

Expressing identity and culture: African American Artists and Authors of Kentucky

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Introduction

This project takes a deep dive into the diverse talent and accomplishments that have existed within the African American community of Kentuckiana. I share the life stories and motivations behind forty-four Black identifying artists and authors. The mix of talent that I was able to research include painters, sculptors, poets, and beyond. This project was conducted in the hopes to bring light to a group of hard working people that have made great achievements in spite of the difficult circumstances brought on by the color of their skin. For many of the authors and artists, they used their culture and hardships as the motivation behind their work and were able to express themselves using their selected mediums. Aside from their creative outlets, many of these people held influential careers as educators, activists, lawyers, etc. When you take a closer look at their work, you can see their stories come to life. As my research grew I found myself excited to learn about what felt like my history. As a young black woman born and raised in Kentucky, I loved learning about a large group of people that had achieved so much. I was surprised at how few of these individuals that I had heard of before. As a result I have become more proud to say that I am from Kentucky. These individuals are Kentucky's legacy and deserve to be recognized. This project shows how rich and diverse the talent that has come out of Kentucky really is, and I am so proud to share it with whoever reads it.

Adams, Florence Victoria "Frankie": Author

Florence V. "Frankie" Adams was born in Danville, KY on July 9, 1902. She was an educator, author, and held a prolonged career at the Atlanta School of Social Work—working there from 1931 until 1964. In 1925, she graduated from Knoxville College and later obtained her master's degree in Education from New York University in 1939. As a member of the Committee on Group Work of the American Association of Social Work she majorly influenced the curriculum and the content of the group work on a national level. She retired from the Atlanta School of Social Work in 1964 and from 1965 to 1967, Adams worked for *Economic Opportunities Atlanta, Inc.* Through 1968 to 1970 she worked for Project Headstart. Throughout her career, she produced multiple publications. Some include *Women in Industry* (1929), *Soulcraft: Sketches on Negro-White Relations Designed to Encourage Friendship* (1944), and *The Reflection of Florence Victoria Adams, a history of the Atlanta University School of Social Work*, this work however was published post-humously in 1981.

Alice Allison Dunnigan: Author

Alice Allison Dunnigan was born April 27, 1906 in Russellville, KY to a sharecropper and a laundress. When she was a teenager, she was admitted to a segregated school and began to write reports for the black newspaper in Owensboro, KY called "*Owensboro Enterprise*." After graduating from Kentucky State University, she balanced two jobs—teaching at a segregated school and working for local white families. While teaching, she pioneered a fact sheet full of historical contributions brought about by Black Americans for her students. This led to her publishing her first book *The Fascinating Story of Black Kentuckians*. She began freelance jobs for the American Negro Press in 1936, before she moved on to writing for the renowned Chicago Defender. This evolution of jobs led her to become the first African American to earn a Congressional Press Pass. She went on to earn a White House Press Pass after taking writing classes at Howard University. While in Washington, she took a job as a reporter for the Associated Negro Press. In 1948, she published multiple writings on the campaign of presidential candidate Harry Truman, and wrote in colossal amounts the desegregation efforts of the early civil rights movement. Presidents Kennedy and Johnson formed a committee based around equal opportunities in which Dunnigan served in the '60's. Her experience brought about her autobiography *A Black Woman's Experience: From Schoolhouse to Whitehouse* published in 1974. In 1982, she was inducted into the Kentucky Journalism Hall of Fame and—that same year—published her second book, *The Fascinating Story of Black Kentuckians*.

Ashley Cathey: Artist

Ashley Cathey is a multidisciplinary artist and muralist based out of her hometown Louisville, Ky. Ashley Cathey began her career in the performing arts, until she transitioned to

visual art. Much of her art depicts the experiences of African Americans. Recently she took part in the Black Art Matters series, which featured black artists who discussed the impact of national protests on their art. Her career began to make traction as she was selected by ArtsReach for commission of a series of portraits. These portraits were featured at their annual Keepers of the Dream celebration at the Kentucky Center for the Arts. Many of her pieces depict “ordinary” women, and she has been said to strive to “uplift her community, and create ownership” through public art. Cathay continues to make strides in the art world, and uses art as her form of activism.

Bell Hooks: Author

Gloria Jean Watkins best known by her pen name bell hooks, was born September 25, 1952 in Hopkinsville, Ky and died December 15, 2021. She grew up with six other siblings in a working class family, and attended segregated schooling as a child. As a young child she was known to enjoy the writings of William Wordsworth, Langston Hughes, Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Gwendolyn Brooks. In 1973 she earned a B.A in English Literature from Stanford University, and then went on to receive her M.A in English Literature from the University of Wisconsin in 1976 and her Ph.D from the University of California Santa Cruz in 1983. While obtaining her Ph.D she wrote her dissertation on author Toni Morrison. Prior to earning her degrees, at the age of 19 she began writing what would become her first full length book titled *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism* which was published in 1981. It was also in 1981 where she began going by the pseudonym bell hooks, which she created to honor her great-grandmother and female legacies; she opted to use only lower case letters in her name in order to highlight her work rather than her name. Hooks spent much of her career as an educator. She was a professor of English and Ethnic studies at the University of Southern California in the mid 1970s'. She also taught African and Afro-American studies at Yale University in the 1980's, Women's studies at Oberlin College, just to name a few of the institutions she worked for. In 2014 the Bell hooks institute was founded at Berea College in Berea, Ky where she became a professor in 2004. Hooks was known for her many critiques on race and feminism, one ideology she spoke about was how she felt that other feminists claimed to speak for all women, but pushed the unique experiences of working class and black women aside. This idea was found in her writings as well as many others. Hooks has a long list of publications under her belt some of which include *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black* (1989), *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (1992), *Killing Rage: Ending Racism* (1995) as well as autobiographical works *Bone Black: Memories of Girlhood* (1996) and *Wounds of Passion: A Writing Life* (1997). In the year 1991 she was awarded American Book Award, Before Columbus Foundation, Writer's Award, the Lila Wallace/Reader's Digest Fund in 1994 and in 1999 Hooks was nominated for an NAACP Image award for her children's book titled *Happy to Be Nappy*,

Bob Thompson: Artist

Bob Thompson is a painter born June 26, 1937 in Louisville, Ky. He died May 30, 1966 in Rome, Italy. At a young age he and his family moved out of the “urban bourgeois social network” within Louisville, Ky to the rural area of Elizabethtown, Ky. During this move he and his sister were prompted by their father to not interact with the lower income black children of the community. When Thompson was thirteen years old he lost his father in a car accident, which affected him deeply as they were very close. Growing up he was encouraged by his parents to pursue an education which prompted him to enroll at Boston University in 1955 with the intent of studying medicine, but after a year he left to explore his passion for art at the University of Louisville. His studies at Louisville, led him to an interest in expressionism and an expansion of fellow artists in his close circle. Ultimately Thompson would relocate to New York where he was given some advice which inspired him to rework the compositions of European Masters into more simplified, abstracted pieces. After one year, his career quickly began to rise as he held his first solo exhibition at the Delancey Street Museum, and then a two-person show at the prestigious Zabriskie Gallery. In the year 1960 he married a young woman named Carol Plenda, and soon after they traveled to Europe on a travel grant from the Walter Gutman Foundation. During these travels he was able to study the great masterworks that inspired his art. He continued to travel throughout his career, in 1966 he traveled to Rome in hopes of studying the Renaissance. In 1966, he fell ill and required emergency gallbladder surgery and would eventually die. Thompson was known for his unique figurative style of painting where he featured an expressive use of color. In his piece *The Spinning, Spinning, Turning, Directing* it is described as “a drama of bold exaggerations”. In this piece Thompson featured dynamic shapes and distortions of natural silhouettes. A few of his well known pieces include *Blue Madonna*, *Homage to Nina Simone (1965)*, *Triumph of Bacchus*, *Enchanted Rider (1961)*, and *Descent of the Cross*. Although his career was short-lived due to his passing, since then Thompson has been featured in many galleries and has served as inspiration for many artists. His pieces have been featured nationwide in locations such as the Art Institute of Chicago, The Brooklyn Museum, Chrysler Museum of Art in Norfolk, VA, just to name a few. Recently, he was featured in *Tell Me Your Story: 100 Years of Storytelling in African American Art*, Kunsthal Kade, Amersfoort, The Netherlands (2020). His legacy continues to inspire many and his art has been featured countless times throughout the world since his untimely death.

Bobby William Austin: Author

Bobby William Austin was born in Jonesville, KY on December 29, 1944. He was raised by his parents Herschel who worked as a railroad worker and Mary Austin who was a homemaker. He has had a love for literature since a very young age, even receiving books instead of toys for Christmas. Austin earned his B.A. in Economics and Sociology from Western Kentucky University in 1966. He then went on to receive his Masters in Sociology from Fisk

University in 1968 and then his Ph.D from McMaster University in 1972. Since earning his degrees he has held many positions. He founded and served as editor of the Urban League Review, served as a partner for a consulting firm Austin Ford Associates, Executive assistant to the president of the University of the District of Columbia, and worked as a Speech writer for the “former Housing and Urban Development Secretary Patricia Roberts Harris and the former mayor of Washington, D.C. Sharon Pratt Kelly” . In 1997 he founded the Village Foundation, this organization was aimed at African American men to “repair the breach” between them and the rest of society. This organization has an initiative called the Give a Boy a Book Day campaign, which was created to encourage reading amongst young African American men. Austin has co authored a book alongside Andrew Young titled *Repairing the Breach* (1996), he has also written a *Wake up and Start to Live* (2002), *Circus Clowns & Carnival Animals* (2008), *What a Piece of Work Is Man* (1992), as well as *The Acacia Strategy* (2012). Austin continues his philanthropic initiatives for African American men and has had a great impact.

Cassius Marcellus Clay Sr: Artist

Cassius Marcellus Clay Sr. was born November 11, 1912 in Louisville, Ky. He is the father of three time World heavy weight champion Muhammad Ali. Clay was born to parents Herman H. Clay and Edith E. Greathouse. He received his name from Cassius Marcellus Clay who was a Republican politician and abolitionist during the 19th century, Clay had one sister and four brothers. Not much is known about his early life other than he is regarded as both a painter and a musician. He played piano and wrote music. His painting career while not largely known, he has been sighted as painting billboards and signs for work. Some of his paintings have gone for sale in 2017 by Bonhams New York, collection of Rodney Hilton Brown. The paintings ranged between \$2,000 and \$3,000.

Charles W. Bell: Author/Journalist

Charles Bell was born August 12, 1848 in Kentucky and died in 1910. It is believed that he may have been a slave but this is not confirmed. Bell was married to a school teacher Ophelia Hall Nesbit Bell and had two children. He attended the Cincinnati School of Design, and went on to work for the Cincinnati school district for over 20 years. He became the superintendent of writing in 1874 and worked with the colored schools, but also taught writing to some schools where white children also attended. Bell was an editor for the *Colored Citizen*, which was a Cincinnati newspaper. He also had publications in the *Declaration*, which at the time was the only African American newspaper in Cincinnati. Bell also served as a columnist for the *Commercial Gazette*. In 1892 he founded the *Ohio Republic* which was a newspaper publication. Alongside his writing career, he was a politician in Ohio and held an influential career until his death in 1910.

Countee Cullen: Author/ Poet

Countee Cullen was born May 30, 1903. Some information of his background is unclear but he was said to be born in either Louisville, KY, New York, NY, or Baltimore, MD. It is believed that Cullen was abandoned by his parents at birth, and at the age of nine he was brought to New York to live with who is believed to be his paternal grandmother. After the death of his grandmother in 1918, he was adopted by Frederick Ashbury Cullen, a minister at the Salem Methodist Episcopal Church in Harlem. Cullen's introduction into poetry began as a young child when he won a citywide poetry contest. Harlem in the 1920s was a pivotal time as the emergence of the Harlem Renaissance persisted and African American intellectuals rose. Cullen's father was head of the Harlem chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and his informal education led to his exposure to many black ideas. The formal side of his education was largely influenced by white intellectuals which led to a dichotomy to exist with Cullen, influencing his writings. Cullen graduated from New York University where he acquired many awards for his poetry, and would go on to earn a master's degree from Harvard University in 1926. At Harvard he published his first volume of poetry titled *Color*. Upon graduating from Harvard he became the assistant editor for the National Urban League's Opportunity. He would go on to work at an all black high school the Frederick Douglass Junior High School in 1934, after rejecting offers from southern schools for lack of racial tolerance. Cullen would lead a great legacy and become known as the Poet Laureate of the Harlem Renaissance. Some of his most notable writings include *On These I Stand: An Anthology of the Best Poems of Countee Cullen* (Harper & Bros., 1947), *The Black Christ and Other Poems* (G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1929), and *Copper Sun* (Harper & Bros., 1927).

Crystal Wilkinson: Author

Crystal Wilkinson was born in Hamilton, OH although she was raised about three miles east of Middleburg, Ky with her grandparents. Middleburg was a farm area, and Wilkinson has stated that they were one of the only African Americans in the area. Wilkinson's experiences in childhood led to her career as she has stated that her grandparents gave her the freedom to explore the countryside and to write, dream, and discover (Wilkinson). She wrote about her childhood experiences in her award winning fiction book titled *Blackberries, Blackberries*. Wilkinson earned her Bachelors of Arts in Journalism from Eastern Kentucky University in 1985. She went on to earn her Master of Fine Art in creative writing from Spalding University in 2003. Wilkinson began her career working as both a news assistant and a marketing research assistant at the Lexington Herald Leader. In her career she also worked as a public information officer and community relations manager for the Lexington-Fayette Urban County Government. Eventually Wilkinson went on to be a part of the Appalachian Poets at the Martin Luther King Jr. Cultural Center at the University of Kentucky, which was a group for African American writers in the Appalachian region. As of 2020, Wilkinson is an associate professor in the English

Department at the University of Kentucky, the Program in African American and Africana Studies. She is also a business owner as she and her husband are the co-owners of Wild Fig Books and Coffee in Lexington, Ky. She is also a published author of the fiction work titled *The Birds of Opulence* (University Press of Kentucky, Lexington, Kentucky). Wilkinson is an award winner, some of her titles include the 2016 Ernest Gaines Fellowship for Literary Excellence, the Kentucky Arts Council's Al Smith Fellowship, The Judy Gaines Prize, Appalachian Book of the Year to name a few. Wilkinson is most renowned for being named the Kentucky Poet laureate of 2021-2022, and many of her works have appeared in literary journals and magazines including Kenyon Review, Agni, Southern Cultures, African Voices, Indiana Review, Oxford American, Emergence, Calyx and many others (Kentucky gov 2021).

Ed Hamilton: Artist

Ed Hamilton was born on February 14, 1947 in Cincinnati, OH but grew up in Louisville, KY. In 1965, he graduated from Shawnee Highschool and went on to become a graduate of the Louisville School of Art in 1969. In the seventies, he pursued higher education at the University of Louisville and Spalding University, hoping to gain a certification to teach. Whilst dreaming of owning his own sculpting studio, he became the mentee of late sculptor Barney Bright whom he curated a lifelong friendship with until Bright's passing. Hamilton remains an active community member in Louisville by hosting lectures at public schools and colleges, teaching art workshops, and even holding tours at his studio. He even briefly taught at Jefferson Community College as a sculpture instructor. Hamilton has achieved worldwide admiration for his sculpture *Spirit of Freedom*, as it serves as a tribute to African American soldiers and sailors of the Civil War. The sculpture stands as a National Memorial in the District of Columbia. Since 1990, Hamilton has been the recipient of multiple awards including *Governor's Artist Award in the Arts (1996)*, and *the Urban League Diversity Award (2005)*. He also has created his own awards including *Black Achievers Award (1980)*, and the *Lift Award* for the *Canaan Community Development*.

Effie Waller Smith: Author/Poet

Effie Waller Smith was born in Pike County, KY on January 6, 1879. She grew up on a farm alongside her formerly enslaved parents-Frank Waller and Sibbie Ratliff Waller- and her three siblings. In the year 1900, she attended Kentucky Normal School for Colored Persons (known now as Kentucky State University) and was training to become a teacher. After graduating, she maintained a teaching career of 16 years in Pikeville and Eastern Tennessee. She would later become one of the first African American poets to reach publication in a national literary magazine. Smith's childhood quickly exposed her to poetry and classical literature and at the age of sixteen, she first pursued her talent for writing and would often publish her own poems in the local newspaper. Being on the receiving end of positive feedback, she urged her community to help her with her goal of publication from greater agencies. The success of their

efforts were visible in 1904, when “Broadway Publishing” located in New York agreed to publish her first volume of poems. Enough success was achieved, that Broadway Publishing made a deal to publish another one of Smith’s volumes. Between the years of 1908 and 1917, seven of her most notable poems were featured in prominent American literary magazines. Smith produced a bountiful career in poetry all the while being limited by a short academic career and living through the challenges of racism. Although Smith never verified this information, it is believed that she used an alias to slip through the cracks of racial barriers and allow her work to be published in more eminent journals. Her second volume, multiple short stories and poems, were all said to be authored under an Effie Smith with roots from Baileyton, not Pikeville as Smith was from. Baileyton’s smith was awarded more publications in major journals than that of Pikevilles, although no record of an Effie Smith in Baileyton has ever been found.

Ellis Wilson: Artist

Ellis Wilson was born April 20, 1899 in Mayfield, Kentucky and died January 1, 1977. Wilson is a renowned painter, known for his contributions to the Harlem renaissance. Ellis spent much of his early life working in various jobs, but always seeking a creative outlet. At some point in his life he worked as a janitor for a dress shop, but was said to have drawn on the windows using soap. Wilson attended what is now known as Kentucky State University, but was then called Frankfurt’s Kentucky Normal and Industrial Institute for Colored Persons. There he was limited to the majors of agriculture or education, consequently he decided to leave after two years. Leaving Kentucky State led Wilson to Chicago, where in 1923 she would earn a degree from the Art Institute of Chicago. Wilson spent quite a bit of time in Chicago working as a commercial artist, and eventually moved to New York where he became involved with the Harmon foundation. During the time Wilson spent in both Chicago and New York, he developed meaningful relationships with other African American artists. In 1944 and 1945 he won the Guggenheim Fellowship, using these funds to travel through the South and create more work. In 1952 he won prize money from the National Terry Art Exhibition, in which he used the funds to travel to Haiti. Wilsons pieces can be described as depicting the daily lives of African Americans, his style could be described as modern and he was known for his use of color, boldness and individuality. Although, much of Wilsons work was undocumented, and it is currently unknown how many pieces he completed. Today many of his pieces can be found in museum exhibitions all around the country. One of Wilson's most renowned pieces titled *Funeral Procession* (1950) was featured in the television series *The Cosby Show*.

Francis A. Boyd: Author

Francis Boyd was born in 1844 in Lexington, KY and died in 1872. Boyd was raised by his parents Nancy and Samuel Boyd and had two brothers, the family would eventually move to Louisville, KY. Boyd became a minister, a school teacher, and served as a Sergeant with the

Union Army in the Civil War in 1864. Boyd is the author of *Columbiana: or, The North Star, Complete in One Volume (1870)*, which is a poem that was published by the Chicago: Steam Job and Book Printing House of G. Hand. Since its publication other authors have cited the poem in their works, some of which include author Houston A. Baker, Jr. who described the poem as “an allegory on the national strife of the Civil War period” in his article *Balancing the perspective, a look at early Black American Literary Artistry*. Another author who has cited Boyd’s work is A. G. Ulyatt who uses it to look at 19th century Afro American poets.

Frank L. Stanley Sr.: Author/Journalist

Frank L. Stanley Sr. originally was born in Chicago, IL but was raised in Louisville, KY as of the age 12 after the death of his father. He was born in 1906 and died October 19, 1974. He was raised an only child by his parents Frank and Helen Stanley. He attended Central High school where he earned high academic achievements. Stanley worked as both a civil right activist as well as an editor and senior publisher for the Louisville Defender for over 38 years. He also headed the English Department for Jackson State College. In 1950 he was instrumental in leading desegregation efforts for colleges and Universities in the state of Kentucky. He drafted the senate resolution No. 53 which successfully led to integration. His integration efforts did not end with higher education, he also served as a chair for various groups commissioned by the US War Department in order to study the segregation of US troops. Another one of his civil rights initiatives was pushing for the organization of the Kentucky Human Rights Commission. He was a very notable journalist, in 1962 he was one of four journalists selected by the State Department to go to Africa. During these travels he and the other journalists held a seminar for African editors and radio program directors. He was the co-founder of the National Newspaper Publishers Association, serving as president five times, as well as serving as a jurist for the Pulitzer Prize panel. One of his most notable and award winning columns was titled *People, Places and Problems*. Throughout his career he obtained over 35 national awards for journalism. Some of his awards include the Wendell Willkie Award for Public Service, which was presented to him by President Truman, as well as the President’s Secret Service Award of the NNPA.

Frank X Walker: Author

Frank X Walker was born June 11, 1961 in Danville, KY. Walker is the oldest of ten siblings, and has sighted his mother as being one of his most important creative influences. He is married with four children of his own. Walker is a multidisciplinary artist, poet and educator who has authored several books and appeared in a few films. Walker a first generation college student, earned his bachelor's degree from the University of Kentucky in 1979 and went on to receive a Masters of Fine Arts in Writing from Spalding University in 2003. Walker began his journey when at a young age he questioned the lack of black authors in his local library, in which he had a teacher respond that he should write one himself. This conversation sparked inspiration

within Walker and led him to his lengthy career in writing and academia. Walker's career began as he served as the Program Director for the Martin Luther King Cultural Center from the years 1985 to 1995. He is the founder of the Bluegrass Black Arts Consortium and has also served as the Assistant Director of Purdue University's Black Cultural Center. He has held board positions for the Kentucky Humanities Council, Appalshop and the Kentucky Writers Coalition as well as a government appointment to Cabinet for Education, Arts & Humanities and the Committee on Gifted Education. He has served as vice president of the Kentucky Center for the Arts and the executive director of Kentucky's Governor's School for the Arts (Howard 2021). Walker has dedicated a lot of his career in fostering the arts, he has done so by hosting a myriad of workshops some of which include the Living Arts and Science Center where he planned events for the Roots and Heritage Festival. A notable moment in Walker's Career is when he coined the term Affrilachia and founded Affrilachian poets, which is an inclusive group of POC writers in the Appalachian region. In coining the term Affrilachia he was inspired by the lack of recognition of black residents of the Appalachian mountains in a variety of spaces. Walker has also served as the editor of *America! What's My Name? The "Other" Poets Unfurl the Flag* (Wind Publications, 2007) as well as *Eclipsing a Nappy New Millennium* and the author of four poetry collections: *When Winter Come: the Ascension of York* (University Press of Kentucky, 2008); just to name a few. In his lengthy career Walker has made television appearances on PBS GED Connection Series, Writing: Getting Ideas on Paper, as well as appearing in Performance At the Governor's Mansion and in Living the Story: The Civil Rights Movement in Kentucky. Walker has had a tremendous career and continues to represent the diversity and beauty that exists within the Appalachian region through his many creative endeavors.

Garry Bibbs: Artist

Gary Bibbs was born in 1960 in Athens, Alabama. His artistic background is in sculpting and printmaking. Bibbs currently works as a Professor at the University of Kentucky in the School of Fine Arts. He has both created art as well as taught at the University for over 31 years. Bibbs has an extensive background in the art world. He initially earned his B.S with Honors in Arts Studio from Kentucky State University. He then went on to obtain his Masters of Fine Arts from the University of Kentucky. Bibbs partook in the Ford Postdoctoral Fellowship at the Chicago Art Institute in 1986, as well as worked as an assistant to renowned sculptor Richard Hunt based in Chicago, IL. Bibbs has had a very successful career in the arts, which includes his many exhibitions around the country. His work has been showcased at locations such as the Smithsonian in Washington D.C, The Hertz Gallery in Louisville, KY, the Ruschman Art Gallery in Indianapolis, IN, and the Art Institute of Chicago in Chicago, IL. Alongside his many exhibitions, he has also been the recipient of many prestigious awards throughout his career. The awards under his belt include the AI Smith award in Sculpture for Outstanding Kentucky artist, as well as the NEA Southern Arts Federation Award for Outstanding Printmaker. Bibbs has spent much of his career researching through travel. He has spent time in Nairobi, Kenya, Athens, as

well as Greece. In his career he has issued over 38 commissions found some of which include commissions for the Kentucky Commission on Human Rights, National Afro-American Museum and Cultural Center, Kentucky Center for African American Heritage, the Frankfort KY New Transportation Building, as well as many solo and group exhibitions in the eastern and mid western part of the United States.

Gayl Jones: Author

Gayl Jones was born November 23, 1949 in Lexington, KY. Jones was raised by her parents Franklin Jones who worked as a cook and her mother Lucille Jones who was a homemaker, storyteller and writer. Jones developed a love for writing at a young age which continued into her adulthood. Her upbringing influenced much of her writing, as she spent a lot of time with her maternal grandmother. Jones shared in an interview that “the best of my writing comes from having heard rather than having read”. She attended a predominantly white high school, at the request of her mother and stood out because of her writing skills despite being very shy. One of the teachers took a liking to Jones and helped her to receive a scholarship to Connecticut College. Jones graduated with honors and received her B.A in English and then went on to attend the writing program at Brown University in 1971, and then earn her Doctor of Arts Degree in 1975. While obtaining her doctorate of arts she met her mentor and longtime friend poet Michael Harper. Much of Jones' inspiration for her writing came from African American literature and she would go on to inspire other writers. In the year 1975, she published *Corregidora*, her first novel. Other novels from Jones include *Eva's Man* (1976), *The Healing* (1998), *White Rat* (1977), and *Almeyda* (1977). She also wrote some books of poetry such as *Song of Anninho* (1981) and the *Hermit-Woman* (1983). Over the years Jones has developed an astounding legacy for her talented writings. Toni Morrison was famously quoted in saying “No novel about any black woman could ever be the same after this” in response to Jones novel *Corregidora*. Recently in 2021 she released a novel titled *Palmares*, which was her first publication in over twenty-one years.

Helen LaFrance: Artist

Helen LaFrance was born November 4, 1919 in Graves County, Kentucky and died November 22, 2020 at the age of 101. LaFrance was a self taught artist who did not begin her art career until she was in her forties. LaFrance grew up in a notable time period, as the daughter of a farmer and has lived through extreme social climates such as Jim Crow. She had an unconventional background as she was raised in confining times, but was encouraged to pursue education and art the best way that her circumstances would allow and did not have a formal education. She was taught reading and math by her parents, and as far as her artwork she was taught by her mother using berries, dandelions and laundry detergent. In her adulthood LaFrance worked in a tobacco field as well as a hospital and began pursuing art in the 1980's by selling her

work to neighbors and in state fairs. LaFrance is considered a folk artist best known for her memory paintings of the disappearing lifestyle of the rural South and her own surroundings growing up. Many of her pieces also feature her spiritual interpretations of the bible. Throughout her career she has had her work presented in many notable public and private collections all around the world some of which include Oprah Winfrey, Gayle King, Bryant Gumbel and contemporary artist Red Grooms. Her work has been shown at county fairs, at the Mayfield, Kentucky bank and public library, Murray State University, the Kentucky Museum (Bowling Green), the National Black Fine Arts Show. In her final days LaFrance spent her time living in a nursing home in Kentucky and what was said of how she spent her time was "When I'm not eating or sleeping, I'm painting." (LaFrance 2019).

Houston Baker: Author

Houston Baker was born March 22, 1943 in Louisville, KY. Baker earned his B.A from Howard University in 1965, his M.A from University of California at Los Angeles in 1966 as well as his Ph.D in 1968. Since earning his degree he has taught at several universities and colleges including: Yale University, Cornell University, the University of Pennsylvania, the University of Virginia, Haverford College, Duke University and Vanderbilt University. While working at the University of Pennsylvania he served as the Afro-American studies program Director from 1974 to 1977. He currently serves as the "Distinguished University Professor and Professor of English" at Vanderbilt University. Baker has published several poems and books throughout his career. The titles of his work include *Long Black Song* (1972), *Singers of Daybreak* (1974), *The Journey Back* (1980), *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance* (1987), *Workings of the Spirit: The Poetics of Afro-American Women's Writing* (1991), *Black Studies, Rap, and the Academy* (1993), *Turning South Again: Rethinking Modernism/Rereading Booker T* (2001), *Critical Memory: Public Spheres, African American Writing, and Black Fathers and Sons in America* (2001), as well as *Betrayal: How Black Intellectuals Have Abandoned the Ideals of the Civil Rights Era* (2008). Most recently he has published *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature* (2015) and co edited *The Trouble With Post-Blackness* (2015) a collection of original essays. Much of Baker's work is focused on representation of African Americans where he offers his own theories and critiques on the subject. Alongside his many other accomplishments, Baker has also been awarded fellowships for both the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation and the National Endowment for the Humanities. Baker has also served as the president of the Modern Language Association (Chicago Press 2022) and been recipient of many notable awards. Baker continues to serve as an educator and an author and has made a profound impact in the African American arts.

Houston Conwill: Artist

Houston Conwill was born April 2, 1947 in Louisville, KY. His father, Gil Conwell, was a waiter and his mother, Mary Luella Herndon, was an educator. Although Conwill would later be known for his multimedia art forms, he first immersed himself in spirituality after moving out of Kentucky during his late teens. Moving to Saint Meinrad, Indiana, he lived in a Benedictine monastery. After his stay at the monastery, he immediately enlisted in the air force during the years of 1966 to 1969, the height of the Vietnam War. Subsequent to the war ending, he enrolled at Howard University and began to study under artists such as Jeff Donaldson and Lois Mailou Jones. Conwill graduated from the University in 1973, with a degree in printmaking, and would move to Louisville, Kentucky with the goal of completing his first major art piece. This first art piece was commissioned for his family's church St. Augustine was a mural and painted-glass made up of biblical figures depicted as African Americans. His first piece garnered major success, and thrust him into graduate school at the University of Southern California. While attending the college, he found a group of artists outside the school—the Los Angeles Street Graphics Committee— that shared his similar political views, and began to paint with them. African spirituality became an interest of Conwill and would inspire his pieces. After creating new pieces under what he conceptualized as *JuJu*, he held solo exhibitions such as *JuJu* (1976) and *JuJu III* (1976). In 1981 he moved to New York and earned a spot in the P.S.1's studio residency program. He held an exhibition through the residency titled *Easter Shout!* (1981). Throughout his career he held many exhibitions in Los Angeles, New York and Washington D.C. He was also the recipient of several awards including “The John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation fellowship in 1982, a Prix de Rome in 1984, and the Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation award in 1987”. Conwill had a very successful career until his passing in 2016 and is still remembered today for his celebration of spirituality and African American culture.

Johnathan H. Brooks: Author

Johnathan H Brooks was born in the year 1904 in Lexington, KY. He earned his degrees from Jackson College (which is now known as Jackson State University), Lincoln University and Tougaloo University. Brooks held many jobs throughout his lifetime, he was a poet as well as a minister, postal clerk, and a teacher. He is the author of a short story titled *The Bible in the Cornfield*, which awarded him a first place prize in a contest. He is also the author of *The Resurrection and Other Poems*, which was released posthumously. In 1928, he revealed himself as the author of *Letter to W. E. B. Du Bois*. This letter was originally printed anonymously in *The Crisis*. Since his passing, Brooks' work has appeared in several publications and anthologies.

Joseph Seamon Cotter Sr.: Author

Joseph Seamon Cotter Sr. was born February 2, 1861 in Bardstown, KY but his upbringing was mostly concentrated in Louisville, KY. Cotter is of mixed ancestry, his father Micheal J. Cotter is of Scots-Irish ancestry and his mother Martha Vaughn is of African American descent. Cotter was born during the inception of the civil war and grew up in poverty, dropping out of school when he reached the third grade to help out his family. His formal education would then take a pause until he reached the age 22. Up until 1883 at the age 22, he worked as a manual laborer until deciding to join night school for ten months. When the ten months were over, he earned his highschool diploma along with teaching credentials. Afterwards, he began a new career endeavor—this time as a teacher at Cloverport Public School. In 1893, he founded the Paul Laurence Dunbar school in Louisville, KY and even sat as principal until 1911. The early poems written by Cotter were published in an abundant amount of prominent newspapers, including Louisville’s own, *The Courier Journal*. His submergence in education lasted for 53 years, although he also worked alongside multiple local and national organizations towards the goal of racial advancement. Cotter’s literary collection spans through nine published works—including poems, plays, and fiction— and he was even known as “Kentucky’s first Negro Poet with real creative ability.” Some of his published volumes include, *Links of Friendship* (1898), *A rhyming* (1895), and *Collected Poems of Joseph S. Cotter Sr.* (1938). He also contributed to a widestream of periodicals including *Southern Teacher’s Advocate*, and *Alexander’s Magazine*, among many others. His poem *The Tragedy of Pete* made him the winner of a contest held by *The Courier Journal*.

Joseph “sunshine” Mallard: Artist

Joseph “Sunshine” Mallard was born in Summit, Mississippi in 1943 and now resides in Louisville, KY. Mallard is a textile artist known for his quilt making. Growing up in Mississippi he was first introduced to stitching and quilt making by his great grandmother who was a former slave. His grandmother was known for using very bright colors and old materials in her quilts. Mallard says that in his adulthood he was inspired by famous footballer Rosie Greer, who went on television doing needlepoint. Mallard says that he helped to popularize an art mostly thought of as a medium for women. In his career he has been known for very large and extensive projects that take years to complete. One piece that he is known for is a quilt made to honor Barack Obama’s first term in office, which features the 630 events that occurred in the duration of his first presidency term. Many of his pieces have touched on social issues such as poverty and hunger. His work often is created through workshops or out in the community. He does work as a mentor for youth, and has built an audience in communities such as classrooms, community centers, libraries, etc. He earned the nickname “Sunshine Joe” while mentoring a group of fifth graders who said to him “the sunshine brings light and you do too”. Mallard has created many quilts throughout his career, some of which include *The other side of the American Dream*, *Tie*

Quilt, and *Genesis*. Much of his work speaks to a larger issue in the world, *The other side of the American Dream* speaks to issues that face young people, such as bullying. He is currently a member of the National Standards Council of American Embroiderers Guild of America. He has spent a large portion of his career teaching embroidery to the youth in the Kentucky and Southern Indiana region.

Kiptoo Tarus: Artist

Kiptoo Taru is an artist, born in Nairobi, Kenya in the year 1984. He earned his Bachelors of Arts in Illustration from The University of Nairobi for Design in 2008. He furthered his education, by studying sculpture from the University of Kentucky. While living in Nairobi he founded his own Graphic Design Company, *King Concepts*. He worked as a brand manager for a bank, until he eventually left that job to focus on his art full time. Taru has had a successful career both in Kenya as well as throughout the United States. While in Nairobi, he lived through the Kenyan Crisis from 2007-2008. During this time, he developed a love for drawing hands, especially the hands of the innocent lives that were lost to political violence. Much of his art is also inspired by the nomadic and pastoral life of his ancestors, and has been described as his own spin on equine art. He is well known for his hand sculptures, one of his most well known large scale sculptures can be found on Short Street of downtown Lexington, KY during the 2015 Breeder's Cup. Throughout his career, he has had several large sculptures on display, some of which include a set of praying hands carved from a fallen tree, a horse head using old wood from horse farms, and a metal sign and bike rack advertising a brewery named *Mirror Twin*.

Lavon Van Williams: Artist

Lavon Van Williams was born in Lakeland, FL in 1958. While Williams was born in Florida he attended the University of Kentucky on a basketball scholarship from 1976 to 1980. He went on to play basketball professionally for a few years, but then returned to Lexington, KY where he has resided ever since. Williams is a self taught sculptor who adapted his own style of African American wood carving as it was passed down to him by his older brother. His brother would carve many of the toys that they played with growing up, which inspired Williams to pursue wood carvings on his own. In his quest for a creative outlet, he wanted to create bigger and mobile creations than he grew up watching his brother make. As a young child he would create skateboards and go karts for entertainment. Much of Williams sculptures depict what he calls "urban folk art". Some of his carvings have been inspired by the jazz music played by his father as well as *The Piano Lesson*, a play by *August Wilson*. These sculptures capture the life of "contemporary urban African Americans" and depict "churchgoers, musicians and romantic couples". Williams' work has been described as energetic and warm, and much of his work has been displayed all over the country. His work was displayed in a National tour titled *When the Spirit Moves: African American Art Inspired by Dance*. Some of his pieces include *Sky's Place*

which is a wood carving, *5 O'Clock Jump*, and *Dreams* which have all been displayed at the Jeanine Taylor Folk Art Exhibition in Sanford. Today Williams' work has been displayed in many locations such as the “Smithsonian Anacostia Museum, the Hickory Museum of Art, New York’s Outsider Art Fair and for his seminal solo 30-year retrospective at the Kentucky Folk Art Center”.

Lucille Allen: Author/ Journalist

Lucille Allen whose original name is Elmer Lucille Allen was born in August 1931 to Elmer Johnson Hammonds and Ophelia Guinn Hammonds. She grew up in the Russell neighborhood of west Louisville, KY amongst segregation. For her early education, she attended Western Elementary, Madison Junior High, and Central High School. By age nine, however, she had already begun to demonstrate an artistic and entrepreneurial spirit selling the most girl scout cookies in her troop, and having some of her art work published in the *Louisville Courier Journal*. Although Allen proved to be an extremely hard worker throughout her school years, even graduating with honors, she struggled with a speech impediment during her highschool career. Fortunately, a dedicated teacher, Ms. Kuykenall, helped Allen overcome this impediment—having her repeat sentences and then adding a new one in the mirror. Eventually, she learned how to speak freely without stuttering. Allen pursued higher education, first in 1949 at Louisville Municipal College and then at an all-female Catholic Nazareth College—which is now known as Spelman University in 1951. In 1953, she was one of two black students to graduate from Nazareth College, earning a Bachelor of Science in general education with a major in chemistry and a minor in math. However, because of her race Allen faced discrimination in her field of study and was unable to find a job post-graduation. Not letting that halt her, she took the civil service exam and after passing, moved to Indiana to become a clerk typist at Fort Benjamin Harrison. She had aspired to become a certified medical technician, however the additional education that would be required for a formal certificate was unattainable to her. However she persevered and went on to work as a med tech, where she helped set up the labs, at First General Hospital, Methodist Hospital, and then finally Community Hospital, after just a few short months of working at Harrison. In 1958, she made her return to Louisville and continued to work labs in the medical community. Additionally, she joined a research group as a chemist, working at Brown Forman for 31 years. Allen made many achievements throughout her life including founding an integrated Little League club, and the Kentucky coalition for Afro-American arts. She also received many accolades for her work and is even Kentucky Colonel.

O 'Leary Bacon: Artist

O’Leary Bacon was born in the year 1944 in Louisville, KY. Bacon earned her bachelor's degree from Kentucky State College and went on to receive her masters in social work from

Loyola University. Bacon spent over twenty years working in the social service field, until she taught herself how to paint during the 1980's. In 1991 she left her career to pursue painting full time. Bacon has stated that she decided on this career change in order to "heal the souls of African Americans" and "lift up the self esteem of black people and depict them as human beings". Many of Bacon's pieces can be found for sale in a variety of auctions some of which include an oil painting titled *Oh! Brother* (1994), *Who Has the Most* (1993), and *The Old Sewing Machine* (1994).

Margaret Buckner Young: Author

Margaret Buckner Young was born March 29, 1921 in Campbellsville, KY but received her primary education in Aurora, Illinois. She attended Kentucky State Industrial college, was president of Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority, and graduated with a bachelor's degree in both English and French. Although, she continued her education and received her master's degree in educational psychology from the University of Minnesota. In 1944, she married author Whitney Young and together in 1953 they moved to Atlanta, Georgia where Buckner Young began to teach educational psychology at Spelman University. Young's writing career began to blossom in 1963, after moving to New York with her husband and had intended to focus her attention on raising their two daughters. Following her husband's death in 1971, Young started to become involved in improving relations between the United States and other countries—including Nigeria, China, and Yugoslavia. She also started to focus her attention on racial equality. Additionally, she committed herself to extending her late husband's legacy through many institutions including the national urban league and the Whitney M. Young Jr. Memorial Foundation. Furthermore, in 1973 Young became a member of the United States delegation to the United Nations General Assembly. Young authored multiple children's books centered around African American History and Civil Rights including *How to Bring Your Child Up Without Prejudice* (1965), *The First Book of American Negroes* (1966), and *The Picture Life of Martin Luther King Jr.* (1968). In 1990, after moving to Denver, Colorado, she passed away from cancer at the age of 88.

Mark Anthony Mulligan: Artist

Mark Anthony Mulligan was born in 1963 in the Chickasaw area of West Louisville, KY. From a young age, he was inspired by the advertising billboards and commercial signs that cluttered his neighborhood. Shortly after dropping out of highschool, Mulligan was homeless and in and out of mental health facilities. It is because of this that he became a self-made artist, focusing on the urban setting of his upbringing. His art centers large scale media, including competing corporate logos, billboards and logos. Although Mulligan does not drive he constantly pushes out art, taking the bus to gather materials and drawing what he sees from memory. His work materials include un-mixed acrylic paints, pen and paper, or large panels. Mulligan delights in including his own made up acronyms based off of corporations into his art, an example being,

“I smell a Rat University.” Mulligan’s work has been exhibited in multiple local shows including the Kentucky Folk Art Center at Morehead University, African American Art at KFAC, and at Bellarmine University in Louisville. He is represented by Swan and Crane Gallery, Louisville, KY. His work permanently holds a spot in the Kentucky Folk Art Center, and the New Orleans Museum of Art. He also enjoys partaking in improvised songs and even has a few regular songs in his collection. He performed his infamous song, “*Louisville Song*” with Red Nails—a local band—at the Brycc House. His art pieces showcase his humor and wit, along with the memories of the congested neighborhood in which he grew up, with original titles in the manner of— “*Connect the dots,*” “*Overpopulated Village,*” and “*Signs and Logos: The World According to Mark Anthony.*”

Marvin Finn: Artist

Marvin Finn was born in the year 1913 in Clio, Alabama. Finn moved to Louisville, KY after World War 2 and was influential in the Louisville art community for several years. Marvin was raised in a large family of ten boys and two girls, and was the son of a sharecropper. While he was in the first grade, he had to leave school in order to work on the fields. It was at a young age working in the fields that he learned carving and whittling skills from his father. At this age he also developed a love for drawing, painting and building. When Finn moved to Louisville he met his wife Helen Breckenridge whom he married in 1952. Together they had five children, and Finn often made toys for the children to play with. Aside from making toys, Finn is also known for making several other pieces including “animals, cranes, shovels, and bulldozers”. Finn found inspiration in his construction work and in the dockyards of Louisville. It was in 1972 that a friend of his motivated him to display his work for the first time at the “Kentuckiana Hobby and Gift Show”. It was after this that he continued to display his work in more and more shows, gaining him a bigger audience. His work at the time had been described as “whimsical”, and in 1976 his entire collection was purchased by an art collector. Finn has gained a favorable audience since the start of his career and his work has been displayed many times, he has even held both a public exhibition and a permanent collection at the Kentucky Museum of Art and Craft since 1984. In 2000 his work was selected by then mayor of Louisville David Armstrong to participate in a public art initiative. His work has held a legacy of evoking fun and imagination, and “seeing the wonder in ordinary things”. Since his passing his work has been on exhibition as a tribute to him and his legacy.

Moneta J. Sleet Jr.: Artist

Moneta Sleet Jr. was born on February 14, 1926 and was raised in Owensboro, KY. At a young age Sleet’s parents Ozetta Allensworth Sleet and Moneta Sleet Sr. gave him a small box camera. With his camera, he enjoyed taking pictures of his family around the house which marked the beginning of what would become his lifelong passion for photography. Near his

hometown, he attended Western Highschool and joined the camera club. In pursuit of higher education, he attended Kentucky State University, became a member of Sigma Pi Phi fraternity, and continued with his love for photography while in attendance. During WWII, he served with an all-black unit, after his service he made a return to Kentucky State University to earn his business degree. After graduating, he continued his education at New York University taking photography courses at the *School of Modern Photography*. In 1950, he received his master's degree in Journalism. Over the course of his career, Sleet worked with various African American publications and in 1950 he began working as a sportswriter for the *Amsterdam News* in New York City—followed by the magazine *Our World*. In 1955, Johnson Publishing Company, the parent company of *Jet* and *Ebony* magazines, offered him a position. Sleet's job at Johnson offered him the opportunity to travel all over the world, visiting places like *Kenya*, *Ghana*, *Norway*, and even the *Soviet Union*. He balanced his career with his family life, in 1950 he married his wife Juanita and the couple had two sons together—Gregory and Michael—along with a daughter, Lisa. Out of many assignments, his most notable was to photograph Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Sleet reported on many of King's expeditions including the *Montgomery Bus Boycott* in 1955, King's acceptance of the Nobel Prize in 1964, and the Selma to Montgomery march in 1965. Sleet was even given access to the King family whilst they were at home—starting the formation of a bond between Sleet and King that would last until King's assassination in 1968. Following the death of Dr. King, Sleet photographed his 1968 funeral in Atlanta, Georgia in Ebenezer Baptist Church. It was there that he snapped a photo of a grieving Coretta Scott King, that would win him a Pulitzer Prize in the upcoming year. Sleet's win for "feature photography" was momentous, as it made him the first black man to receive a Pulitzer Prize in any field along with being the first person to win an award while working for a black publication. Throughout his lifetime, Sleet won multiple awards including the *Citation for Excellence* from the Overseas Press Club of America, along with awards from the National Urban League and the National Association of Black Journalists. Additionally, his art was exhibited in many notable spaces, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. On February 24, 2000 Sleet's hometown of Owensboro awarded him with a bronze statue in commemoration of his journalism and civil rights efforts; they also declared the date Moneta Sleet Jr. day. Sleet continued to work for Johnson Publishing Company until his death in 1996.

Porter Grainger: Playwright

Porter Grainger was born October 22, 1891 in Bowling Green, Ky, Grainger was a pianist, songwriter, music publisher and playwright. Born in Bowling Green, he was raised by his grandparents alongside his sister in Hickory Flat, Kentucky. On November 7, 1914 he married Allies Kieth in Chicago, Il. Prior to his musical career he worked as a waiter and a laborer. He began his career in Chicago, Il and eventually relocated to New York. His career was prominent in the 1920's as he appeared on many records during that time. He was most known for backing up blues and vaudeville singers, as well as composing for musical shows. Some of

the influential singers he was said to back include artists such as Fannie May Goosby, Viola McCoy, Clara Smith, and Victoria Spivey. While living in New York he and Robert Ricketts were partners in Grainger & Ricketts, a music publishing company. He is known for his publications of a number of musical scores and performance scripts. A triumphant part of his career was when he worked with the blues singer Bessie Smith from 1924 to 1928.

Robert Charles O'Hara Benjamin: Author

Robert Charles O'Hara Benjamin was born in 1855 in St. Kitts in the British West Indies. He would move to New York in 1869 until settling in Lexington, KY in 1897 after marrying his wife Lula Marie Robinson. Benjamin attended Trinity College as well as the University of Oxford. He held many positions in his life, he worked as a teacher, an editor, activist, lawyer, journalist, author, and poet. He taught in Kentucky for a brief period of time, but is more known for being the first African American lawyer in Los Angeles and was the first African American to establish a law firm in Alabama. Benjamin would practice law in 12 different states, while also serving as the editor of several newspapers. While living in Lexington he edited the African American newspaper *The Lexington Standard*. Throughout his career he would publish several poems, and proses such as *Life of Toussaint L'Ouverture* (1888), *Southern Outrages: A Statistical Record of Lawless Doings* (1894), and a collection of poems titled *Poetic Gems* (1883). He also authored several books such as *Benjamin's Pocket History of the American Negro* (1894), *Southern Outrages: A Statistical Record of Lawless Doings* (1894), *Poetic Gems* (1883), and *Don't: a Book for Girls* (1891). Benjamin held an influential career where he was well known for speaking out against racial violence and voter intimidation until he was shot in the back and killed in his own home in 1900. The killing was in retaliation of Benjamin confronting a white poll worker who was harassing Black voters. The killer pleaded self defense and the case would be dismissed.

Rosetta Quisenberry: Author

Rosetta Quisenberry was born in Lexington, KY in 1951. She graduated from Eastern Kentucky University and University of Kentucky. For fourteen years of her life, she worked as a school teacher. In her four-part series— *A Saga of the Black Man*, *A Saga of the Black Woman*, *A Saga of the Black Child*, and *A saga of the Black Family*— she featured 1,000 saved postcards that had captured depictions of hateful racial acts towards African Americans. The series was featured in an exhibit in the William J. Clinton Presidential Library and Museum, located in Arkansas, and was made available from September 2007 until May 2008. In 2009, she made an appearance on Black Entertainment Television (BET) to speak about her work. In April of the following year, she was awarded the Lucy-Harth Smith-Atwood S. Wilson Award by the Kentucky Education Association. The fifth book of the *A Saga* series was published three years later, and was titled *Things, People, and Places We Must Always Remember*.

Sandra Charles: Artist

Sandra Charles was born in the year 1953 in Hazard, Kentucky. Charles is a contemporary oil painter currently residing in Louisville, Ky. Charles has had a passion for art throughout her entire life, art being her favorite subject in school. Charles emphasizes in her artwork many issues that affect African American women such as racism, self esteem and code switching. At the beginning of Charles' career she worked as a batik fiber artist, Charles then found herself incorporating painting in her work more and more and made the decision to return to school for painting. Although she took a break from her education to raise a family, she eventually returned to school in 2011 and in 2015 Charles obtained her Bachelors of Fine Arts in Painting from the University of Louisville. The style that Charles has adapted is reminiscent of impressionism. She commonly works with oil paints and is known for her style which emphasizes textures and deep brush strokes. Much of the pieces that Charles creates has been with the focus of issues that African American women face. Currently Charles is working on a series of paintings that will address how African American women respond to the effects of systemic racism and how that response is changing the American racial narrative, this will be showcased in 2022 (Residency Unlimited 2014). Charles has had a fulfilling career as she has held many exhibitions some of which include her 2010 *The Sum of All of Us* located at the Muhammad Ali Center Museum in Louisville, KY, in 2018 *Portraits of Us*, Solo Exhibit at the Wayside Expressions Gallery located in Louisville, KY and most recently in 2021 titled *Real Space* which was an Art Gowanus Group Exhibit located in Brooklyn, New York. Charles has held over twenty one exhibitions all over the country. Throughout her career, she has received several awards as well as grants those include the Kentucky Foundation of Women Summer Residency Grant in 2016, the Mellon-Oberst Family Award in 2017, the Hadley Creatives, Community Foundation of Louisville in 2017, the Great Meadows Foundation Venice Biennale Dedicated Travel Grant of Louisville, KY in 2019, and the Residency Unlimited, Brooklyn, NY, Sponsored by Great Meadows Foundation of Louisville, KY in 2021.

Suzan Lori Parks: Playwright/screenwriter

Suzan Lori Parks was born May 10, 1963 in Fort Knox, KY. Parks grew up in a military family, which led her to live all around the world in places such as California, North Carolina and Germany. She began writing stories at the young age of five years old. She went on to get her B.A from Mount Holyoke College in 1985, where James Baldwin was teaching a writing class. It was there that Baldwin recognized Parks' gift, and encouraged her to pursue playwriting. While still enrolled at Mount Holyoke, she wrote her first play titled *The Sinners Place* (1984). This play would serve as her senior thesis, and while her college refused to stage the play it would later be shown at Hampshire College. As her career continued, many of her plays would become award winning. Some of her notable plays include her project *365 Days/365 Plays* which was produced in over 700 theaters worldwide, *Topdog/Underdog* which won her a

Pulitzer Prize in 2002, *The Book of Grace*, *In the Blood*, etc. The style commonly found within Parks's work would be her use of revision on famous texts, although she would not be described as a "revisionist". Parks has been nominated and won many notable prizes throughout her career. One of her most notable prizes being the 2012 Tony Award for Best Revival of a Musical for her adaptation of The Gershwins' *Porgy and Bess*. She has also received the Pulitzer Prize, The Gish Prize for Excellence in the Arts in 2015, the National Endowment for the Arts, Rockefeller Foundation, Ford Foundation, New York State Council on the Arts and New York Foundation for the Arts as well as many others.

Tomisha Lovely Allen: Artist

Tomisha Lovely Allen is a self taught figure artist born in January of 1976 in Louisville, Kentucky. Allen has grown up with a passion for art, and has been drawing ever since she was a young child. Allen did not have a traditional art background, as she did not take art classes in school but found ways to incorporate art as often as she could. Allens passion for art was met with discouragement, when she expressed to a high school counselor her plans to pursue art in college. This resulted in Allen being guided to pursue an Accounting career as she was good with numbers. Allen enrolled at Northern Kentucky University as an Accounting major eventually earning a CPA and pursuing a career in corporate accounting. Allen made a career shift as she began exploring art and found a niche with acrylic paints and attending a six-week oil painting course through the Louisville Visual Arts Association. As she transitioned into a career in art, Allen began gaining commissions for her pieces. Today, Allen is known for her bright murals, many of which can be found throughout the city of Louisville, Ky. Many of her pieces are known for their photo realism, and she often uses human subjects. A notable moment in Allens career is in that she was featured in the 2021 Art Center of Bluegrass exhibit titled *The Art of being Black: Conversation and Experience*. This exhibit featured several black artists and focused on issues of race and the black experience. In this exhibit Allen was asked to respond to civil rights photographs of their choosing. Allen created a set of pieces which reflected the continued struggle for racial justice.

Toya Northington: Artist

Toya Northington was born in Louisville, Kentucky. She attended Georgia State University earning a degree in Fine Arts and then went on to earn her Masters in Social Work from the University of Louisville. She currently serves as the Executive Director of artTHRUST as well as the Community Outreach Manager at the Speed Art Museum in Louisville, KY. She has worked both as a full time artist and as a lighting designer, and is trained in Social Work. Her work is influenced by her desire to not "impress people or sell" but to benefit others. In 2012, Northington co-founded artTHRUST an art based non profit organization aimed at black and lgbtq+ youth to address psychosocial needs. In 2021, she participated in the Center for Health

Equity project CREATE which stands for Centering Reimagined Equity and Transformative Empowerment. This project focuses on enriching creativity and healing in the Louisville Community. Northington is considered to be a mixed media artist. Her project through the CREATE program is titled *Dancing in the Rain*. This project, similar to her other work centers black lives. This project in particular “brings together ten black women in order to discuss the joys, sorrow, trauma, and triumph they have experienced in their lives”. Some of her other projects include a project dedicated to the life, killing and legacy of Breonna Taylor, as well as She has been the recipient of many grants through the Kentucky Foundation for Women (KFW), where she was able to work on social justice and feminist art based projects. She also worked as an artist in residence for the Hopscotch House through the KFW. Northington alongside her other positions has founded the Community Engagement Steering Committee as well as a research committee throughout the University of Louisville School of Public Health and School of Social Work and Virginia Commonwealth University School of Social Work (Burnaway 2021).

Whitney M Young Jr.: Author

Whitney M. Young Jr. was born on July 31, 1921 in Lincoln Ridge, Kentucky. In contrast to how many black southern citizens viewed education, Young and his siblings always knew that they could be educated and successful. Young’s father, Whitney M. Young Sr was the president of a black boarding school named Lincoln Institute and his mother Laura Ray was a teacher at the school. Young would attend the school his parents taught and would even graduate as his class valedictorian. For higher education, he studied at Kentucky State University and, in 1941, earned a bachelor’s of Science degree. His education took a brief pause, as he began working with a road construction crew in the army, and after just three weeks of work he was promoted from private to first sergeant. This quick promotion and the overflow of controversy—stemming from other workers-- that came from it, would cause his interest in racism and the fight for civil rights to peak. With the end of WWII, Young picked up his education and in 1947 graduated from the University of Minnesota with his Master’s degree in Social Work. After his graduation, he was hired at the University as a lecturer. He quickly began to see an expansion in his career after graduating, starting in the early 1950’s when he served as director of the National Urban League, for their Nebraska branch. In addition, the University of Atlanta named Young the Dean of the School of Social Work in 1954. This led him into becoming active in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and was elected as the Georgia NAACP president in 1960. Furthermore, he became president of the National Urban League in 1961, and worked to evolve the organization into a lead civil rights agency(?). When taking on the role, he did so with the understanding that the purpose of the league was to help acclimate southern Black folk with their new living conditions in the North. Consequently, he implemented new programs that focused on African American education— *Street Academy*— and a plan to rid black citizens of poverty *Domestic Marshall Plan*. Under Young, the budget of the league was increased leading to thousands of available job opportunities for African Americans.

Additionally, he authored two books on his created programs, *To Be Equal* (1964) and *Beyond Racism* (1969).

William Wells Brown: Author

William Wells Brown is believed to be born in the year 1814 in Lexington, KY. Brown was born to George Higgins, a white plantation owner whose plantation resided right outside of Lexington, KY, and an unknown african slave mother. Brown spent the majority of his early life in St. Louis, although he was sold multiple times before he turned 20 years of age. He worked multiple jobs on the Mississippi river—through demand of his masters—and made several attempts to escape, finally being successful on New Year's Day in 1834. After his escape he moved to Buffalo, NY and remained there for nine years working as a steam boatsman on Lake Erie and served as a conductor for the Underground Railroad. Brown began gaining some acclaim in 1843, as he became a lecturer for the Western New York Anti-Slavery Society, an abolitionist group. He spoke about his first hand experiences of slavery's end, and his lectures eventually expanded to include women's rights. In 1847, he began lecturing around the country for the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society and published the book, "*Narrative of William W. Brown, a Fugitive Slave*." Although, it was this same year that his personal life began to go through the shredder—he underwent a troublesome divorce from his wife, Elizabeth Schooner, and had to entrust the care and education of his two daughters to another African American abolitionist. Soon after he became the personification of the "American dream", born from rags but later saw the riches of his labor. In the years between 1854 to 1859, he wrote two books—his novel "*Clotel* " is believed to be the first African American novel— and had given more than a thousand speeches across the North American continent. In the year 1854, Brown's friends came together and purchased his freedom, allowing him his return to the United States. Upon his return, the climate of African-Americans in the U.S. had grown so dangerous that he would go on to become a key advocate for African American emigration to Haiti. Brown is responsible for having many "firsts" for African Americans—the first printed African American play, the first African American novel, the first history of African American military service in the Civil War, among many other accomplishments.

Willie Massey: Artist

Willie Massey was born in 1906 in Salem, KY. Massey spent over 70 years working as a tenant dairy farmer where he developed his skill of making practical things. He worked on that farm for one family, who eventually gave him the deed to his home, as a form of gratitude for his services. Massey is a self taught artist, and it wasn't until after the death of his wife in 1955 that he began painting and making sculptures. Once he began making sculptures, he referred to them as "tricks". Massey is best known for his colorful birdhouses, miniature furniture, tinfoil birds and his airplanes. Each of these sculptures were made of a variety of materials, the furniture in

particular being made of old fruit crates. The other sculptures are made of different repurposed materials. In order to make his paintings he would “buy stretched canvases and paint on the backs to create pre-made frames for his images”. Massey art has been held in a variety of exhibitions including: African-American Folk Art in Kentucky, Passionate Visions of the American South, and others. His work has also been found in permanent collections around the country such as Birmingham Museum of Art, the Morris Museum of Art and the Kentucky Folk Art Center. Massey passed away in 1990 as a result of burn injuries he acquired in a fire in his home. Today his work continues to be seen, and has made a splash in the folk art world.

Project Reflection

It has been a great pleasure participating in the NKU Steely Library Fellowship. Prior to this project, I was greatly unaware of the many resources that the library has to offer, or of its amazing and hard working staff. As a student, I have been no stranger to research and originally felt as though I had little more to learn on the subject. As soon as my fellowship began, I was introduced to a myriad of databases, information, and tools that can elevate the way that I approach research. As someone who has always had a passion for both drawing and writing, I enjoyed being able to explore the vast amount of artists and authors that have come out of Kentucky over the last century. Conducting the research for this project was enjoyable, mostly as I was able to connect the work to myself and my own life. I was able to see the work that each person made alongside learning about their life stories, which made this experience all the more powerful. Overall this fellowship reignited my passion for research and I found myself inspired and excited by each of the artists and authors that I learned about. I can only hope to leave such a large footprint as each of the individuals that can be found in my project.

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