



THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE

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Lois Mailou Jones, *Dans un Café à Paris (Leigh Whipper)*, 1939

- This talk was recorded to coincide with 'The Harlem Renaissance and Transatlantic Modernism', an exhibition at the Met, New York between February and July 28, 2024.
- Many of my subscribers live outside the United States so I should explain that Harlem is a district of New York City north of Central Park that saw a **sudden flowering of artistic and cultural activity** between the end of World War One and the beginning of World War Two. This artistic rebirth became known as the **Harlem Renaissance** and although it was spread across many cities in the Northern US it was centred in Harlem.
- But, you might be asking why Harlem and why at that time?

NOTES

- Introduction
 - Great Migration
 - Themes pride in black identity, social realism, modernism, folk art
- **Meta Vaux Warrick Fuller** (1877-1968): A sculptor who incorporated African and European influences in her work.
- **James Van Der Zee** (1886-1983), photographer
- **Aaron Douglas** (1889-1979): A muralist and painter known for his bold, geometric style and historical narratives.
- **Archibald John Motley Jr.** (1891-1981): A painter who explored social themes through expressive figuration.
- **Augusta Savage** (1892-1962) was a sculptor and teacher.

- **Hale Woodruff** (1900-1980): A painter and printmaker known for his murals and depictions of the Black experience.
- **Lois Mailou Jones** (1905-1998) attended the School of Museum of Fine Art, Boston
- **Charles Alston** (1907-1977) was a sculptor, painter, artist, muralist and teacher.
- **Jacob Lawrence** (1917-2000): A painter who developed a unique narrative style using small, tempera panels.
- The exhibition at The Met includes Charles Alston, Aaron Douglas, Meta Warrick Fuller, William H. Johnson, Archibald Motley, Winold Reiss, Augusta Savage, James Van Der Zee, and Laura Wheeler Waring

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https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harlem_Renaissance

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_Arts_Movement African American art of the 1960s and 70s

<https://www.britannica.com/event/Harlem-Renaissance-American-literature-and-art>

<https://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/the-harlem-renaissance-and-transatlantic-modernism>

<https://www.nga.gov/learn/teachers/lessons-activities/uncovering-america/harlem-renaissance.html>

https://youtu.be/BldEo-2F010?si=UVX_ZBQPE387wdAa a 45 minute introduction to the Harlem Renaissance

RECOMMENDED BOOKS

Denise Murrell, *The Harlem Renaissance and Transatlantic Modernism*, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, distributed by Yale University Press.

<https://amzn.to/3UO139m> This is the book of the exhibition. Unfortunately it was not published soon enough for me to read it before preparing my talk.

REFERENCES AND COPYRIGHT

- My talks and notes are produced with the assistance of AI systems such as ChatGPT, Google Gemini and Microsoft Bing.
- They are also based on information found on public websites such as Wikipedia, Tate, National Gallery, Louvre, The Met, Oxford Dictionary of

National Biography, Khan Academy and the Art Story.

- If they use information from specific books, websites or articles these are referenced at the beginning of each talk and in the 'References' section of the relevant page. The talks that are inspired by an exhibition may use the booklets and books associated with the exhibition as a source of information.
- Where possible images and information are taken from Wikipedia under an [Attribution-Share Alike Creative Commons License](#).
- If I have forgotten to reference your work then please let me know and I will add a reference or delete the information.

Cover of "Le Petit Journal", 7 October, 1906. Race riots in Atlanta, Georgia, 7 October 1906, Bibliothèque nationale de France



- Cover of "Le Petit Journal", 7 October, 1906. Depicting the race riots in Atlanta, Georgia. "The Lynchings in the United States: The Massacre of Negroes in Atlanta.", 7 October 1906, Bibliothèque nationale de France
- This illustration explains one reason. It shows a massacre that took place between September 24th and 26th, 1906, when white mobs killed dozens of Black Americans and injured scores more. Known as the Atlanta Race Riot, or the **Atlanta Race Massacre**, it was one of many violent events in the Southern US at the beginning of the **Jim Crow era**.
- Between the 1910s and 1970s the **Great Migration** took place. Roughly **six million Black Americans** moved from the Southern states to Northern, Midwestern and Western states. One of the largest movements of people in US history.
- They migrated to escape from violence, racism, Jim Crow laws, indentured labour, the lack of social and economic opportunities and even widespread lynching.
- For those outside American I should explain that **Jim Crow** is a pejorative term associated with a song-and-dance routine performed by a white man (Thomas D. Rice) blacked up as a caricature of African Americans. The Jim Crow laws were local and state laws that enforced segregation based on skin colour. Segregation took place in schools, libraries, public transport, hotels, restaurants in fact anywhere people met. In addition, facilities for African Americans such as schools and libraries were massively underfunded.

NOTES

- **Introduction**

- 1906 Atlanta race massacre
- The Great Migration
- Nearly 3,500 African Americans were lynched between 1882 and 1968.

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- [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Migration_\(African_American\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Migration_(African_American))
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Three African American women in Harlem during the Harlem Renaissance, ca. 1925



Three African American women in Harlem during the Harlem Renaissance, ca. 1925

- Many African Americans who had moved from the South settled in Harlem. These are three African American flappers perhaps about to dance the night away at one of the jazz clubs, such as the **Cotton Club** or the **Savoy Ballroom** which both attracted Black and white audiences. The Harlem Renaissance brought jazz to widespread attention and appreciation and this period saw the rise of legendary jazz figures like **Louis Armstrong**, **Duke Ellington**, **Bessie Smith**, and many others.
- The Harlem Renaissance was a rebirth of all forms of culture— music, literature, poetry, the visual arts, religion, philosophy, fashion and photography. But this talk is **about the art**, in particular painting. I have selected ten artists. So let's get started...

NOTES

- "Flappers were a subculture of young Western women in the 1920s who wore short skirts (knee height was considered short during that period), bobbed their hair, listened to jazz, and flaunted their disdain for what was then considered acceptable behavior. Flappers were seen as brash for wearing excessive makeup, drinking alcohol, smoking cigarettes in public, driving automobiles, treating sex in a casual manner, and otherwise flouting social and sexual norms." (Wikipedia)

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- <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flapper>
- <https://www.open.edu/openlearn/society-politics-law/sociology/a-brief-history-harlem>

Meta Vaux Warrick Fuller (1877-1968), *The Wretched*, 1902, bronze, 53.34 x 35.56 x 38.1 cm, Maryhill Museum of Art



Meta Vaux Warrick Fuller (1877-1968), *The Wretched*, 1902, bronze, 53.34 x 35.56 x 38.1 cm, Maryhill Museum of Art

- Meta V.W. Fuller (1877–1968) became one of the **leading Black female sculptors in America**. She was born in Philadelphia to a relatively well-off middle-class family and she won a three-year scholarship to study at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts.
- Fuller lived in Paris in 1899-1903 and studied sculpture at the Académie Colarossi (1870-1930, accepted female students and allowed them to draw nude male models), drawing at the École des Beaux-Arts, and painting with Raphaël Collin (1850-1916, French academic painter).
- In 1902 she became the protege of Auguste Rodin (1840-1917). It was when she completed this bronze showing his influence. She became so skilled at representing suffering that the French press described her as "the delicate sculptor of horrors".
- In 1903 she returned to Philadelphia but was shunned by the art scene because she was Black. In 1907 she married Dr. Solomon Fuller a prominent physician and psychiatrist and she added his name to hers.
- In 1910 a fire destroyed 16 years of her work leaving her emotionally devastated.

NOTES

- Meta Vaux Warrick Fuller (1877-1968) career spanned seven decades and she is a prominent figure in American art history.

- **Early Life and Artistic Awakening:** Born in Philadelphia, Meta Warrick was surrounded by artistic influences. Her mother, a successful wig maker and beautician, instilled in her a sense of pride and accomplishment. Despite her father's initial disapproval, Warrick's artistic talent blossomed early. She honed her skills and developed a passion for sculpting.
- **Formal Education and Early Influences:** In 1897, Warrick enrolled in the Pennsylvania Museum School of Industrial Arts (now the University of the Arts). During this time, she received classical training in sculpture and developed a strong foundation in anatomy and form. Her studies were further enriched by a trip to Paris in 1899, where she encountered the works of renowned sculptors like Auguste Rodin.
- **Harlem Renaissance and Artistic Voice:** By the early 1900s, Warrick established her artistic studio in Boston, Massachusetts. It was during this period that she immersed herself in the burgeoning Harlem Renaissance, a cultural movement that celebrated Black art, literature, and music.
- Drawing inspiration from her African American heritage and the experiences of her community, Warrick's sculptures focused on realistic portrayals of Black people. Her works challenged the prevailing negative stereotypes and showcased the dignity, strength, and beauty of Black individuals and families.
- **Themes and Techniques:** Warrick's diverse body of work explored various themes. Early pieces often depicted children, mothers, and historical figures like Frederick Douglass. As her career progressed, she incorporated African artistic influences into her sculptures, utilising expressive forms and symbolic elements.
- Throughout her artistic journey, Warrick experimented with various techniques, working with bronze, clay, and plaster. Her mastery of form and attention to detail resulted in powerful and evocative sculptures that resonated deeply with viewers.
- **Legacy and Recognition:** Throughout her long career, Meta Vaux Warrick Fuller achieved significant recognition. Her work was exhibited nationally and internationally, and she received numerous awards, including the prestigious Harmon Foundation Award for Distinguished Achievement in the Fine Arts (1933).
- Beyond her artistic contributions, Warrick was also a committed advocate for Black artists. She established the Negro Art Theatre Workshop in Boston

and actively encouraged the artistic endeavours of others.

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https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Académie_Colarossi

Meta Vaux Warrick Fuller (1877-1968), *Emancipation*, Harriet Tubman Park, Boston's South End; West Newton Street and Columbus Avenue



Meta Vaux Warrick Fuller (1877-1968), *Emancipation*, Harriet Tubman Park, Boston's South End; West Newton Street and Columbus Avenue

- Despite this set back she was the first African American woman to receive a U.S. government commission and she received further commissions including, in 1913, this statue, *Emancipation*, to honour the 50th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation. In 1999, it was cast in bronze and placed in the Harriet Tubman Park, Boston's South End; West Newton Street and Columbus Avenue. In celebration of the Park's 15th Anniversary, quotes by Fuller describing her statue and her thoughts about the Proclamation were engraved on the statute's base.
- For non-US listeners the Emancipation Proclamation was issued by President Abraham Lincoln on January 1, 1863, as the nation approached its third year of bloody civil war. The proclamation declared "that all persons held as slaves" within the rebellious states "are, and henceforward shall be free."
- At the center of the composition, a young woman and man stand upright and are semi-nude. The couple emerge from the "Tree of Knowledge." Behind the male figure is another female figure representing "Humanity," clothed in a gown, she bows her head and rests it on her raised left arm. She gently rests her right hand on the young man's shoulder.
- Throughout her **long career**, Fuller achieved significant recognition. Her work was exhibited nationally and internationally, and she received numerous awards, including the prestigious Harmon Foundation Award for Distinguished Achievement in the Fine Arts (1933). She was also supported young Black artists

and established the Negro Art Theatre Workshop in Boston.

NOTES

- **Inscription on granite base (1999):** *Emancipation*, 1913. In honor of African American freed persons who by their courage and valour gave meaning to emancipation. Meta Vaux Warrick Fuller, (1877-1968) sculptor. Courtesy of The Museum of the National Center for Afro-American Artists and the Museum of Afro-American History.
- **Inscription on granite base (2013):** "Humanity weeping over her suddenly freed children who beneath the gnarled fingers of Fate, step forth into the world, unafraid." Meta Warrick Fuller
- **Inscription on granite base (2013):** "The Negro has been emancipated from slavery but not from the curse of race hatred and prejudice. . . It was not Lincoln alone who wrote the Emancipation but the humane side of the nation . . ." Meta Warrick Fuller

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James Van Der Zee (1886-1983),
Wedding Day, Harlem, 1926,
printed 1974, Gelatin silver
print. Clark Art Institute,
Williamstown



James Van Der Zee (1886-1983), *Wedding Day, Harlem*, 1926, printed 1974, Gelatin silver print. Clark Art Institute, Williamstown

- This is the work of the photographer **James Van Der Zee**. This photograph is typical of his style. It is set in his studio and it has been manipulated by adding a **ethereal image of a child** holding a doll to indicate the marriage's future fertility.
- He was **technically proficient** and aimed to **improve on nature** by adding to the scene or by making the sitter more attractive. As a result he quickly became the **leading photographer in Harlem** and was much in demand. His photographs helped define what we know of the Harlem Renaissance today.

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James Van Der Zee (1886-1983), *Couple Wearing Raccoon Coats with a Cadillac, Harlem, 1932*, 19 × 23.7 cm, Museum of Modern Art



James Van Der Zee (1886-1983), *Couple Wearing Raccoon Coats with a Cadillac, Harlem, 1932*, 19 × 23.7 cm, Museum of Modern Art

- Here is another side of Harlem; a wealthy couple pose with the most expensive car of the day a Cadillac V-16.
- He was born in Lenox, Massachusetts and actually had an early gift for music and he wanted to become a professional violinist but his second interest was photography. He bought his first camera when he was a teenager, and even improvised a darkroom in his parents' home.
- He moved to New York where he worked as a waiter and elevator operator and played in the Harlem Orchestra. The following year he married and moved back to Lenox where their daughter was born. In 1915, aged 29 he moved to Newark, New Jersey and became a **darkroom assistant**. That was the breakthrough. The same year he moved back to Harlem and **set up a studio** as there was a big demand for photographs from the many migrants and immigrants arriving.
- He became known internationally by **accident**. Years later, a researcher came across his studio and asked if he had any photographs of the 1920s and 30s. He had thousands of negatives and these became the basis of an exhibition called *Harlem on My Mind* in 1969 at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. He was then 83 and his career took off with many solo and group exhibitions across the US and internationally. He died when he was 96.

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Laura Wheeler Waring (1887–1948), *Alice Dunbar Nelson*, 1927, 62.4 × 51.4 cm, National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian



Laura Wheeler Waring (1887–1948), *Alice Dunbar Nelson*, 1927, 62.4 × 51.4 cm, National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian

Alice Dunbar Nelson (1875–1935)

- When this was painted Laura Waring was already an established artist who had studied in France and she painted Dunbar-Nelson's portrait in Philadelphia the year she married Walter E. Waring, a Lincoln University professor. By 1927 Alice Dunbar-Nelson was an American poet, journalist, author and women's rights activist and was in demand as a public speaker. The portrait exudes the confidence and self-possession of two accomplished, intellectual women whose friendship helped advance the rights of both women and African Americans.
- Alice Nelson was born in 1875 and was among the first generation of African Americans born free in the Southern United States after the end of the American Civil War, she was one of the prominent African Americans involved in the artistic flourishing of the Harlem Renaissance. Her first husband was the poet Paul Laurence Dunbar. After his death, she married physician Henry A. Callis; and, lastly, was married to Robert J. Nelson, a poet and civil rights activist.
- Laura Waring and Alice Nelson first met at the National Association of Coloured Women founded to combat negative stereotypes and fight for basic rights.

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Laura Wheeler Waring (1887-1948), *Waterfront, Semur, France*, c. 1925, 33 x 42 cm

Laura Wheeler Waring (1887-1948), *Waterfront, Semur, France*, c. 1925, 33 x 42 cm

- Laura Waring's study in Paris was interrupted by World War One but she returned in 1924. She enrolled for a year of painting study at a famous Académie (Académie de la Grande Chaumière). There she studied with other artists (Boutet de Monvel, and the African American Henry Ossawa Tanner) enjoying her "**only period of uninterrupted life as an artist with an environment and associates that were a constant stimulus and inspiration. My savings, however, would not allow me to continue this life indefinitely.**"
- At the end of her French trip, she traveled south stopping in **Semur, a hilly and scenic medieval town** in Burgundy that was a favourite of landscape artists. The landscape paintings from this trip were a breakthrough and were exhibited on both sides of Atlantic.
- She avoided publicity but in 1944, eight of her portraits were included in a travelling exhibition called Portraits of Outstanding Americans of Negro Origin. (Subjects of her portraits included Marian Anderson, W.E.B. DuBois, James Weldon Johnson, and Mary White Ovington.)
- She died in 1948 after a long illness. In 1967, portraits from the 1944 exhibition were given to the Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery.

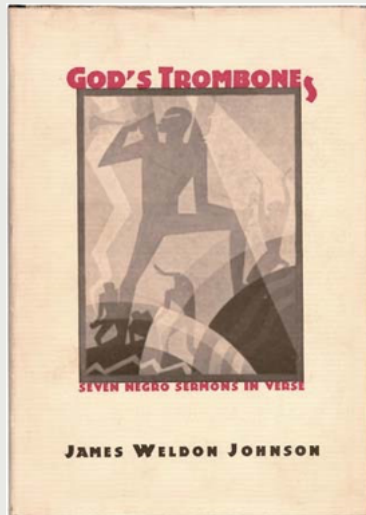
NOTES

- This painting sold for just \$4,750 in 2015.

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Aaron Douglas (1899-1979), *The Judgment Day*, illustration for *God's Trombones*, by James Weldon Johnson (New York: Viking Press, 1927)

Aaron Douglas (1899-1979), *The Judgment Day*, illustration for *God's Trombones*, by James Weldon Johnson (New York: Viking Press, 1927)

- Aaron Douglas (1899–1979) was one of the **leading artists of the Harlem Renaissance** and is known as the **“father of African American art.”** He created a modern visual language that represented black Americans in a new light.
- He was born in Kansas and in 1922 earned a bachelor's degree in fine arts. He worked as a teacher in a high school for two years before he was **invited by a leading figure in Harlem** (Charles S. Johnson, editor of *Opportunity*, the monthly publication of the National Urban League) to move to Harlem. At first he declined the offer but he then read **an essay by Alain Locke called “Harlem: Mecca for the New Negro”** (in the March 1925 issue of *Survey Graphic*) and that convinced him to go. Alain Locke was the intellectual founder of what was called the **New Negro movement**. This was the creation of a new proud identity for African Americans that, for example, refused to accept the practices of Jim Crow racial segregation.
- This work, called ***God's Trombones* was a breakthrough for Douglas**. It was based on ***God's Trombones: Seven Negro Sermons in Verse***, a masterwork by James Weldon Johnson, poet and activist.
- In his illustrations for this publication, and later in paintings and murals, Douglas drew upon his **study of African art** and his understanding of the **intersection of cubism and art deco** to create a style that soon became the **visual signature of the Harlem Renaissance**.

NOTES

- "Years after the 1927 publication of *God's Trombones: Seven Negro Sermons in Verse*, Aaron Douglas painted new works of art based on his original illustrations for the book. The artist's use of complementary colours (purple and yellow/green) combined with overlapping arcs, zigzagging shapes, and the silhouetted figures' extended limbs create an energised composition. The central figure, who is outsize to show his importance (a device used in ancient Egyptian art, which was an influence on Douglas's style) represents Gabriel, an archangel appearing in the Old and New Testaments of the Bible who serves as God's messenger and whose name means "God is my strength." The other figures respond to Gabriel's call and the pulsating forms suggest the trumpet's echoing sound. The verse that accompanied the illustration published in *God's Trombones* likens Gabriel to a blues trumpeter:" [1]
- The term 'New Negro' was made popular by Alain LeRoy Locke in his anthology *The New Negro*.

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Aaron Douglas (1889-1979), copy of *Aspects of Negro Life: From Slavery Through Reconstruction*, 1934, 12th Street between Lane and Washburn, Topeka, Kansas

Aaron Douglas (1889-1979), copy of *Aspects of Negro Life: From Slavery Through Reconstruction*, 1934, 12th Street between Lane and Washburn, Topeka, Kansas, I believe the original is in the Schomburg Center in Harlem

- This is a copy of an original work by Douglas but double the size. It was one of four panels of "**Aspects of Negro Life: From Slavery Through Reconstruction**" that he completed in **1934** for the 135th Street Branch of the **New York Public Library** (now the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture). Also included in this were the paintings *Song of Towers*, *An Idyll of the Deep South*, and *The Negro in an African Setting*.
- This mural was created during his time as a **professor at Fisk University** just after accomplishing his dream of living and studying in Paris. It takes the viewer on a **journey through slavery, emancipation and the rebirth of African traditions**. From the picking of cotton on the left of the mural to the Emancipation Proclamation in the center to the music and freedom portrayed on the right, Douglas walks the viewer through the emergence of Black America.
- Douglas (1899-1979) was born in Topeka, Kansas, the town where this is installed. He graduated from Topeka High School in 1917 and attended the University of Nebraska from 1918-1922, graduating with a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree. He taught at schools in the Kansas City Area for several years, then moved to New York City to study art under a master artist. He became known as the "**Dean of African American painters**" and as **the "official" artist and muralist of the Harlem Renaissance**.

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Archibald John Motley Jr. (1891-1981), *Nightlife*, 1943, 91.4 × 121.3 cm, The Art Institute of Chicago

Archibald John Motley Jr. (1891-1981), *Nightlife*, 1943, 91.4 × 121.3 cm, The Art Institute of Chicago

- *Nightlife* is **Archibald Motley's portrayal of a crowded cabaret** in the South Side neighbourhood of Bronzeville in Chicago.
- Its stylised figures create an array of diagonal lines that introduce a **sense of movement**. The movement and the shocking shades of magenta and violet capture the **fun and excitement of city dwellers out on the town**. Motley created a network of **gestures and glances among the people**, drawing attention to the various social interactions that animate the scene.
- Motley was inspired, in part, to paint *Nightlife* after having seen **Edward Hopper's *Nighthawks*** (1942), which had entered the collection of the Art Institute of Chicago the year before. [1] Although Hopper's work conveys a sense of stillness and loneliness and Motley is all activity and movement.

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[1] <https://www.artic.edu/artworks/117266/nightlife>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Archibald_Motley

<https://www.artic.edu/artworks/111628/nighthawks>



Archibald John Motley Jr. (1891-1981), *Portrait of My Grandmother*, 1922, Chicago History Museum

Archibald John Motley Jr. (1891-1981), *Portrait of My Grandmother*, 1922, Chicago History Museum

- Unlike most of the artists here **Motley never lived in Harlem**. He was born in New Orleans, Louisiana and his parents moved to Chicago where he grew up in a **predominantly white neighbourhood**.
- His maternal grandmother, shown in this portrait by Motley, was a slave and he listened carefully to her many stories. While growing up his father took him to many cities across the US where he encountered racial hatred and prejudice.
- He won a scholarship to study architecture but he preferred painting and attended the School of the Art Institute Chicago. Although at first he was influenced by classical themes he became inspired by the vibrant jazz scene in Chicago.
- He is known for his colourful chronicling of the African American experience in Chicago during the 1920s and 1930s, and is considered one of the major contributors to the **Harlem Renaissance**, and the **New Negro Movement**, a time in which African American art reached new heights not just in New York but across America—its local expression is referred to as the **Chicago Black Renaissance**.
- His subjects were bustling street scenes, lively nightclubs, and portraits of everyday people with dignity and individuality. Throughout his career, he received recognition for his work, including solo exhibitions at prestigious institutions. During the Great Depression, he continued to create art but had to take on odd jobs to support his family. He later returned to painting with

renewed enthusiasm in the 1960s.

- He once said in an interview "**... racism is the first thing that they have got to get out of their heads, forget about this damned racism, to hell with racism. ... That means nothing to an artist. We're all human beings.**"

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Augusta Savage (1892-1962),
Gamin, c. 1929, painted plaster,
22.9 x 14.7 x 11.2 cm, Smithsonian
American Art Museum



Augusta Savage (1892-1962), *Gamin*, c. 1929, painted plaster, 22.9 x 14.7 x 11.2 cm, Smithsonian American Art Museum

- Augusta Savage (born Fells) had a **difficult time as a child** as she loved to model figures out of clay but her father was a Methodist preacher who interpreted the second commandment literally "**Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing** that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them nor serve them." She said later he almost whipped all the art out of her but she persevered and she was allowed to teach art to the other pupils at high school.
- She married when she was 15 and had a daughter but her husband died a few years later, When she was 23 she married John Savage and although they divorced a few years later she retained his name. When she was 31 she married again but her husband died the following year.
- In 1921 she moved to New York and as she could not afford to attend the School of American Sculpture she applied for and won a scholarship to Cooper Union ahead of 142 men and she went on to complete the four year degree course in three years.
- Savage moved to New York City in the 1920s, where she found herself amidst the flourishing Harlem Renaissance. Her sculptures, often depict Black people in dignified and realistic portrayals that challenged the conventional stereotypes.
- In 1923, she applied for a summer art program at the Fontainebleau School of Fine Arts in France but when the **American selection committee** found out she

was Black they **rescinded the offer**. However, her most well-known work, "Gamin," shown here, a portrait bust of her nephew, earned her a fellowship to study in Paris. Upon returning, she established a studio in Harlem, where she supported and guided aspiring Black artists.

- Savage wasn't just focused on creating; she actively advocated for the inclusion of Black artists in government-funded art projects. Her efforts led to the creation of the **Harlem Community Art Center**, where she served as the first director.

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Augusta Savage (1892-1962),
Realization, 1938, location
unknown



Augusta Savage (1892-1962), *Realization*, 1938, location unknown

- There is very little known about Augusta Savage particularly her later years when she seems to have retired to the Catskill Mountains of New York before returning to New York to live with her daughter. There is a chapter on her in Theresa Leininger-Miller, *New Negro Artists in Paris: African American Painters and Sculptors in the City of Light, 1922-1934* (Rutgers, 2001). However, when I looked the book was \$450 as used on Amazon.
- This piece, *Realization*, looks like a plaster version of two figures, a woman and a man. I think the head behind is hanging on the wall. Augusta Savage is leaning on the work and holding the man's foot. He looks frightened and seeking comfort from the woman like a child although he looks like an adult. The fact that he is naked and she is half-naked, their expressions and the title all indicate that they have just realised that they have been enslaved and there is no escape.

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Hale Woodruff (1900-1980), *Amistad Murals—The Mutiny on the Amistad*, 1938, Talladega College, Alabama

Hale Woodruff (1900-1980), *Amistad Murals—The Mutiny on the Amistad*, 1938, Talladega College, Alabama

- Hale Woodruff established himself as a powerful creator of murals. This is one of the "**Amistad Mutiny Murals**" at Talladega College, Alabama, which depict the story of how enslaved Africans revolted aboard a slave ship in 1839. They attacked the crew with sugar cane knives in a desperate attempt to return to Africa. The case was argued in court and the Supreme Court ruled that Africans were free individuals and never had been slaves and in the final mural they are shown returning to Africa.
- Woodruff's grew up in Nashville, Tennessee. He displayed an early aptitude for art and drew cartoons for his high school newspaper. His passion for art led him to study at the Herron School of Art and Design in Indianapolis, laying the foundation for his formal artistic training.
- He received a prestigious award that allowed him to study in Paris from 1927 to 1931 where he immersed himself in the vibrant art scene. He explored various styles, including Cubism and Expressionism. This period heavily influenced his early work, which often utilized geometric shapes and bold colours.
- On his return to the US it was the middle of the **Great Depression**, and he faced financial hardships that forced him to work as a teacher to support himself. However, in 1931, he won a prestigious teaching post at Atlanta University, a historically Black college. There he played a key role in establishing the university's art department for African American students.
- In 1936, two years before he painted this work, he went to Mexico to study as

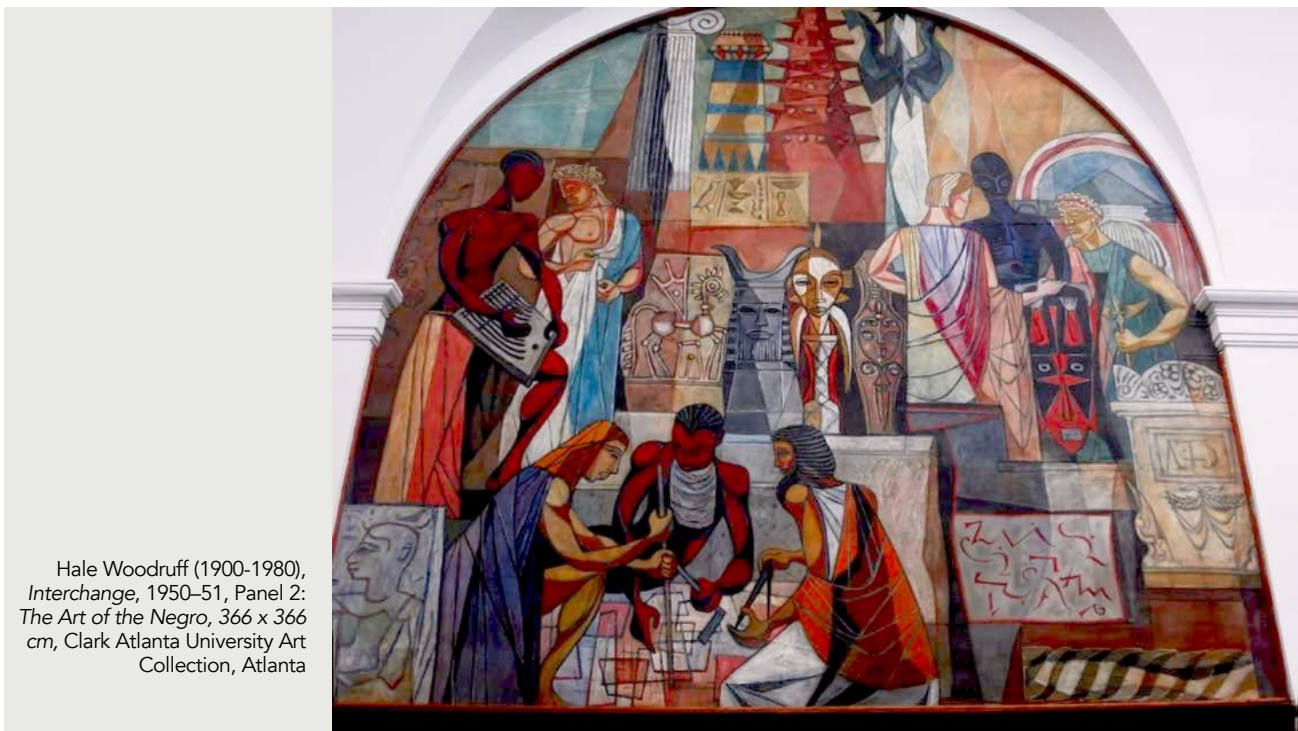
an apprentice under the famed muralist **Diego Rivera** and learned his fresco technique.

NOTES

- *The Mutiny on the Amistad*: The shipboard revolt depicts the moment the kidnapped Africans, in a desperate attempt to return to Africa, attack the crew with sugar cane knives.
- *The Trial of the Amistad Captives*: The case of the Amistad was argued in the U.S. Supreme Court before Justice Joseph Story. He ruled that the Africans were free individuals, and had never been slaves.
- *Repatriation of the Freed Captives*: In the final mural, the freed Africans and missionaries with the American Missionary Association alight on the shores of Africa.
- Talladega College is Alabama's oldest private historically black liberal arts college. It was founded in 1867 in an historic district of the city of Talladega.

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Hale Woodruff (1900-1980),
Interchange, 1950-51, Panel 2:
The Art of the Negro, 366 x 366
 cm, Clark Atlanta University Art
 Collection, Atlanta

Hale Woodruff (1900-1980), *Interchange*, 1950-51, Panel 2: *The Art of the Negro*, 366 x 366 cm, Clark Atlanta University Art Collection, Atlanta

- This **six-panel mural cycle** is in Trevor Arnett Library at Atlanta University and was painted in 1950-51. It takes viewers on a visual journey through **the contributions of Black people throughout history**, showcasing various styles and civilisations across Africa and the Americas. This work exemplifies Woodruff's dedication to celebrating and educating others about Black history and culture.
- **In 1946, Woodruff moved to New York City**, where he continued his artistic exploration. He taught at New York University and co-founded the **Spiral group**, a collective dedicated to advocating for Black artists. While his earlier work drew upon European influences, his later New York period saw him embracing abstraction and exploring the expressive potential of colour and form.
- Throughout his life, Hale Woodruff dedicated himself to both artistic creation and fostering opportunities for others. He left behind a legacy as a pioneering artist, educator, and advocate who played a crucial role in shaping the landscape of African American art and education. His commitment to social commentary and celebrating Black history and culture continues to inspire artists and scholars alike.

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Lois Mailou Jones
(1905-1998),
Sedalia, North Carolina, 1929; 34.9
x 50.2 cm,
watercolor on
paper, private
collection



Lois Mailou Jones (1905-1998), *Sedalia, North Carolina*, 1929-30, 34.9 x 50.2 cm, watercolour on paper, private collection

- Lois (pronounced 'low-ess') Jones began her career as a textile designer but during a teaching post at Palmer Memorial Institute in Sedalia, North Carolina, she created several paintings, including this one, that marked her transition to fine art.
- She was born in Boston in 1905 to working-class parents and they spent their summers on Martha's Vineyard. She displayed artistic talent from a young age. Encouraged by her family, she studied at the Boston High School of Practical Arts, the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, and the Designers Art School of Boston.
- It was in 1928, when she was 23 that she was offered the teaching position at the **Palmer Memorial Institute in North Carolina**, and despite a 50% salary cut she jumped at the chance to found a new art department. Two years later, she joined the faculty at Howard University in Washington D.C., where she would remain for the next 47 years (1930-1977) inspiring generations of what would become prominent African American artists.

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Lois Mailou Jones (1905-1998), *Dans un Café à Paris* (Leigh Whipper), 1939, 91.4 x 73.7 cm, Brooklyn Museum



Lois Mailou Jones (1905-1998), *Dans un Café à Paris* (Leigh Whipper), 1939, 91.4 x 73.7 cm, Brooklyn Museum

- This is her portrait of **Leigh Whipper** (1876-1975), an American actor on the stage and in motion pictures. He was the first African American to join the Actors' Equity Association, and one of the founders of the Negro Actors Guild of America. He created the role of Crooks in the original Broadway production of *Of Mice and Men*, which he repeated in the 1939 film version.
- **She took a sabbatical in 1937-38** and studied at the **prestigious Académie Julian in Paris**. This proved **transformative** as not only did she expand her artistic depth but **she lived in a society free of racial prejudice**. This period of freedom and cultural immersion influenced her artistic style as we see here, and empowered her to return to the United States with renewed purpose and a broader perspective.
- Later, in 1970, Jones was commissioned by the United States Information Agency to serve as a cultural ambassador to Africa. She embarked on a remarkable journey, traveling to 11 African countries over two years talking to artists and deepening her understanding of the African Diaspora and her own heritage.

NOTES

- **Artistic Evolution and Influences:** Throughout her career, Jones's artistic style evolved in response to her travels and experiences. Early works showcased impressionistic and realistic styles, often depicting landscapes and portraits. Her

travels to Europe and Africa significantly influenced her later work, incorporating African motifs, vibrant colours, and bolder forms in her paintings and collages.

- **Themes and Legacy:** Jones tackled various themes in her art, including Black identity, social justice, and cultural celebration. She was a champion for the inclusion of Black artists in the mainstream art world. Her dedication to education is another significant aspect of her legacy. Jones inspired generations of students at Howard University, including prominent African American artists like David Driskell, Elizabeth Catlett and Sylvia Snowden.
- **Recognition and Awards:** Jones received numerous awards and recognition throughout her long career. Her work is represented in various prestigious institutions, including the Smithsonian American Art Museum, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the National Museum of Women in the Arts.

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Charles Alston (1907-1977), *Walking*, 1940, 121.9 × 162.6 cm, Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture

Charles Alston (1907-1977), *Walking*, 1940, 121.9 × 162.6 cm, Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture

- Charles Alston painted *Walking* two years after the Montgomery Bus Boycott. This was a protest against racial segregation in Montgomery, Alabama. It started the Monday after **Rosa Parks**, an African American woman, was arrested for her refusal to surrender her seat to a white person and it lasted just over a year. The court case led to a Supreme Court decision that the Alabama and Montgomery laws that segregated buses were unconstitutional.
- He wrote, **“The idea of a march was growing. . . . It was in the air . . . and this painting just came. I called it Walking on purpose. It wasn’t the militancy that you saw later. It was a very definite walk—not going back, no hesitation.”**
- The flattened planes of colour and sculptural forms were inspired by his interest in African sculpture and European modernism. This approach adds weight and power to the figures, particularly the important but often overlooked role that women played as leaders and critical contributors to the success of the Civil Rights Movement.
- Alston was a sculptor, painter, artist, muralist and teacher who played a pivotal role in the Harlem Renaissance. He was born in Charlotte, North Carolina, and his artistic talent blossomed early. He moved to New York City with his family as a teenager, attending high school and later earning both a Bachelor of Arts (1929) and a Master of Arts (1931) from Columbia University.
- During the 1930s, he established himself as a successful illustrator for magazines

like *Mademoiselle* and ***The New Yorker***. He also actively participated in the **Harlem Renaissance art scene**, creating works that addressed themes of Black identity, social justice, and community life.

- Alston became the first African American supervisor for the **Works Progress Administration's (WPA) Federal Art Project (FAP) in New York**. This position allowed him to mentor and empower other young Black artists during the Great Depression.

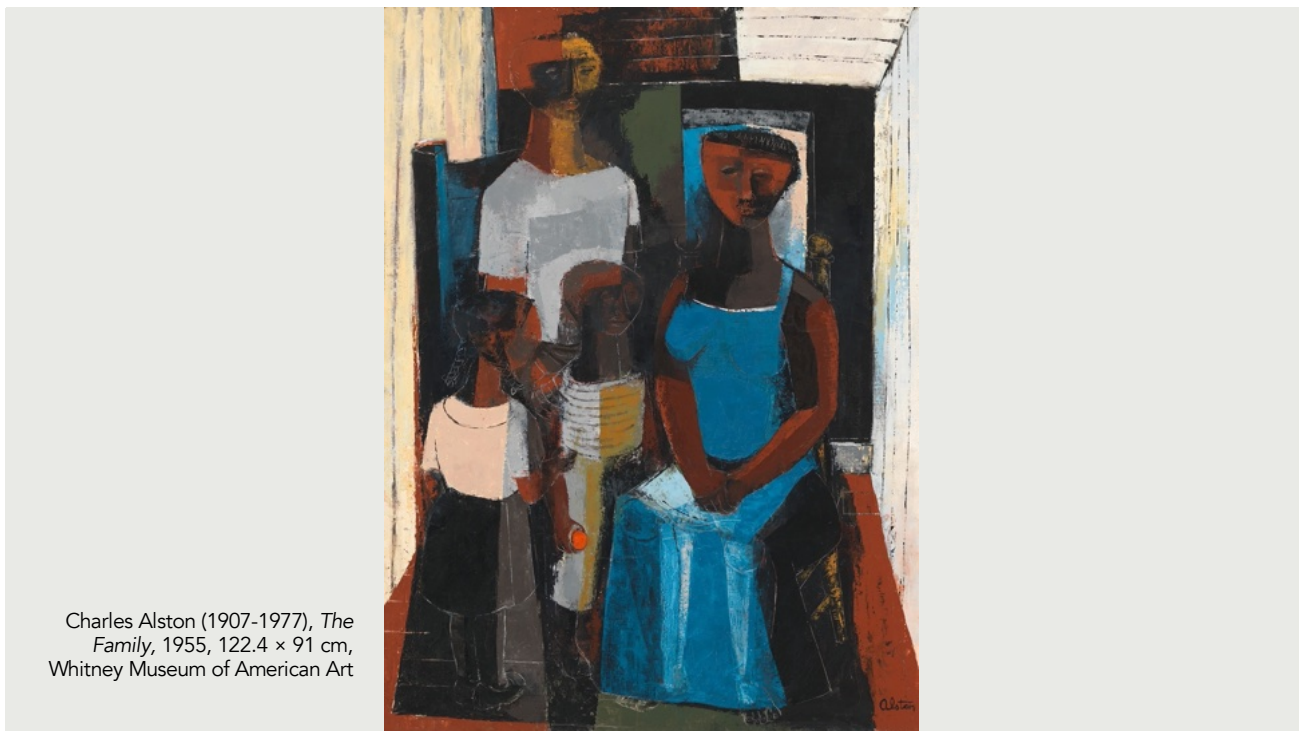
NOTES

- This colourful, modernist painting depicts women and a young girl walking in front of a long line of others. The figures move out of a shadowy background on the left, towards the light, emanating from the upper right corner. The line appears to be moving forwards, out of the picture plane. The women leading the line step forward strongly to the viewer's right; their leg movements are delineated by the columns of strongly contrasting light and shadow of their long skirts. The leading woman's face is upturned towards the light. Next to and slightly behind her a second female figure, with forward facing gaze, has her right arm around a much smaller female figure. This child figure moves with the line but turns her head to face the viewer, hands folded at the waist. Directly behind them is another female figure carrying a swathed infant. There are several isolated individuals outside the orderly grouping of the line. The line is the focus of their gaze; the nearest individual turns her back on the viewer as she focuses on the line.

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Charles Alston (1907-1977), *The Family*, 1955, 122.4 × 91 cm, Whitney Museum of American Art

Charles Alston (1907-1977), *The Family*, 1955, 122.4 × 91 cm, Whitney Museum of American Art

- Alston created this family portrait in bold blocks of colour and lines that he carved into the paint with a palette knife. Alston wrote that this painting was ". . . **an attempt to express the security, stability, and human fulfillment which the ideal family represents. Artistically my problem was to find the painterly equivalents for these qualities, as well as tell the story. Such a theme calls for a compact, well organized design with subtle harmonies and discords and a certain solid, monumental quality.**"
- He designed and painted **influential murals at prominent locations** like the Harlem Hospital and the Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Building. His sculptures, such as the **bust of Martin Luther King Jr.** displayed in the White House, further solidified his legacy. He was also a committed advocate, co-founding the **Spiral Group**, a collective dedicated to promoting and celebrating the works of Black artists.
- **Recognition and Legacy:** Alston received numerous accolades throughout his career, including Guggenheim Fellowships and National Endowment for the Arts grants. His works are housed in prestigious collections like the Museum of Modern Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art, and the Smithsonian American Art Museum

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Jacob Lawrence (1917-2000), *The Life of Harriet Tubman*, 1941, Hampton University Museum in Hampton, Virginia

Jacob Lawrence (1917-2000), *The Life of Harriet Tubman, The Last Journey, No. 17*, 1967, Hampton University Museum in Hampton, Virginia

- This is a 31-panel series by Jacob Lawrence that commemorates **Harriet Tubman**, who helped enslaved people escape to freedom. Each panel captures a moment in her life, highlighting her courage and dedication to fighting for freedom.
- The image at the top of this page, "The Last Journey, No. 17" (1967), appears on the last spread in the book, accompanied by the following lines in verse: "**The chariot was sent/By the Lord's Own Hand,/And Harriet/Rode the chariot/To the Promised Land!**" The final page reads: "**Harriet, Harriet,/Born to be free,/Led her people/To liberty!**"
- He also wrote and illustrated the children's book "**Harriet Tubman and the Promised Land**" which was first published a half century ago in 1968 with a yellow dust jacket, it was re-released with a black one in 1993. He dedicated the volume "**To the courageous women of America.**"
- In the introduction to the 1993 edition, the artist recounts when he first heard about Harriet Tubman's pioneering legacy. "**I recall learning of Harriet Tubman from my mother and from the many schoolteachers and librarians within New York's Harlem community with whom I had the opportunity of coming in contact when I was a very young boy of about five or six years of age,**" Lawrence wrote. "**I will always remember the drama and exploits of Harriet.**"

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1993 caption "Their children were forced to work in the fields. They could not go to school."



1993 caption "In the North the African American had more educational opportunities."

Jacob Lawrence (1917-2000), *The Migration Series #24*, 1941, Museum of Modern Art (MoMA)

Jacob Lawrence (1917-2000), *The Migration Series #24*, 1941, Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), 1993 caption "Their children were forced to work in the fields. They could not go to school."

Jacob Lawrence (1917-2000), *The Migration Series #58*, 1941, Museum of Modern Art (MoMA),

- I end with another **series of murals by Jacob Lawrence** about the Great Migration, where the story of the Harlem Renaissance began.
- The struggle of African American migrants to adapt to Northern cities was the subject of his Migration Series, created when he was a young man in New York.
- It was exhibited in 1941 at the Museum of Modern Art and it attracted wide attention; he was quickly perceived as one of the most important African American artists of the time.
- On the left we see children in the fields working. They are carrying heavy containers of cotton. It is painted in the style of ancient Egyptian wall paintings as one of Lawrence's great champions, the philosopher Alain Locke (1885-1954) advocated for a new African American culture grounded in race pride and for painters and sculptors to recognise their heritage in ancient Egyptian art.
- On the right three school girls are writing on a blackboard in a school in the North. Their bright clothes and education contrast with the underage labour in the South. In the South "**black children faced overcrowded classrooms that lacked books and basic supplies. Teachers were underpaid, undertrained, and overworked. In 1917, there were only sixty-four black public high schools in the entire South, and until World War II rural black children often**

went to school for no more than three to six months a year; they spent the rest of the time working with their families at home or on a farm."

[1] Education was often cited as the reason for moving from the South to the North. The captions were rewritten in 1993 to avoid what was then racist language and to make them shorter and more direct.

NOTES

- He was professor at the University of Washington for sixteen years. He painted African American history and scenes of everyday life. He became famous at the age of 23 for his *The Migration Series (1940-41)* about the migration of African Americans from the rural South to the urban North. There are 60 panels shared equally between the Museum of Modern Art and The Phillips Collection.
- The Great Migration that began in the 1910s saw 1.6 million people move from the rural South to the urban North. In the South African Americans had low wages, economic hardship from the ravages of the boll weevil and a social and justice system rigged against them. The North offered better wages and slightly more rights although city living conditions were much more crowded.

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THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE

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Lois Mailou Jones, *Dans un Café à Paris (Leigh Whipper)*, 1939

- The Harlem Renaissance is probably best known for its literary and performing arts but as we have just seen its sculptors, painters and printmakers were key contributors to a movement that instilled a spirit of achievement and pride in African Americans.
- Thank you for your time and I will be back with another talk soon.