

## COMMUNITY NEWS

# Conference highlights Nashville's black history

By Nancy DeVille  
The Tennessean

A local conference highlighting the contributions of African-Americans to Nashville will be held Friday at the Tennessee State University Avon Williams Campus.

The 32nd annual Nashville Conference on African-American History and Culture will focus on political, social and artistic legacies of the African-American community in Nashville.

Reavis Mitchell, dean of the School of Humanities and Social Sciences at Fisk University, will analyze the impact of the governmental city-county consolidation on the city's African-American community. Additionally, in honor of the 150th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation, Dan Pomeroy of the Tennessee State Museum will examine the effect of the proclamation in Tennessee.

"This is a community conference. People from the neighborhoods can come out and have interaction with the speakers," Mitchell said.

"I will entertain questions about people's remembrance of Metro government and how they affected the black community. It's really a time for the community to renew itself, and the conference introduces aspects of Nashville's black history that some may not be aware of."

Other speakers will in-

## TO LEARN MORE

For more information, call 615-862-7970. Registration is available on site.

clude Ophelia Paine, former staff member at the Metro Historical Commission and former commissioner with the Tennessee Historical Commission; and Stacey Graham of the Center for Historic Preservation at Middle Tennessee State University. Both will discuss aspects of the impact of the Civil War on the African-American homefront community in Middle Tennessee. Victor Simmons, director of the Fisk University Galleries, will discuss Aaron Douglas and his work at Fisk, as well as curating an exhibit of Douglas' work.

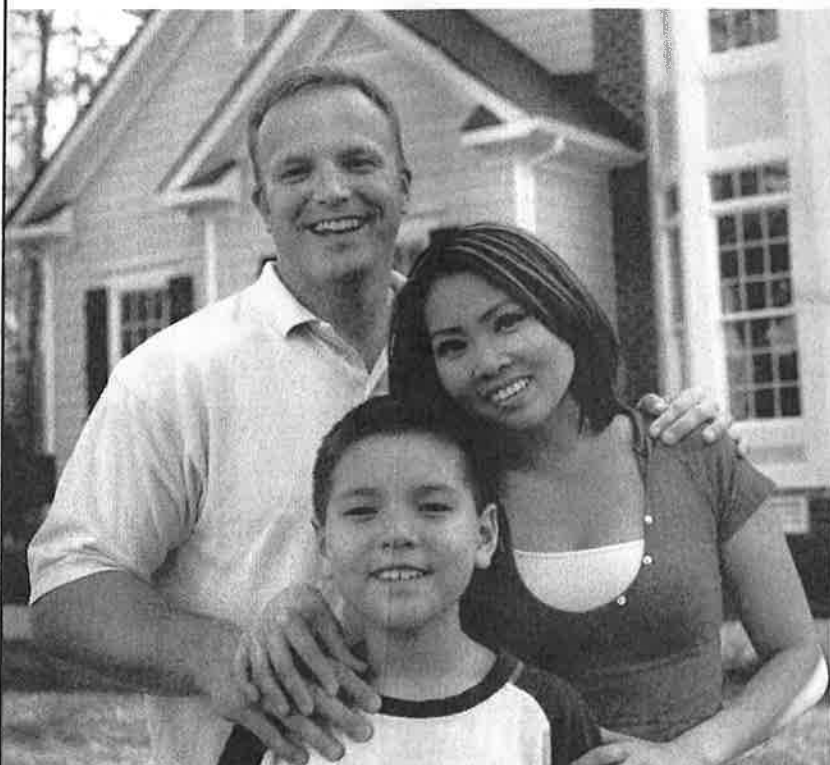
Registration is \$20 and includes admission to all sessions, lunch buffet, recent additions to the Profiles of African-Americans in Tennessee and other educational materials.

For more than 30 years, the Metro Historical Commission and TSU have sponsored the annual conference. Each year, participants and experts come together to honor these individuals through historical and cultural presentations by historians, artists, students, dramatists, musicians, genealogists and others interested in the history of the city and state.



## Building your dream just got easier

Middle Tennessee's Best Builders - Un



If you're in the market to build a new home this year—or started—this is a can't-miss event **no matter what your** builders and ask questions, get valuable tips, attend seminars with experts and more.

Register now at [Tennessean.com](http://Tennessean.com)  
(Admission is FREE if you pre-register)

Saturday, March 2, 10am - 5pm  
Hutton Hotel • 1808 West End Avenue  
Tickets: \$5 each day of the event.



Friday, February 8, 2013

Tennessee State University, Avon Williams Campus

- 
- 8:30 Registration begins
- 9:00 **Welcome and Opening Remarks**  
Mr. Tim Walker, Executive Director, Metro Nashville Historical Commission  
Mrs. Linda T. Wynn, Conference Co-Chair
- 9:20 **Nashville's Black Community Response to the Establishment of Metropolitan Government**  
Dr. Reavis L. Mitchell, Jr., Dean, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Fisk University
- 9:40 **Aaron Douglas, Art and Politics**  
Dr. Victor Simmons, Director and Curator, Fisk University Galleries
- 10:10 **Break**
- 10:30 **"The Proposition that All... Are Created Equal": The Emancipation Proclamation**  
Mr. Dan Pomeroy, Director of Collections, Tennessee State Museum
- 11:00 **Remarks**  
Mr. Howard Gentry, Criminal Court Clerk, Metropolitan Nashville and Davidson County  
Dr. Gloria Johnson, Interim Dean, College of Liberal Arts, Tennessee State University  
Dr. Glenda Baskin Glover, President, Tennessee State University
- 11:20 **Student Award Presentation: Emancipation Proclamation Essay**  
Mr. Marcus Kinnon, Teacher, John Early Museum Magnet Middle School
- 11:30 **Musical Performance**  
Sonja Porter Hopkins, Jazz Vocalist
- Noon Lunch (provided)
- 1:30 **Musical Performance**  
Sonja Porter Hopkins, Jazz Vocalist
- 2:00 **The 19th Century African-American Community at Glen Leven Farm**  
Mrs. Ophelia Paine and Ms. Katie Randall, Glen Leven Farm, Land Trust for Tennessee
- 2:30 **The Plantation Community Cemetery: Antebellum Blacks and Whites and 'the world they made together'**  
Dr. Stacey Graham, Research Professor, Center for Historic Preservation, Middle Tennessee State University
- 3:00 **Closing Remarks**  
Dr. Reavis L. Mitchell, Jr., Conference Co-Chair

## FINANCIAL SUPPORTERS

ALKEBU-LAN IMAGES

ARAMARK

HOLY TRINITY EPISCOPAL CHURCH

TENNESSEE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

SPRUCE STREET BAPTIST CHURCH

TSU FRIENDS OF THE LIBRARY

## PLANNING COMMITTEE

Co-Chair Reavis L. Mitchell, Jr., *Fisk University*

Co-Chair Linda T. Wynn, *Tennessee Historical Commission/Fisk University*

Yildiz Binkley, *Tennessee State University*

Gloria McKissack, *Tennessee State University*

Pamela Bobo, *Tennessee State University*

Tara Mitchell Mielnik, *Metro Historical Commission*

Crystal A. deGregory, *Tennessee State University*

Sharon Hull Smith, *Tennessee State University*

Gloria C. Johnson, *Tennessee State University*

Learotha Williams, Jr., *Tennessee State University*

Michael McBride, *Tennessee State University*

# Profiles of *African Americans* in Tennessee



## Metropolitan Consolidation and Nashville's African-American Community

The 1951 local elections in Nashville, Tennessee signaled a turning point in race relations in a city that prided itself on being a progressive southern city. A new generation of leadership had emerged within the African-American community of the city during World War II and now that generation was about to step forward. The election of Z. Alexander Looby and Robert Lillard as the first African Americans elected to the city council in more than forty years was the first step of this new group into the political arena. Dr. Looby and Mr. Lillard came from different backgrounds and represented different constituencies within the black community, but both were committed to seeing African-American influence in local government expand. In this same election, Ben West narrowly defeated the incumbent mayor of Nashville Thomas Cummings and his election marked a changing of the guard for Nashville's white political establishment as well. With the support of Nashville's NAACP chapter, Councilman Looby immediately began to introduce bills to desegregate public facilities.

Throughout out the early 1950s, white Nashvillians began moving out of the city into Davidson County's newly built suburbs that began to surround the city. While Davidson County, headed by County Judge Beverly Briley, struggled to provide essential services to these residents, Mayor West and the City Council began to see their tax revenues shrinking. In this environment, the city council and the county court created a joint commission of fifteen citizens to study the needs for local government and make proposals, including a consolidated system. This group became known as the Community Services Commission and in 1952 published "A Future for Nashville," a comprehensive study of the challenges of growth and possible solutions to the problems of providing

adequate government services to all residents in an efficient manner. A major theme was that the city and the county were economically inter-dependent and the county residents needed city services. The report planted the seeds for an extended discussion about changes in the current system that led to the creation of a city-county commission to write a charter for a unified system in which the city of Nashville and Davidson County would be consolidated into one governmental unit. This idea became known as simply "Metro".

Z. Alexander Looby was one of Mayor West's five appointees to the 1957 charter commission and Mayor Briley appointed Dr. George S. Meadors, a well-known black community leader and businessman. These appointments gave African Americans 20% of the representation on the 10-member commission that wrote the first charter for metropolitan government. This charter was endorsed by both Mayor West and County Judge Briley, as well as both of Nashville's daily newspapers. At the time of the writing of this charter and the referendum on it that followed, there were less than 10,000 registered black voters in Davidson County out of 70,000 who were actually eligible to vote. African Americans who now made up a third of the population of the city were divided over the benefits of consolidation. They had steadily gained strength in city government and Councilman Bob Lillard feared that African Americans could lose their hard-won political gains if the city and county governments were merged. Z. Alexander Looby, however, believed that consolidation would bring economic growth that would benefit all Nashvillians, including African Americans. When a referendum on the charter was held in June 1958, it passed in the city but failed in the county, where residents were fearful of increased taxes.

---

With the failure of the first charter, Mayor West and his city council began taking controversial steps to solve the city's financial problems by annexing two significant areas of the county that included over forty-two square miles and 82,000 residents. These annexations, along with a wheel tax on county residents who drove their cars into the city, created an outcry among county residents who by 1962 were calling for another charter. When a second charter commission convened, however, the racial atmosphere in Nashville, a city that regarded itself as a moderate southern city, had dramatically changed. The Nashville sit-ins had ushered in a wave of protests and boycotts that continued for several years because many white Nashvillians remained opposed to integration. After the sit-ins, many African Americans became disenchanted with Mayor West and his political allies at the Nashville Banner because of West's reluctance to endorse complete integration of all public facilities and the Banner's outright opposition to ending segregation. It was in this highly charged environment that a second charter, now opposed by Mayor West and the Banner, was written and presented to the voters for approval.

Z. Alexander Looby and Fisk University economics professor Vivian Henderson were the most vocal spokesmen in support of consolidation within the black community. They argued that the annexations would ultimately dilute the black vote by increasing the numbers of white voters in the city. Only through consolidation would African Americans be able to maintain political power through the deliberate drawing of district lines for the 35-member metropolitan council now included in the new charter. Because of Dr. Looby's persistent defense of majority black districts during the commission meetings, six of the thirty-five councilmanic districts were drawn to preserve black majorities in them. Dr. Henderson and Dr. Looby also argued that economic gains promised by consolidation would create additional job opportunities for both blacks and whites. In the June 28, 1962 referendum, the charter passed in both the city and the county, in spite of the fact that fifty-five percent of black voters rejected it.

On April 1, 1963 Beverly Briley was sworn in as the first mayor of Metropolitan Nashville and Mansfield Douglas, John Driver, Robert Lillard, and Harold Love, Sr., joined Z. Alexander Looby as African Americans among the 40 members of the first Metropolitan council. Nashville's struggles with ending segregation, however, were not over with the implementation of consolidated government.

Shortly after Metropolitan government went into effect in 1963, violence erupted at several Nashville restaurants when demonstrators attempted to picket segregated establishments. African-American leaders pressured Mayor Briley to take action. Six weeks after Briley's inauguration, he created the Metropolitan Human Relations Committee to work to bring both the demonstrators and the business community together. That same month President John F. Kennedy came to Nashville and gave an eloquent speech about race relations before 30,000 spectators at Vanderbilt Stadium. In this speech the President challenged Nashvillians and Southerners to accept their full responsibilities of citizenship and voluntarily desegregate. In spite of all of the gains that African Americans made politically, desegregation of public places was not fully achieved for many years to come.

Dr. Carole Bucy  
Davidson County Historian

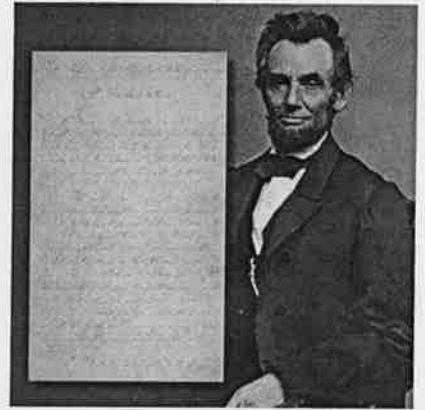
For further reading:

Benjamin Houston, *The Nashville Way: Racial Etiquette and the Struggle for Social Justice in a Southern City*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012.



# Profiles of *African Americans* in Tennessee

## The Emancipation Proclamation in Tennessee



President Abraham Lincoln's proclamation, which took effect 150 years ago on January 1, 1863, in the middle of America's Civil War, imparted to the conflict, which until that time had been waged as a struggle to preserve the Union, a social revolutionary character. According to Allen C. Guelzo's *Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation: The End of Slavery in America* (2004), the Emancipation Proclamation triggered one of the largest property transfers in history. It freed 4 million slaves valued at \$3 billion. By comparison, as a proportion of national wealth, this would represent several trillion in current United States dollars. Perceived by Guelzo as "America's last Enlightenment politician," he notes Lincoln's affection for the political activist, author, political theorist and revolutionary freethinker Thomas Paine and Scottish poet Robert Burns. He writes: "If there was any cardinal doctrine among Lincoln's beliefs, it was his confidence in the inevitability of progress....His was a typically Enlightenment kind of optimism, coming from a man born at the end of the long Enlightenment era and steeped in the conviction that the American founding 'contemplated the progressive improvement in the condition of all men everywhere'" (p. 149).

In the 1850s, Lincoln noted that slavery was "an unqualified evil to the negro [sic], the white man, and the state." Between the election of Lincoln as the 16th President of the United States and his inauguration on March 4, 1861, seven Deep South states—South Carolina, Mississippi, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, and Texas seceded from the Union. Virginia, Arkansas, and North Carolina seceded between April and May of 1861, with Tennessee following on June 8 of the same year. The United States, as well as several foreign nations, awaited Lincoln's position toward the new Confederacy. When he delivered his first inaugural address, President Lincoln affirmed that he had "no

purpose, directly or indirectly to interfere with the institution of thralldom in the states where it exists." Four months later, on July 4, 1861, in his first address to the Congress, Lincoln reiterated his earlier affirmation. Although Tennessee was the last state to secede from the Union, it was at the heart of the war between North and South, second only to Virginia in the number of skirmishes and battles fought on its soil. Only weeks after Lincoln's inauguration, the Confederacy consummated its break with the union by firing on Fort Sumter in South Carolina, one of the last federal military outposts in the South. Lincoln responded by issuing a call for volunteers to put down the rebellion, signaling the beginning of full-scale civil war.

While the Civil War caused mayhem in Tennessee, it broke the manacles of bondage that kept some 275,000 persons enslaved. "By the spring of 1865," according to Ira Berlin's 1985 *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861-1867*, "few Tennessee blacks were still living as slaves," (p.285). When the war started, enslaved black Tennesseans focused their attention on the intersectional hostilities, as well as how their enslavers reacted to the war. Tennessee's enslaved persons remained observant and shared what they learned with each other. Early in 1862 the Union army pushed into the state and by the end of the year, the Union army occupied areas of Middle and West Tennessee, including the cities of Nashville and Memphis. By the end of 1863, the Union army also controlled the East Tennessee cities of Chattanooga and Knoxville. The Union army's occupation of Tennessee contributed to the demise of slavery in the state. Before the end of 1863, Lincoln took action that set in motion the end of the institution of thralldom.

On July 22, 1862, President Lincoln read his "preliminary proclamation" to his cabinet. However, he decided to wait for a Union military



---

victory before bring the document forth. Two months later, on September 22, 1862, following a victory at Antietam, the president signed the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation, formally alerting the Confederate States of America of his intention to free all persons held as slaves within the rebellious states. One hundred days later, with the Confederacy still in full rebellion, President Abraham Lincoln issued the final Emancipation Proclamation to take effect on January 1, 1863.

The signals had been mounting for months. On April 16, 1862, word traveled that the District of Columbia's 3,100 slaves had been freed by Congress—and their owners compensated by the federal government. That July, Congress passed the Second Confiscation Act, which permitted the Union Army to enlist black soldiers and forbade the capture of runaway slaves.

The proclamation managed to destabilize slavery even where it technically remained legal. In Missouri and Tennessee, areas exempted from the Emancipation Proclamation, slaves deserted plantations en masse. By January 1864, one Union general declared that slavery was "virtually dead in Tennessee" (Guelzo p. 215).

President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation did not free enslaved persons in Tennessee or in any other state of the Union or the Confederate States of America. Lincoln specifically exempted Tennessee from the Emancipation Proclamation at the request of Governor Andrew Johnson and other state leaders because the state was not under Confederate control in the fall of 1862—it was under the control of the Union Army and Military Governor Johnson. However, the Proclamation was important because it unreservedly sanctioned the principle of freedom. Enslaved men, women, and children in the state of Tennessee were freed by statewide election on February 22, 1865. Because the Emancipation was a wartime measure, Congress decided that the U. S. Constitution needed amending doing away with slavery for the last time. The Thirteenth Amendment, which formally abolished slavery in the United States, was passed by the 38th Congress on January 31, 1865. Tennessee ratified the amendment on April 7, 1865. Twenty-seven of the thirty-six states ratified the 13th Amendment on December 6, 1865;

approximately ten months after Tennessee freed its slaves by state law.

The impact of the Emancipation Proclamation was immediate and decisive. It changed the dynamic of the war by turning the federal armies into agents of liberation and by giving slaves a direct and vital interest in the defeat of the South.

On May 17, 1962, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. delivered a manifesto reminiscent of the 1863 Emancipation Proclamation to the White House. Sent on the same day that the United States Supreme Court rendered the unanimous *Brown v. Board of Education* decision that outlawed segregated racial public education, King's proposal was constructed as both a moral appeal and a legal brief. The 64-page document called on President John F. Kennedy to issue a "second Emancipation Proclamation," an executive order outlawing segregation — just as President Abraham Lincoln had done with slavery a century earlier.

A year later, during the American Civil Rights movement of the 1960s Lyndon B. Johnson invoked the Emancipation Proclamation holding it up as a promise yet to be fully implemented. Speaking from Gettysburg on May 30, 1963 (Memorial Day), at the centennial of the Emancipation Proclamation, Vice President Johnson connected it directly with the ongoing Civil Rights struggles of the time: "One hundred years ago, the slave was freed. One hundred years later, the Negro remains in bondage to the color of his skin... In this hour, it is not our respective races which are at stake --it is our nation. Let those who care for their country come forward, North and South, white and Negro, to lead the way through this moment of challenge and decision.... Until justice is blind to color, until education is unaware of race, until opportunity is unconcerned with color of men's skins, emancipation will be a proclamation but not a fact. To the extent that the proclamation of emancipation is not fulfilled in fact, to that extent we shall have fallen short of assuring freedom to the free."

Linda T. Wynn  
Tennessee Historical Commission

---

# Profiles of *African Americans* in Tennessee



## Hiram Van Gordon (1918-1979)

Hiram Van Gordon, artist, military cartographer, and longtime chair of Tennessee State University's Art Department was born on September 23, 1918, in Maury County, Tennessee. Born the son of William G. and Louella Gordon, Gordon would rise from humble beginnings in Maury County to become a nationally known professor of Art and serve as inspiration for countless aspiring artists during the twentieth century.

Hiram Gordon entered the world during one of the most tumultuous periods in US history, when African-Americans suffered through several episodes of racial violence throughout the country. Between July and September 1919, riots in Washington DC, Chicago, Omaha, Nebraska, and Elaine, Arkansas, shook many African-Americans belief that they could ever obtain full inclusion in American society. Yet throughout this period, the Gordon family persevered to survive like Maury County's almost 12,000 residents. Gordon's father, William, worked as a corporate local barrel factory while his mother supplemented their income by working as a washerwoman from their home on Pulaski Pike. Although William Gordon owned his Maury County home, he would move his family to Nashville by 1930, purchasing a home and working as an ice dealer on the city's historic Jefferson Street.

It was from their home located at 2707 Jefferson St. that Hiram Gordon's more than forty year relationship with North Nashville and

Tennessee State University began. Gordon attended and graduated from the community's highly regarded Pearl High School and enrolled at Tennessee A & I in 1940. While in school, Gordon took various jobs to assist with the cost of his education, working in warehouses and stores loading and unloading cargo in local Nashville businesses.

Gordon suspended his quest for a college degree on May 23, 1942, when he enlisted in the United States Army, five months after the start of World War II. Shortly after his enlistment, he received orders to serve in the European theater. Gordon worked as a cartographer while in theater and had the task of drawing maps of German ammunition dumps. At the conclusion of the war, he returned to Tennessee A & I, earning both Bachelors and Masters Degrees in Art. In 1951, while still in school, Gordon received an appointment as a graduate assistant in the Department of Art and became a sign painter for the university. Two years later, Tennessee State University hired him as a part-time instructor of art.

Upon the 1958 retirement of Frances Thompson, the dynamic head of the Department of Art and one of the major influences on Gordon's career, he received a promotion to the position of assistant professor of Art was appointed as Head of the Department of Art; a position he would hold for the next twenty-one years. As Head, Gordon envisioned a department



---

that would fulfill what he saw as the purpose of art schools in America and create an environment that would "stimulate those creative arts that give inward satisfaction, install confidence, and arouse new interests."<sup>1</sup> The Department of Art's objectives at the time of Gordon's arrival were to "guide students in the understanding of arts as it appears in everyday living" and "to stimulate students to express themselves in various media as part of their cultural growth."<sup>2</sup> As Head of the department, Gordon continued to strive to meet these goals, teaching his students to understand the intrinsic relationship between art and other fields of learning. The department flourished under his guidance, offering students a wide array of courses in design, lettering, manuscript writing, and crafts.

Gordon maintained a vibrant Art department that frequently placed the work of its faculty, students, and famous and amateur artists on full display for the university and the city of Nashville to enjoy. Art jamborees, Design Spectrums, and other artistic programs became common features of the art program under Gordon's leadership, providing forums for students to explore, discover, and express their artistic passions. During Gordon's tenure,

Tennessee State University's reputation blossomed as a place where young aspiring artists could thrive.

Following Gordon's retirement due to illness and his subsequent death in March 1979, the department took up his mantle and continues to build upon the legacy and foundation he helped establish as its leader. Current faculty in the Department of Art remain active and can boast of having their work featured on television and at historic places around Nashville. Likewise, the Hiram Van Gordon Memorial Gallery, located in Elliot Hall on the campus of Tennessee State University, stands as a monument to his life's work by providing a venue where TSU students can express, cultivate, and showcase their work.

Dr. Learotha Williams  
Tennessee State University

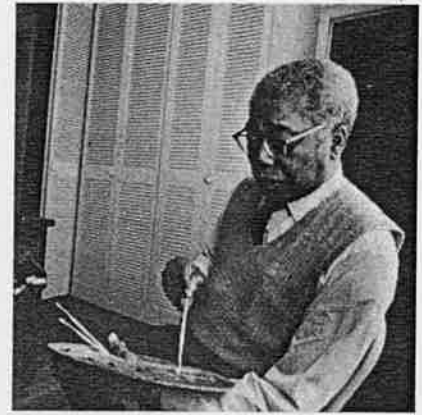
1. Hiram Van Gordon, "A Study of Curriculum Patterns for the Preparation of Teachers," Nashville, TN: Tennessee A.&I State University, June 1953. Unpublished Master's Thesis, 11.

2. Ibid. 20

---

# Profiles of *African Americans* in Tennessee

**Aaron Douglas (1899-1979)**



Aaron Douglas was a “pioneering Africanist” artist who led the way in using African-oriented imagery in visual art during the Harlem Renaissance of 1919-1929. His work has been credited as the catalyst for the art genre “incorporating themes in form and style which affirm the validity of the black consciousness and experience in America.”

Douglas was born in Topeka, Kansas, on May 26, 1899, to Aaron and Elizabeth Douglas. He attended the University of Nebraska School of Fine Arts and was graduated from there in 1922. This Midwestern background seemed an unlikely indicator for this man who would rise to meet W. E. B. DuBois’s 1921 *Crisis* challenge, calling for “the transforming hand and seeing eye of the artist, white or black,” to lead the way in the search for African-American identity. After teaching art in Kansas City, Missouri, Douglas moved to New York City’s Harlem neighborhood in 1924, and began studying under German artist Winold Reiss. His mentor discouraged the budding artist’s penchant for traditional realist painting and encouraged him to explore African art “for design elements that would express racial commitment in his art.” The young painter embraced the teachings of Reiss to develop a unique style incorporating African aesthetics and black American subject matter, and he soon captured the attention of leading black scholars and activists.

In early 1925, one of Douglas’s illustrations appeared on the cover of *Opportunity* magazine, which awarded Douglas its first prize for excellence in art. A few months later, his illustration for the NAACP *Crisis* magazine won the publication’s first prize for drawing. Also in 1925, Douglas’s illustrations were published in

Alain Locke’s survey of the Harlem Renaissance, *The New Negro*. Locke called Douglas a “pioneering Africanist,” and that stamp of praise and approval for the artist influenced future historians to describe Douglas as “the father of Black American art.” His fame quickly spread beyond Harlem, and he began to mount painting exhibitions in Chicago and Nashville, among numerous other cities, and to paint murals and historical narratives interpreting black history and racial pride.

During the mid-1920s, Douglas was an important illustrator for *Crisis*, *Vanity Fair*, *Opportunity*, *Theatre Arts Monthly*, *Fire!!*, and *Harlem*. At the same time, he married the love of his life, Alta Sawyer, on June 18, 1926. The following year, Douglas illustrated two important works of poetry, *Caroling Dusk* (an anthology by black poets), and James Weldon Johnson’s book of poems, *God’s Trombones: Seven Negro Sermons in Verse*. Douglas’s images for the book were inspired by Negro spirituals, customs of Africans and African Americans, biblical stories, and contemporary black history. The series, soon to become among the celebrated of Douglas’s work, “defined figures with the language of Synthetic Cubism and borrowed heavily from the lyrical style of Reiss and the forms of African sculpture.” Through his Precisionist-style drawings for the series, Douglas “came close to inventing his own painting style by this eclectic combination of elements in his work.” At the height of his popularity, Douglas left for Europe in 1931 to spend a year studying at L’Academie Scandinave in Paris. He returned to New York in 1932, and studied at Columbia University, where he later received his Master of Arts degree in 1944.

---

Douglas received a New Deal commission from the Public Works of Art Project in 1934 for a series of murals for the New York Public Library's 135th street branch, now the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. These murals, titled *Aspects of Negro Life* depict "the entire African-American experience from African heritage, the Emancipation, life in the rural South, and the contemporary urban dilemma." Three years later, after being recruited by his friend Charles S. Johnson, Douglas joined the staff of Fisk University in Nashville. Douglas and a fellow black artist, Edwin Harleston of Charleston, South Carolina, completed a series of highly significant murals depicting "the course of Negro history" for the Erastus Milo Cravath Library at Fisk University. Douglas taught painting and was chair of the art department at Fisk from 1937 until his retirement in 1966.

Prior to Douglas's death in Nashville on February 3, 1979, his work had been exhibited throughout the country and featured in companion volumes, including *Retrospective Exhibition: Paintings by Aaron Douglas* (1971) by David Driskell, Gregory Ridley, and D. L. Graham, and *Two Centuries of Black American Art* (1976) by David Driskell. In the decade following his death, the innovative art of the "pioneering Africanist" Aaron Douglas was featured in numerous exhibitions and critical publications such as *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy* (1983) by Robert Farris Thompson; *Harlem Renaissance:*

*Art of Black America* (1987), published by The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York; and *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture* (1989), co-edited by C.R. Wilson and William Ferris.

A major traveling retrospective exhibition, *Aaron Douglas: African American Modernist*, was organized by the Spencer Museum of Art, University of Kansas, in 2007. It presented Douglas not only as an important figure in the New Negro Arts Movement but also as a seminal figure in the development of twentieth century art. Based on archival research at Fisk University and the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in New York City, the exhibition was shown at the Frist Center for the Visual Arts in Nashville in 2008. Exhibition curator Susan Earle edited the accompanying book, which includes essays by art historians Renee Ater, Kinshasha Holman Conwill, David C. Driskell, Susan Earle, Amy Helene Kirschke, Richard J. Powell, and Cheryl R. Ragar, with a Foreword by Robert Hemenway and an illustrated narrative chronology by Stephanie Fox Knappe.

Dr. Reavis L. Mitchell, Jr.  
Fisk University

Unless otherwise noted, all quotations are taken from *Harlem Renaissance: Art of Black America* by Mary Schmidt Campbell, David Driskell, David Levering Lewis, and published by The Studio Museum in Harlem (1987).

---