

## Wall Quotes

[over *Booker T. Washington Revelation*] “We all should rise, above the clouds of ignorance, narrowness, and selfishness.” –Booker T. Washington

[over archival case] “William H. Johnson’s oils captivate our imagination and intelligence.” –*Chicago Times*, 1940

[Over *Three Great Freedom Fighters*] “If there is no struggle, there is no progress.” –Frederick Douglass

[Over *Underground Railroad*] “There was one of two things I had a right to—liberty or death. If I could not have one, I would have the other.” –Harriet Tubman

[Over three WWII paintings] “We must remember that any oppression, any injustice, any hatred, is a wedge designed to attack our civilization.” - Franklin D. Roosevelt

[library end wall] “I have a great belief in the future of my people and my country.” –Marian Anderson

[library end wall] “Our children must never lose their zeal for building a better world.” –Mary McLeod Bethune

[library end wall] “It has always been the one great ideal of my life to be the greatest good to the greatest number of 'my people' possible.” –George Washington Carver

[final wall] “Stories like these are as vital today as they have ever been because the struggle for freedom continues.” –Lonnie G. Bunch III, Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution

## Archival Reader Rail label

### Recognition at Home: Selections from the Artist’s Archive

William H. Johnson’s work was widely exhibited and critically acclaimed during his lifetime, both in the United States and abroad. Here is a selection of press clippings, reviews, exhibition invitations, and catalogue pages—some from Johnson’s own scrapbook.

Scan to discover more from Johnson’s archive at the Archives of American Art.

AAA website: <https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/william-h-johnson-papers-6889>

## Decoding the Paintings interactive kiosk texts

### I. Underground Railroad

This kiosk contains descriptions and imagery related to slavery, violence, and death.

## **The Book That Inspired the Painting**

William H. Johnson's painting *Underground Railroad* was inspired by an 1872 book by William Still, an African American abolitionist based in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, who was himself a conductor on the Underground Railroad. Still interviewed hundreds of people who had escaped slavery, keeping careful records of their stories and compiling many of their accounts in his book.

Johnson used the book's engravings as visual source material for his painting. Explore this kiosk to discover the stories of the figures depicted.

### **1. Quaker Abolitionists**

Quakers, whose religion preaches the equality of all people under God, were some of the most active contributors to the antislavery movement among white people in the United States. This grouping depicts four Quaker abolitionists—from left to right: Abigail Goodwin, Thomas Garrett, Daniel Gibbons, and Lucretia Mott—all of whom aided freedom-seekers on the Underground Railroad.

### **2. William and Ellen Craft**

William and Ellen Craft were a married enslaved couple from Georgia. They devised a plan to flee bondage by disguising Ellen, who was light-skinned, as a male enslaver and William as her enslaved servant. Under these false identities they successfully escaped to Philadelphia by train in 1848. However, after the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 made it legal for self-emancipators to be recaptured even in the free state of Pennsylvania, they left for London with the help of abolitionist groups.

### **3. Death of Romulus Hall**

The tragic story of Romulus Hall reminds us that capture was not the only threat to freedom-seekers. Hall attempted to reach Canada with another enslaved man, Abram Harris. The pair had been traveling for nine days in frigid weather and with very little food when Hall developed frost bite; Harris had no choice but to leave him behind. After reaching freedom, Harris learned that his companion had been found "in a most shocking condition" and had received medical treatment but died soon after.

### **4. Frances Ellen Watkins Harper**

Frances Ellen Watkins Harper was one of the most influential abolitionist writers and orators of the nineteenth century. Born free in Baltimore, she published her first collection of poems and prose by age twenty-one and went on to write poetry for antislavery newspapers. She also became a powerful advocate for Black women's inclusion in the women's suffrage movement. Addressing a group of suffragists in 1866 she said, "You white women speak here of rights. I speak of wrongs."

### **5. Discovery of Henry "Box" Brown**

Henry "Box" Brown escaped to freedom by sealing himself in a small box that was mailed from Richmond, Virginia, to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. When delivered to the office of the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society, Brown emerged before four abolitionists and reportedly recited a psalm: "I waited patiently on the Lord and He heard my prayer."

## 6. Underground Railroad Stationmasters

While some served the Underground Railroad as “conductors,” helping enslaved people escape and guiding them on their journeys, others operated as “station masters,” opening their homes to freedom-seekers and providing meals, shelter, and medical care. Pictured here (from left to right) are Elijah F. Pennypacker, William Wright, Dr. Bartholomew Fussell, and Robert Purvis, each of whom operated safe houses from their homes in Pennsylvania.

## 7. Samuel D. Burris

Samuel Burris’s story illustrates how thin the line between slavery and freedom could be. Born free, Burris worked as a conductor on the Underground Railroad, journeying south to aid people escaping to freedom. He was captured in 1847 and sentenced to seven years of enslavement. Unbeknownst to Burris, the Anti-Slavery Society had a plan to purchase him at the auction block. Their volunteer, hiding his abolitionist identity, outbid the other parties by one hundred dollars and revealed to Burris that he was free to return to his family.

## 8. Escape of George Laws

This scene depicts the cruel punishment of an enslaved Delaware man, George Laws, just before his escape to freedom. Accused by his enslaver of “provoking” a horse to grow tired in the field, Laws’s wrists were bound with rope and hung from the ceiling so his toes could barely touch the ground. Left hanging alone before his enslaver could whip him, he managed to break free and journey north via the Underground Railroad.

## 9. Philadelphia Vigilance Committee

The Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society organized a so-called vigilance committee in Philadelphia in 1852. An interracial group that assisted people escaping slavery, the vigilance committee became the center of Underground Railroad activity in the region. William Still, the author of *The Underground Rail Road*, was the group’s chairman. Pictured here are original committee members (from left to right) Nathaniel Depee, Jacob White, and Charles Wise.

## 10. William Lloyd Garrison

William Lloyd Garrison was a prominent abolitionist and journalist whose ideas inspired many of the other figures depicted in this painting. He is best known for his weekly newspaper *The Liberator* (1831–65), which became the most influential antislavery periodical of the era. Garrison was also one of the founders of the American Anti-Slavery Society.

## 11. The Still Family

William Still (center) authored *The Underground Rail Road*, the book upon which Johnson based this painting. William was born free after his mother, Charity (right), escaped from slavery. His older brother Peter (left) remained enslaved in Maryland until adulthood. The brothers did not know of each other until they met by chance in Philadelphia, where William was working as a conductor on the Underground Railroad.

## 12. Abraham Galloway

Abraham Galloway was born enslaved in North Carolina. At age twenty he escaped to Philadelphia by hiding aboard a ship carrying turpentine and rosin, suffering greatly from the fumes. He went on to become a valued spy for the Union Army and in 1868 became one of the first African Americans elected to the North Carolina Senate.

## 13. Samuel Green Sr.

Samuel Green Sr. was a freedman and minister in Dorchester County, Maryland. When Green was suspected of helping local enslaved people escape, his home was raided for evidence, but not enough was found to convict him. Green was then arraigned for possession of Harriet Beecher Stowe's book "Uncle Tom's Cabin," which the prosecutor argued was "insurrectionary in intent." He was sentenced to ten years in prison.

## 14. Jane Johnson and Passmore Williamson

Jane Johnson secured freedom for herself and her two sons while traveling through Philadelphia with her enslaver, North Carolina planter John Wheeler, in 1855. Johnson saw a fleeting opportunity to self-emancipate while in the free state and managed to relay a plea for help to Philadelphia's vigilance committee. Passmore Williamson was part of a group that boarded Wheeler's departing ship and informed Johnson of her legal right to claim freedom. She bravely walked away with her sons, defying her enslaver.

Williamson was sentenced to jail time shortly afterward for failing to produce Johnson in court, a case that sparked outrage and drew support for the antislavery cause.

## 15. Ann Maria Weems

Ann Maria Weems was separated from her family in childhood, remaining enslaved in Rockville, Maryland, after her mother and five of her siblings were sold and sent to Alabama. When she was fifteen, Weems made a daring bid for freedom. Disguised as a carriage driver named "Joe Wright," she rode north from Washington, DC, carrying a white abolitionist who posed as her enslaver. She arrived safely at William Still's home in Philadelphia on Thanksgiving Day 1855 before traveling on to New York and Canada.

## II. Women Builders

### The Book That Inspired the Painting

William H. Johnson's *Women Builders* is based on a 1931 book of the same name by Sadie Lola Daniel. In the book, Daniel profiles the careers of seven African American women who shattered both gender and racial barriers in the early twentieth century through their entrepreneurship and activism. Several of these women played pivotal roles in the development of schools for African Americans in the southeastern United States.

Johnson used photographs from Daniel's book as visual inspiration for his painting. Explore this kiosk to discover the stories of the women depicted.

### **1. Lucy Craft Laney**

Lucy Craft Laney (1854–1933) was one of the most influential educators in Georgia’s history. Born free to formerly enslaved parents, she learned to read and write as a young child and graduated from Atlanta University’s teacher training program. In 1883, Laney opened a school in a church basement to serve Black children in Augusta. The Haines Normal and Industrial Institute’s enrollment grew rapidly and eventually served students from kindergarten through junior college.

### **2. Charlotte Hawkins Brown**

Charlotte Hawkins Brown (1883–1961) founded the Palmer Memorial Institute, a prestigious private school for African Americans in rural Sedalia, North Carolina. The school offered a rigorous liberal arts education to its pupils, with an emphasis on character development and community service. Brown became a nationally recognized advocate for African American education and continued to run the school until her retirement in 1952.

### **3. Maggie Lena Walker**

Maggie Lena Walker (1864–1934) was a businesswoman and community leader from Richmond, Virginia. She was the first African American woman to found a bank and serve as its president. The St. Luke Penny Savings Bank served the African American community in Richmond for decades. By 1920, it had issued more than six hundred mortgages to Black families, allowing them to become homeowners.

### **4. Jane Edna Hunter**

Jane Edna Hunter (1882–1971) was a social worker whose efforts provided young Black women safe housing and opportunity in Cleveland, Ohio. Informed by her own experiences moving there alone from South Carolina, Hunter founded a boarding house—later named the Phillis Wheatley Association (PWA)—to help unmarried Black women newly arrived in the city. The PWA offered domestic skills training, job placement, and recreational opportunities.

### **5. Mary McLeod Bethune**

Mary McLeod Bethune (1875–1955) was one of the most important educators and civil rights activists of the twentieth century. The founder of a school for Black girls in Daytona Beach, Florida, that later became the coeducational Bethune-Cookman College, Bethune also held several prominent national leadership positions, including as an adviser to President Franklin D. Roosevelt on civil rights and educational opportunity.

### **6. Janie Porter Barrett**

Janie Porter Barrett (1865–1948) was an educator and social worker who founded innovative social service institutions in Virginia. In 1890, she established the Locust Street Social Settlement, which hosted clubs, classes, and athletic programs for the African American community in Hampton, Virginia. She later founded a school in rural Hanover County to rehabilitate Black girls considered “delinquent or dependent” by the state, most of whom had been sentenced to prison in the absence of a foster care system.

## 7. Nannie Helen Burroughs

Nannie Helen Burroughs (1879–1961) was an educator, businesswoman, and activist whose work had local and national impact. In 1909, she founded the National Training School for Women and Girls in Washington, DC, with money raised through small community donations. The school (later renamed the Nannie Helen Burroughs School in her honor) emphasized cultural pride, requiring a Black history course for graduation. On the national stage, Burroughs advocated for both African American civil rights and women’s suffrage.

## 8. Unidentified Figure

This is the only figure in Johnson’s painting who does not seem to be pictured in Sadie Lola Daniel’s 1931 book, *Women Builders*. It’s likely she represents the author herself. Education was central to Daniel’s life; born free in Virginia, she earned a PhD and was an assistant professor of history at Miner Teachers College in Washington, DC.

## 9. Institutions Founded by Black Women

Next to each figure in *Women Builders*, Johnson depicted buildings related to the institution the woman founded. Photographs in Sadie Lola Daniel’s book seem to have been Johnson’s visual references.

# III. George Washington Carver

## 1. George Washington Carver

Dr. George Washington Carver (ca. 1864–1943) was a scientist, inventor, and educator whose research helped transform the Southern agricultural economy, creating opportunities for African American sharecropping farmers. Carver spent most of his career leading the agriculture department at the Tuskegee Institute in rural Alabama.

## 2. Dr. Carver the Artist

Carver initially went to college to study art and music. His art teacher noticed his talent for painting plants and encouraged him to transfer to study botany at Iowa State Agricultural College. The school’s first Black student, he went on to earn a master’s degree and join the faculty. He continued to make art, and one of his paintings, *Yucca and Cactus*, was selected to represent Iowa at the 1893 world’s fair in Chicago.

## 3. Crops and Agricultural Research

For most people, Dr. Carver’s name may be synonymous with peanuts, but his agricultural research spanned a variety of crops, from soybeans to sweet potatoes. He helped educate Southern Black sharecroppers on how to diversify what they grew, which had the dual benefits of replenishing the soil and increasing the farmers’ self-sufficiency.

#### **4. Jesup Agricultural Wagon**

In 1906, Dr. Carver developed a mobile classroom to bring agricultural education directly to sharecropping farmers across rural Alabama. His original model was a wagon drawn by mules and was equipped with farm equipment, soil samples, and other educational materials. Carver's first-of-its-kind classroom, named for its patron, Morris K. Jesup, was later modernized to use an automobile.

#### **5. Treating Polio with Peanuts**

This illustration may depict Dr. Carver's experimental treatment of polio patients. In the first half of the twentieth century, the United States saw several epidemics of polio, an infectious disease that can cause paralysis and permanent disability, mostly in young children. In the mid-1930s, Carver promoted the use of peanut oil massages to soothe pain in the limbs of polio patients. Many families brought their children to the Tuskegee Institute to be treated by Carver.

#### **6. Franklin D. Roosevelt and Dr. Carver**

Dr. Carver was an adviser to multiple US presidents and government officials, on topics from race relations to agriculture. This scene depicts Carver meeting President Franklin D. Roosevelt, who led the country from 1933 until 1945. Roosevelt sought his advice on crop rotation and soil cultivation when dealing with the environmental impacts of the Dust Bowl, a series of drought-induced dust storms that devastated the Great Plains in the 1930s.

#### **7. Henry Ford and Dr. Carver**

American industrialist Henry Ford, founder of the Ford Motor Company, was a friend and collaborator of George Washington Carver. Ford, who was interested in developing alternative energy sources to gasoline, was fascinated by Carver's work with soybeans and peanuts. In 1942, the two men worked together to develop an alternative to rubber to ease wartime shortages. Carver also helped Ford develop the first colored paints for automobiles, using soybean oil as a pigment-binding agent.

#### **8. The George Washington Carver Museum**

The George Washington Carver Museum is located on the campus of Tuskegee University in Alabama. It was formally dedicated in 1941 by Henry Ford, who provided significant financial support for the museum. It originally displayed Dr. Carver's collection of plant, animal, and mineral specimens as well as his artwork. Unfortunately, a fire caused serious damage to the building and collections in 1947. The museum was extensively renovated after the fire and transferred to the National Park Service in 1977.

### **IV. Marian Anderson**

#### **1. Philadelphia Roots**

This building, likely the Philadelphia Museum of Art, may be Johnson's nod to the city that raised a young Marian Anderson and nurtured her singing career. Growing up in South Philadelphia, Anderson began singing in her church choir at age six. Within a few years, she joined the People's Chorus of Philadelphia and became a frequent soloist, earning money to support her family.

## **2. Marian Anderson the Opera Star**

Anderson overcame social and political barriers to become a world-renowned contralto. When racial discrimination limited her performing opportunities in the United States, she left for Europe. “Marian Mania” ensued; in the early 1930s Anderson toured several countries and performed for European royalty. When she returned home in 1935, she was a celebrated opera star but still faced the ugly reality of segregation.

## **3. The White House**

In 1936, Marian Anderson became the first African American to perform at the White House, singing for President Franklin D. Roosevelt, First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, and their guests. She would return to the White House several times, performing for multiple presidents.

## **4. Eleanor Roosevelt and Marian Anderson**

After their first meeting in 1936, Marian Anderson and First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt formed a friendship. Three years later, when Anderson was barred by the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) from singing at Constitution Hall due to her race, Mrs. Roosevelt resigned her DAR membership in protest, bringing national media attention to the incident. She then worked to organize a concert for Anderson at the Lincoln Memorial.

## **5. Lincoln Memorial Concert**

On Easter Sunday in 1939, an interracial crowd of seventy-five thousand people gathered to hear Marian Anderson perform on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial. Millions more heard the concert broadcast over the radio. This location was highly symbolic, as Anderson had been barred from singing at her original venue, Constitution Hall, because of her race. Anderson sang “My Country, ‘Tis of Thee,” “Ave Maria,” and a selection of spirituals, closing with “Nobody Knows the Trouble I’ve Seen.”

## **6. Bell Symbol**

Johnson may have included this bell in his composition as a symbol of freedom and a nod to Anderson’s music. The famous Liberty Bell, housed in Marian Anderson’s hometown of Philadelphia, has inspired generations of abolitionists and civil rights activists with its meaning. The image of a bell also evokes a line from “My Country, ‘Tis of Thee,” which Anderson performed at the Lincoln Memorial: “let freedom ring.”

## **7. Carnegie Hall**

Marian Anderson first sang at New York City’s Carnegie Hall, one of the world’s most prestigious concert venues, as part of a music school recital in 1920. She appeared there more than fifty times before her death in 1993.

## **8. Kosti Vehanen**

This image appears to represent Marian Anderson’s longtime accompanist, the Finnish pianist and composer Kosti Vehanen, who accompanied Anderson on the piano during her famous April 9, 1939, concert at the Lincoln Memorial. Recalling the first time he heard Anderson sing, Vehanen wrote that her voice was “filled with deep, tragic feeling, as though the sound came from under the earth.”



## 9. European Landmarks

Johnson included several recognizable landmarks that represent major European cities in which Anderson performed, including the Eiffel Tower and Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris, St. Peter's Basilica in Vatican City, St. Basil's Cathedral in Moscow, and Buckingham Palace in London.

## 10. Flags of the World

Marian Anderson's career as an opera singer brought her opportunities to perform all over the world. Johnson included an array of international flags representing places she toured in North and South America, Europe, and Africa.

# Fighters in Action Media Space

## Experience the Fighters

Have you ever heard the resonant voice of actor Paul Robeson, or seen Josephine Baker's bold, expressive dance moves?

In seeking to capture his Fighters, Johnson collected photographs, newspaper articles, and magazine clippings of them, piecing together moments of history into his paintings. Discover how Johnson built his compositions and experience the Fighters as Johnson may have seen and heard them.

### Paul Robeson:

Singer, Stage Star, Human Rights Activist

**Paul Robeson**

1898–1976

“Artists are the gatekeepers of truth. We are civilization's radical voice.”

### Marian Anderson:

Opera Singer, Trailblazer, Icon

**Marian Anderson**

1897–1993

“We are all here to have a kind of living of our own, and to be recognized for what we are, not for what somebody thinks we should be.”

### Jack Johnson:

Heavyweight Boxing Champion, Celebrity, Rebel

**Jack Johnson**

1878–1946

“My life, almost from its very start, has been filled with tragedy and romance, failures and success, poverty and wealth, misery and happiness.”

Josephine Baker:

Performer, Activist, Allied Spy

**Josephine Baker**

1906–1975

“Each time I leaped I seemed to touch the sky and when I regained earth it seemed to be mine alone.”

Mary McLeod Bethune:

Educator, Advocate, Presidential Adviser

**Mary McLeod Bethune**

1875–1955

“Believe in yourself, learn, and never stop wanting to build a better world.”

Gandhi:

Leader, Peacemaker, Social Activist

**Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi**

1869–1948

“If we could change ourselves, the tendencies in the world would also change.”

## One Smithsonian panels

**What can this shawl tell us about Harriet Tubman?** Scan the QR code to hear from Mary Elliott, curator of slavery at the National Museum of African American History and Culture.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D0rGEkAVOA>

Shawl given to Harriet Tubman by Queen Victoria, ca. 1897, silk lace and linen, Collection of the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, Gift of Charles L. Blockson, 2009.50.39

**What can this Bible tell us about Nat Turner?** Scan the QR code to hear from Mary Elliott, curator of slavery at the National Museum of African American History and Culture.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zyug\\_bl-Qqk&t=2s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zyug_bl-Qqk&t=2s)

Bible belonging to Nat Turner, 1830s, ink on paper, Collection of the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, Gift of Maurice A. Person and Noah and Brooke Porter, 2011.28

**What can this cash register tell us about Nannie Helen Burroughs?** Scan the QR code to hear from Modupe Labode, curator of African American social justice history at the National Museum of American History.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5LjyatYJ5y0>

Cash register, 1904, glass, wood, marble, manufactured by National Cash Register Company, Nannie Helen Burroughs School, National Museum of American History, 1978.0342.009

**What can this fur coat tell us about Marian Anderson?** Scan the QR code to hear from Samir Meghelli, senior curator at the Anacostia Community Museum.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zG2eJ4EAtXM&t=2s>

Marian Anderson's fur coat, ca. 1950s, fur, silk, Anacostia Community Museum, 1992.0034.0001

**What can this boxing glove tell us about Jack Johnson?** Scan the QR code to hear from Damion Thomas, curator of sports at the National Museum of African American History and Culture.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bwZaOQvdVKU>

Boxing glove signed by Jack Johnson, 1919-45, leather, cotton, manufactured by Ken-Wel Sporting Goods Company, Collection of the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, 2013.115

## Conservation Wall Panel Text

### How do conservators assess the condition of a painting?

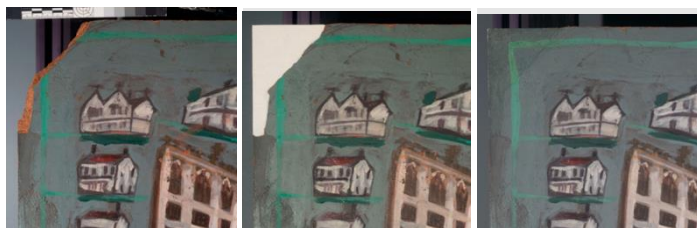
Conservators use a variety of tools to analyze a painting and determine what kind of treatment it might require. Shining light on a painting from a low angle (to produce what's called raking light) can help them study a painting's surface and see where damage has occurred.



*Crispus Attucks* under raking light before (left) and after (right) treatment.

### What does a conservator do when a painting has suffered structural damages?

The top left corner of this painting, *Historical Scene*, had broken off after years of rough handling and exposure to the elements. SAAM conservators reconstructed the missing section using a material similar to—but distinct from—the original support, a pressed-wood composite called Masonite. By making repairs in a different material, conservators allow other professionals to identify past treatments and reverse them if needed.



Detail of *Historical Scene* before treatment (left), after reconstruction (middle) and after inpainting (right).

### How does a conservator treat areas of paint loss?

Conservators are trained in “inpainting,” a process of carefully filling areas of lost paint to match an artist’s original work. They use reversible materials that can be readily distinguished from the artist’s paint and removed without harming the original painting.



Detail of *Historical Scene with Mary McLeod Bethune* before (left) and after (right) inpainting.

### How can conservators tell which parts of the painting are original and which were added later?

Using a blacklight (which emits ultraviolet, or UV, light), conservators can identify which parts of the painting are later additions, as materials react differently when exposed to this type of illumination. In the example below, the areas that are not original appear darker under UV light.



Detail of *Dr. George Washington Carver* under normal light (left) and UV light (right). Notice how the pink border turns bright orange under UV illumination, and how conserved sections appear black.