



DELAWARE ART MUSEUM

CURRICULUM PACKET

Spring 2006

PORTRAITS PICTURING AFRICAN AMERICANS IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY *of a* PEOPLE



Ethan Allen Greenwood, (1779-1856), Portrait of Charles Jones, 1815, oil on panel, Addison Gallery of American Art

April 22 – July 16, 2006

Delaware Art Museum
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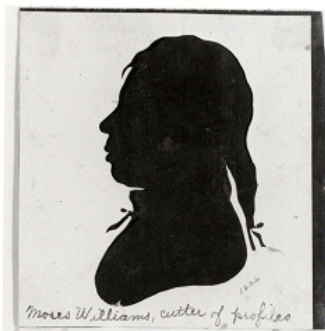
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Portraits of a People: Picturing African Americans in the Nineteenth Century

Introduction

At its heart, *Portraits of a People: Picturing African Americans in the Nineteenth Century* is about exploring the ways that freeborn and freed African Americans used portraiture to establish public and private identities during a time in United States history when their identity as a group was largely determined and misrepresented by others. This collection of nearly 100 paintings, photographs, silhouettes, books, and prints features the faces of revolutionary figures such as Frederick Douglass and Sojourner Truth as well as those of less familiar individuals like Boston barber, John Moore, and the first noted African American scientist, Benjamin Banneker. These remarkable portraits reveal the creation of a visual space in which such people could compel an audience to recognize them as dynamic and ambitious individuals during a century of profound social change.



Attributed to Raphaelle Peale (1774–1825), *Moses Williams, Cutter of Profiles*, after 1802, hollow-cut profile, 3 3/8 x 3 1/4 in., The Library Company of Philadelphia

Together these portraits – many made by African American artists – serve as extraordinary primary resources for both the study of an important historical period (1773-1897) and the life stories of some of its luminaries. In addition, they can reveal the ways that people used imagery to further personal and group ambitions while also addressing the power of the portrait to shape perceptions of cultural and social groups, both in the past and today.

Ultimately, *Portraits of a People* has the ability to address the larger themes of identity and race as it connects the historical significance of the portrait in the United States with the power of images in contemporary culture. Just as in the arts and the

media today, the artists and subjects in *Portraits of a People* take on the challenge of defining and portraying racial designations, family heritage, social status, individual personalities, and communal accomplishments.

Why are these portraits important today?

Whether using the portraits as sources for historical study, as examples of personal narratives, or as representations of African American identity, they offer the opportunity to inspire conversations among students essential to fostering a socially and racially tolerant society in the twenty-first century. As positive, individualized portrayals the images present an alternative to popular perceptions of African Americans in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Close study of the images can reveal how early studies of science and law were often manipulated to justify the dehumanization of African Americans and how imagery was employed to either construct or counter negative stereotypes of this group. *Portraits of a People* can prompt valuable dialogue concerning the definition of race, personal and public identity, and the nature of human perception, as these topics continue to relate to contemporary culture and to the lives of students.

Two approaches to the exhibition are outlined in the two sections that follow.

- **A People Represented** suggests use of the portraits as forms of biography, sources of personal and public memory, and as examples of historic material culture.
- **The Power of the Image** discusses the potential for using images in the construction of race and as a means to counter stereotypes in popular culture.

Theme 1: A People Represented

Who are the individuals behind the faces pictured? What stories can they tell us? *Portraits of a People* traces the varied experiences of a number of free African Americans who were able to defy the restrictions imposed upon them in both the mid-Atlantic and northern states. American artists of both African and European descent carefully constructed these portraits to testify to the stories and achievements of a diverse group of individuals, from barbers and small business owners, to artists, writers, social activists, politicians, and religious leaders credited with laying critical foundations for African American society.

Public Leaders and Social Activists

While many of the individuals represented in the exhibition were public leaders or social activists, particular faces are more recognizable than others because they utilized their public appearance and popularity as an instrument for affecting change. Reformers such as Frederick Douglass and Sojourner Truth promoted their causes through the mass-reproduction and distribution of their image while Liberian leaders took on the stature of American presidents in their formal portraits.

Questions For Discussion

- Have you seen these faces before? Where?
- What does their appearance tell you about their character and accomplishments?
- Why was it important for public leaders and social activists to have their portraits made?
- Why were these portraits of noted individuals made in various mediums and formats – painting, photography, lithographs, engravings, etc.?



Frederick Douglass, frontispiece to *Narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass, an American slave, Written by Himself*, published 1845, Engraving, 6 ¾ x 4 ½ in., Manuscripts, Archives, and Rare Books Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations

Frederick Douglass (1818-1895)

Self-emancipated and self-educated, Frederick Douglass used his skills as a journalist, orator, autobiographer, abolitionist, and social rights activist to promote equality for African Americans, establishing himself as one of the most influential reformers of his time.



Thomas Sully (1783–1872), *Edward James Roye*, 1864, Oil on canvas, 24 x 20 in., Atwater Kent Museum of Philadelphia, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania Collection, Gift of the Pennsylvania Colonization Society

Edward James Roye (1815-1872)

The son of a former slave, Roye moved to Liberia from Ohio as a part of the popular cause supported by the American Colonization Society. A successful businessman, he rose through the ranks of government to serve as president of Liberia for two years.

Writers and Artists

Central to the focus of this exhibition is the influence of images and words on public perception. Both men and women used their abilities as skilled writers and artists to create positive depictions of African Americans. Phillis Wheatley and Frederick Douglass broke barriers by demonstrating their intelligence and talent through writing. Painters Henry Ossawa Tanner and Edward Mitchell Bannister, sculptor Edmonia Lewis, and daguerreotypist Augustus Washington not only constructed dignified likenesses of fellow African Americans, but earned a living from their art.

- How does Phillis Wheatley's portraitist express her intelligence and talent as a writer?
- What details in Wheatley's portrait signify her as a poet? as a woman? as an African American?
- Wheatley's was the first book by an African American to feature the author's portrait. Why do you think that the publisher wanted to have her picture on the frontispiece?
- How does Edmonia Lewis use her portrait to promote herself as an artist?
- Does Tanner consider his profession as an artist an important part of his portrait?
- How do these images speak to the unique challenges faced by African American writers and artists?
- What are these writers and artists doing to counteract negative imagery of their race?



Attributed to Scipio Moorhead (lived in Boston, c. 1750), *Phillis Wheatley, Negro Servant to Mr. John Wheatley, of Boston*, frontispiece to *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral*, published 1773, Engraving, 5 1/16 x 4 in., Special Collections, Margaret Clapp Library, Wellesley College

Phillis Wheatley (1753-1784)

While a slave in Boston, the first African American and female published poet in U.S. history, Phillis Wheatley, proved through her poetry and her portrait that both African Americans and women were capable of intelligent creativity.



Henry Rocher (b. 1824), *Edmonia Lewis*, c. 1870, Albumen print on card, 3 5/8 x 2 in., Courtesy of the Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University Art Museums, On loan from the Historical Photographs & Special Collections Department, Fine Arts Library, Bequest of Evert Jansen Wendell

Edmonia Lewis (c. 1844-1911)

Of mixed African American and Native American heritage, Edmonia Lewis began her career in 1863 as an artist in Boston. After 1866 she settled in Rome, along with other expatriates, where she became a well-established sculptor. While working primarily on historical and later, religious commissions, she also created unique interpretations of African American and Native American themes.



Thomas Cowperthwait Eakins (1844-1916), *Portrait of Henry O. Tanner*, 1897, Oil on canvas, 24 x 20 in., The Hyde Collection, Glens Falls, NY

Henry Ossawa Tanner (1859-1937)

Henry Ossawa Tanner formally trained at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts with painter Thomas Eakins. Successful in his depictions of nature, American genre scenes, and religious paintings, Tanner exhibited his work at numerous American and European expositions and eventually settled in Paris.

Religious Leaders

As emancipated slaves migrated north to settle in free, urban areas, swiftly-growing communities looked to the sanctuary of the church for worship, economic assistance, social life, entertainment, and as a place to share common beliefs and ideas. Spurred into action by the segregationist system of many white congregations, Philadelphians Absalom Jones and Richard Allen proved instrumental in the founding of the first African American churches, while many other religious leaders played important roles in their individual communities.

- How does Absalom Jones communicate his personality, feelings, and activist spirit to the viewer?
- How does the artist construct the portrait in order to convey the religious standing and leadership qualities of the subject?

Quiet Successes

While public and religious leaders, social activists, writers, and artists were making progress for the larger African American population, lesser-known individuals were making headway in their own neighborhoods and professions. Both former slaves and free-born people achieved success as skilled laborers, soldiers, mariners, entrepreneurs, and investors, and were integrated into the white community.

- How do Moore and Mamout convey a sense of pride or success?
- What evidence in the portraits denotes the skills or attitudes of the sitters? and those of the artists?
- How do these portraits compare to those of more prominent figures?
- How did ordinary individuals contribute to the advancement of the African American identity?



Raphaelle Peale (1774–1825), *Absalom Jones*, 1810, Oil on paper mounted on board, 30 x 25 in., Delaware Art Museum, Gift of Absalom Jones School, Wilmington, 1971

Absalom Jones (1746-1818)

After purchasing his wife's and his own freedom, Absalom Jones established the African Episcopal Church and became its first minister. With Richard Allen, he founded the Free African Society of Philadelphia – a religiously-based family aid organization – and spent his years orating against slavery.



William P. Codman (1798–1831), *Portrait of John Moore, Jr.*, 1826, Oil on canvas, 26 x 21 3/4 in., American Antiquarian Society, Gift of Martha Jane Brown, Bernice Brown Goldsberry, John J. Goldsberry, Jr., 1974

John Moore (dates unknown)

Moore prospered in Boston in the 1820s as a barber, one of the skilled trades of the time, and one which gave him an opportunity to earn the respect of those in both the black & white communities. His confidence and affluence are reflected in his gold accessories and comfortable yet assured posture.



Charles Willson Peale (1741–1827), *Yarrow Mamout*, 1819, Oil on canvas, 24 x 20 in., Atwater Kent Museum of Philadelphia, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania Collection, Gift of Charles S. Ogden

Yarrow Mamout (dates unknown)

Yarrow Mamout – despite being taken as a child from his native land of Guinea and enslaved until the age of 80 – was able to purchase his own property and home through successful business ventures. Believed to be 133 years old, Mamout intrigued famed artist Charles Willson Peale to paint his portrait on a trip to Washington, DC.

Theme 2: The Power of the Image

A portrait is more than a visual representation of an individual; it is someone’s vision of him or herself, an artist’s expression and creative design, a story waiting to be read, or a memorial to the deceased. But who sees this image, and how will they interpret it? Who ultimately controls the effect this image will have?

When confronting a portrait, considering the following questions:

- Who made this image?
- What was the artist’s relationship to the subject?
- For what purpose was this image made?
- What message does this image send, and to whom?
- How has the meaning of the image changed over time?

A portrait’s construction depends entirely on a combination of forces: the subject’s wishes, the artist’s perspective, and the proposed audience, among others. The images in *Portraits of a People* were created for a variety of purposes, and were constructed to send positive messages about African Americans, unlike most popular imagery of the nineteenth century which was employed to do just the opposite. To counter predominate stereotypic portrayals, African Americans referenced traditional European forms of portraiture identifiable by their European American contemporaries in order to gain the respect of the larger community.

Mass-Produced Imagery

During the mid-nineteenth century, small, inexpensive, mass-produced photographic portraits called *carte-de-visites* (much like modern-day business cards) became popular. Artists and actors dispensed *carte-de-visites* to increase their celebrity while abolitionists like Sojourner Truth, Frederick Douglass, and Robert Purvis used them to mobilize the service of their moral, social, and political goals. By spreading their images, they were not only voicing their messages and gaining notoriety across the country; they were establishing an alternative identity for the African American. Whereas popular imagery of African Americans such as slave auction tabloids, fugitive slave advertisements, and newspaper illustrations had previously identified them as dehumanized chattel, the portraits constructed by Sojourner Truth, for example, identify her as a dignified, intelligent individual. “Truth found that the photograph allowed her to control the sale of the representation of her body, a body that had at one time been bought and sold by others.”¹

- In many of the portraits she distributed, Truth inserted the phrase, “I sell the Shadow to Support the Substance.” What does Truth mean by this?
- “Unlike more prevalent popular constructions of emancipated slaves, which often showed them partially unclothed in order to reveal the scars of past whippings to evidence of the horrors of slavery, Sojourner Truth was always careful to be portrayed as a well- and fully-dressed middle-class matron.”² How does she use her photographic image to counter expectations of African Americans?
- In what ways does Truth demonstrate her strengths – both physical and moral?
- Compare Truth’s *carte-de-visite* with Phillis Wheatley’s book frontispiece: what do these women have in common? What distinguishes them?



Unknown, *Sojourner Truth*, 1864, Albumen print on card, 2 1/4 x 4 in., Gladstone Collection, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

^{1,2} Shaw, Gwendolyn DuBois. *Portraits of a People: Picturing African Americans in the Nineteenth Century*. (Andover: Addison Gallery of American Art, 2006. Page 168).

Private Portraits as Sources of Memory

Portraiture has long been a means of capturing someone's image in order that they may be remembered. Affluent families commissioned portraits of their children, using props and clothing to communicate their status and hopes for their children's futures. While painted portraits were limited to those who could afford to commission an artist, the advent of photography in the 1830s opened this luxury to the middle classes.

- Who wanted to have this portrait made? What was its purpose?
- Where would this painting have been exhibited? Who did the maker intend to see it?
- What do the children's clothing and props indicate about their gender, age, family, and social status?
- What does the painting style tell you about the artist?
- What about this image makes it unsuitable for mass-reproduction?



William Matthew Prior (1806–1873), *Three Sisters of the Copeland Family*, 1854, Oil on canvas, 26 7/8 x 36 1/2 in., Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Bequest of Martha C. Karolik for the M. and M. Karolik Collection of American Paintings, 1815–1865

The Artist's Influence



Jeremiah Pearson Hardy (1800–1887), *Abraham Hanson*, c. 1828, Oil on canvas, 24 1/2 x 21 9/16 in., Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy, museum purchase

A portrait is generally a collaboration between the artist, the subject, and the person commissioning the portrait. It is through the artist's understanding and unique interpretation of his or her sitter that we come to see and know the pictured individual. Questioning authorship is equally as important in interpreting images as is recognizing the identity of the subject.

- What does Abraham Hanson's clothing and posture communicate about him?
- What do you think is the subject's relationship to the artist?
- Which parts of the portrait represent the way Hanson sees himself and which parts represent the way the artist sees him?
- If a portrait of Abraham Hanson were being made today, how might the image be different?

Art & Writing Activities adaptable for all age levels in the museum or classroom

1. **Positive Self-Image** – What is your favorite part of you? Make a drawing, painting, or collage self-portrait that illustrates your most positive trait(s). Options: Your self-portrait could also include a poem or personal narrative, or act as a positive response to something negative someone has said about you.
2. **A Self-Portrait to Last a Lifetime** – Until the late nineteenth century, most people had only one portrait made of them throughout their lives. If you could have only one photographic or painted portrait of you in your lifetime, what would you want it to look like? Write an essay describing how you would like to be pictured and why. Option: Create the self-portrait that you wrote about.
3. **Remembering People** – How will you remember the important people in your life? Will it be through their image, their words, or their accomplishments? Construct a portrait of someone you admire through writing or art – or a combination. Emphasize the qualities you feel most represent this individual in your depiction of him/her.
4. **Discovering Family Histories** – Who are your ancestors? What can portraits of your ancestors tell you about their lives and personalities? First, choose photographs of several family members and write about them based on their pictures. Then talk with your family about the ancestors and write more complete biographies about them. Share among the class the differences when writing from appearance versus oral history.
5. **Autobiographies and Book Frontispieces** – How will you use words and a portrait to represent your identity or life story? Write an autobiography, memoir, or personal narrative that you then make into a book complete with a frontispiece that illustrates something about you.
6. **Re-constructing the Media** – How can you create respectful images of people or groups using today’s media – such as newspapers, magazines, television, music videos? With video, photography, drawing, or computer graphics re-create an ad that you feel sends negative messages about a person or group in order to change the message to a positive one.
7. **Create Your Own *Carte-de-Visite*** (Photographic Business Card) – Design a *carte-de-visite* to help you promote an issue that is important to you, just as abolitionist and women’s rights activist Sojourner Truth did. Take a photograph of yourself and pair it with a personal slogan that speaks to your cause. Make copies of your card and share them with classmates, friends, and family with whom you would like to promote and discuss your message.
8. **In Other People’s Eyes** – Is how you see yourself the same as how your family, friends and teachers see you? Write a list of questions that you will ask a variety of people to discover the different ways in which they know you. Reflect on your “identities” in art or writing. Which is real to you?
9. **Portrait Props** – Props or personal possessions often have a symbolic function signifying the interests, hobbies or occupation of the portrait subject. If an artist was painting your portrait, what objects would you want included in the painting? What do these items say about you and your interests?

Many additional discussion points, visual resources, and activities are available through websites and books mentioned in the *Resources* section that follows

Resources to enrich your Addison visit and curriculum

Books

- Bolden, Tanya. *Wake Up Our Souls: A Celebration of Black American Artists*. (New York, NY: Harry N. Abrams, 2004). A book for young people with satisfying biographies and reproductions of work by nineteenth and twentieth century black artists working in a variety of mediums. Features Joshua Johnston, Edward Mitchell Bannister, Edmonia Lewis, and Henry Ossawa Tanner, who are all included in *Portraits of a People*.
- Gates, Henry Louis, Jr. and Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, Eds. *African-American Lives*. (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2004). Offers a range of African American history through hundreds of poignant biographies.
- Horton, James Oliver and Lois E. Horton. *Black Bostonians: Family Life and Community Struggle in the Antebellum North* (Teaneck, NJ: Holmes & Meier Publishers, 2000). A social history exploring the work, church, and family lives of Boston's African American community. Includes effective anecdotes of well- and lesser-known black Bostonians.
- Painter, Nell Irvin. *Creating Black Americans: African-American History and Its Meaning, 1619 to the Present*. (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2006). An exploration of the construction of African American identity accompanied by interpretations of African American artworks and images.
- Primary Source, Inc., Ed. *Making Freedom: African Americans in U.S. History*. (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann Books, 2004). Essays, lesson plans, and historic documents on CD geared specifically towards middle and high school teachers provide a concise and accurate understanding of African American history. This comprehensive 5-volume set covers the beginnings of slavery in the colonies through 1970.
- Salzman, Jack, Ed. *The African-American Experience*. (New York: MacMillan, 1998). An encyclopedia presenting the most necessary, detailed information about major people and events from African American history.
- Shaw, Gwendolyn DuBois. *Portraits of a People: Picturing African Americans in the Nineteenth Century*. (Andover, MA: Addison Gallery of American Art, 2006). The catalogue for the Addison exhibition including introductory essays and comprehensive images accompanied by biographical information each of the subjects and artists.
- Stoskopf, Alan. *Race and Membership in American History: The Eugenics Movement*. (New York, NY: Facing History and Ourselves, 2002). Excellent book designed for educators with lesson ideas, poems, and first-person narratives that help pave the way for important conversations about race and identity in the classroom.

Web

Africans in America <www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/home.html>

A concise, comprehensive history of the African American experience from 1450 to 1865, clearly organized and accessible for both teachers and students. Offers explanatory text, primary source images and documents, historical narratives, interviews, and a complete teacher's guide with lesson plans.

Encyclopedia Britannica's Guide to Black History <<http://search.eb.com/Blackhistory/home.do>>

A vast array of articles, images, video and sound clips, and activities. Includes a timeline tracing two millennia of black history and entries pinpointing central people, places, topics, and events.

Matters of Race <<http://www.pbs.org/mattersofrace/index.shtml>>

Thought-provoking essays and narratives addressing the past, present, and future of race in America and in our personal lives. Includes a teacher's guide, video and sound clips, statistics, and an online discussion board.

Race-The Power of an Illusion <http://www.pbs.org/race/000_General/000_00-Home.htm>

An enlightening, interactive, and not-to-miss site investigates perceptions of race in society, science, and history. Includes lessons in identifying others and oneself and in deciphering the origins of racism, class discussion guide, resources, and perspectives on addressing issues of race in any setting.

The African American Mosaic <<http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/african/intro.html>>

Digitized primary-source documents from the Library of Congress, including books, advertisements, broadsides, and sheet music.

Uncle Tom's Cabin and American Culture <<http://jefferson.village.virginia.edu/utc/index2f.html>>

Comprehensive exploration of the impact of Harriet Beecher Stowe's controversial novel on American culture, past and present, from literature and film to popular culture and media.

Museum Information

RESERVATIONS

To arrange a guided school group tour, contact the Docent & Tour Programs Manager between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m., Monday through Friday. The following information is necessary in order to reserve a tour:

Group Contact Name
School Address & Phone Number (e-mail if available)
Requested Tour Theme
First and Second Choice of dates and times
Number of Students and Adult Chaperones
Grade Level
Special abilities or needs of your students

PROGRAM COSTS

Admission for guided student tours is \$4 for students. For grades K-3, two chaperones are required for every 10 students. For grades 4-12, one chaperone for every 10 students is required. Chaperones are free of charge up to the ratio limit. Additional chaperones are \$5 each.

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

Reduced admission is granted to schools and youth organizations based on financial need. Requests for financial support must be made in writing on organization letterhead and mailed to the Department of Education (see contact information below). The Delaware Art Museum has received a generous grant from MBNA America that offers financial support for transportation when bringing students to tour the Museum. When scheduling a tour, please ask for more details. A formal letter of request is required. Scholarships can cover transportation costs of up to \$200 per day.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Courtney Waring
Docent & Tour Programs Manager
Delaware Art Museum
2301 Kentmere Parkway
Wilmington, DE 19806
Phone: 302-571-9590, ext. 509

HOURS

Monday	Closed
Tuesday	10 am - 4 pm
Wednesday	10 am - 8 pm
Thursday	10 am - 4 pm
Friday	10 am - 4 pm
Saturday	10 am - 4 pm
Sunday	Noon - 4 pm

Acknowledgements

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Presented in Delaware by 

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