



# Art and the New Negro

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**An Online Professional Development Seminar**

**Richard J. Powell**

John Spencer Bassett Professor of Art  
& Art History

Duke University

National Humanities Center Fellow 1995-96

**AMERICA *in* CLASS<sup>®</sup>**

*from the* National Humanities Center

## GOALS

- To deepen your understanding of the ways in which the New Negro Movement expressed itself in the visual arts
- To provide fresh primary resources and instructional approaches for use with students

## UNDERSTANDINGS

- African American culture, from the vernacular to the cosmopolitan, and from the purely artistic to the socially grounded, figures prominently in the evolution of an early 20th century modernist sensibility.
- Despite the importance of African American- and/or Harlem-based expressions in the New Negro Arts Movement, the creative manifestations of this cultural initiative were international in scope, appearing in Europe, the Americas, and throughout the black diaspora.
- The chronological parameters of the New Negro Arts Movement span from the World War I years to the end of the 1930s.

## From the Forum

How does the art of the New Negro Movement reflect African American history?

How does the art of the New Negro Movement relate to the literature of the Harlem Renaissance, particularly with the work of Zora Neale Hurston?

To what extent did the Harlem Renaissance depend on the patronage of whites?

If the Harlem Renaissance “helped” African Americans find an identity, did its reliance on white patronage “hurt” them?

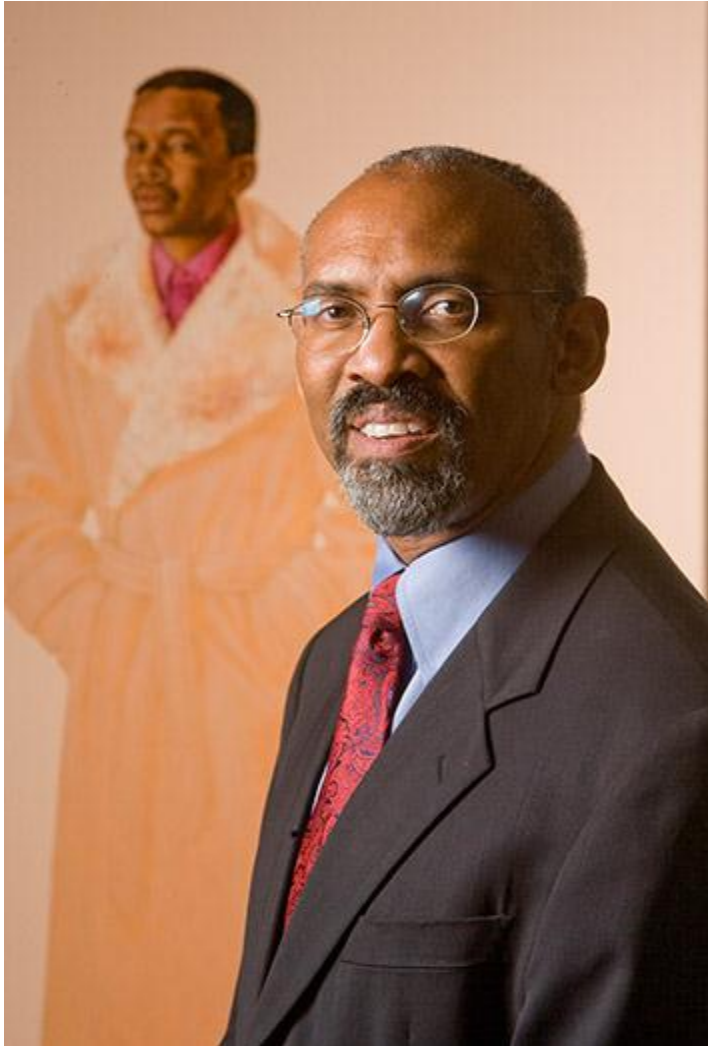
## From the Forum

How does the art of the New Negro Movement reflect the joy and pain of the African American experience?

To what extent did the Harlem Renaissance inject African American culture into the American mainstream? Was it the first time African American culture had a major impact on American mainstream culture?

Did the Harlem Renaissance promote racial integration?

How does the New Negro Movement relate to black nationalism, to the Civil Rights Movement?



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*Cutting a Figure:  
Fashioning Black Portraiture (2008)*

*Black Art:  
A Cultural History (2002)*

*Jacob Lawrence (1992)*

*Homecoming: The Art and Life of  
William H. Johnson (1991)*

## Interview with Professor Rick Powell

Listen to Professor Powell discussing what is art, art history, “the blues,” African-American art and images, Aaron Douglas and more from 1996.

[http://soundings.renci.org/wp-content/audio/Soundings\\_ep804.mp3](http://soundings.renci.org/wp-content/audio/Soundings_ep804.mp3)



# Within Our Gates, Oscar Micheaux

Preoccupations of  
the New Negro  
Arts Movement:

- racial hybridity
- urban sophistication
- the spectre of white-on-black violence
- new media technologies



OSCAR MICHEAUX'S  
SCREEN MASTERPIECE

## "WITHIN OUR GATES"

A STORY OF THE RACE  
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FEATURING  
**Evelyn Preer**  
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AND THE GLARING INJUSTICES THAT ARE BEING  
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Upper & lower left: Film stills from *Within Our Gates* (directed by Oscar Micheaux, 1919); Right: Newspaper advertisement for *Within Our Gates*, *Chicago Defender*, January 31, 1920.



Pour O pour that parting soul in song,  
Pour it in the sawdust glow of night,  
Into the velvet pine-smoke air to-night,  
And let the valley carry it along.  
And let the valley carry it along.

Land and soil, red soil and sweet-gum tree,  
So scant of grass, so profligate of pines,  
Now just before an epoch's sun declines  
Thy son, in time, I have returned to thee,  
Thy son, I have in time returned to thee.

In time, for though the sun is setting on  
A song-lit race of slaves, it has not set;

Though late, O soil, it is not too late yet  
To catch thy plaintive soul, leaving, soon gone,  
Leaving, to catch thy plaintive soul soon gone.

Negro slaves, dark purple ripened plums,  
Squeezed, and bursting in the pine-wood air,  
Passing, before they stripped the old tree bare  
One plum was saved for me, one seed becomes

An everlasting song, a singing tree,  
Caroling softly souls of slavery,  
What they were, and what they are to me,  
Caroling softly souls of slavery.

What are some of the “word images” that Jean Toomer’s poem “Song of the Son” employ in order to articulate the goals and ideals of the New Negro Arts Movements? And what do they specifically connote?



Reminders of the role of World War I in planting the seeds of black visibility, discontent, and internationalism.

Left to right: Advertisement for Banania, 1917. Color lithograph. Bibliothèque Forney, Paris; Edwin A. Harleston, *The Soldier*, 1919. Oil on canvas. Photo courtesy of the National Archives, Washington, DC.



# Art and the New Negro



ETHIOPIA—AWAKENING  
By Meta Warrick Fuller



Left to right: Meta Warrick Fuller, Ethiopia Awakening, circa 1923. Plaster;  
Winold Reiss, Portrait of Langston Hughes, circa 1925. Pastel on artist board.  
National Portrait Gallery, Washington, DC.

Metaphors of cultural/racial rebirth and the modern/streamlined art of the black body. These two worlds also reminds us that a range of artistic practitioners, academic and avant-garde, black and white, American and Continental, participated in the creation of New Negro images.



Left to right: Aaron Douglas, Dance Magic, 1929-30. Mural in the College Room Inn, Sherman Hotel, Chicago (Destroyed); Aaron Douglas, circa 1930s.





Aaron Douglas, Harriet Tubman, 1931. Mural at Bennett College, Greensboro, North Carolina.

# “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain,” Langston Hughes, *The Nation*, 1926

“. . . We younger Negro artists who create now intend to express our individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame. If white people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, it doesn't matter. We know we are beautiful. And ugly, too. The tom-tom cries and the tom-tom laughs. If colored people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, their displeasure doesn't matter either. We build our temples for tomorrow, strong as we know how, and we stand on top of the mountain, free within ourselves.”

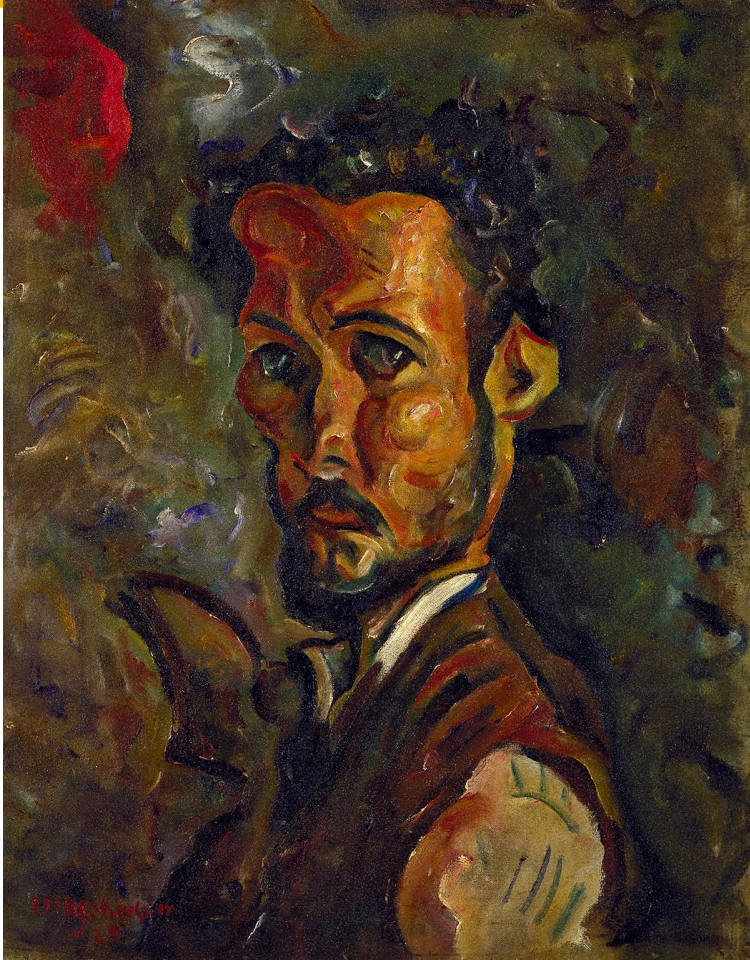
When Langston Hughes proclaims that “younger Negro artists” are “free within themselves” to create, what kind of African American cultural images is he alluding to in particular?





Left to right: Doris Ullmann, Baptism in river, South Carolina, 1929-30. Photograph. Doris Ullmann Collection, Special Collections, University of Oregon Library;  
Richard Samuel Roberts, Cornelius C. Roberts, circa 1925. Photograph. The South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia.





Left to right: William H. Johnson, *Self-Portrait*, 1929. Oil on canvas. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC; Laura Wheeler Waring, *Anna Washington Derry*, circa 1927. Oil on canvas. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC.



# Art and the New Negro



Left to right: James VanDerZee, Couple wearing raccoon coats with a Cadillac, taken on West 127th Street, Harlem, New York, 1932. Photograph. Consolidated Freightways, Inc., Palo Alto, California; James VanDerZee, Self-Portrait, 1922. Photograph. Donna Mussenden VanDerZee

“Her face was beautiful with the rich ripe beauty of southern darkness, a deep bronze, matching the bronze of her bare arms. Walking slowly to the footlights, to the accompaniment of the wailing, muted brasses, the monotonous African pounding of the drums, the dromedary glide of the pianist’s fingers over the responsive keys, she began her strange, rhythmic rites in a voice full of shouting and moaning and praying and suffering, a wild, rough Ethiopian voice, harsh and volcanic, but seductive and sensuous too, released between rouged lips and the whitest of teeth. . . .”





1-PAGE 8 THE CHICAGO DEFENDER SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 14, 1925

## Black Hand Blues and Ske-Da-De by Memphis Julia Davis

**NO SIR!** You just can't help but get a kick out of this new Paramount Record when you hear Memphis Julia Davis put over "Black Hand Blues" and "Ske-Da-De". This is the record everybody is talking about — you'll say Memphis Julia is a riot when you hear her sing!

**"Black hand letters come from all over the land,  
It's all on account of taking one trifling man."**

Just drop in at a Paramount dealer's and hear this record — No. 12248. On the other side is another knock-out — "Ske-Da-De" (you know what it means?) Accompaniments are by Lovie Austin and Her Blues Serenaders.

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**Race's Best Spirituals**  
12247 — *When All The Saints Come Marching In and The Old Time Religion*  
12246 — *Rocked In The Whirl and Other Holy Ten The Lord*  
12245 — *When Shall I Be Released For Jesus' Sake*

**Send no Money!** If your dealer has the record, you may order it from the Paramount Recording Laboratories. They will be sent to you, free of charge, with a few pennies delivery charge. SEND THE MONEY—COLLECT THE COUPON.

12248	12249	12250	12251
12252	12253	12254	12255
12256	12257	12258	12259
12260	12261	12262	12263

Left to right: Bessie Smith, circa 1930; Newspaper advertisement for Memphis Julia Davis's "Black Hand Blues," Chicago Defender 1925.

1920.-----I return to France. In the post-War bars. So sublime, so heartrending, are the accents of jazz, that we all realize that a new form is needed for our mode of feeling. But the basis of it all? Sooner or later, I tell myself, we shall have to respond to this summons from the darkness, and go out to see what lies behind this overweening melancholy that calls from the saxophones. How can we stand still while the ice of time is melting between our warm hands?

En route!

1925.-----Jibuti.

1927.-----Havana, New Orleans, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Virginia, the Carolinas, Charleston, Harlem.-----Guadeloupe, Martinique, Trinidad, Curacao, Haiti, Jamaica, Cuba, Alabama, Mississippi.

1928.-----Dakar, Guinea, Senegambia, the Sudan, the Southern Sahara, the Niger, Timbuktu, the Mossi country, the Ivory Coast.

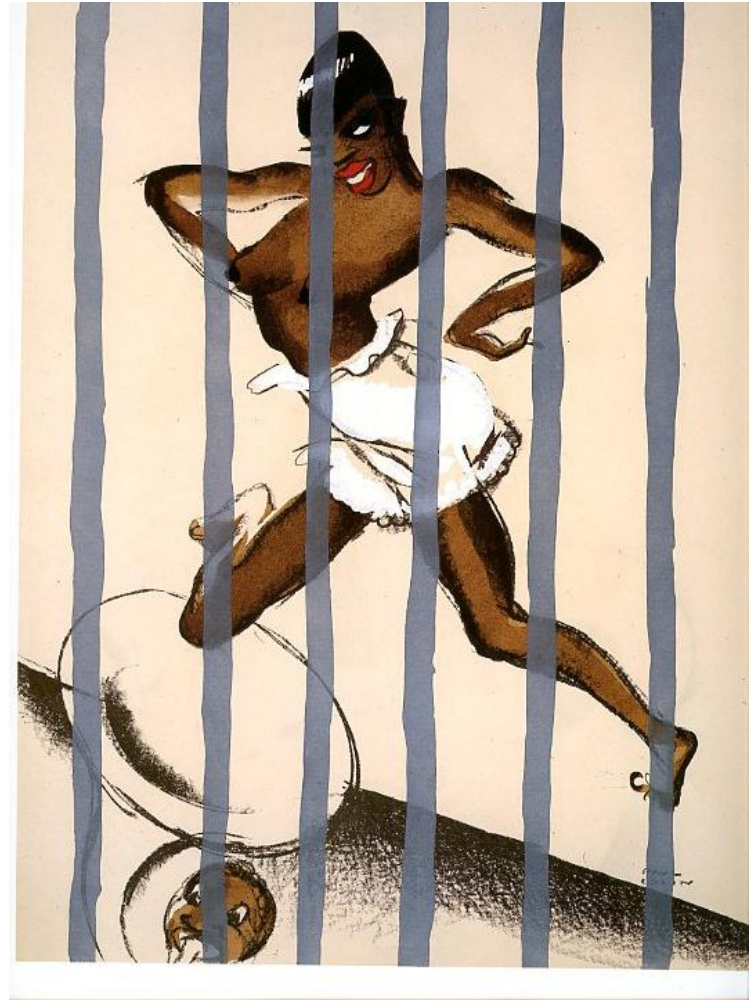
30,000 miles. 28 Negro countries.





Archibald J. Motley, Jr., Blues, 1929. Oil on canvas. Valerie Gerrard Browne.

# Art and the New Negro



Left to right: Josephine Baker, photograph; Paul Colin, from *Le Tumulte Noir*, c. 1927



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**H. Belcher Pharmacy**  
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**Wagner Barber Supply Co.**  
 187 Franklin, Minneapolis, Minn.  
**Watts Drug Pharmacy**  
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**Thorn Drug Store**  
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**Wacoys Pharmacy**  
 Taylor Ave., 1814 and N. 5th, W. Va.  
 Washington, D. C.  
**Roberts & Madock**  
 202 E. 21st St., Chicago, Ill.  
**Wright Drug Co.**  
 125 and 126th St., Chicago, Ill.  
**Wright Drug Co.**  
 125 and 126th St., Chicago, Ill.  
**Williams Pharmacy**  
 4714 and Champlain Ave., Chicago, Ill.

**Joseph Baldwin, Drug**  
 643 Essex Ave., New York  
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 412 Essex Ave., New York

**1. Faust**  
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**M. Willett & Sons**  
 114 Bay St., Baltimore, Md.

**A HAIR STRAIGHTENER**  
**MADAGASCO**  
**OF NO REGRETS**

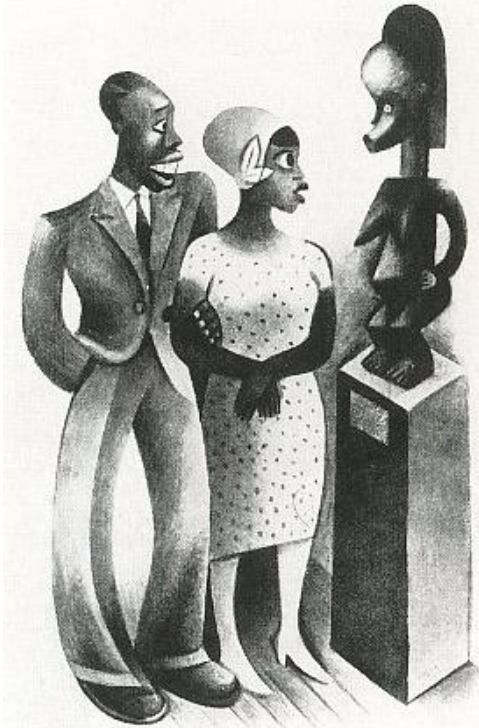
**NOIR-OL**  
 OF NO REGRETS

**O'NEALL CHEMICAL CO.**

Charles C. Dawson, Advertisement for Madagasco Hair Straightener, from the Chicago Defender 1925



Left to right: Miguel Covarrubias, *Rhapsody in Blue*, 1927.  
Oil on canvas. Private Collection; Miguel Covarrubias



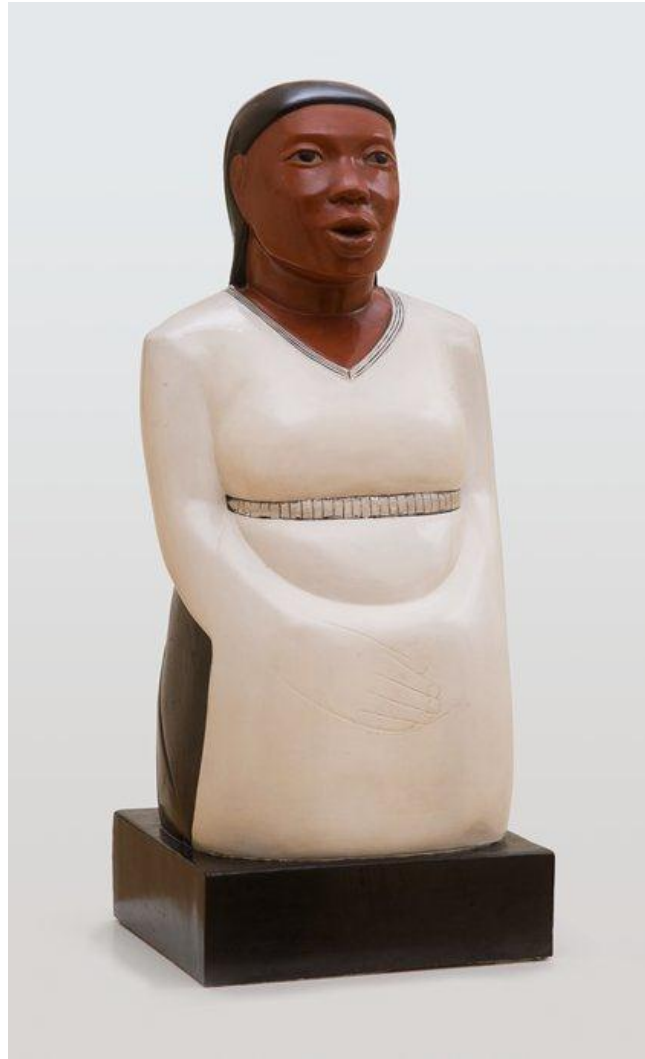
GENTLEMAN, for the first time viewing a work of African sculpture: "What sort of a woman is that?"

"To Hold, as t'Were the Mirror Up to Nature"

GENTLEMAN, for the first time viewing a work of African sculpture: "What sort of woman is that?"  
"To Hold, as t'Were the Mirror Up to Nature"  
Covarrubias, *Vanity Fair*, 1929



# Art and the New Negro



Left to right: Richmond Barthé, African Dancer, 1933. Plaster. Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Sargent Johnson, Negro Woman, 1933. Terracotta. San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.



Archibald J. Motley, Jr., *The Picnic*, 1936. Oil on canvas.  
Howard University Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.



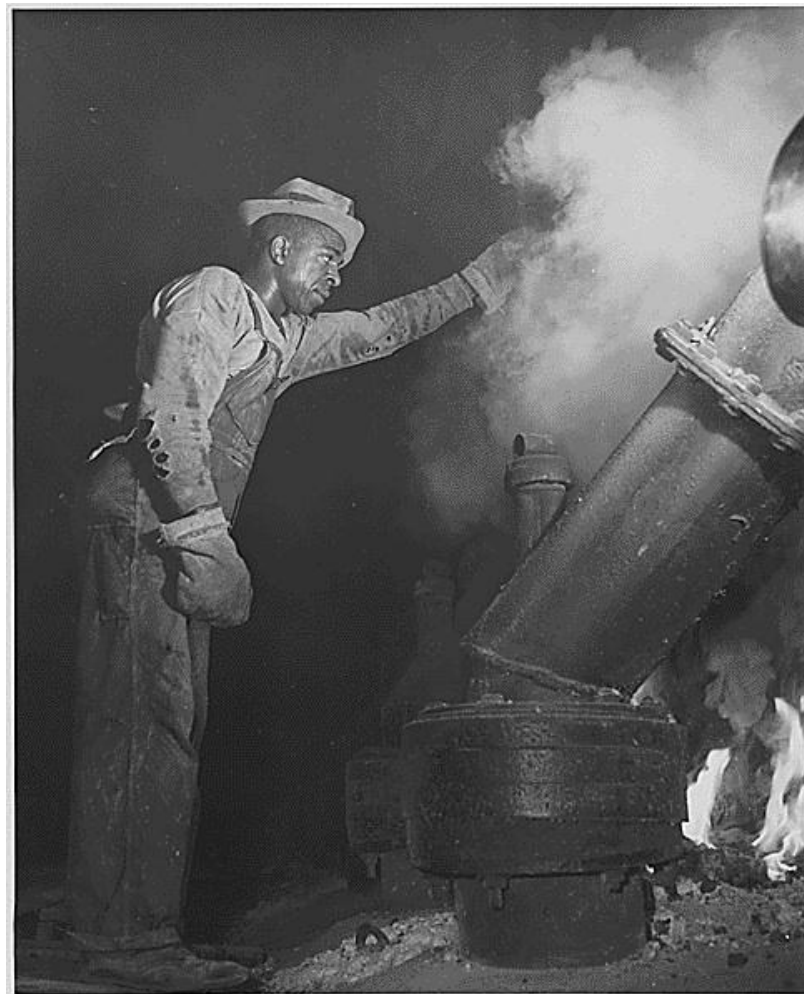
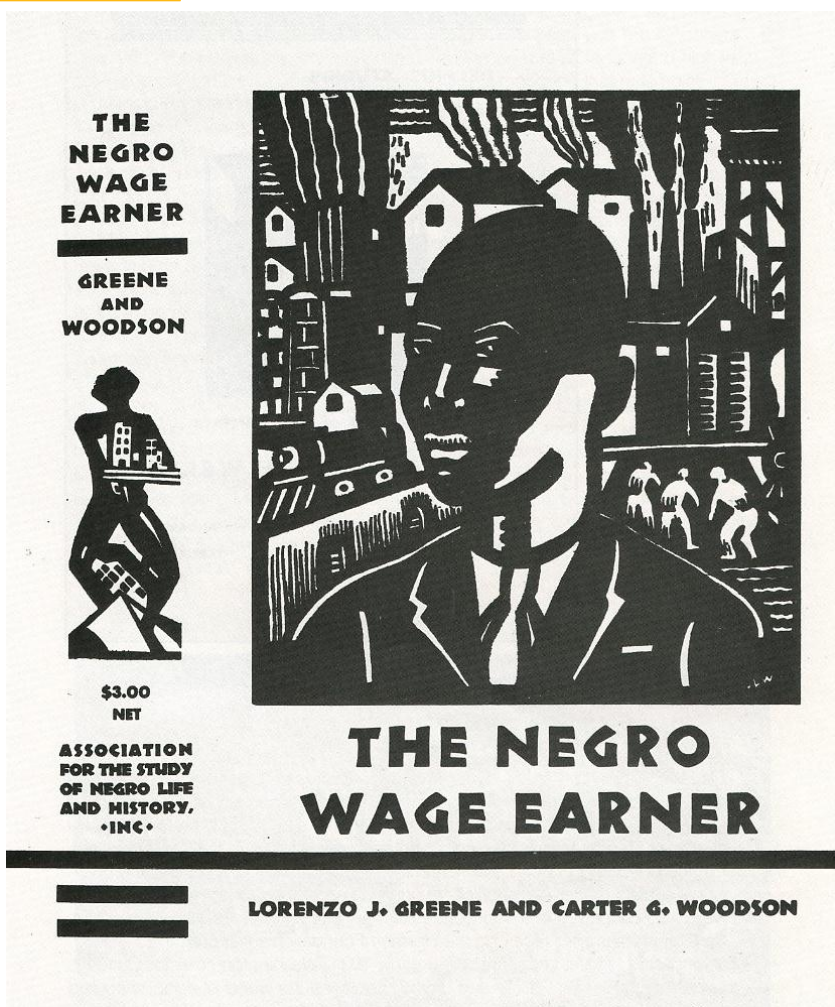
“On the walls of the homes of the average Negro one always finds a glut of gaudy calendars, wall pockets and advertising lithographs. . . I saw in Mobile a room in which there was an over-stuffed mohair living-room suite, an imitation mahogany bed and a chifferobe, a console victrola. The walls were gaily papered with Sunday supplements of the Mobile Register. There were seven calendars and three wall pockets. One of them was decorated with a lace doily. The mantel-shelf was covered with a scarf of deep home-made lace, looped up with a huge bow of pink crepe paper. Over the door was a huge lithograph showing the Treaty of Versailles being signed with a Waterman fountain pen.

It was grotesque, yes. But it indicated the desire for beauty. And decorating a decoration, as in the case of the doily on the gaudy wall pocket, did not seem out of place to the hostess. The feeling back of such an act is that there can never be enough of beauty, let alone too much. Perhaps she is right. We each have our standards of art, and thus are we all interested parties and so unfit to pass judgment upon the art concepts of others.”



Palmer C. Hayden, *Midsummer Night in Harlem*, 1936. Oil on canvas. Museum of African American Art, Los Angeles, CA.





Left to right: James Lesesne Wells, Book jacket for *The Negro Wage Earner*, 1930. Offset lithograph. Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy, Andover, MA; Photograph of steel mill worker, Pittsburgh, PA, circa 1930s.



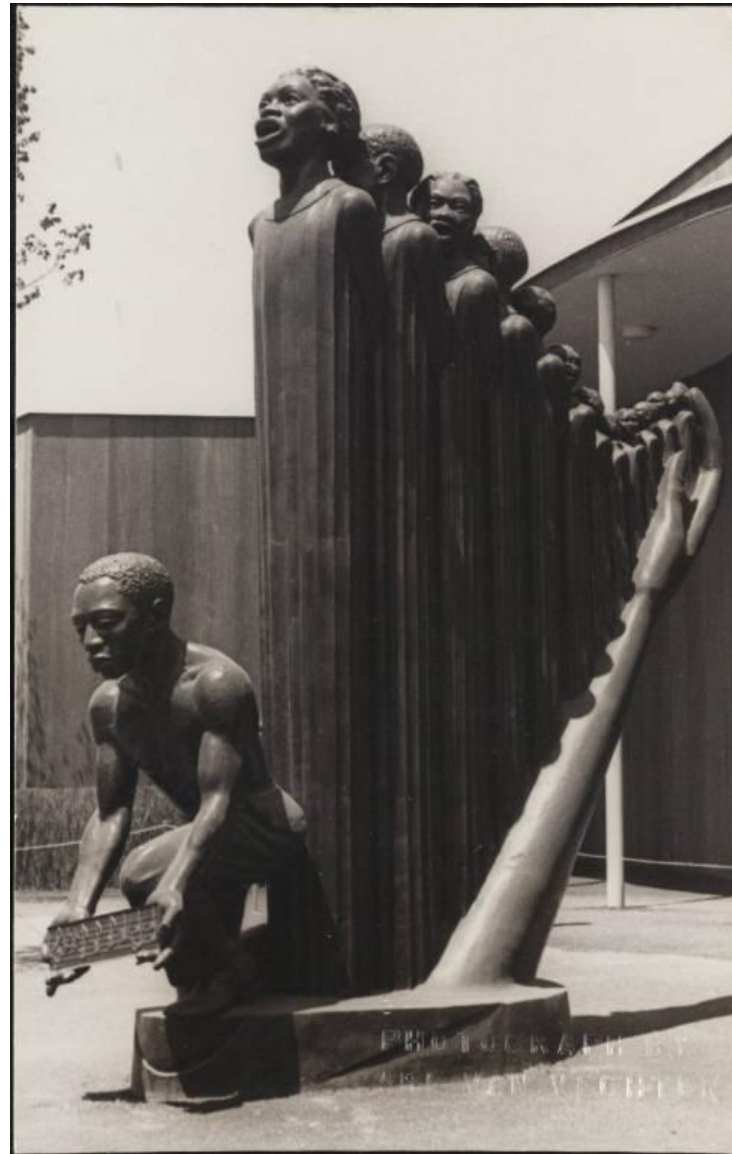
# Art and the New Negro



Ernest Crichlow, *Lovers*, 1938. Lithograph. Reba & David Williams; Langston Hughes (text) and Prentiss Taylor (illustrations), *Scottsboro Limited*, 1932.

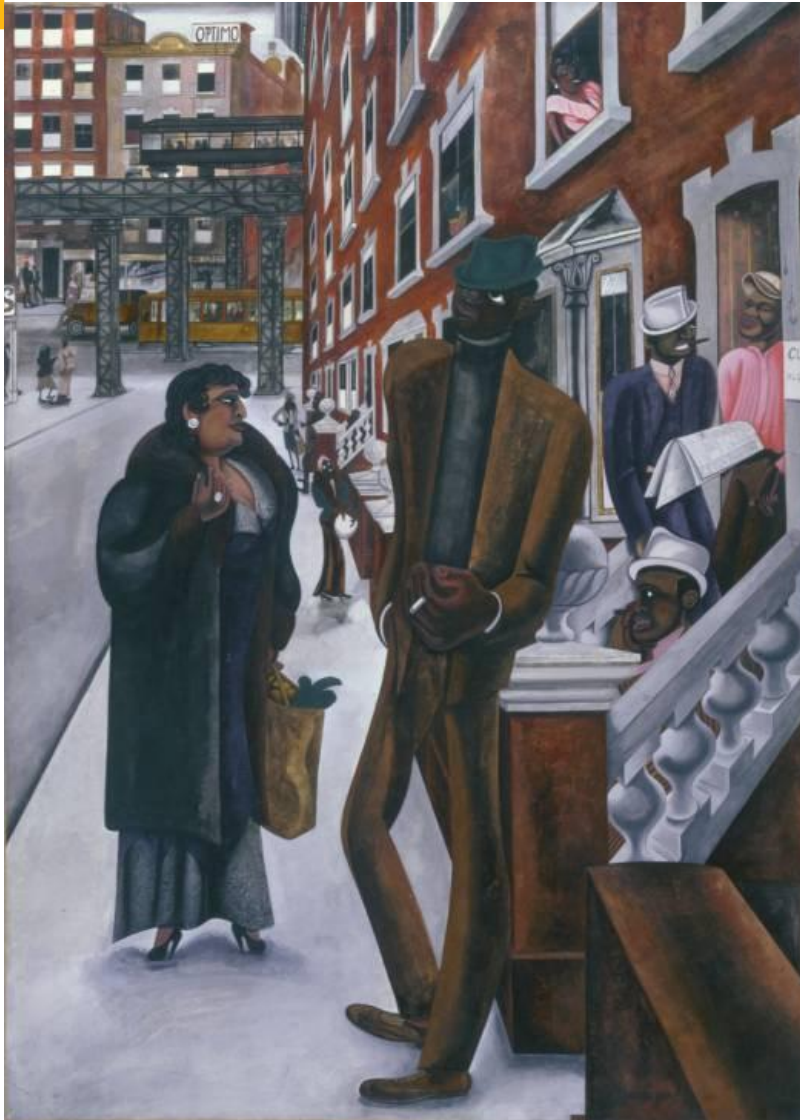


Left to right: Augusta Savage in front of her studio, Harlem, NY, circa 1940; Augusta Savage, *Lift Every Voice and Sing (The Harp)*, 1939. Plaster (Destroyed). Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT.





# Art and the New Negro

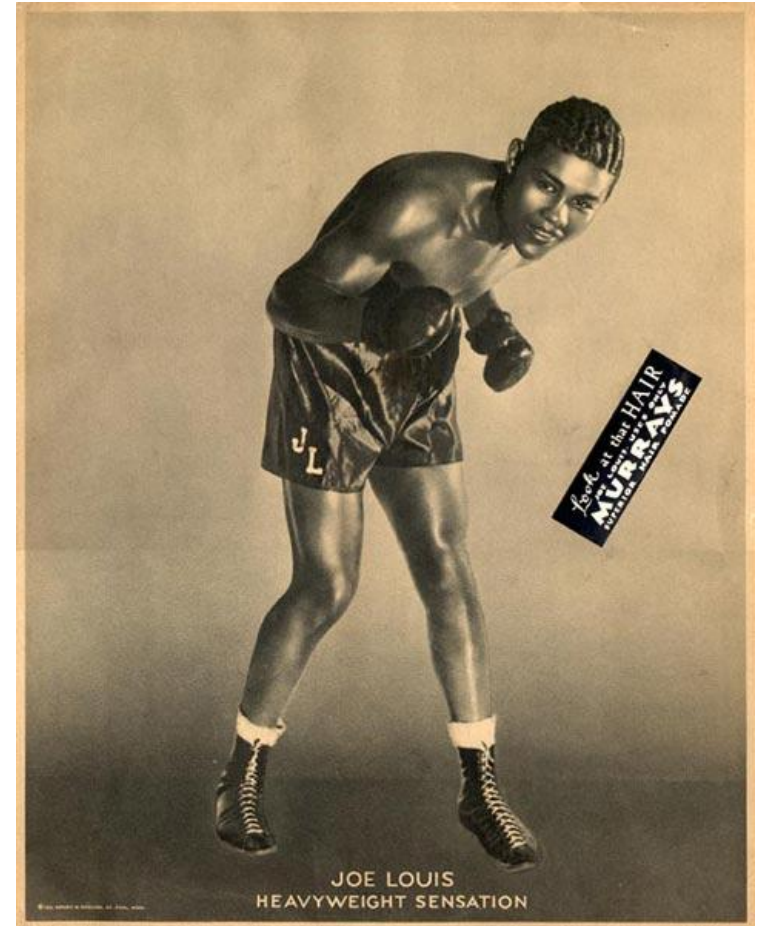


Left to right: Edward Burra, *Harlem*, 1934. Brush, ink and gouache on paper. Tate Britain, London; Walker Evans, *Havana Citizen*, 1933. Photograph. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.





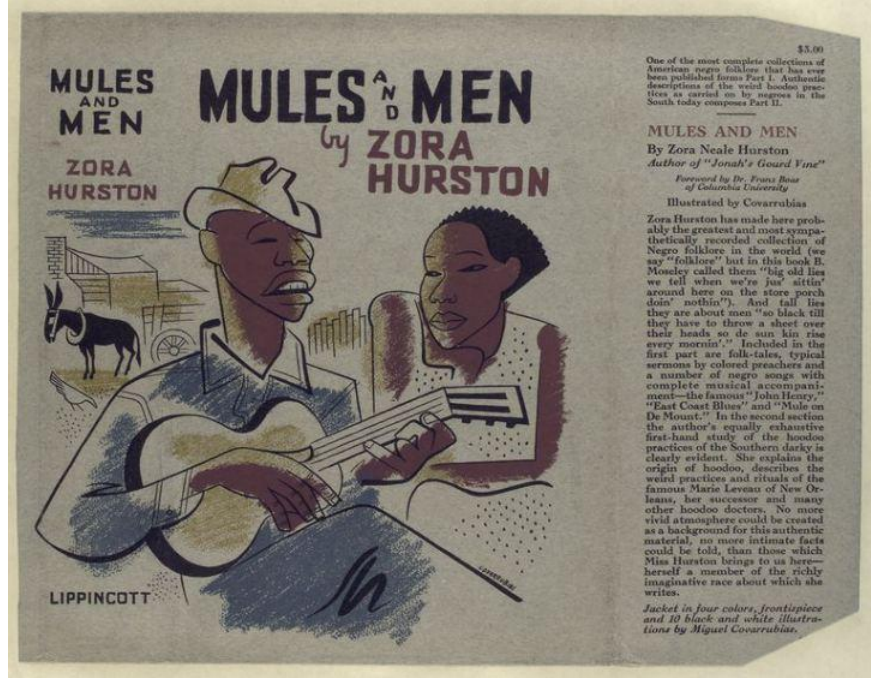
Left to right: Lois Mailou Jones, *Les Fétiches*, 1938. Oil on canvas. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC



Left to right: Robert Riggs, *The Brown Bomber*, 1939. Oil on canvas. Capricorn Galleries, Bethesda, MD; Advertisement for Murray's Pomade (featuring Joe Louis), circa 1939.



# Art and the New Negro



Miguel Covarrubias, Book jacket for Zora Neale Hurston's *Mules and Men*, 1935

William Edmondson, *Angel*, 1932-37, limestone

Final slide.

Thank You