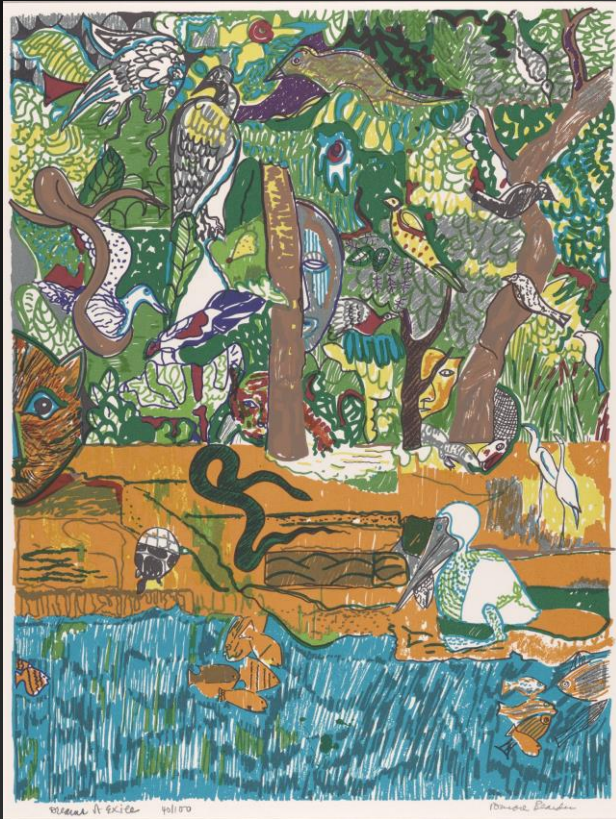
## Romare Bearden Foundation

**Romare Bearden** (September 2, 1911 – March 12, 1988) was an American artist, author, and songwriter. He worked with many types of media including cartoons, oils, and collages. Born in Charlotte, North Carolina, Bearden grew up in New York City and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and graduated from New York University in 1935. He began his artistic career creating scenes of the American South. Later, he worked to express the humanity he felt was lacking in the world after his experience in the US Army during World War II on the European front. He returned to Paris in 1950 and studied art history and philosophy at the Sorbonne.

Bearden's early work focused on unity and cooperation within the African-American community. After a period during the 1950s when he painted more abstractly, this theme reemerged in his collage works of the 1960s. *The New York Times* described Bearden as "the nation's foremost collagist" in his 1988 obituary. Bearden became a founding member of the Harlem-based art group known as The Spiral, formed to discuss the responsibility of the African-American artist in the civil rights movement.

Bearden was the author or coauthor of several books. He also was a songwriter, known as co-writer of the jazz classic "Sea Breeze", which was recorded by Billy Eckstine, a former high school classmate at Peabody High School, and Dizzy Gillespie. He had long supported young, emerging artists, and he and his wife established the Bearden Foundation to continue this work, as well as to support young scholars. In 1987, Bearden was awarded the National Medal of Arts.

# ROMARE BEARDEN



Dreams of Exile

1971



Carolina Morning

1974



Roots

1977



# GORDON PARKS



Parks at the Civil Rights March on Washington, 1963

**Gordon Roger Alexander Buchanan Parks (1912 – 2006)**

Gordon Parks, one of the greatest photographers of the twentieth century, was a humanitarian with a deep commitment to social justice. He left behind an exceptional body of work that documents American life and culture from the early 1940s into the 2000s, with a focus on race relations, poverty, civil rights, and urban life. Parks was also a distinguished composer, author, and filmmaker who interacted with many of the leading people of his era—from politicians and artists to athletes and other celebrities.

Born into poverty and segregation in Fort Scott, Kansas, Parks was drawn to photography as a young man when he saw images of migrant workers in a magazine. After buying a camera at a pawnshop, he taught himself how to use it. Despite his lack of professional training, he won the Julius Rosenwald Fellowship in 1942; this led to a position with the photography section of the Farm Security Administration (FSA) in Washington, D.C., and, later, the Office of War Information (OWI). Working for these agencies, which were then chronicling the nation's social conditions, Parks quickly developed a personal style that would make him among the most celebrated photographers of his era. His extraordinary pictures allowed him to break the color line in professional photography while he created remarkably expressive images that consistently explored the social and economic impact of poverty, racism, and other forms of discrimination.

Parks was the first African American to produce and direct major motion pictures—developing films relating the experience of slaves and struggling black Americans and creating the "blaxploitation" genre. He is best remembered for his iconic photos of poor Americans during the 1940s (taken for a federal government project), for his photographic essays for *Life* magazine, and as the director of the 1971 film *Shaft*.

[gordonparksfoundation.org](http://gordonparksfoundation.org)



# GORDON PARKS



Washington, D.C. Mrs. Ella Watson, a government charwoman, with three grandchildren and her adopted daughter

1942



*American Gothic, Washington, D.C.*

1942



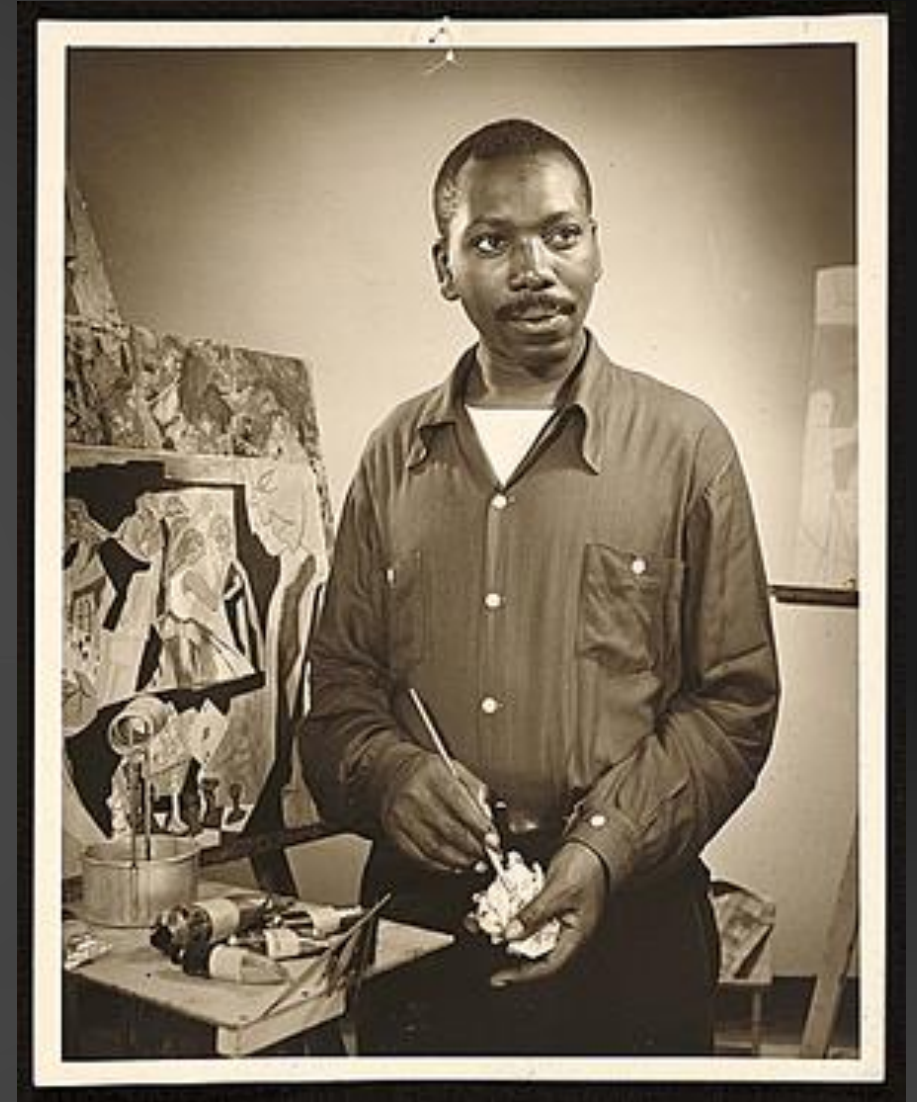
# JACOB LAWRENCE

Born: September 7, 1917 Atlantic City, New Jersey

Died: June 9, 2000 Seattle, Washington

Jacob Lawrence was an African-American painter known for his portrayal of African-American life. As well as a painter, storyteller, and interpreter, he was an educator. Lawrence referred to his style as "dynamic cubism", though by his own account the primary influence was not so much French art as the shapes and colors of Harlem. He brought the African-American experience to life using blacks and browns juxtaposed with vivid colors. He also taught and spent 15 years as a professor at the University of Washington.

Lawrence is among the best-known 20th-century African-American painters. He was 25 years old when he gained national recognition with his 60-panel Migration Series, painted on cardboard. The series depicted the Great Migration of African-Americans from the rural South to the urban North. A part of this series was featured in a 1941 issue of Fortune.





# JACOB LAWRENCE



The Shoemaker 1945



The Seamstress 1946





# NINA SIMONE

**Eunice Kathleen Waymon** 1933-2003, known professionally as **Nina Simone**, was an American singer, songwriter, musician, arranger, and civil rights activist.

Her music spanned a broad range of musical styles including classical, jazz, blues, folk, R&B, gospel, and pop.

[Watch and listen to Nina Simone Live in Holland '65 & England '68](#)



Nina Simone in concert Morlaix, France 1982





# VARNETTE HONEYWOOD



Varnette Patricia Honeywood (December 27, 1950 – September 12, 2010) was an American painter, writer, and businesswoman whose paintings and collages depicting African-American life hung on walls in interior settings for *The Cosby Show* after Camille and Bill Cosby had seen her art and started collecting some of her works. Her paintings also appeared on television on the *Cosby Show* spin-off *A Different World*, as well as on the TV series *Amen* and *227*.

Honeywood was born on December 27, 1950, in Los Angeles. Her parents, Stepney and Lovie Honeywood, were elementary school teachers who had come to California from Louisiana and Mississippi. Honeywood earned her undergraduate degree in Art in 1972 from Spelman College in Atlanta, the first historically black female school of higher education in the United States. (She would exhibit there in 1987.) She earned her master's degree from the University of Southern California in 1974, where she majored in education.

As part of a community outreach program conducted by USC, Honeywood used her educational training to teach multicultural arts and crafts programs to minority children in the public schools. Her work, influenced by such artists as Romare Bearden and Jacob Lawrence showed black Americans in everyday life, in family and social settings. The time she spent visiting relatives in the South during her childhood, her college experience at Spelman and a 1977 trip to Nigeria all provided themes for her paintings. She and her sister Stephanie established the greeting-card company *Black Lifestyles* with cards showing her brightly colored portraits depicting the daily life of African Americans, making it the first such company specializing in black themes.



# VARNETTE HONEYWOOD



**Rites I** 1983

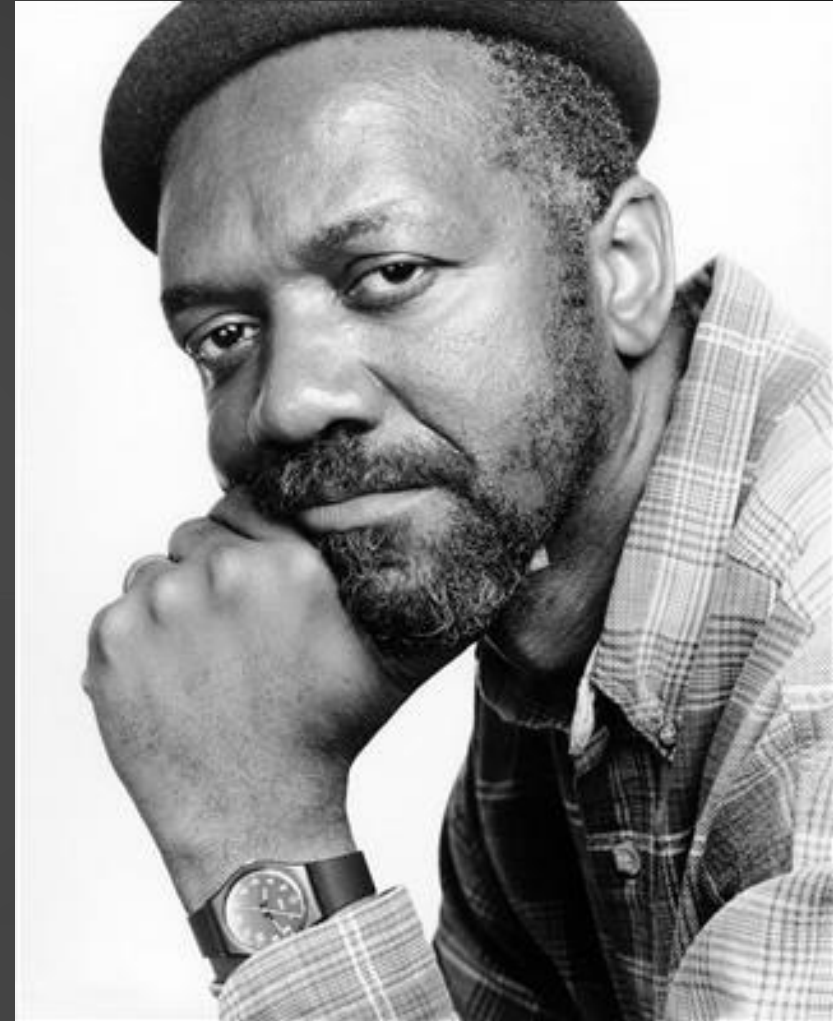


**Generations of Creative Genius** 1984



# KERRY JAMES MARSHALL

Kerry James Marshall challenges the marginalization of African-Americans through his formally rigorous paintings, drawings, videos, and installations, whose central protagonists are always, in his words, “unequivocally, emphatically black.” As he describes, his work is rooted in his life experience: “You can’t be born in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1955 and grow up in South Central [Los Angeles] near the Black Panthers headquarters, and not feel like you’ve got some kind of social responsibility. You can’t move to Watts in 1963 and not speak about it.” Marshall’s erudite knowledge of art history and black folk art structures his compositions; he mines black culture and stereotypes for his unflinching subject matter. In [Black Star](#) (2011), a nude black woman bursts through a Frank Stella-like canvas, commanding attention and daring viewers to consider how she has been (and how she should be) seen and portrayed.





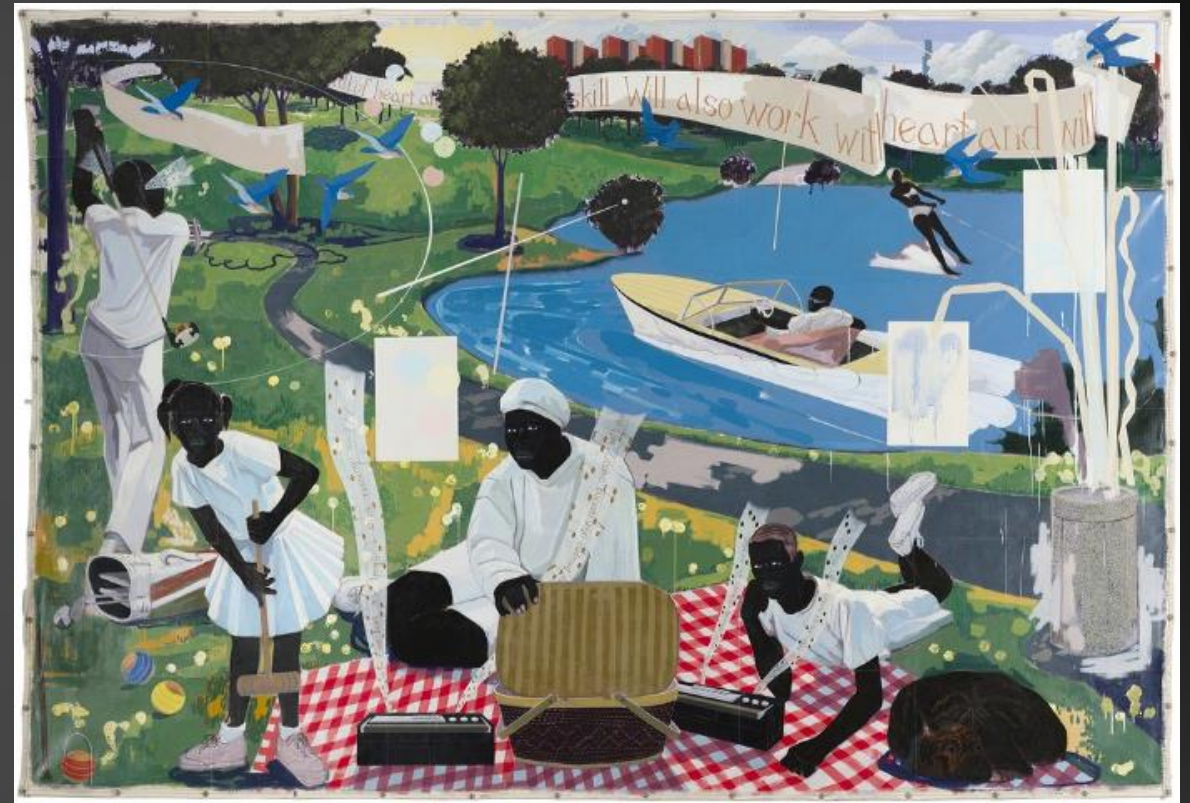
# KERRY JAMES MARSHALL



Many Mansions

1994

[Commentary on this work and the artist](#)



Past Times

1997

[Commentary on this work and the artist](#)



# JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT



1960-1988

In his short life, Jean-Michel Basquiat was a pop icon, cultural figure, graffiti artist, musician, and neo-expressionist painter. He was a precocious child, and by the age of four he could both read and write. By the time he was eleven, he was fluent in English, French, and Spanish. And by the time he was fifteen, he ran away from home, living for less than a week in Washington Square Park, after which he was arrested and sent back home to live with his father. He dropped out of school in tenth grade, after which his father kicked him out of the house, leaving the young artist to live with friends, supporting himself by selling T-shirts and homemade postcards.

In the 1970's Basquiat began spray painting buildings in Lower Manhattan, using the pseudonym SAMO, earning him notoriety and a certain amount of fame. He appeared on television in 1979 on the show "TV Party," and that same year formed a rock band called "Gray," which performed all throughout New York. During this time, he also appeared in the music video "Rapture" by Blondie.

By 1982, he was regularly showing his work, and had many high-profile friendships, including a brief relationship with Madonna, a brief involvement with the musician David Bowie, and a long-time collaboration with the artist Andy Warhol. He worked on his paintings in \$1,000 dollar Armani suits, in which he would appear in public, spattered in paint. He also appeared on the cover of New York Times Magazine in 1986.

Although he was a successful artist, Basquiat became addicted to heroin, and after the death of his friend Andy Warhol in 1987, his addiction became worse. He became increasingly isolated and died of a heroin overdose in 1988. Posthumously, many exhibitions of his works have been held, and biopics, books, collections of poems and feature films have all been inspired by his work and life.



# JEAN-MICHEL BASQUIAT



# Profit 1

1982



# Riddle Me This, Batman

1987



# Additional Resources and Articles

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- [African-American Cinema](#)
- [African-American Dancers](#)
- [African-American Literature](#)
- [African-American Music](#)
- [African-American Musicians](#)
- [African-American Poets](#)
- [African-American Singers](#)
- [African-American Stand-up Comedians](#)
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- [African-American Dance, A Brief History](#)
- [African-American Literature - Library of America](#)
- [African-American Theater - Britannica](#)
- [Harlem Renaissance - History.com](#)
- [How Enslaved Chefs Helped Shape American Cuisine](#)
- [National Gallery of Art African-American Artists](#)
- [Roots of African-American Music - Smithsonian](#)
- [The Quilting Tradition](#)
- [10 Black Photographers Who Shaped American History](#)

# THE END

This presentation was created by the Romeoville Art Society  
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